

Irish Americans



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Irish Americans

History:

- Irish among the first immigrants to North America
- First immigrants arrived during Colonial Period of the 18th century
- The potato famine in Ireland from 1845 to 1947 prompted immigration to the U.S. to escape disease and starvation
- Irish Roman Catholics settled in York, Lincoln and Cumberland counties in Maine
- In the early 1800's thousands of Irish sailed to America to build the Erie Canal

General Information:

- 15% of Maine's total population is Irish
- According to 2000 census data there are 192,344 Irish people living in Maine
- 40 million people in the United States claim Irish ancestry
- Catholic Irish Americans are among best educated & most liberal in U.S.
- Traditional language is Gaelic, primary language is English
- Western-style clothing (durable & comfortable)
- Irish symbols: color green, shamrock clover, harp

Holidays:

- New Year's Day, St. Patrick's Day, Good Friday, Easter Sunday & Easter Monday, Christmas, St. Stephen's Day (12/26), and bank holidays on the first Mondays of June & August

Cultural Characteristics:

- Irish culture emphasizes informality in public and private spaces
- Personal space is small & negotiable
- Not common to touch each other when walking or talking
- Values: humor, literacy, verbal acuity
- Loud, boisterous, and boastful behavior discouraged

Religion:

- No official religion, although 95% are Roman Catholic (90% attend weekly mass)
- Many Irish traveled to America in search of religious freedom because there was conflict between the Catholics and Protestants in their homeland
- Roman Catholic families have children baptized within a week of birth

Family Relationships / Roles

- Divorce discouraged but allowed in certain circumstances
- Most marriages occur in churches
- Monogamous marriages are the norm
- Emphasis on nuclear, traditional family
- Gender inequalities exist with pay and access to professional achievement is

more available to men.

- Traditionally, Irish American mother was a homemaker
- Female dominance of domestic life
- Women active in community
- Will & determination are dominant characteristics of Irish American woman
- Families large & tend to produce above-average number of children
- Children treated firmly, but kindly

Beliefs about work/play:

- Jobs occur in the labor force (service sector jobs, industry, and agriculture)
- Prominent in Democratic ranks of city & local politics, and federal government
- Irish renowned for hospitality to strangers
- Front doors commonly left open
- Entertainment/Recreation: pubs, drinking beer, reading, watching television,
- Listening to traditional music, flirting, chess, bingo, and bridge

Beliefs, Legends, Superstitions and Folk Remedies:

- Irish are master storytellers of Irish legends & mythology
- Diverse customs, traditions, folklore, mythology, music, and dance are one of the richest and most distinctive of all Europeans
- The ancient gods driven underground by Christianity
- Fire and Iron ~ weapons to be used against fairies
- Sing a song at a wake ~ shed a tear when a child is born
- If on a journey, you meet a red-haired woman ~ turn back
- If you meet a funeral on the road ~ take three steps backwards
- Best days for gathering medicinal herbs ~ May Eve and May Day
- Anoint the face with the blood of a bull or hare ~ to get rid of freckles
- Traditional cure for chest colds and coughs ~ Carrageen moss (edible seaweed) simmered in water

Challenges to Healthcare:

- Abortion frowned upon
- Chief cause of death is heart-related disease
- Rich diet high in fat and caloric content
- Alcoholism rate is high
- Alcohol-related illnesses common
- Above-average rate of mental health disease, with organic psychosis and schizophrenia particularly prevalent

Healing/wellness:

- Various forms of folk & alternative medicines exist
- To maintain good health & prevent illnesses:
 - * Wear holy metals & scapulars
 - * Bless the throat
 - * Never go to bed with wet hair

- * Never sit in a draft
- * Take laxatives regularly
- * Take tonic & extra vitamins
- * Exercise & fresh air
- * Avoid physicians except when quite ill
- Most rural communities in Ireland have locally known healers or healing places
- Treatments still used in Irish culture:
 - * Painting sore throat with iodine
 - * Soothing throat with lemon & honey
 - * Drinking hot whiskeys with cloves & honey for coughs or colds
 - * Rub Vicks on chest or breathing in hot Balsam vapors for coughs

Suggestions to Healthcare Providers:

- People of Irish ancestry should be treated with the same consideration as all Americans

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