

DESTINY

A Project for a Canadian / Irish Co-Production

Historical background

Ireland in the summer of 1847 was devastated by the potato famine which had peaked causing starvation and death among the Irish peasants. They had a stark choice emigrate or die. Ships were hastily converted into passenger carrying vessels to accommodate the thousands choosing to emigrate. They were ill equipped and unsanitary – ripe breeding grounds for contagious diseases.

Packed in holds that held up to 190 were immigrants, crowded into berths that 4 people had to share. Sometimes they were total strangers not even of the same sex. It was inevitable that disease should break out. Typhus and cholera were rampant. Victims who died were buried at sea causing the ships to become known as “Coffin Ships”. At Grosse Ile in Quebec a station was set-up when ships arriving were quarantined. Fever sheds were constructed to care for the sick typhus victims suffering from raging fevers, delirium, thirst headache and diarrhea. Some built rafts to escape the island, but drowned in the rough waters surrounding it. When the plague eventually came to Montreal the sick were landed away from the harbour and kept in sheds. One typical day reported 1,626 sick with 33 having died. Orphaned children were sent out for adoption to French families with the proviso they keep their Irish names. The mayor of Montreal along with dozens of doctors, nurses, nuns and priests succumbed to the deadly disease while aiding the unfortunate victims.

In 1847 the immigrant death toll between all ships and quarantine stations was estimated at 50,000. It is against this terrible tragedy that this love story will take place: as well it will pay a tribute to those Irish immigrants who risked their lives to seek a better life in Canada.

The intention is to make a film that will honour the trials and tribulations that the Irish immigrants suffered in order to make a new life in Canada.



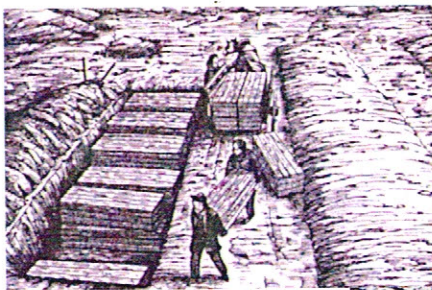
Immigrants Packed Into the Ship “The Star” 1847

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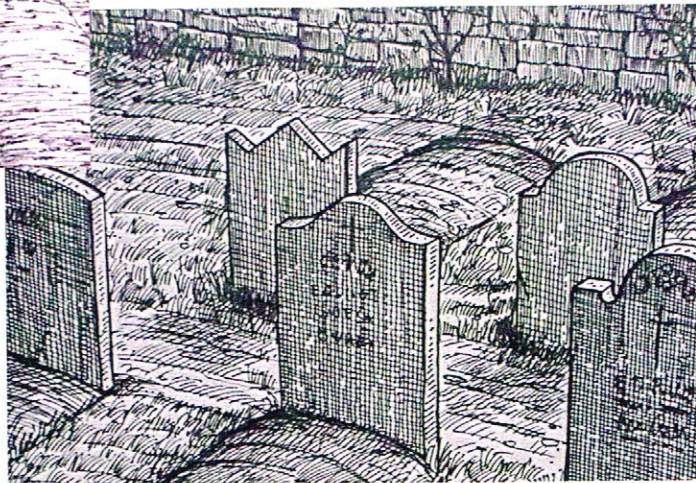
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Facts on the Irish Emigration

- Much of the emigration left from the OLF port of TRALEE.
- The fare was about £3.10 shillings - \$5.50.
- Average length of transatlantic journey was 45 days from Ireland to Quebec.
- The largest group were simple women between 16-30 destined for domestic work
- The worst day at the quarantine station in Grosse Ile 112 died.
- In 1847 – more than 70,000 Irish immigrants had passed through Grosse Ile. 9000 were hospitalized and 5,300 deaths were noted many went unrecorded.
- That summer 22 of the 26 doctors on the island had suffered typhus symptoms.
- When typhus came to Montreal the sick were landed at the entrance to the Lachine Canal away from the harbour proper and kept in sheds.
- One typical day reported 1,626 sick with 33 having died.
- In one week 4 Irish Catholic priests from Montreal died.
- In one month The Grey Nuns a nursing order reported every one of the order was ill as they attended the sick and dying.
- Death came in staggering numbers 50 per day on an average.
- (A marketing consideration) Somewhere between 20 and 50 million people in North America have Irish connections.



Mass Grave Burials at Grosse Ile 1847



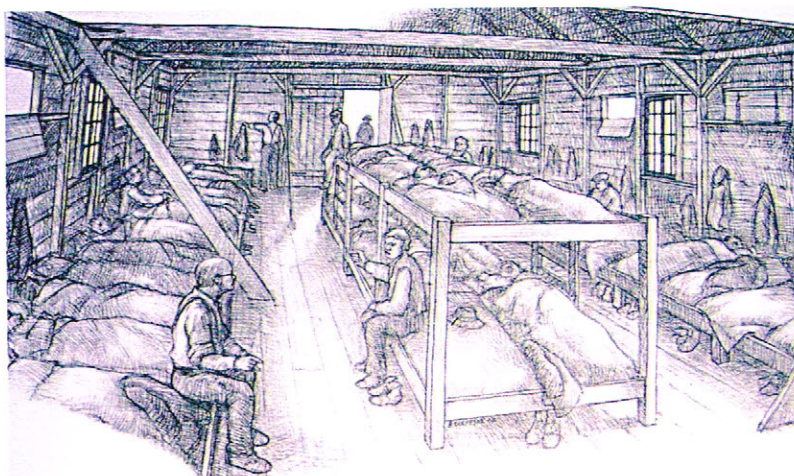
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Hospitalization, sickness and death rates among quarantine station personnel and clergy in 1847

<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Admitted to hospital</i>	<i>Suffering from typhus</i>	<i>Deaths</i>
Roman Catholic priests	42	19	4
Anglican missionaries	17	7	2
Physicians	26	22	4
Hospital stewards	29	21	3
Nurses, orderlies, cooks	186*	76	22
Police officers	10	8	3
Carters employed to transport the sick, death and dying	6	5	2
Total	316	158	40

**Several nurses, orderlies and cooks were emigrants who were employed after recovering from typhus. They were thought to be immunized.*



Interior of a Shed for Immigrants in 1847

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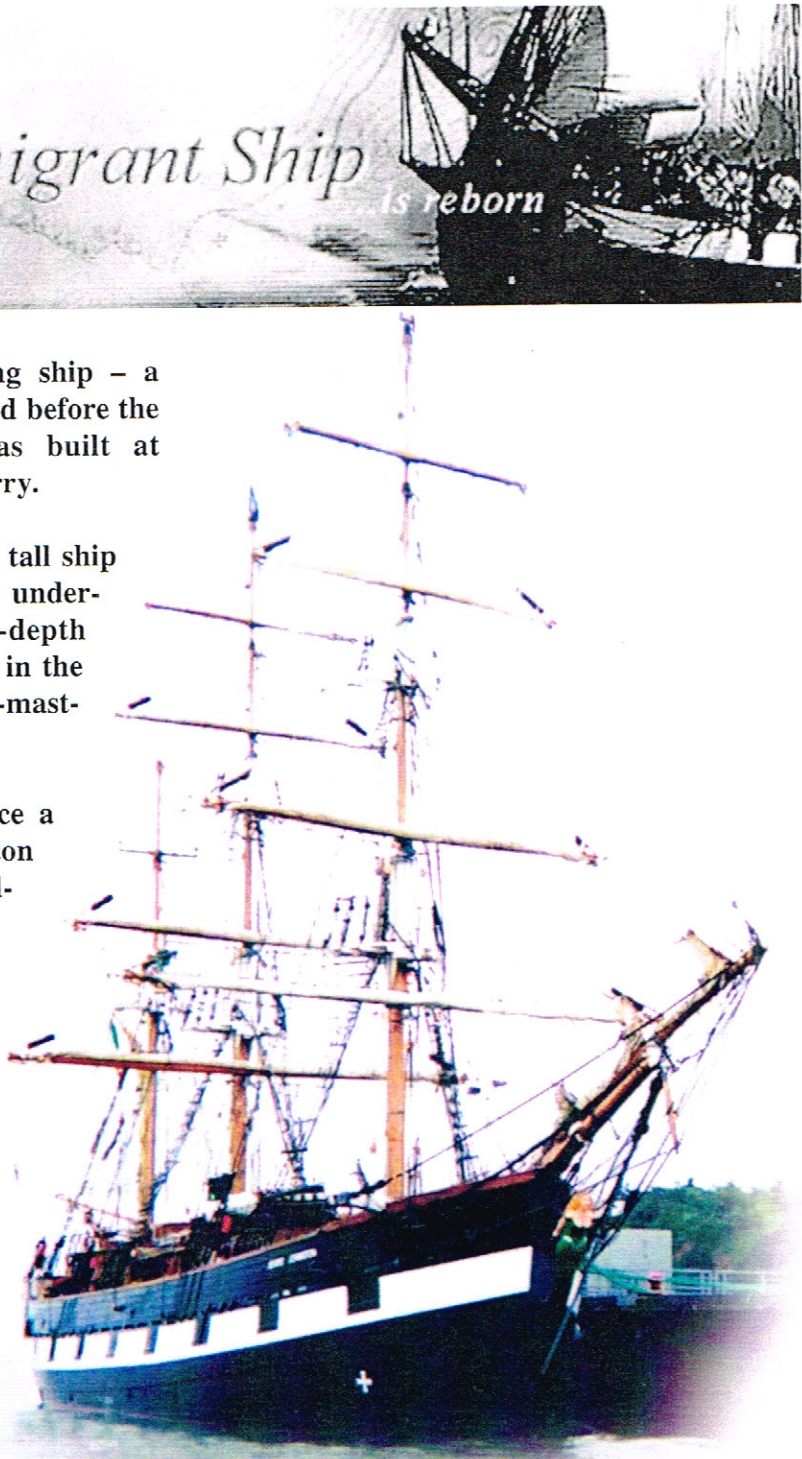
*The Proud
Irish Emigrant Ship
...is reborn*

The re-born 19th century sailing ship – a replica of one of the last of its kind before the steam ship era dawned – was built at Blennerville, near Tralee, Co. Kerry.

Building the remarkable wooden tall ship involved a massive and complex undertaking, which began with in-depth research in 1993 and culminated in the completion of the graceful, triple-masted vessel in 2002.

The project team had to produce a seaworthy ship (the Jeanie Johnston sets sail for North America in mid-February 2003 to retrace the historic transatlantic voyages it made 150 years earlier) while also offering an interesting living history visitor experience.

An international team of young people, linking Ireland North and South, the US, Canada, and many other countries built the replica under the supervision of experienced shipwrights through FAS, the Irish Training & Employment Agency.



*Note : It is the intention of the production
to incorporate this fine ship in the film.*

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GROSSE ILE

O solitary isle – whereon a granite sentinel does stand
For all to see, from great ships passing by,
In memory of the thousands who did die
Upon your shore, far from their own dear native land.

O tear-drenched isle – such scenes of anguish were enacted here;
Heart-rending moans of suffering filled the air
And only Faith did save them from despair.
That sad, sad, sorrow-stricken year.

O poor Grosse Ile – what awful scars you bore
When spades dug deep into your breast
Where speedily the dead were laid to rest
By brave Canadians who did this ghastly chore.

Mourn, o lone isle – not only for the plague-wracked humans now at rest,
History will ever link their fate with you;
But for the clergy, doctors and layfolk too
Whose works of mercy only God did see, who now sleep still beneath your breast.

Mary Eileen O'Gallagher

