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Grosse Île, Quebec, resting place for thousands of Irish



In a quiet corner of Grosse Île, a small island near Quebec city in the St Lawrence river, lies a striking monument to the 7,500 immigrants and staff who died there over the 100 or so

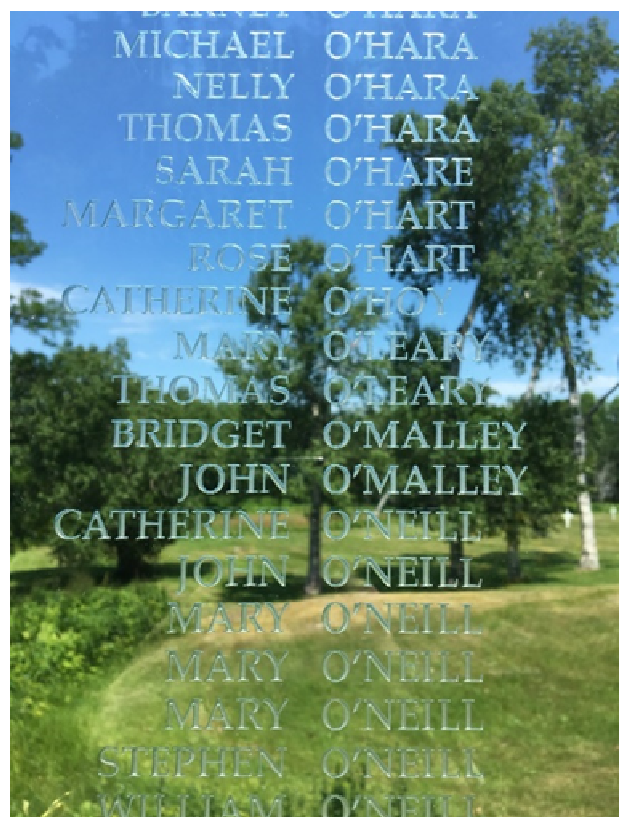
years when the island served as the quarantine station for the Port of Québec, the main gateway for immigrants into Canada. Built in 1997, the monument is a circular stone wall with two pathways crossing in the middle and several weathered iron sculptures shaped like the sails of a ship. Around one side of the monument are 12 tall glass panels where the names of the dead are engraved, listed by year from 1832 to 1937. By far the largest group is the approximately 5,500 listed for 1847, when the typhus epidemic killed thousands of Irish emigrants fleeing the famine in the notorious coffin ships.

On one of the panels for 1847 are engraved the names of Bridget O'Malley and John O'Malley. On our trip there in July of this year, it was strangely moving to come across these two distant family members. I wondered where in Ireland they had come from and whether they were by themselves or with other family members who survived. Were they adults or children? Some further research might possibly shed more light on who they were, but it was a brief visit and I haven't had the chance to investigate further since.

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President Mary McAleese visited the island in 1998 for the official opening of the new monument.

Nearby is the graveyard where those who died are buried. There are no individual headstones, just a number of symbolic crosses erected in recent times over the mass graves. We can only assume that Bridget and John are in there with the rest.



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The depot was originally set up in 1832 to contain a cholera epidemic, believed to be caused by the large influx of European immigrants, and the station was reopened in the mid-Nineteenth Century to accommodate Irish migrants who had contracted typhus during their voyages. Thousands of Irish were quarantined on Grosse Isle from 1832 to 1848 and it is believed that over 3,000 Irish died on the island. Grosse Isle is the largest burial ground for refugees of the Great Famine outside Ireland.

Also on the island, visible as you approach on the ferry from Berthier-sur-Mer, is a huge celtic cross, erected by the Ancient Order of Hibernians in 1909, as the first memorial to the Irish who died there. The monument itself is 14.18 meters tall. On three sides of the base are inscriptions in English, French and Irish. The English text reads:



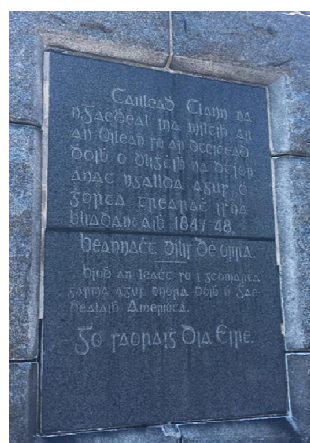
“Sacred to the memory of thousands of Irish emigrants, who, to preserve the faith, suffered hunger and exile in 1847-48 and, stricken with fever, ended here their sorrowful pilgrimage.”

“Erected by the Ancient Order of Hibernians in America, and dedicated Feast of the Assumption, 1909.”

The French inscription closely follows the English, but the one in Irish (written in traditional Irish script) is more pointed:

“Children of the Gael died in their thousands on this island having fled from the laws of the foreign tyrants and from an artificial famine in the years 1847-48. The sweet blessings of God on them.

*Let this monument be a token to their name and honour from the Gaels of America.
May God Save Ireland.”*



The political realities of English-ruled Canada in 1909 were not lost on the Ancient Order of Hibernians!

If you ever travel to Québec, a trip to Grosse Isle is well worth it. Many of the original buildings have been restored and Parks Canada employ excellent guides to tell the story. Check it out at: https://www.pc.gc.ca/en/lhn-nhs/qc/grosse_ile

Thanks to Current Clan Chieftain Brendan O'Malley



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The O'Malley Clan Association aims to reach out to O'Malleys from all around the world and foster links between the O'Malleys around the globe and the clan at home here in Ireland.

The Clan Association formed in 1953 has been connecting O'Malleys around the world in The US and Canada, Britain, Australia, South Africa, New Zealand, South America, and anywhere else you can think of for over 60 years now.

We hope with our new website, and newsletter, that We can go from strength to strength in our aim to connect all the O'Malleys around the world.

The O'Malley Clan DNA Project on Family Tree DNA

The most common queries we get at The O'Malley Clan Association are queries in relation to helping to trace peoples ancestors in Ireland. As we all know, written records can only take us so far, (if you're lucky you'll get back to the early 1800's or late 1700's).

Many of the Irish Census Records and other historic documents were destroyed during the early part of the 20th century and as a result it can be very hard to trace ancestors back beyond the 19th century. Church records are a help, but can be patchy at times.

One way of narrowing down the search is through DNA testing. The O'Malley Clan Association is involved in a project with Family Tree DNA to test as many O'Malleys as possible to try and expand our knowledge of our roots as much as we possibly can.

There's a specific page for the project on the Family Tree DNA website:

<https://www.familytreedna.com/groups/omalley/about>

Check it out, there's lots of info there, and administrators also for any questions.

