

NEH Fellowship awarded to historian of Ireland's Great Famine

At 10 o'clock on the morning on Sept. 24, 1847, Hugh Gallagher found Mary Gallagher stealing potatoes from one of his fields. Assisted by his wife, Sarah, he cut off one of the woman's ears with a reaping hook, and nearly the other. The field was on Arranmore Island, five miles off the coast of Donegal, northwest Ireland, and the mutilation of Mary Gallagher was but one brutal incident in the country's Great Famine.

A result of the loss of the potato crop to blight and the inadequate relief policies of the government of the United Kingdom, Ireland's Great Famine was the last great subsistence crisis in Western Europe. In the space of five years, a country of more than 8.5 million people lost a quarter of its population to starvation, disease and emigration. A history professor at Centenary College has secured a coveted fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities to research the history of this catastrophe. Breandán Mac Suibhne is among 80 scholars nationwide (and only 10 in the field of European history) to receive one of these prestigious fellowships.

"Most studies of the Great Famine tend to be burdened by the desire to tell the whole story, or they tend to focus on what was done to and for the poor by landlords, charities or the state," Mac Suibhne said. "I am interested in what the poor did to and for each other. Certainly, many poor people exhibited selfless generosity. They shared food with those less fortunate and sheltered evicted families. They protested against government policies. But there is a less heroic side, too. Some people took advantage of neighbors, 'grabbing' their land or lending money to them at exorbitant rates. Some people denied food to family members. Indeed, people killed for food. And those stories need to be told, if we are ever to fully comprehend the condition to which many Irish people were reduced in the mid-19th century."



A graduate of University College Dublin and Carnegie Mellon University, Mac Suibhne has written on various aspects of modern Irish history. He is editor of *Society and Manners in Early-Nineteenth-Century Ireland*, an annotated edition of the travel writing of John Gamble, medical doctor and man of letters, and co-editor, with David Dickson, of Hugh Dorian, *The Outer Edge of Ulster: A Memoir of Social Life in Nineteenth-Century Donegal*, the most extensive lower-class account of Ireland's Great Famine.

Mac Suibhne has been teaching at Centenary College, New Jersey since 2010.

Class size is small and professors know their students on a first-name basis. "That is one of the reasons students come here," he said. "It is a safe, small, relaxed institution. It is a great place to study, to learn and to grow. But students also come for the quality of the education. Centenary's faculty includes graduates of some of the finest Ph.D. programs in the United States. The faculty set high academic standards for students, and, in this small institution, professors have the time to help their students to achieve those standards."

"This award is a testimony to the academic rigor of small liberal arts colleges. It is the opportunity to work with teacher-scholars of this caliber that makes Centenary College a first-choice for students across the region," said James Patterson, provost of Centenary College.



NEH has awarded more than 63,000 grants since 1965, totaling \$5.3 billion, and has leveraged \$2.5 billion in private matching donations. That public investment has led to the creation of books, films, museum exhibits, exciting discoveries and more.

"NEH provides support for projects across America that preserves our heritage, promote scholarly discoveries, and make the best of America's humanities ideas available to all Americans," said William D. Adams, NEH chairman.

Founded in 1867 by the Newark Conference of the United Methodist Church, Centenary College of New Jersey is an independent, coeducational liberal arts and career studies college distinguished by an accomplished faculty, small class size and diverse student body. Centenary is the only baccalaureate and master's degree granting institution in northwest New Jersey.

Centenary College's main campus is located in Hackettstown, with its equestrian facility a few miles away in Washington Township, Morris County. The Centenary College School of Professional Studies offers degree programs for adults online, designated corporate sites, and in Parsippany and Edison. The School of International Programs recruits international students for study at Centenary and Centenary students for study abroad.

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- John Saccenti