

'What Does America Mean To You?': an Oral History Project, 1922-60

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The article examines the Irish popular understanding of the idea of 'America' in the period 1922 to 1960. It identifies the primary sources through which the image of America was created and reveals both a positive and negative view. Although emigration to the United States declined throughout the period, the 'return tide' of emigrants, letters, packages and the power of the written word and celluloid pictures emphasised the positive image of America, irrespective of the reality of life for many emigrants.

Much has been written about the extent, nature and significance of the links and ties that bind Ireland and the United States together, particularly in the period 1856 to 1914.¹ Miller's research on Irish emigration in this period has shaped much of the discourse. It is clear from his work that the 'idea of America' was an established part of the Irish mentality by 1914. America was perceived as the 'land of gold' or the 'land of sweat and snakes'.² This was a diametrically opposed image of America but it was not specific to Ireland, as all other European emigrant societies constructed similar views of the New World.³ This generic view of America saw it as a land of political freedom, a place where land could be obtained and a country of urban and industrial growth. Hoerder suggests that the extent to which these features took hold in European emigrant societies and were expanded upon, depended upon conditions in those countries and the power of the channels of communication through which information about America was conveyed.⁴

Little work has been conducted on the twentieth-century Irish context of these issues. This article which is part of a work-in-progress, reflects on the following questions, how was 'America' perceived and understood by the Irish and how did it manifest itself in the popular consciousness? What were the sources of that popular image? Using oral testimony, memoirs and official documents, it seeks to identify how America was perceived, imagined and understood at least by a cross-section of people

¹ For example, see Kerby Miller, *Emigrants and exiles: Ireland and the Irish exodus to North America*, New York 1985; Kirby Miller, 'Paddy's paradox: emigration to America in Irish imagination and rhetoric' in Dirk Hoerder, Horst Rössler (eds), *Distant magnets. Expectations and realities in the immigrant experience, 1840-1930*, New York 1993, pp 264-94; David Noel Doyle, *Ireland, Irishmen and Revolutionary America, 1760-1820*, Dublin 1981; David Noel Doyle and Owen Dudley Edwards (eds), *America and Ireland, 1776-1976. The American identity and the Irish connection*, Westport 1980; Andy Bielenberg (ed.), *The Irish Diaspora*, Harlow 2000. See William Forbes Adams, *Ireland and Irish emigration to the new world from 1815 to the Famine*, Yale 1932, reprinted Baltimore 1980 and James Kelly, 'The resumption of emigration from Ireland after the American War of Independence: 1783-1787', *Studia Hibernica*, 24, pp 61-88 on the eighteenth century context.

² DH Akenson critiques Miller's larger thesis in DH Akenson, 'Irish Migration to North America, 1800-1920' in Andy Bielenberg (ed.) *The Irish Diaspora*, Essex 2000, pp 128-31. The phrase 'idea of America' comes from a session of the Coimisiún na Gaeltachta, on 4 June 1925, the chairman, Richard Mulcahy TD twice referred to the 'idea of America' and its primary influence in the declining use of the Irish language in the west of Ireland. At a further session on 16 June, Pádraig Ó Siocfhradha (An Seabhac) questioned Dr Seaghan P MacÉinrí of Conradh na Gaedhilge, about the reasons why people left the Connemara Gaeltacht and the latter replied that 'there is no influence as powerful as America'. *Coimisiún na Gaeltachta, Report*, Dublin 1926, p. 7.

³ Dirk Hoerder, Horst Rössler (eds), *Distant magnets. Expectations and realities in the immigrant experience, 1840-1930*, New York 1993.

⁴ See Dirk Hoerder, 'From Dreams to Possibilities: the secularization of hope and the quest for independence' in Hoerder and Rössler, *Distant magnets*, pp 1-27.

living in rural and urban settings in nine counties in the period, 1922 to 1960.⁵ The advantages and disadvantages of using oral history as a source in history have been well-documented elsewhere, most recently by Caitriona Clear in her study of women's household work in Ireland between 1922 and 1961.⁶ She identified how documentary-based data provided part of the story but there was little published about the actual experience of such work, a gap which could be filled only by the information obtained from participants. Yet, the danger of these narratives was that they might be 'well-polished by age and use' which could weaken their value.⁷ In the case of this oral history project, ten interviews were conducted with five men and five women. Only the general theme and not the specific questions, was notified to the participant prior to the interview. None was self-selected but chosen on the basis of being interested in the project and had first-hand experience of the period under investigation. The questions were open-ended but an attempt was made to focus the interview on the period in question and to elicit information about personal experiences. As Clear discovered, each testimony is valuable for its individual insight at a particular place and time into how America was perceived.

Creating the Image of America:

(a) *The Emigrant*

It is not surprising that by 1922 a number of sources informed the popular image and understanding of America. The first and perhaps most significant one, was emigration. By 1922 when the new Irish state was established, emigration generally was an accepted part of Irish life. In statistical terms between 1801 and 1921, approximately eight million Irish people permanently emigrated. Prior to the 1845-51 famine, Canada was the favoured destination. Between the famine and the First World War, it was the United States and after 1918, it was Britain. Between 1815 and 1845 at least one million went to the United States and in excess of one million left between 1846 and 1850. Table 1 indicates that after 1850, emigration relentlessly persisted. By 1921 five million had settled in the US.⁸

This meant that by 1890 one in four persons born in Ireland lived in the United States and almost every household had been affected by emigration to the United States either directly through family or indirectly by friends' departures from village, town or city. The counties that recorded the highest rate of outward movement particularly to the United States between 1876 and 1914, were those in Connacht and the west but people in all counties were affected to some degree.⁹

⁵ The oral testimony derives from an oral history project which comprised ten interviews with five men and five women. The author is grateful to all who participated and wishes to thank Catherine O'Connor, Margaret Hogan and Tony Hogan for their work and commitment to this project. The project was funded by the University of Limerick College of Humanities Research Fund and the University of Limerick Foundation Seed Fund. The ULOHP interviews provided information for counties Clare, Cork, Galway, Offaly, Tipperary and Limerick city. Other testimony used comes from the Irish Manuscripts Commission collection and encompassed counties Kerry, Wexford, Offaly, Westmeath. See appendix one for list of questions asked in interviews conducted in 2001. The ULOHP tape recordings will be located in the University of Limerick Library Special Collections Division and will be available for academic purposes subject to the copyright conditions requested by the individual informants. This article is not an exhaustive study of the topic for example, the roles of religion, socio-economic background and gender are not tools of analysis in this study. Instead it attempts to analyse and provide a framework for the understanding of the personal experiences of people living in nine counties.

⁶ Caitriona Clear, *Women of the house: women's household work in Ireland, 1922-61*, Dublin 2000.

⁷ Caitriona Clear, 'Oral history and women's household work in Ireland, 1922-1961: some reflections', *Women's Studies Review, Oral History and Biography*, vol. 7, pp 53-63.

⁸ David Fitzpatrick, 'Emigration: 1801-1921' in Michael Glazier (ed.), *The encyclopaedia of the Irish in America*, Notre Dame 1999, pp. 254-62.

⁹ David Fitzpatrick, *Irish emigration 1801-1921. Studies in Irish Economic and Social History 1*, Dundalk 1990, pp 5, 11.

Table 1

Immigrants admitted into the United States from Ireland 1831 to 1920 (totals for periods).

<i>Year</i>	32 counties
1831-40	207,381
1841-50	780,719
1851-60	914,119
1861-70	435,778
1871-80	436,871
1881-90	655,482
1891-1900	388,416
1901-10	339,065
1911-20	146,181

Source: Government Publication Office, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1926* (Washington, 1927), table 96, p. 89.¹⁰

Johanna O'Dwyer, born in 1907 in Thurles, county Tipperary, felt that she did not have many American connections but then recalled an uncle and neighbours who had gone to the US prior to her birth.¹¹ Whereas Thomas O'Brien, born in Limerick city, in 1919, knew 'a lot of people' who had gone there by the time he was born. Of ten members of his wife's family, her eldest sister and two eldest brothers went to the US before the early 1920s.¹² Peggy McDermott, born in 1928 in Eyrecourt, county Galway, might have been an American citizen as her parents went to America around 1915 but came back to Ireland in the early 1920s when they began their family. But her two uncles who had emigrated at the turn of the century remained in America and kept in close contact with Peggy's mother, their sister.¹³ Matt Spain who was born in 1920 in Drumcullen, county Offaly, had two aunts and two uncles who left well before 1914.¹⁴ But not only were these people born into a society where emigration specifically to the US, was embedded but it remained a reality for them despite changes in conditions in Ireland and America.

The establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922 might have been expected to signal the end of emigration which Sinn Féin leaders denounced, to use Lee's words, as the 'single most serious obstacle to the prospects of social regeneration in Ireland'. But as table 2 indicates, the 'curse of emigration' continued largely because the leaders of the new state had few economic solutions to the difficulties.¹⁵

¹⁰ According to Ó Gráda, official American statistics are broadly more accurate than Irish equivalents particularly in the nineteenth century. Cormac Ó Gráda, 'Irish emigration to the United States' in Doyle and Edwards (eds), *America and Ireland*, p. 103.

¹¹ University of Limerick Oral History Project (hereafter ULOHP), Johanna O'Dwyer, aged 94 years, housewife, born in Thurles, county Tipperary interviewed 28 March 2001. Tape 7.

¹² ULOHP, Thomas O'Brien, aged 82 years, retired accountant and shopkeeper, Limerick city, interviewed 3 August 2001. Tape 4.

¹³ ULOHP, Peggy McDermott, aged 73 years, housewife, Eyrecourt, county Galway, interviewed 9 July 2001, Tape 8. Peggy moved to Johnstown, county Kilkenny.

¹⁴ ULOHP Matt Spain, aged 81 years, auctioneer, Drumcullen, county Offaly, interviewed 24 October 2001. Tape 9. The ULOHP team note with regret Mr Spain's recent death.

¹⁵ JJ Lee, 'Emigration: 1922-98' in Glazier (ed.), *The encyclopaedia*, p. 263.

Table 2
Immigrants admitted into the United States from Ireland, 1920-60

Year	32 counties
1921-30 (total)	220,591
1930	23,445
	Irish Free State
1931-40 (total)	13,167
1931	801
1935	314
1941-45 (total)	1,059
1942	42
1946-50 (total)	26,444
1950	5,842
1951-60 (total)	75-90,000

Source: Government Publication Office, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1937* (Washington, 1938), tables 98, 99; *Ibid.*, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1951* (Washington, 1951), table 107; Lee, 'Emigration: 1922-1998', pp 264-5.

By the mid-1920s, emigration rates to the US had almost returned to the immediate pre-war levels and if any one year represented the end of the post-famine (1845-51) wave it was 1931. For this reason, Lee has suggested that it was this year rather than 1921, which marks a watershed in Irish social history, yet it largely goes unnoticed in the historiography of post-Independence cultural and social history.¹⁶

The recovery in emigration levels to the US in the period after 1918 was noticeable in the testimony. Thomas O'Brien described Thomas MacNamara leaving Limerick city in 1928, 'He lived in Blackboy Heights ... just above Mulgrave Street in Limerick and I chanced to be up there ... and he was going from door to door bidding goodbye to people shaking hands and hugging each other'.¹⁷ The reasons for this emigrant's departure are unknown but increased and rapid unemployment after 1920 in Ireland contributed to many departures at this time.¹⁸ Eileen Dinan's mother died in April 1925 and her father had six children to care for at their home in Ennis, county Clare. He was a casual labourer with no regular income so he wrote to his late wife's sister in New Haven, Connecticut to ask if she would 'take' his eldest daughter out to the US. The girl, aged fifteen years, left home in November 1925 and after three years working as a housekeeper for a Catholic priest, sent back the passage money for her eldest brother aged seventeen years, who then departed and worked in the railway system. A third sibling was assisted in leaving a few years later.¹⁹ In this case the pre-existing family network assisted

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 263.

¹⁷ ULOHP, Tape 4.

¹⁸ JJ Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985 politics and society*, Cambridge 1989, p. 126. Lee notes the controversy that surrounds the official reporting of unemployment rates in the 1920s, *ibid.*

¹⁹ ULOHP, Eileen Dinan, aged 81 years, housewife, Ennis, county Clare, interviewed 18 July 2001, Tape 5.

the departures, as was the case with Margaret O'Connell's two aunts who left from Crusheen, county Clare for New York in the early 1920s to go to cousins already there. The two girls immediately found work in house cleaning.²⁰

Even for those born into a farm-owning family, impartible inheritance meant that emigration remained a reality for sons of farmers. Jim Phelan born in 1928 in Mullinahone, south Tipperary, recalled two uncles who left for the US because there was not enough land to be shared by three sons. As youngest sons of a farmer, they had little choice but to leave. One found work in low-paid jobs but went to night school and was employed eventually by the US Post Office.²¹

In the early 1920s, emigration also seems to have offered asylum for political refugees as was the case so often in the nineteenth century. During the Irish Civil War (1922-3), approximately 10,000 anti-treaty IRA fighters were imprisoned and with the victory of their opponents, many believed they had little chance of employment in the new Irish Free State. Thomas O'Brien recalled 'those on the losing side, I think most of them cleared out because they wouldn't get any state jobs ... it was mostly to America they went'.²² Jeremiah Murphy, the IRA fighter, in his memoir of Kerry, noted 'the bitterness that the fighting and the atrocities had produced was quite obvious. There was a lot of talk about emigration.' Although he found work as a taxi driver in Killarney by 1925, he yearned for the 'gaiety of the past' and decided to leave for the US.²³ For those who left either voluntarily or involuntarily, America still offered refuge.

Thus, in the period 1922 to 1931 at least, it appears that the combination of a lack of employment in Ireland, the lure of work and the presence of friends and family due to chain emigration, combined to ensure that emigration to the US would continue. For these emigrants, their families and friends whether prompted to leave by desire, duty, economic or political necessity, America was still perceived as a land of freedom and a place of wealth. In other words, the myth of 'America' persisted irrespective of the reality. This perception of the US as a land of opportunity appears not to have been greatly altered in the subsequent decades to 1960. Even though 1931 marks the end of the post-famine movement to the US due to the slump in the American economy arising from the Wall Street Crash in 1929, the outward flow of Irish people does not cease completely.²⁴

From the mid-1930s onwards, the numbers begin to revive again, but it was Britain with its revived economy and during world war two, its ease of access and war economy, which drew most Irish emigrants. After 1945 when emigration to the US resumes, as indicated in Table 2, most who left still sought work; 'at that time east Galway was no different to the rest of Ireland, there was precious little employment in the country, and both Britain and America provided that ... everybody that went got work.'²⁵ Not only was employment to be found but so also was an improved standard of living which will be discussed further later on. Nora Kelly from Passage West in county Cork, recalled:

²⁰ ULOHP, Margaret O Connell, aged 64 years, retired nurse, Clarecastle, county Clare, interviewed 27 May 2001, Tape 3.

²¹ ULOHP, Jim Phelan, aged 71, retired veterinary surgeon, Mullinahone, south Tipperary, interviewed on 24 October 2001, Tape 10.

²² ULOHP, Tape 4.

²³ Jeremiah Murphy, *When youth was mine. A memoir of Kerry, 1902-25*, Dublin 1998, pp 280, 300.

²⁴ The introduction of restrictive American legislation is often identified as the cause of the decline in Irish emigration during the 1920s. The Irish Free State (IFS) was allocated a quota of 28,567 under the 1924 Immigration Act but it was never reached and neither was a reduced quota of 17,853 set in 1929. After 1929, it was increasing unemployment in the US, which caused a fall in numbers rather than the legislation. The quota increased slightly to 18,700 in 1952 which remained in place until 1965. There is no reference in any of the interviews to quotas. Lee, 'Emigration: 1922-98', pp 263-4; Government Publication Office, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1951* (Washington, 1951), table 106, p. 93. The diplomatic and political background to the introduction of the quotas for the IFS will be examined in a forthcoming work by the author. The impact of the economic crisis in the US in reducing the levels of Irish emigration was welcomed in the 1931 edition of the *Capuchin Annual*; 'for this we thank God ... the drain of emigration was threatening the very survival of our people'. *The Capuchin Annual*, 1931, p. 247.

²⁵ ULOHP, Tony Hogan, aged 64 years, retired teacher, Woodford, county Galway, interviewed 27 May 2001, Tape 6. Between 1956 and 1961, 43,000 left per annum, the highest rates since the 1880s. Lee, *Ireland*, p. 359.

my brother-in-law went [to the US] around I'd say 1955 or '6, and he's still out there, even though they often thought about coming back home, but I think they find life is too good out there now for them and if they came home they mightn't settle with our weather and whatever and they enjoy themselves and brought up a family out there.²⁶

Nevertheless, the positive image of America was still attended by an emotional cost to those leaving and those remaining behind. First, the departing emigrant was leaving family, friends and home behind and secondly, until the growth of air travel in the second half of the 1950s, she or he had little chance of returning home during their respective lifetimes. According to Fitzpatrick, the low rate of return migration was a distinctive characteristic of the Irish experience in the US.²⁷ Consequently, by 1922 the 'American wake' was an established part of the emigrant's departure ritual. For most, leaving for America differed little from dying, thus relatives, neighbours and friends gathered to spend a night in drinking, singing, dancing and story-telling. The custom was a way of honouring the emigrant by a last festive gathering.²⁸

During the late nineteenth century, the combination of 'merry-making and mourning' was criticised by Catholic clergy who were determined to end it and by the early twentieth century it was less prevalent. Schrier suggested in 1957 that it was only a vivid memory among 'old men and old women' of rural Ireland but further evidence suggests that it had not disappeared completely.²⁹ In his memoir, Jeremiah Murphy described his own 'wake' in 1925 in Ballyvourney in county Kerry. While Eileen Dinan from Ennis, county Clare attended many wakes, 'there was dancing and singing and a lot of drinking ... it would continue into the early hours of the morning. Then it was time to see the emigrant off on the first stage of their journey to America. It was a very sad parting. Some parents knew they would never see their son or daughter again'.³⁰ Thomas was on the platform of Limerick's Con Colbert railway station and seems to have caught the end of a 'wake' some time in the 1930s:

there was a train taking off for Cork, for Cobh, because that time there was no aeroplanes and they were going down to Cobh to get a liner to take them to New York, and they were from the country, they weren't city people and they had a big following who came to see them off from county Clare and county Limerick ... They certainly were going to make an occasion of it ... they had a session there, a half-hour, [it] started before the train was due to take off and they had 'melogians' and accordions and they had a dance session and it was some yahooing I can tell you ... It was sad ... they were leaving families and they didn't know would they ever see them again.³¹

The arrival of the age of air travel after the second world war, did not signal the end of the 'American wake' either. Matthew Mangan and William Byrne both from Edenderry, county Offaly, were interviewed in 1955, and noted that the 'American wake' was still a practice in the locality. If the intending emigrant was a member of the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA), he would be presented with a sum of money at an event.³² A few years later, Margaret O'Connell from Clarecastle, county

²⁶ ULOHP, Nora Kelly, aged 62 years, housewife, Cobh, county Cork, interviewed 22 May 2001, Tape 1.

²⁷ Fitzpatrick, *Irish emigration*, p. 7.

²⁸ For origins of wakes see SJ Connolly, *The Oxford Companion to Irish History*, Oxford 1998, p. 582.

²⁹ Arnold Schrier, *Ireland and the American Emigration 1850-1900*, Chester Springs 1997, p. 93.

³⁰ ULOHP, Tape 5.

³¹ ULOHP, Tape 4.

³² Irish Manuscripts Commission (hereafter IMC), Ms. 1407, pp. 1-78, Matthew Mangan, aged 76 years, farmer, Clonmullen, Edenderry, county Offaly, interviewed February 1955; *Ibid.*, William Byrne, aged 54 years, farmer, Killane, Edenderry, county Offaly, interviewed February 1955.

Clare was at:

the greatest American wake ... in 1958 down in Shannon ... And it started at about four o'clock in the evening and we were told the flight was going at eight, and the Tulla Ceilí Band was there ... there must have been about fifty people down there ... it was absolutely fantastic. They were calling the flight from about eight o'clock in the evening, 'The last call for the flight to New York'. I'd say it went on till about one o'clock in the morning. And everybody was below, and the tears were unbelievable ... it was like a death because they didn't expect to come back, you see.³³

Undoubtedly the form of the American wake adapted to changing circumstances, becoming less formalised. By the late 1950s, friends and family simply 'called at the home of the intending emigrant or emigrants and wished them god-speed'.³⁴ But the note of sadness remained unchanged. It also permeated some of the emigrant ballads that are still remembered such as 'Noreen Bawn' and 'I'm sitting on the stile, Mary'.³⁵

(b) The American 'return tide'

Those who stayed behind soon experienced the indirect consequences of the departure, which Schrier described as the 'American return tide' for the nineteenth century. The letters, money and packages continued to flow in the twentieth century and also shaped the perception of America. Between 1850 and 1900, over \$250 million in individual remittances was sent back to Ireland. Approximately 40 per cent of this was in the form of prepaid passage tickets and financed over three-quarters of the emigration from Ireland. The remaining 60 per cent paid for rent, shopkeepers' bills, repairs on farmhouses, bought animals and financed education sometimes.³⁶ By 1922, this pattern was well established and the 'return tide' further explained the persistence of the positive image or cliché.³⁷

Although further research is needed on the twentieth-century context, by 1949 dollar remittances fluctuated between £3-4 million per year comprising almost half of Ireland's dollar earnings.³⁸ Not surprisingly, the arrival of dollars into a home was welcomed and not forgotten by recipients. It was noted also when relatives failed to send any dollars home. Throughout the period, Eileen Dinan's sisters sent dollars which were used at Christmas time to buy the turkey and extra coal for the fire even though she recognised that it 'wasn't easy for them to help us but they did help a lot'. Sometimes Eileen's father could not afford to pay the grocery bill in the local shop and the shopkeeper refused to give him any more credit. On one occasion, her father was so desperate 'he told the shopkeeper to send the bill to one of my sisters in the States whose address he gave. My sister paid the bill and from then onwards, she paid our monthly grocery bill so that we could eat. That went on for some time'.³⁹

These monies could be used also to buy land and extend family holdings. Arensberg and Kimball writing about the 1930s in county Clare noted the case of a family where the mother wrote to children in America to request money to buy additional land from the Land Commission. The latter

³³ ULOHP, Tape 3.

³⁴ IMC, MS 1407, Thomas Harpur, aged 72 years, farmer and labourer, Kilmore, county Wexford, interviewed March 1955; *ibid.*, John Murphy, aged 80 years, Publican, Kilrane, county Wexford, interviewed March 1955; *ibid.*, Matt O'Reilly, aged 75 years, farmer, Kilbride, Trim, county Meath, interviewed February 1955.

³⁵ ULOHP, Tapes 6.

³⁶ Schrier, *Ireland and the American Emigration*, p. 151.

³⁷ See Hoerder, 'From Dreams to Possibilities', p. 6.

³⁸ Bernadette Whelan, *Ireland and the Marshall Plan 1947-1957*, Dublin 2000, p. 328; see also JP McHale, 'Ireland and the US Dollar', *Irish Monthly*, 78, December 1950, p. 566.

³⁹ ULOHP, Tape 5.

was established in 1881 to facilitate the transfer of land ownership from landlords to farmer and to redistribute land, with much of its work taking place in the period after 1903.⁴⁰ In this case, the children sent the purchase price and the daughter sent her usual remittance at Christmas time also. She wrote to her parents 'I would think it wasn't Christmas and I hadn't any father and mother if I didn't send them something.'⁴¹ Seán Tom Ceárnaí from the Blasket islands in north west Kerry concluded in 1955, that 'a good lot of money or remittances has come from America down through the years for three or four generations ... it would buy necessities, food, clothes, pay debts or rent and make improvements in the house or lands, buy land, pay costs to the US, buy drink'.⁴² Pattern days and siblings' birthdays could be marked also by the arrival of dollars.⁴³

But the arrival of a package of clothing caused mixed reactions. First, sometimes the recipient had to find the money to pay the duty, otherwise the package would be returned to the Customs and Excise section. Eileen Dinan was 'always so afraid' her father could not pay the duty.⁴⁴ But once the package was opened, not all might have been satisfied. Peggy McDermott's friends were sent second-hand 'very fussy, frilly and sequined' dresses belonging to American cousins who were of 'a bigger frame'. The father thought they were 'wonderful' and insisted they be worn to the 'local dance' but the girls 'hated them'. They used to bring their own clothing to change into and 'dreaded these American things'.⁴⁵ Matt Spain's sisters 'were reared on American parcels' although again 'wearing something new' might provoke jibes from class mates, 'oh ye got an American parcel didn't ye'.⁴⁶ Whereas Eileen's sisters sent clothes that were practical and useful:

My sisters were good to us. They sent us parcels with lovely clothes and things for the home. We got nice, warm, winter clothes and I remember especially my brother and I getting lovely, warm pyjamas and slippers. They were much appreciated as our Irish homes were very cold during winter. At Christmas we got toy parcels with books, games and many other toys. One year I got a beautiful doll which I cherished very much.⁴⁷

The response to such clothes, therefore, depended on the economic circumstances of the Irish household and the kind of clothes sent. Packages of food including tea, sugar, flour and rice, were much appreciated particularly during world war two when rationing was in place.⁴⁸ For some families, the arrival of money, clothes and packages could, and did, make the difference between a comfortable and uncomfortable existence at particular times. Moreover, the packages along with the accompanying

⁴⁰ Vincent Comerford, 'Land Commission' in SJ Connolly, *The Oxford Companion to Irish History*, Oxford 1998, p. 296.

⁴¹ Conrad M. Arensberg and Solon T. Kimball, *Family and community in Ireland*, third edition, Ennis 2001, p. 144. This work presents an idealised version of many aspects of life in rural Ireland after the 1845-51 famine. Byrne, Edmondson and Varley have identified the weaknesses in the work relating to exaggerated conclusions but do not include the veracity of the participant observations. See Anne Byrne, Ricca Edmondson, Tony Varley, 'Introduction to the third edition' in *ibid.*, pp. i-lxix.

⁴² IMC, MS. 1407, Seán Tom Ceárnaí, aged 72 years, fisherman, Blasket Islands, county Kerry, interviewed January 1955.

⁴³ ULOHP, Tape 3; IMC, 1407, Tadhg Ó Murchadha. Pattern days were parish religious celebrations held on the feast day of the local patron saint. Sharon Gmelch, 'Fairs and pilgrimages' in Sharon Gmelch (ed.), *Irish life*, Dublin 1979, p. 172.

⁴⁴ ULOHP, Tape 5.

⁴⁵ ULOHP, Tape 8.

⁴⁶ ULOHP, Tape 9.

⁴⁷ ULOHP, Tape 5.

⁴⁸ ULOHP, Tape 5. Rationing and shortages of sugar, tea, butter and potatoes particularly in urban areas were a feature of the 'emergency' period in Ireland. The situation did not improve after 1945. In the following year, bread rationing was reintroduced, the butter ration was reduced by half, the margarine ration was doubled and petrol was in short supply. In addition to the packages that arrived informally, in 1947 the Fianna Fáil government concluded an agreement with an American organisation called 'Co-operative for American Remittances to Europe, Inc' (CARE). It was a non-profit organisation founded for the purpose of organising the dispatch of packages to Europe. Donations were collected in the US from persons who nominate a recipient in a European country and CARE delivered the package to the nominated recipient. Foodstuffs, blankets, needles could be sent. All west European counties were included. *Irish Trade Journal*, September 1947, p. 117.

letter, which outlined 'how they were getting on themselves in America', also helped to create an impression of America and had significant consequences for teenagers and young people thinking about the future.⁴⁹ Eileen Dinan always wanted to follow her sisters and emigrate to America:

Q. What was it that made you wish to emigrate when you were young?

A. Well, I suppose the lovely clothes we got and the photographs and when I see the lovely homes and photographs taken inside the homes, and we had such cold winters here, and I would see these people and men would be in their shirt sleeves and the ladies would have short sleeve dresses, and we have the heaviest clothes on us here in Ireland in the homes, so I thought it was a fantastic country. I mean they had central heating at that time which we ... would never ever imagine. So, every way I thought it was great.⁵⁰

Eileen also thought America a prosperous place and even though there were 'hard times' in America 'there were still opportunities for people: a lot more than in Ireland in the decades of the 1930s and 1940s in county Clare'.⁵¹ For Margaret O'Connell whose family received packages from her aunts in New York every six or eight weeks in the 1950s, it was the letters which created an impression. One of her two aunts living in New York raised eleven children, the other two and both provided frequent bulletins of their progress through life, 'we felt by the letters that "God wouldn't I love to go there", you know, that it was a great country ... they seemed to have had so much more than we had'.⁵² In other words, just as the Commission on Emigration and other Population Problems identified in 1954, it was the positive information which made an impact not the exploitation, bad housing and irregular employment which must have prevailed also.⁵³ Neither was the myth corrected by those who were unsuccessful because as Hoerder suggests, they generally lost contact with their home communities.⁵⁴

Similarly, just as the successful emigrant could afford to spend money on postage of letters and packages she or he could afford to return home or, at least, later generations could. Schrier noted that by the end of the nineteenth century, no more than six Irish-Americans returned yearly to each townland in Ireland either to visit or to stay.⁵⁵ In a twentieth-century context, Tables 3 and 4 outlines the numbers of persons resident in Ireland classified by country of origin, although it is difficult to know how many of those with American citizenship were of Irish origin, what was the length of stay and how many more with Irish citizenship had returned.

However, the increase in the early 1930s is noticeable. It may be accounted for by specific factors which Leo McCauley, the Irish Consulate General in New York set out for Joseph Walshe, Secretary, Department of External Affairs, on 11 May 1932. He stated that 'consequent on the serious unemployment and distress at present prevailing in this country, I am daily being approached by our nationals to obtain reduced steamship fares to enable them to return to Ireland'. By July the flow had not abated and requests for assistance towards payment of the steamship fare were 'becoming more numerous daily'.⁵⁶

⁴⁹ ULOHP, Tape 10.

⁵⁰ ULOHP, Tape 5.

⁵¹ ULOHP, Tape 5.

⁵² ULOHP, Tape 3.

⁵³ *Commission on Emigration and other Population Problems, 1948-54* (Dublin, 1954), p.135.

⁵⁴ Hoerder, 'From Dreams to Possibilities', p. 6.

⁵⁵ Schrier, *Ireland and the American emigration, 1850-1900*, p. 130.

⁵⁶ National Archives of Ireland (hereafter NAI), Department of External Affairs (hereafter D/EA), 21/116, McCauley to Secretary, External Affairs 11 May 1932, McCauley to Secretary, 14 July 1932.

Table 3
Persons in Republic of Ireland classified by country of birth, 1926-61

Years	United States of America
1926	8,932
1936	10,111
1946	8,509
1961	6,447

Source: *Census of Population of Ireland, 1961, Vol. III, Part II, Birthplaces* (Dublin, 1965), Table 3, p. 84.

But in the context of the total outward movement in the nineteenth and twentieth century, tables 3 and 4 supports Lee's suggestion that the low rate of return emigration was a 'distinctive characteristic' of the Irish emigrant experience to the US until the mid-1950s at least when increasing affluence, the growth of air travel and perhaps the curiosity of second and subsequent generations, made it more attractive and appealing.⁵⁷ Nonetheless, keeping in mind the above caveats, table 4 indicates that between 1926 and 1961 every county in the Republic of Ireland registered American-born residents exclusive of returning Irish-born residents. In relation to the former category, the Commission on Emigration and other Population Problems suggested in 1954 that 'that the majority were of Irish parentage'.⁵⁸

Table 4
Persons in twenty-six counties born in the United States of America, 1926-61

	1926	1936	1946	1961
Leinster	2,507	3,005	2,741	2,590
County				
Carlow	55	74	67	53
Dublin*	966	1,339	1,333	1,527
Kildare	127	131	135	106
Kilkenny	207	165	124	92
Laois	92	100	90	58
Longford	206	213	139	109
Louth	158	199	170	115
Meath	162	179	153	126
Offaly	147	153	130	85
Westmeath	173	168	157	116
Wexford	136	169	128	102
Wicklow	78	115	115	101
Munster	2,716	3,031	2,605	1,918
Clare	219	282	211	178
Cork*	1,001	1,128	937	681
Kerry	529	586	456	368
Limerick*	422	473	499	325

⁵⁷ Lee, 'Emigration: 1922-1998', p. 265. See also *Commission on Emigration and other Population Problems*, p. 115.

⁵⁸ *Commission on Emigration and other Population Problems*, p. 132.

Tipperary County N.R.	136	152	134	91
Tipperary County S.R.	212	218	189	147
Waterford*	197	192	179	128
Connacht	2,361	2,594	2,030	1,272
Galway	794	908	706	440
Leitrim	296	251	177	118
Mayo	655	769	605	390
Roscommon	392	374	301	187
Sligo	224	292	241	137
Ulster	1,348	1,481	1,133	667
Cavan	363	341	257	158
Donegal	747	872	623	370
Monaghan	238	268	253	139

* County and County Borough

Source: *Census of Population of Ireland, 1926*, vol. 111, (Dublin, 1965), table 6a. p. 152; *Census of Population of Ireland, 1961*, Vol. III (Dublin, 1965), table 3, p. 84

But it is the personal testimony which provides texture to the patchy statistics. One of the common features of the testimony collected in 1955 and 2001, was the reference to the returning emigrant from America. In the nineteenth century, some came home to marry, due to bad health or an inability to cope with the pace of life and work, to retire, owing to the death of a parent and finally, to visit for a short period.⁵⁹ Similarly in the twentieth century, such motives are identifiable and the impact was significant.

In 1955, most of the people Seán Tom Ceárnaí knew in the locality of the Blasket islands in north west Kerry, had more relations in the US than in Ireland and he provided an overview of the incidence of returned emigrants in the locality. He stated that the 'sole occupier' of house and land in Carraig townland was Mrs Breathnach, a pensioner who lived alone and was a 'returned Yank'. In Mhuiríoch of the 'fourteen or fifteen inhabited dwellings, five or six of them have returned Americans either as the man of the house or the woman of the house or both; and up to a few years ago, there were people left in three or four houses who spent a spell, long or short in the USA.' While in Clachán Dubh, the eldest of the Walshe family had returned home permanently some years previously as did a son of the Crihins and daughter of the Murphys in Cillmaolceadair. The Begleys who were settled thirty years in the latter townland were still regarded as a 'new family' because their father had come from Conaile originally, then spent some years in the US and returned with money to buy a farm from a 'Connor man'. Cearnaí concluded:

So every household of the six households now in Cill has a close connection with USA. Three of the men of the houses were in USA one married there, and came home to the bit of land after a spell.

The fourth yank is dead a few years.

So that if the returned yanks with their families were taken [out] of the population there would not be many left.⁶⁰

In Kilmore, county Wexford, in 1955, seven men from six families, who had emigrated to the US had

⁵⁹ Schrier, *Ireland and the American emigration, 1850-1900*, p. 130.

⁶⁰ IMC, Ms. 1407, Seán Tom Ceárnaí, aged 72 years, fisherman, Blasket islands, county Kerry, interviewed January 1955.

returned to live in the area and in the neighbouring Kilrane townland, John Roche, Tess Hayes and Mrs Keating (formerly Moore) were identified as the 'returned yanks'.⁶¹ This trend emerged also in testimony obtained for counties Clare, Cork, Galway, Offaly and Limerick city during the period under consideration, with men sometimes known throughout their lives by the appellation 'Yank Kennedy' in Thurles, county Tipperary, 'Yank Breen' in Drumcullen, county Offaly and 'Yank Slattery' in Clarecastle, county Clare.⁶²

Those individuals who returned home permanently to east Galway after the second world war, did so 'because they had parents living on their own at home, another son had left or had died or a daughter had left or died or got married and there was no one at home ... others obviously failed in America, didn't make the vast wealth which they had hoped for'.⁶³ Jim Brien came home to Drumcullen, county Offaly, due to 'family conditions ... and he had to stay to work the farm'.⁶⁴ Others who had prospered, voluntarily returned to purchase land and settle such as 'Yank Slattery' in Clarecastle, county Clare who returned in the late 1950s, 'got a site' from a relative to build a house and 'always seemed to have plentiness'.⁶⁵ After witnessing three or four generations of emigration to the US from the Blasket Islands region, by 1955 Seán Tom Ceárnaí believed that:

Many emigrants returned to stay. There were many reasons for their return:

- (a) some made good and returned to settle down in Ireland. Some bought farms, others married into farms, some bought public houses or shops or married into them. Others who were too old to marry or settle down lived on their savings generally with their relatives
- (b) some others returned to Ireland because the climate did not agree with them, or for health reasons
- (c) some returned because they could not stick the work or keep to the clock. A lot of fishermen came back and went fishing again. They preferred that free life to bosses and clocks. Were it not for the fishing the most of them would have remained over
- (d) a good few ran home at the time of the depression
- (e) some ne'er do wells returned,⁶⁶

The return of female emigrants to live in Ireland was remembered specifically because some returned with money and married soon after. Tess Hayes and Mrs Keating of Kilrane, county Wexford both came into this category.⁶⁷ While Nellie Owens who emigrated from Edenderry, county Offaly, to America in 1900, worked in a department store and then the Hotel Commodore in New York, married there but returned with her husband in 1927 and 'lived on their savings.' George McGuire's aunt returned to county Wexford 'after making an awful lot of money in America and lived with her nephew'.⁶⁸ The ability of these women to create wealth for themselves in the US, made their presence in a rural society where women had few such opportunities until the 1960s, note-worthy and emphasised the positive image of America as a place of opportunity and prosperity for men and women alike.⁶⁹

But returned yanks could represent also a negative image of America although it was less powerful.

⁶¹ IMC, MS. 1407, William Cahill, aged 65 years, retired post man, Ballask, Kilmore, county Wexford, interviewed March 1955; *ibid.*, John Murphy, Richard Joyce, aged 90 years, farmer, Hayesland, Kilrane, county Wexford, interviewed March 1955.

⁶² ULOHP, Tapes 6, 4, 1, 7 and Francis Power, aged 57 years, victualler and farmer, Clarecastle, county Clare, interviewed 27 May 2001, Tape 2.

⁶³ ULOHP, Tape 6.

⁶⁴ ULOHP, Tape 9.

⁶⁵ ULOHP, Tape 2.

⁶⁶ IMC, MS. 1407, Tadhg Ó Murchadha, An Coireán, county Kerry, collector.

⁶⁷ IMC, MS. 1408, Richard Joyce, aged 90 years, farmer, Kilrane, county Wexford, interviewed March 1955.

⁶⁸ IMC, MS. 1408, Mrs O Connor (Nellie Owens), aged 85 years, housewife, Edenderry, county Offaly, interviewed February 1955.

⁶⁹ The Commission on Emigration and other Population problems noted 'In this country, unlike many others, married women do not usually take up regular gain employment outside the home'. *Commission on Emigration and other Population Problems*, p. 81.

Seán Tom Cearnaí suggested that some emigrants from north west Kerry did not prosper as was hoped and had little choice but to return to Ireland.⁷⁰ Jim Brien came home to Drumcullen, county Offaly 'during Prohibition ... [due to the] bad times in America'.⁷¹ Recollections of such emigrants are not extensive, details are hazy and do not refer at all to those who came to the attention of the American and Irish authorities. This latter category offered the home community another view of life in the US.

On 7 October 1922, a hearing was held at Ellis Island, New York by the Immigration Service of the Office of Commissioner of Immigration. Michael Carroll was charged first, with being a stowaway at the time of his entry into the United States, secondly, that he was a 'person likely to become a public charge' and thirdly, that he 'entered by water at a time or place other than as designated by immigration officials'. Carroll was thirty-nine years of age, born in Waterford on 4 October 1883 or 1884, had a number of aliases and had been deported previously from the US in July 1914. He had no passport, visa or money and stated that he did not want to be represented by a lawyer because he wanted 'to be sent back - I cannot make a living here.' The Immigrant Inspector, Thomas J Conry, noted 'he admits having performed no work since he came to the US, just loafing around, and is destitute.' Conry recommended that a warrant be issued for the 'alien's deportation'.⁷² He could not be deported immediately because the next step in the procedure was to verify his identification which could be undertaken only by his relatives in Ireland. By 12 June 1923, Carroll had not been deported as his brother and sister living in Waterford could not recognise his picture or perhaps were unwilling to do so and his fate is unknown.⁷³

Technically by 1923, Carroll was a citizen of the Irish Free State and needed an Irish visa to enter the country of his birth. Application had to be made first to an Irish consular representative in the US who would then contact the Department of External Affairs in Dublin. The latter then requested the Department of Justice, through the Garda Síochána, to check out the financial circumstances of the returnees' family and recommend whether a visa should be issued or not. A further associated consular function from 1932 onwards was to process requests for assisted passages from needy returned emigrants of Irish nationality. In these cases the Irish state paid the fare or the steamship company was requested to reduce the price of the fare. In the event of the applicant not having sufficient funds to pay for the fare and, more importantly, support themselves in Ireland or if their family refused to keep them, a visa and assisted passage of either sort could be refused. Among the more detailed cases in External Affairs' files was that of Mrs Elizabeth Doyle, a widow who was 'not destitute' but was being 'maintained' by the Department of Social Welfare in New York city.⁷⁴

In December 1936, the US Department requested McCauley in New York, to issue a passport to Doyle who wanted to return to Ireland.⁷⁵ She provided the name and address of her son, with whom she proposed to live. The Garda Síochána at Union Quay, Cork city, investigated and discovered that John Mahoney resided with his wife, three daughters and one grand-child. He worked with Cork Corporation, was in receipt of a pension of £1 per week from the British Army and rented rooms at 21 North Main Street, Cork city. Mahoney told the police that he was 'willing to support his mother' in the event of her return and had a vacant room for her but he would 'not contribute in any way to her assisted passage.' The Garda report stated that Mahoney 'was known to be respectable and ... assisted passage be recommended on behalf of Mrs Doyle.' Seán Murphy, assistant secretary in External

⁷⁰ IMC, MS. 1407, Seán Tom Cearnaí.

⁷¹ ULOHP, Tape 9.

⁷² NAI, D/T, S2033, Enclosure to Despatch, No. 16 of 21 December 1922, Devonshire to Geddes; Thomas J Conry, summary, undated probably October 1921.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, Healy to Devonshire, 12 June 1923.

⁷⁴ See NAI, D/EA, 102/143, 102/32 for other examples

⁷⁵ Franklin D Roosevelt introduced the Social Security Act on 14 August 1935 to provide for unemployment benefit, pensions and help to needy members of society.

Affairs, recommended to McCauley that the visa, passport and assisted passage be granted to allow her to return.⁷⁶ Neither Doyle nor Geary would return with any resources and expected to be maintained by family members as did Mrs Annie Tucker (formerly Lally), her husband and eight children.

Tucker who lived in New York applied to McCauley in March 1937, for a visa to return to live permanently with her mother in Bohermore, county Galway. But the Garda Síochána report noted that accommodation in her mother's house was limited as there were already five people living there. Seán Murphy wrote to McCauley on 22 April 1937, 'it is understood from the Department of Justice that none of Mrs Tucker's relatives in this country are in very comfortable circumstances and that they would not be in a position to support Mr Tucker in addition to his wife and family.'⁷⁷ The visa was denied but it was clear from the circumstances that the family had not prospered in the US and, therefore, could not financially support themselves upon return to home.

It was also the case that families in Ireland could refuse to take responsibility for returning relatives who were suffering from physical or psychiatric problems. Alice Stapleton was born in Kilkee, county Clare, on 4 May 1899 and emigrated to America in late 1922. In 1937 she was an inmate of the State Hospital in New York city and, on her behalf, the US Department of Mental Hygiene requested McCauley to issue her a passport. She was described as being 'in a very comfortable mental and physical condition at the present time' and wished to return to Kilkee to live with her parents.⁷⁸ The Garda in Kilrush reported on 1 March 1937, that:

The parents of this woman are in very poor circumstances, as the father's income of 10 shilling, per week, the Old Age Pension, is the only means of support they have. They have residing with them one son who is a casual labourer and is rarely employed and one daughter who has no occupation. The parents state that they have no intimation of the return of this daughter and that unless she has means of her own, they will be unable to support her.⁷⁹

Seán Murphy advised McCauley in New York on 8 March 1937, that 'In view of the facts as disclosed in the Garda report you should not recommend the grant of any assisted passage to Miss Stapleton ... In that Miss Stapleton appears to be clearly a citizen of Saorstát Éireann, there could be, of course, no objection to the issue to her of a passport should the Department of Mental Hygiene decide to pay the full cost of her journey home.'⁸⁰ It is unknown if she returned but if she did, she also represented the negative side of the American experience.

On the other side, the presence of the returned-American with Irish connections, in the locality for a short holiday certainly represented prosperity and affluence and became a feature of society particularly after the Second World War. For example, 11,000 American tourists visited Ireland in 1937 and 1947, 15,000 in 1948 and 33,000 in 1953.⁸¹ Each post-war government when referring to this group in the context of tourism, promulgated the myth of America. For example, John A Costello, leader of the second inter-party government, told his cabinet on 5 October 1956 'there is still a vast untapped source of tourist traffic in the United States ... there are approximately twenty million people of Irish birth,

⁷⁶ NAI, D/EA, 102/143, McCauley to External Affairs, 30 December 1936, External Affairs to Justice, 12 January 1937, Garda Síochána, Cork to Justice, 8 April 1937, External Affairs to McCauley, 27 April 1937.

⁷⁷ NAI, D/EA, 102/32, McCauley to External Affairs, 8 April 1937, Justice to External Affairs, 18 May 1937, Murphy to McCauley, 22 April 1937.

⁷⁸ NAI, D/EA, 102/34, McCauley to External Affairs, 4 February 1937.

⁷⁹ NAI, D/EA, 102/34, Dawson to Justice, 16 February 1937.

⁸⁰ NAI, D/EA, 102/34, , Murphy to McCauley, 8 March 1937.

⁸¹ NAI, D/T, S13087B, Inter-Departmental Working Party on Dollar Earnings, First Interim Report on Tourism, 18 November 1949; Whelan, *Marshall Plan*, p. 339. These figures are approximate and include those who travelled to Ireland directly by sea and air but do not include those who travelled via Britain or Northern Ireland. In June 1953, the US Department of Commerce published a figure of 23,800 Americans as having departed the US for Ireland in 1952. *Irish Trade Journal*, September 1953, p. 159.

or Irish extraction, in the United States, and if ... we could induce them to spend a holiday in Ireland once every ten years it would electrify our economy.'⁸² Each was wealthy and their lucrative potential was not just a given fact but one to be exploited to financially benefit Ireland. Visiting relatives was one reason for such short-term visits and others related to attendance at specific events such as the Tailtean games in 1924 and 1928, the Eucharistic congress in 1932, An Tóstal in 1953 and the Holy Year celebrations in Rome in 1950 also drew American visitors to visit en route.⁸³

Irrespective of the length of stay of a returned emigrant, each created an impression in the local community which shaped ideas about America. Not only were they seen to be wealthy because they could afford to return but they expected certain standards in domestic facilities. Accommodation and amenities in relatives' houses were subjected to serious attention and sometimes underwent a transformation. Johanna O'Dwyer who witnessed three generations of emigration in county Tipperary recalled a sense of embarrassment 'when they came home first' because 'there was no toilet. There was no such thing as the toilet or bath or anything like that.'⁸⁴ Margaret O'Connell remembered the occasion when a first cousin visited Clarecastle, county Clare, from New York in the 1960s, 'we painted, we papered ... a new bathroom went in ... you name it, it was in the house'.⁸⁵ The improvement in facilities, specifically bathrooms, for the American visitor suggests an awareness that Irish standards of domestic amenities were lacking, particularly in rural areas.

Not surprisingly, the statistics bear this out. The Electricity Supply Board (ESB) began its rural electrification scheme in 1947 and by 1956 had connected over half of rural households. Regarding water and sanitary services, Daly suggests that the gap between urban and rural probably widened during the 1950s. In 1946, 92 per cent of urban homes had access to piped water and 35 per cent had a fixed bath. While 91 per cent of rural homes relied on a pump, a well or a stream for water and less than 4 per cent of rural homes had a fixed bath.⁸⁶ Approximately half of all private households in 1946 had no sanitary facilities and just one-third had flush toilets with rural householders least equipped.⁸⁷

Moreover, Daly's research on the provision of running water for rural homes highlights that as recent as 1971, approximately 42 per cent of rural homes lacked a supply and less than one-third of rural households contained a fixed bath.⁸⁸ Indeed in the 1970s, when a cousin of Francis Power's started visiting Clarecastle from the US, he had to go to 'neighbours down the road, who had a bathroom, for his bath'.⁸⁹ At the very least, visiting Americans drew attention to the gap in the standards of sanitary facilities available within private homes and indeed commercial accommodation, between parts of Ireland and America respectively. Such visits appeared to emphasise, to use Nora's description, the 'very backward' nature of rural Ireland.⁹⁰ Similar terminology was used by the Commission on Emigration and other Population Problems in 1954 when commenting on differences between social

⁸² NAI, Department of Taoiseach (hereafter D/T), S16095, Extract from Taoiseach's speech at Inter-Party meeting on 5 October 1956. In 1949, the first inter-party government negotiated an easing of restrictions on visa requirements with the American government whereby the Irish visa requirement for American citizens entering Ireland as tourists was abolished provided they held a valid American passport. *Irish Trade Journal*, September 1949, p. 174.

⁸³ By 1950, it was evident to successive governments and leaders of tourism that while these events had drawn in American visitors to Ireland, the numbers were small in comparison to the numbers of Americans visiting Europe generally. This was particularly obvious after 1945 when shortages of dollars and the pressure from Marshall Plan administrators pushed Irish governments to become active on the matter. NAI, D/T, S15674A, Fógra Fáilte, Annual Report and Accounts, 21 September 1951 to 31 March 1953 to the Minister for Industry and Commerce; *ibid*, S13087G, TJ Sheehy, 'The Irish Hotelier', Oifig and Taoiseach to the government, 13 June 1950.

⁸⁴ ULOHP, Tape 7.

⁸⁵ ULOHP, Tape 3.

⁸⁶ Mary E Daly, 'Turn on the tap': The state, Irish women and running water' in Maryann Gialanella Valiulis and Mary O'Dowd, *Women and Irish history*, Dublin 1997, pp. 206-7.

⁸⁷ Central Statistics Office, *That was then, this is now. Changes in Ireland, 1949-99*, Dublin 2000, p. 22.

⁸⁸ Daly, 'Turn on the tap', p. 218.

⁸⁹ ULOHP, Tape 2.

amenities and housing standards in urban and rural areas; 'to the young mind, rural areas appear, dull, drab, monotonous, backward and lonely'.⁹¹ But, while returned emigrants or visitors from America certainly represented modern, up-to-date standards, by the late 1950s these were distinctive not just to the US context but were associated also with urban areas generally.

The clothing and behaviour of returned emigrants also transmitted certain messages. Referring to the earlier period, Tadhg Ó Murchadha of An Coireán, south Kerry, said 'the clothing of the returned emigrant was always much admired', while Johanna O'Dwyer in Thurles, county Tipperary, took it further and said 'they were more stylish'. Similarly Tony remembering the more recent 1950s, recalled 'they wore brighter clothing ... they were dressed differently and probably better dressed as well ... people at home had the one suit from one end of the year to the next'.⁹² Although 'never copied', their apparel reflected a certain affluence also.⁹³ Seán Tom Ceárnaí from the Blasket islands stated 'the most of them wearing fine clothes and having a watch and chain and plenty of cash created a favourable impression of the USA'.⁹⁴ Although the clothes were considered 'too loud', the general opinion was held in Tadhg Ó Murchadha's locality that the individual 'must be possessed of great wealth'. Or as Margaret O'Connell in Clarecastle put it, the 'Americans when they came home ... had full and plenty'.⁹⁵ For those who stayed permanently, they soon settled down to retirement or to eke out a living on a farm or pub, but in county Kerry at least, they always 'had the name of ... money'. While in Edenderry, county Offaly 'they were level-headed people who did not "show off" their wealth'. Others became 'a bit disgusted with the old country and left again'.⁹⁶

But America was associated not just with opportunities to prosper and become wealthy but some who returned represented an ethic of hard work also. In the first place to be able to come back to Ireland meant in Margaret O'Connell's words, 'they probably had worked very hard'.⁹⁷ Although their stories about life in America were known to be exaggerated some times, Tadhg Ó Murchadha believed they had 'acquired the habit of hard work and constant "driving" during their time in America'. Similarly Seán Tom Ceárnaí stated 'most of them were good workers ... the most of them praised the USA in a way. A good country for the man who was not lazy to work'.⁹⁸ The qualities noticeable of the returned emigrant to the Edenderry locality, county Offaly, were 'love of work and industry, personal cleanliness, thrift, early to rise in the morning, efficiency in their work. The women were good housekeepers and good cooks. The men folk improved their homes and farms. They showed no class distinctions'.⁹⁹ While these informants identified and praised the work ethic of the returned Americans, the reality of life for most American factory workers did not impinge on their positive view of America: whereas it did not impress Irish trade union leaders in the early 1950s.

Under the auspices of a Marshall Plan-sponsored programme to promote increased productivity, representatives of the Congress of Irish Unions (CIU) visited the US in November 1951. The

⁹⁰ The importance of providing fully equipped bathrooms in Irish hotels was identified in 1950 by a group of Irish hoteliers who visited the US under the auspices of the Marshall Plan. The facility was deemed a basic requirement for touring Americans and an area requiring capital investment by owners of Irish hotels. NAI, D/T, S13087A, Brendan O'Regan, Patrick F Dornan, Economic Co-operation Administration Technical Assistance Programme in travel, hotel and allied activities, 1950, 29 April 1950; ULOHP, Tape 1.

⁹¹ *Commission on Emigration and other Population Problems*, p. 136.

⁹² IMC, 1407, Tadhg Ó Murchadha, ULOHP, Tape 7, 6.

⁹³ IMC, 1408, Matthew Mangan, aged 76 year, farmer, Clonmullen, Edenderry, county Offaly, interviewed February 1955.

⁹⁴ IMC, 1407, Seán Tom Ceárnaí

⁹⁵ IMC, 1407, Tadhg Ó Murchadha, ULOHP, Tape 3.

⁹⁶ IMC, 1407, Tadhg Ó Murchadha, 1408 Matthew Mangan.

⁹⁷ ULOHP, Tape 3.

⁹⁸ IMC, 1407, Seán Tom Ceárnaí, Tadhg Ó Murchadha

⁹⁹ IMC, 1408, William Byrne, aged 54 years, farmer, Killane, Edenderry, county Offaly, interviewed February 1955. All testimonies identified a talkative occasionally boastful, nature as characteristics of the returnees and the distinctive accent and use of slang emphasised their presence in a gathering. According to Seán Tom Ceárnaí, 'most had a lot to say' and were usually sought out for information about America. IMC, 1407, Seán Tom Ceárnaí, Tadhg Ó Murchadha.

subsequent report noted that the American worker enjoyed a higher standard of living including homes equipped with 'televisions, telephones, fridges, washing machines, electrical cleaners, etc. ... central heating, hot water - 24 hrs'. But the price to be paid involved married women working outside the home while the demands of mass-production dictated the working day, making it monotonous and mind numbing. The CIU team believed that the American worker had become a slave to machinery and, therefore, they were not so admiring of the American work ethic due to the high costs that attended it.¹⁰⁰ But for the receiving community of returned emigrants, the manner in which they had succeeded mattered little, their presence, clothes, behaviour and activities seems to have created an impression of prosperity, progress and modernisation and that the US was the 'land of opportunity' if a person was willing to work hard.¹⁰¹

(c) *The written and moving source*

Other channels through which information about the US was received and noted by the informants were cinema, comic books, magazines and fashion catalogues originating in America. Although Nora Kelly did not equate them specifically with America, she felt that pictures of women's clothing created an image of wealth.¹⁰² Eileen Dinan's father received a copy of the *New Haven Journal* regularly which 'he enjoyed looking through' as did she as a child in county Clare in the 1920s and 1930s because 'there were photographs of people and houses and countryside ... that ... were lovely.' She continued 'we had this idea about America, and looking at the paper would bring it all home to us.'¹⁰³ Similarly, magazines such as *Time*, *Life* and *Picture Post* provided Tony Hogan with information about America in the 1940s and 1950s.¹⁰⁴

The role of film in projecting positive and negative images of American life which vividly contrasted with that in Ireland, has been noted elsewhere. Browne has written that in the 1930s 'countryside, town and city were ... addicted ... to the Hollywood film'. Just as in the rest of the English-speaking world, in villages, towns and cities throughout Ireland, halls, walls and cinemas of all sorts, showed the 'celluloid dreams from California'.¹⁰⁵ By 1950, one in every three people in Ireland went to the cinema at least once a week and £3.5 million was spent on tickets and Hollywood-made films had become the dominant force in world cinema.¹⁰⁶

Attending the cinema was a popular form of entertainment; its impact on society remains difficult to measure. Certainly, concerns about Irish culture being able to withstand the immoral, atheistic values portrayed in American films and magazines were constantly voiced from the 1920s onwards by Catholic priests and bishops, writers, politicians and public figures.¹⁰⁷ According to Thomas O'Brien who went to the cinema regularly from the 1920s onwards, films represented America as a place of 'crime ... a place where the almighty dollar was God'.¹⁰⁸ In other words, the negative image of America as unsafe, materialistic and lacking spiritual values prevailed with him and indeed partly influenced O'Brien not to emigrate there.

On the other hand, from the 1940s onwards Peggy McDermott went to the cinema weekly after she moved to Johnstown in county Kilkenny, and she thought 'America was everything' from the films

¹⁰⁰ Congress of Irish Unions, *Report on the visit of a team from the Congress of Irish Unions to the USA in 1951*, Dublin 1952, pp. 21-3.

¹⁰¹ ULOHP, Tape 4.

¹⁰² ULOHP, Tape 1.

¹⁰³ ULOHP, Tape 5.

¹⁰⁴ ULOHP, Tape 6.

¹⁰⁵ Terence Brown, *Ireland: a social and cultural history 1922-79*, London 1985, p. 153.

¹⁰⁶ *The Furrow*, 6, 1955, nos. 1-12, p. 304; Brian McLroy, *Irish cinema: an illustrated history*, Dublin 1988, p. 39; Kevin Rockett, 'The silent period' in Kevin Rockett, Luke Gibbons and, John Hill, *Cinema and Ireland*, Syracuse 1988, p. 39.

¹⁰⁷ Whelan, *The Marshall Plan*, pp 362-3.

¹⁰⁸ ULOHP, Tape 4.

she saw.¹⁰⁹ For her, cinema confirmed America as a place of great size, growth, speed and affluence. Furthermore, it contrasted sharply with life in rural Ireland and indeed, elsewhere in Europe as the work of Ellwood and others has shown.¹¹⁰ Even by 1954 the report of the Commission on Emigration and other Population Problems stated that:

through cinema and the radio, and above all by direct experience either personal or through relatives, people ... are more than ever before, becoming aware of the contrast between their way of life and those in other countries, especially in urban centres, though their impressions in these matters are often more favourable than the facts warrant. They are gradually becoming less willing to accept the relatively frugal standards of previous generations.¹¹¹

Conclusion

An image of America existed in parts of Ireland in the period 1922 to 1960 which had its origins in American and Irish societies respectively and it was two dimensional in nature. America was imagined as a place of freedom and opportunity and this positive perception of the US appears to have persisted from the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries. It was heavily influenced by emigration from two perspectives. First, there were the financial and practical benefits of emigration which accrued to individuals, families and friends in Ireland. As Francis Power in Clarecastle, county Clare, said 'America to us would mean everything, because just looking back, first and foremost, our aunts went there, and they looked after us in the parcels ... think of all the goodness we got sent home from the States'.¹¹² Secondly, there were the letters and presence of the 'returned yank' which contributed to this optimistic view of America also.

This positive image remained intact even when evidence of possible negative experiences existed. The respondents accepted first, that economic conditions in the US were depressed from time to time, secondly, that not all Irish emigrants did well in the US, thirdly, some returned emigrants from the US displayed common characteristics such as being 'loud', 'boastful' and 'flaunting' money which were regarded as vulgar and finally, that American society could be materialistic, dangerous and unsafe.¹¹³ But this study suggests that ultimately sufficient individuals were perceived to have prospered in the US, managed to exploit the opportunities available, send money and goods home, pay a passage home for a holiday or to stay permanently, to outweigh the inglorious actuality of life in the US.

Keeping in mind Clear's warnings that memory can become 'well-polished' over time, it seems that the 'idea of America', in Matt Spain's words 'was something to dream about' in 1960 just as it had been in 1922.¹¹⁴ But two further dimensions were added to the positive image over time; first, during world war two, America was believed to have 'saved us from Hitler' and secondly, in the 1950s when the economic stagnation worsened, the under-developed state of Irish society emphasised the view that America was, in Peggy McDermott's words, 'El Dorado'.¹¹⁵ The myth of America was intact in many minds in 1960.

¹⁰⁹ ULOHP, Tape 8.

¹¹⁰ Pierre Sorlin, *European cinemas, European societies, 1939-1990*, London 1991. See also David Ellwood (ed.), *Hollywood in Europe: politics, governments, markets*, Amsterdam 1994; Richard Pells, *Not like us. How Europeans have loved, hated and transformed American culture since world war 2*, New York 1997.

¹¹¹ *Commission on Emigration and other Population Problems, 1948-54*, p. 174.

¹¹² ULOHP, Tape 2.

¹¹³ IMC, 1407, Seán Tom Ceárnaí, ULOHP, Tape 2.

¹¹⁴ ULOHP, Tape 9.

¹¹⁵ ULOHP, Tape 5, 9, 8.

Appendix One

Wording of the questionnaire used in the ULOHP in 2001. It is partly based upon that administered by the Irish Manuscripts Commission on behalf of Arnold Schrier, in 1955.

1. Do you know of any friends or relatives who went to America in the period? When did they go? How old were they? What was their occupation? Were they married or single? If married, did they take their family with them or send for them later?
2. Why did these people decide to emigrate? Was it lack of employment? Letters from America? Money from America? Job offer in America? A returned emigrant from America? Personal problems at home? Political reasons? Any other?
3. In some localities it was the custom to hold an 'American wake' for intending emigrants on the eve of departure. Have you ever attended such a wake? Could you describe a wake and how was it conducted? Could you indicate who attended: just family, or friends also? Where was it held? When did it begin? How long did it last?
4. Were 'American wakes' usually held for a single individual or only for groups of intending emigrants? Were wakes also held for emigrants to lands other than America, e.g. 'Australian wakes'? How far back can you remember that 'American wakes' were held in your locality? Are they still a practice? When did they stop?
5. What songs, stories or ballads grew up about emigration to America among those who remained? Were there any special ones which were peculiar to your area? Were they generally sad? Did any tell of eventual success in America? Of the emigrant's return to Ireland?
6. It is well known that many emigrant letters were sent from America which did much to foster the impression of a land of opportunity across the Atlantic. Were there particular phrases or descriptions in these letters which especially fired the imagination of the people at home? Did any of these become traditional as descriptions or sayings about America?
7. In some areas the emigrant letter eventually became an object of sarcastic cant, as illustrated in such expressions as: 'How are you doing? Oh, fine, just like the American letter!' Were there any such expressions peculiar to your area? Were they all sarcastic? About when did the note of sarcasm begin to appear? What factors led to this change?
8. Upon receipt of a letter it sometimes became a custom to assemble the local family and neighbours and have the letter read aloud. Was this often done in your area? Were they ever read aloud in church by the parish priest or at social gatherings such as fairs? Was a letter often passed around from person to person so that all who wanted to could see and read it for themselves?
9. Gifts of money or remittances were frequently sent back from America. When such remittances arrived did the fact become generally known in the neighbourhood or did the recipients try to keep the information to themselves? Was money ever asked for, or did it more usually come without the asking? How was the money usually used: to pay the rent? Buy more land? Make improvements? To emigrate? Can you give specific examples of how this money was used?
10. A considerable number of emigrants often returned for a visit to their native land. Did they create a favourable impression? Were they sought after for information on America? Are there any stories about the experiences of emigrants in America? Did they try to persuade others to emigrate? Was their clothing admired and habits or styles of dress copied? Did they cause resentment because of bragging or 'showing off' their wealth?
11. Some emigrants returned to stay. Why did they return? Had they been successful or unsuccessful in America? What did they do when they got back here: work? buy a farm? live on savings? Did they talk much about America? Did they try to introduce 'American ways' of doing things? Did they try to

influence others to emigrate to America? Did they take an active part in local or national politics?

12. Much of the story of the innermost workings of emigration and the traditions which grew up around it lie buried in the millions of emigrant letters which flooded back to Ireland from America. Are any of these letters still in the possession of local families or persons in your area? Would these people be willing to allow a qualified research scholar to read them for their historical content? The names and addresses of such persons would be greatly appreciated.

13. What does America mean to you?

13a. How was your view of America formed?

13b. Does it have a negative and/or positive meaning? Explain either

14. Was the cinema regarded as representing America?

15. Was dancing regarded as representing America?

16. Was Ford regarded as representing America?

16a. Was mass-production regarded as representing America?

17. What American goods could be bought in shops?

17a. Can you remember the titles of books, newspapers or any author's names?

18. What were the first items in your house that were American?

19. Where did they come from?

20. Did other houses have them?

21. Did they represent progress or modernisation?

22. Do you remember Americans visiting Ireland? Airmen, politicians,

21 What were your feelings towards America during world war two?