

Bridgit's Iowa : the immigrant experience for Irish women in the hawkeye state, 1840-1900.



View/Open

[ALL OF IT.pdf \(1.039Mb\)](#)

Date

2016

Author

Burke- Smith, Bridgit.

Metadata

[Show full item record](#)

Abstract

This thesis will study the importance of labor in the experience of Irish female immigrants in the nineteenth century. It will explore the effects of Irish women having the opportunity in America to earn wages and contribute to their household, a role almost nonexistent in post-famine Ireland. It will also heavily focus on domestic labor, examining how women were expected to do non-paid work in the United States regardless of their other duties. It will be argued that while women had the opportunity to earn a degree of economic independence in the United States, economic independence did not allow them to escape from imposed patriarchal assumptions about women's traditional duties. The thesis will also look at Irish "whiteness" and argue that the labor of Irish women in America in paid domestic service was influential in the Irish climbing the ladder of American social success, a factor still often ignored by dominant historiographical discourse. The state of Iowa will provide a reference point for research, for Iowa's rich Irish and labor history make it a prime context to study the immigrant experience of Irish women.

URI

<http://hdl.handle.net/11040/24393>

Collections

[History](#)

File: [ALL OF IT.pdf](#) 1.039Mb

MIME type: application/pdf

[Show File](#)

Iowa women also served their nation during the war. Hundreds of women knitted sweaters, sewed uniforms, rolled bandages, and collected money for military supplies. Women formed soldiers' relief societies throughout the state. Annie Wittenmyer particularly distinguished herself through volunteer work. She spent much time during the war raising money and needed supplies for Iowa soldiers. As the Goettsch experience indicates, opportunities abounded for immigrants settling in Iowa in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The newcomers and their children could take up land, go into business, or pursue higher education. For most immigrants, these areas offered a better, more prosperous life than their parents had known in the old country. Irish immigrants of this period participated in significant numbers in the American Revolution, leading one British major general to testify at the House of Commons that "half the rebel Continental Army were from Ireland."^[34] Historiographer Michael J. O'Brien examined many of the muster rolls from the Revolutionary War and found mostly quintessential native Irish surnames and possible Anglicized Irish surnames, he. After 1840, most Irish Catholic immigrants went directly to the cities, mill towns, and railroad or canal construction sites on the East Coast. In upstate New York, the Great Lakes area, the Midwest and the Far West, many became farmers or ranchers. Women often were employed doing piece-work from home and sometimes went days without seeing sunlight. Those women who worked outside the home faced the hazards of working long hours in sweatshops. Men took the work of unskilled laborers on municipal projects. Low wages afforded these immigrants the lowest tier of housing -- tenements. In some cases, a dozen or more people shared one or two rooms, in buildings plagued by infectious disease and vermin. The Know-Nothings. The biggest challenge to immigrants in 19th-century America came from the rise in a movement known as nativism.