

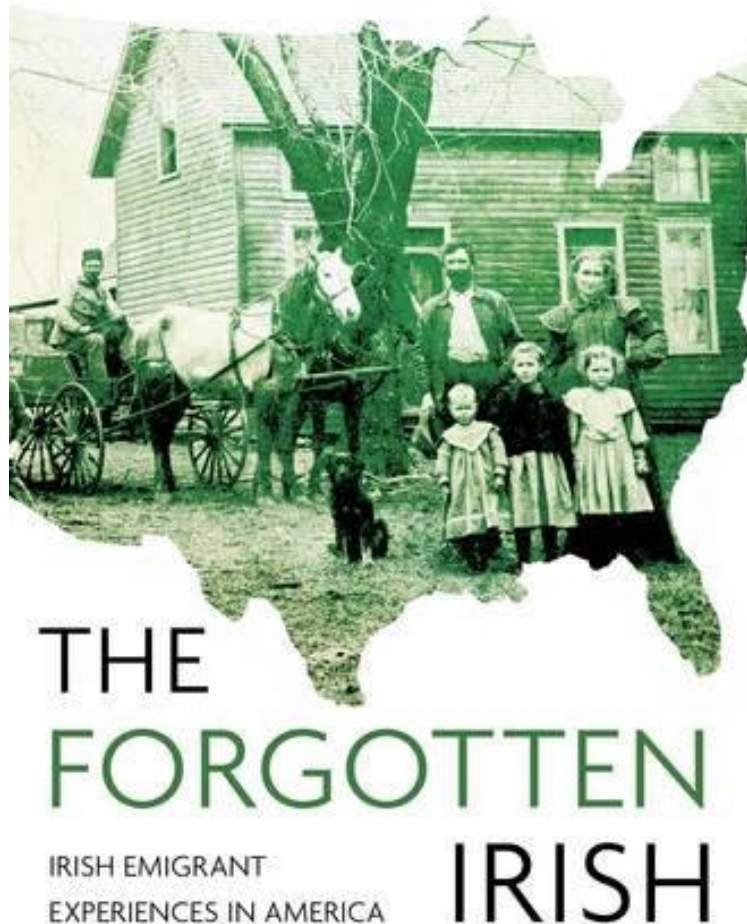
(Pdf free) The Forgotten Irish: Irish Emigrant Experiences in America

The Forgotten Irish: Irish Emigrant Experiences in America

Damian Shiels

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Damian Shiels : The Forgotten Irish: Irish Emigrant Experiences in America before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Forgotten Irish: Irish Emigrant Experiences in America:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Damian Shiel's Recovers the Voices of Irish Families from the Civil War EraBy Patrick YoungDamian Shiels's new book, The Forgotten Irish, opens with the story of a New York boy who would have been forgotten even if he had not been an Irish immigrant. Cornelius Garvin, Con to all who knew him, was an intellectually disabled young man who had come to the United States from Limerick, Ireland with his

family. His mental disorder had manifested itself in his teens and by the time the Civil War broke out, Con was listed as an idiot at the local mental asylum. The staff diagnosed him as incurable and partly idiotic. Cons widowed mother could not care for him and he was consigned to the local almshouse in Troy, New York. She visited him regularly and never stopped caring about his happiness. One day in 1863, Con disappeared. In spite of her own poverty, Cons mother searched for him tirelessly. She determined that her son had been sold by a member of the almshouse staff to a substitute broker, a man who made money by finding substitutes to serve for men drafted into the army. Con apparently went for \$400, close to \$10,000 in today's money. The worried mother abandoned her life in Troy to devote herself to searching for her disabled son in the Union army. Soldiers in camps around Washington often recorded seeing her looking for her poor Con. By May 21 of 1864, the Irish woman had even gotten the attention of Abraham Lincoln. The president wrote to Secretary of War Stanton, There is reason to believe this Cornelius Garvin is kept concealed to avoid any exposure of guilty parties. Will the Sec. of War have this thing probed? Unfortunately, by this time, Con was already dead, killed just three days earlier at the Battle of Spotsylvania in Virginia. Cons mother did not learn of this at the time, though. She would keep looking for him until 1866. Cons is the first of the three dozen stories of ordinary Irish immigrants, known only to their families and friends, that Damien Shiels brings us. These men all died in the Civil War or soon afterwards. Their stories come from letters Shiels, an archeologist and historian based in Cork, Ireland, found in the Army Pension files in the National Archives. The Pension Files, Shiels tells us, owe their origins to an act signed into law by President Abraham Lincoln on 14 July 1862. It provided for monthly pensions for both widows and men totally disabled by the American Civil War. The pensions were designed both to provide for the families of those killed or wounded during the war, and to spur military recruiting which had started to lag in the second year of the war. A widow would receive \$8 per month with a \$2 supplement for each child. The widows pension grew to \$12 per month by 1886, about a third of a laboring mans monthly wage. *The Forgotten Irish: Irish Emigrant Experiences in America* by Damian Shiels published by The History Press (2017) To qualify for a pension, widows and other relatives often submitted letters from the dead soldiers as evidence. Damian Shiels writes that the letters included with the application must have been treasured possessions, submitted only out of dire economic need. Once they were submitted, the letters became the property of the pension office and would never be returned. Given that many of the widows were supporting very young children, left orphaned by their fathers deaths in the service of the United States, surrender of the letters was necessary for the very survival of the soldiers children. Shiels has carefully transcribed each of the letters he includes in *The Forgotten Irish* and set it in the context of the soldiers life in Ireland and the United States. He also provides painstakingly researched information on the women made widows by the war, who were the most common applicants for these pensions. In a few cases, we also see the conflicts within a soldiers network. Some soldiers had been separated for years from their families in Ireland and started new families in America without ever telling one wife of the other wifes existence. The deceit only came to light when two wives applied for the same mans pension. The author treats the letters as artifacts of the past, but also as conduits of emotion among family members. Some of the letters express disappointment at betrayals by sibling or friends. Other express worry over the health and safety of the family left behind. We find out about family tragedies unrelated to the war that soldiers learned about at the front. Shiels emphasizes that this is not a war book, but a book about people and families and communities of immigrants in America and their corresponding communities in Ireland. This is not just another Civil War book. Shiels has brought to light the complex world of families living on two different continents, of soldiers with feet in two worlds. The fact that Shiels lives in the country his subjects left and is digging into their lives in an archive thousands of miles away by the Internet reminds us of the interconnections between both 19th Century and 21st Century immigrants. Lincoln, when asked to write his autobiography, said that his life could be summed up in a single sentence. He said that he had lived the life found in the short and simple annals of the poor. In reading the lives of these neglected immigrants, we realize how rich these lives of the poor were. Damien Shiels is to be thanked for rescuing these immigrant voices for a new generation. Patrick Young is Special Professor of Immigration Law at Hofstra University and the blogger behind *The Immigrants' Civil War*.² of 2 people found the following review helpful. *The travails of poor and working-class Irish families* By William D. Hickox I can do little more than echo Patrick Young's earlier review. Damian Shiels is a diligent researcher and author of the *Irish in the American Civil War* blog. In this second book he recounts the stories of several dozen Irish families who became caught up in America's deadliest war, suffering losses of their own. The travails of poor and working-class Irish families, the tough decisions to emigrate and enlist in a military at war, and long, exhausting struggles to claim pensions by surviving family members are all described with great insight and detail. The family vignettes Shiels provides open a window onto 19th-century life in Ireland and America.

On the eve of the American Civil War 1.6 million Irish-born people were living in the United States. The majority had emigrated to the major industrialized cities of the North; New York alone was home to more than 200,000 Irish, one in four of the total population. The research for this book has its origins in the pension records of the Civil War, which included birth and baptismal certs, medical records, and letters and private correspondence between family members. The treasure trove of material made available by the widows and dependent files comes, however, at a cost. In every

instance, the file only exists due to the death of a soldier or sailor. From that as its starting point, colored by sadness, the author has crafted the stories of 35 Irish families whose lives were emblematic of the nature of the Irish emigrant experience.