

Emigration in my family in the 1880s and how hard life was in the early 1900s in Ireland.

I interviewed my grandfather (William O Sullivan) and my grand uncle Joe O Sullivan over Christmas this year; this is what they told me about their family:

Emigration was very common in Ireland in the past .My great- great grandfather William O Sullivan had two brothers John and Dan and one sister Agnes who all emigrated to America from Cappabeg Ballydehob Co.Cork in 1880/1890.William was the only on left at home and only just about....

On arrival in the USA in the 1880s John and Dan O Sullivan travelled south and opened saloons. They needed staff that they could trust so they wrote home and asked if their younger brother William (my great great grandfather) could come out to help them. He would have been happy to go but his extended family did not allow it and a letter was written to say that someone was needed to mind the old people at home in Ireland. So he stayed, and at the age of twenty one he married Julia Maguire who was a teacher and a little older than him. They had three sons ,Joe ,John Vincent and my great grandfather William .

When they grew up Joe stayed farming at home in Cappabeg, John Vincent became a priest and ministered and died in Florida USA, and a farm was bought for William the youngest son (my great grand father). The farm was in Lissane in the parish of Caheragh and when they bought it in 1932 it cost 1,000 pounds.Times were very bad then and for five years after that, land was worthless.

Under De Valera, they said, a calf was worth more dead than alive. They began growing flax,and although it was very hard work there was some money to be made in flax in the 1930s and 1940s.

As for the people who left Ballydehob in 1880/1890 the family have lost contact with the descendants of John and Dan but they did get word that John lived to be 100 years old. In recent times the descendants of Agnes O Sullivan who left West Cork in 1890 have been back to Ireland and we are in regular contact with them.

Who knows what would have happened if my great grandfather had followed his brothers and sister out to the USA...I guess I would be an American boy now if he had!!

Rory Kingston,Caheragh,Drimoleague,Co.Cork.Age 11



William O Sullivan in Lissane

