

May 2017, Immigration Reflections

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Today we hear a great deal about immigration as millions around the world are leaving their home countries in search of a better life and hopes for they might expect in new lands. May is especially important for us as Immigration Month" since it marks the anniversaries of our own forbearers who left their homelands for America.

For the Quinns that was,

May 7, 1883 aboard the *USS Phildelphia*, landing in Philadelphia.

And, for the Coogans,

May 16, 1904 aboard the *HMS Furnessia*, arriving at Ellis Island, New York.

Both moved on to Western Pennsylvania where they hoped to reestablish themselves.

As far as we know Great grandfather John Quinn, although having been a farmer in Ireland, found work as a mechanic with the Pennsylvania Railroad in Pittsburgh with enough money to support his wife, Mary, and eight children. Grandad James Coogan, before sending for his family, had come earlier with his father John and brother Tom, to take up hard lives as coal miners in Fayette City, Pennsylvania; his wife Margaret came later with two children, three more were born here.

It is well for us, their descendants, to look back now on what it must have felt like for these courageous people to undertake the journeys they braved given rough sailing conditions along with the unknown of what they might find upon arrival..

While we know more about these two families coming from Ireland and Scotland – it is well to include many other families took similar risks and are now related to us by blood or marriage having come from England, Germany, Holland, Poland, Italy, China and many Middle-European countries. The gene pool has been vastly enriched beyond the first two – and the mix continues.

Leaving "home"

Consider for a moment what it must have been like to "leave home", to face the prospect of never again seeing parents, relatives, and friends, to hear cherished languages and enjoy those local customs that formed their very identity. Or, going to another country without the security of citizenship; taking children on an expensive and dangerous sea voyage knowing that many others died along the way all the while lacking in education or skills. What fortitude!

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What forced them to make these decisions? Might it have been the lack of even the basic necessities of food, want of financial security, political turmoil, crowded or unsanitary housing, religious discrimination – who knows what motivated them as they seldom spoke of these conditions so anxious were they to adapt and become “Americans”. Nor did they ever return to their countries of origin.

What they did hold in common were certain qualities of *faith*: faith in God and His Providence, faith in the American way of life, and above all faith in themselves. Practically speaking this was all they had but it was enough.

Today's Immigrant

We are far removed from the hostile conditions that plagued our ancestors but close at hand are the new immigrants in our country many millions of whom are threatened with or have already been removed from achieving their fondest hopes even after having lived here for many years. The politics behind these decisions is flawed to say nothing of the pending legislation or even attitudes of those who feel that these newcomers are a threat to our way of life. “Whose country is this anyway?” Short memories abound? Rejection and discrimination are not the answer.

A Closing Thought

Without going into a long search for answers to these perplexing questions this May we might take a few minutes to reflect on the courage of those whose names we carry to make real those admirable traits that motivated them to make possible the benefits we enjoy such as freedom, lifestyle, education, opportunity, and the expression of our religious Faith – qualities that meant so much to them. Let us not take them for granted.

In a real sense we are all now and will always be – pilgrims on a journey leading to an everlasting “homeland”. How we conduct ourselves and treat those traveling with us today will have much to say about how safely we will arrive at that destination. Meantime, let us be appreciative of and share the stories we have about those who laid down the paths we walk keeping in mind those newcomers for whom present conditions are far less welcoming.