

## Famous Irish men and women

### The First Emigrant to go through Ellis Island

Annie Moore didn't know what to think of all the excitement that greeted her on January 1<sup>st</sup> 1882 when she disembarked the SS Nevada. She had just spent 12 days in the steerage section of a ship and was anxious to be reunited with her parents. She was also the first of 700 immigrants to disembark from one of three ships at the brand new processing station at Ellis Island. She was treated like a celebrity and was questioned by Charles M. Henley from the Secretary of the Treasurer's office in the Great Hall. He then presented her with a \$10 gold coin and a certificate.



Annie Moore

So, who was Annie Moore? She was born in Co. Cork in 1887, the second child and only daughter of Matthew and Mary Moore. Like many Irish at the time, Annie's parents wanted a better life for themselves and their family. So, they left their children with an aunt and after establishing themselves in New York, sent for them two years later. Annie and her brother sailed from Cobh (formerly Queenstown, Co. Cork) on the SS. Nevada on December 20<sup>th</sup>, arriving 12 days later on her 15<sup>th</sup> birthday, in America. Though she was sad to be leaving Ireland, she was excited at the prospect of seeing her parents again and starting a new life in America.

Annie and her brothers were met by their parents and taken to their new home in New York. However they soon moved to Indiana and then to Texas, finally settling down in Waco. In 1899, she married Patrick O'Connell, a descendant of Ireland's great patriot, Daniel O'Connell. They farmed and enjoyed a good life. They had eight children, five of whom survived. Patrick died during the great influenza epidemic of 1919 and Annie died tragically four years later, at the age of 46 after being struck by a train.

Annie Moore is commemorated both in Ellis Island and Cobh, in Ireland. She serves as a symbol, not only to the people of Ireland but for emigrants of all nations that have contributed to the rich fabric of the United States and also as a reminder of the courageous journey made by countless millions of immigrants. Ireland was the only country during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries that saw an exodus of just as many women as men. In fact, during several decades Irish female immigrants actually outnumbered males in stark contrast to the migration of Italians, Poles, Hungarians and Greeks, among whom males over-whelmingly dominated. Annie Moore also arrived in America at a time that welcomed immigrants. This changed dramatically after World War I when Congress imposed severe restrictions on immigration, reflecting the attitudes of a society grown wary of foreigners. After 1924, immigration slowed down to a trickle and Ellis Island fell into disuse. It was closed in 1954.

Today, four out of ten Americans can trace their heritage via Ellis Island. Annie Moore was the first. Over 17 million followed.

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