A World Away: Servants’ View of the Bartow Mansion

Pre-Visit Activity

In this program, students will learn about the work that went into running a large home like that of the Bartow family’s, as well as think about the experiences of Irish immigrants to New York in the 1800s.

Suggested pre-visit activities

Grades K-3:
Ask students what kinds of chores they do at home or at school. Have them draw a picture of themselves doing a chore or write a couple of sentences about their chores.
Ask: How do you feel when doing these chores? What types of chores do the adults do?

Grades 4-8:
Show students the image of Irish immigrants leaving Queenstown (Ireland) for New York and describe what they see. What clothes are the emigrants wearing?
Ask: Based on what you see, how do you think they feel about leaving Ireland? Have you ever had to move somewhere new? How did it make you feel?

Grades 9-12:
Read the pancake recipe from the American Frugal Housewife book. Ask students what they can infer about life in the nineteenth century based on this recipe.
Ask: Can you identify the direction and the ingredients? How does this recipe compare to one from the twenty-first century?
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Post-Visit Activity

After visiting Bartow-Pell, students will know more about the types of jobs done by domestic workers in the nineteenth century and the experiences of some Irish immigrants to New York in the mid-nineteenth century.

Suggested post-visit activities

Grades K-3:

Ask students what types of jobs the workers at Bartow-Pell had to do in 1860. Ask: Which job would you most like to do? Which job would you least like to do? Why?
Have them draw the tools they would have to use in order to do that job, and write the name of the job and tool underneath their drawing. Hang them up in the classroom to create a “mini-museum.”

Grades 4-8:

Distribute copies of the Margaret McCarthy letter to students (based on reading level, feel free to only use the excerpt of the first paragraph). Ask students to read the letter in pairs or small groups and write a short paragraph summarizing what Margaret is writing about to her family. Ask: If you were Margaret’s family, how would you feel reading this letter in Ireland? Would you want to join her in the United States?

Grades 9-12:

Distribute copies of the Margaret McCarthy letter to students. After reading, ask students to summarize as a class what Margaret is saying; does she like her life in America?
Ask: Based on what you have learned about the lives of the Bartow’s domestic servants, and the lives of other Irish immigrants in New York, write a letter as though you are a recent Irish immigrant in 1860. Tell you family back home whether or not they should come to join you in the United States and explain your reasons. Note: There is no evidence that Margaret’s family joined her in America.
The Pancake Recipe from *The American Frugal Housewife*


Pancakes should be made of half a pint of milk, three great spoonfuls of sugar, one or two eggs, a tea-spoonful of dissolved pearl ash, spiced with cinnamon, or cloves, a little salt, rose-water, or lemon-brandy, just as you happen to have it. Flour should be stirred in till the spoon moves round with difficulty. If they are thin, they are apt to soak fat. Have the fat in your skillet boiling hot, and drop them in with a spoon. Let them cook till thoroughly brown. The fat which is left is good to shorten other cakes. The more fat they are cooked in, the less they soak.

If you have no eggs, or wish to save them, use the above ingredients, and supply the place of eggs by two or three spoonfuls of lively emptings; but in this case they must be made five or six hours before they are cooked, - and in winter they should stand all night. A spoonful or more of N.E. rum makes pancakes light. Flip makes very nice pancakes. In this case, nothing is done but to sweeten your mug of beer with molasses; put in one glass of N.E. rum; heat it till it foams, by putting in a hot poker; and stir it up with flour as thick as other pancakes.
Margaret McCarthy Letter


*Margaret McCarthy was 23 years of age when this letter was written one year after arriving in America. Her father was Alexander (Sandy) McCarthy, carpenter on the Kingwilliamstown Crown Estate and a native of the townland of Boherboy, and her mother, Nell, his wife. Margaret emigrated as a single woman on the 7th of September 1849 on the ship, Columbus, arriving on the 22nd of October, as part of a group of 114 persons assisted to emigrate from the Estate.*

New York September 22nd 1850

My D[ea]r Father and Mother, Brothers and Sisters,

I write these few lines to you hoping that these few lines may find you all in as good State of health as I am in at present, thank God. I Received your welcome letter to me Dated 22nd of May which was a Credit to me for the style and Elligance of its Fluent Language, but I must say rather Flattering. My D[ea]r father, I must only that this [is] a good place and a good Country for if one place does not suit a Man he can go to Another and can very easy please himself. But there is one thing that’s Ruining this place especially the Frontier towns and Cities where the Flow of Emmigration is most. The Emmigrants has not money Enough to take them to the Interior of the Country which oblidges them to remain here in [New] York and the like places for which Reason causes the less demand for Labour and also the great Reduction in wages. For this reason I would advise no one to come to America that would not have Some Money after landing here that would enable them to go west in case they would get no work to do here. But any man or woman without a family are fools that would not venture and come to this plentiful country where no man or woman ever hungered or ever will and where you will not be Seen Naked, but I can assure you there are Dangers upon Dangers Attending coming here, but my friends nothing venture nothing have. Fortune will favour the brave. Have courage and prepare yourself for the next time that that worthy man Mr. Boyan is sending out the next lot; and come you all together courageously and bid adieu to that lovely place the land of our

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1 The townland of Boherboy is in the parish of Duhallow and the townland of Kingwilliamstown is in the parish of Nohaval Daly, both in the barony of Duhallow and the poor law union of Kanturk in Co. Cork.
Birth. That place where the young and old joined together in our Common union both night and day Engaged in Innocent Amusement.

But alas I am now told -- it's the Gulf of Misery, oppression, Degradation, and ruin of every Description which I am sorry to hear of so Doleful a History to be told of our D[ea]r Country. This my D[ea]r Father induces me to Remit to you in this Letter 20 dollars, that is four pounds, thinking it might be some acquisition to you until you might be Clearing away from that place all together and the Sooner the Better, for Believe me, I could not Express how great would be my joy at our seeing you all here together where you would never want or be at a loss for a good Breakfast and Dinner. So prepare as soon as possible for this will be my last Remittance until I see you all here.

Bring with you as much Tools as you can as it will cost you nothing to Bring them and as for your Clothing you need not care much. But that I would like that yourself would bring one good shoot[suit] of cloth that you would spare until you come here. And as for Mary, she need not mind much as I will have for her a Silk Dress, a Bonnet and Viel according, and Ellen I need not mention what I will have for her. I can fit her well. You are to Bring Enough of Flannels and do not form it at home as the way they wear Flannel at home and here is quite different for which reason I would rather than you would not form any of it untill you Come, with the Exception of whatever Quantity of Drawers you may have you can make them at home, but make them you may roomly enough. But make no jackets my D[ea]r father. I am still in the same place but do not intend to stop there for the winter. I mean to come in to New York and there spend the winter. Thade Houlehan wrote to me saying that if I wished to go up the country that he would send me money, but I declined so doing until you come and there after your coming if you think it may be Better for us to Remain here or go west it will be for you to judge, but until then I will Remain here.

Dan Keliher tells me that you knew more of the House Carpentry than he did himself and he can earn from twelve to fourteen shilling a day, that is seven shilling British. And he also tells me that Florence will do very well and that Michael can get a place right off as you will not be the second day when you can Bind him to any Trade you wish. And as for John, he will be very shortly able to be Bound too, so that I have every reason to believe that we will all do well Together So as that I am sure it's not for slavery I want you to come here. No, it's for affording my brothers and sisters and I an opportunity of Showing our Kindness and Gratitude and Coming on your seniour days that we would be placed in that possision that you, my D[ea]r Father and Mother could walk about Leisurely and Independently without Requiring your Labour, an object which I am Sure will not fail even by myself if I was obliged to do it without the assistance of Brother or Sister for, my D[ea]r Father and Mother.
I am proud and happy to be away from where the County Charges man or the Poor Rates Man or any other Rates Man would have the Satisfaction of once Impounding my cow or any other article of mine. Oh how happy I feel and am sure to have looke[d] as[at?] the Lord had not it destined for [me] to get married to Some Loammun[^3] or another at home that after a few months he and I may be an Incumberance upon you or perhaps in the Poor House by this [time]. So my D[ea]r Father according as I have Stated to you I hope that whilst you are at home I hope that you will give my Sister Mary that privilege of Injoying herself Innocently on any occasion that she pleases so far as I have saw Innocently and as for my D[ear]r Ellen I am in Raptures of joy when I think of one day Seeing her and you all at the dock in New York and if I do not have a good Bottle of Brandy for you Awaiting your arrival its a causion.

Well I have only to tell my D[ea]r Mother to Bring all her bed Close and also to bring the Kittle and an oven and have handles to them and do not forget the Smoothing Irons and Beware when you are on Board to Bring Some good floor[f]lour and Ingage with the Captain['s] Cook and he will do it Better for you for very little and also Bring some whiskey and give them [to] the Cook and Some Sailors that you may think would do you any good to give them a glass once in a time and it may be no harm.

And D[ea]r Father when you are Coming here if you Possibly can Bring my Uncle Con I would Be glad that you [] and I am sure he would be of the greatest acquecession to you on board and also [] tell Mary Keeffe that if her Child died that I will pay her passage very Shortly and when you are coming do not be frightened. Take courage and be Determined and bold in your undertaking as the first two or three days will be the worst to you and mind whatever happens on board. Keep your own temper. Do not speak angry to any, nor harshly. The Mildest Man has the best chance on board. So you make your way with everyone and further you are to speak to Mr. Boyen and he, I am sure, will get our Request for you. Mr. Boyen will do it for me. When you are to come ask Mr. Boyen [to gi]ve you a few lines to the Agent or Berth Master of the Ship that will Secure to you the Second Cabin which I am sure Mr. Boyen will do and as soon as you Receive this letter write to me and let me Know About everything, when are to come and what time and state the particulars of evry thing to me and direct as before and if you are to come shortly when you come to Liverpool wright to me also and let me know when you are to sail and the name of the Ship you sail in as I will be uneasy untill I get an answer.

No More at present But that you will give Mr. and Mrs. Boyen my best love and hope and let me know how they and family are as they would or will not be every better than I would wish them to be. [A]lso Mrs. Milton and Charles, Mr. and Mrs. Roche and family, Mr. and Mrs. Day and family, Mr. Walsh and as for his family, I [am] sure are all well. Mr. and Mrs. Sullivan

[^3]: In Irish, a poor man or one of no prospects.
and family,\textsuperscript{4} Mrs. O’Brien, Con Sheehan, wife and family, all the Hearlihys and family, Tim Leahy and family, Owen Sullivan of Caragan and family, Darby Guinee and family,\textsuperscript{5} John Calleghan and family, Timothy Calleghan and family, Timothy Sheehan and Mother. So No More at present from your Ever Dear and Loveing Child,

Margaret McCarthy

\textbf{NOTE:} the envelope addressed to: Michael Boyan Esqre., Kingwilliamstown Kanturk post office County of Cork Ireland. to be forwarded to Mr. Alexander McCarthy, of same place.

\textsuperscript{4} According to the Q.R.O. records, the Pat Sullivan family, of the townland of Carriganes, parish of Nohaval Daly, emigrated in October 1850, a month after this letter was written. The family consisted of Pat (50) a farmer, his wife, Judy (43), and their children, May (14), John (12), Michael (8), Pat (7), Dan (4), and Judy (1).

\textsuperscript{5} According to the Q.R.O. records, the Darby Guiney family, of the townland of Glencollins, Upper and Lower, parish of Nohaval Daly, emigrated in October 1850, a month after this letter was written. The family consisted of Darby (50), a laborer, his wife, Kitty (37), and their children, Dan (17), daughter, Joney (13), Eileen (11), Biddy (9), twins, Tady and Ben (5), and Darby (3).