

# SAILING 1847

## Sailing 1847

In 1846-48 during the famines brought on by the potato blight, Irish citizens fled their country for Canada and other parts of the world. Despite widespread imminent starvation, staple foods continued to be shipped out of Ireland by absentee English landlords. To escape their misery in Ireland, many risked passage on **cholera**-infested “coffin-ships” that landed in places such as **Grosse-Ile** (Ile des Irlandais), a **quarantine** station in the St-Lawrence

river. There and in other locations around the world an overwhelming number found death, social segregation, and the destruction of their language and culture.

**Cholera n.** an infectious and often fatal bacterial disease of the small intestine, typically contracted from infected water supplies and causing severe vomiting and



Sound file:  
[Sailing 1847](#)

## The Lyrics

words and music G. Scott MacLeod.

The year is 1847 / Half an hour before heaven  
Our staple food is gone / Another migrant song

‘Cause I’m sailing 1847  
Sailing half an hour before heaven

Ship greed on the water / Cholera for sons and daughters  
Left Cork city / Olive branch from the dove

### CHORUS

Well the monarch may have its way / But our day will come  
Take our right to culture / Take our Irish tongue

### CHORUS

(Bridge)  
Peace on earth, let the orphans keep their names of family,  
Peace on earth, bury me under Celtic cross don’t damn me - silent stone,  
Peace on earth, God bless the horror of Grosse-Isle earth,

### CHORUS

Machiavellian principles / Hidden under the hood,  
Dead grass in the mouth / You emptied our neighborhood.

### CHORUS

diarrhea.

**Quarantine n.** a state, period, or place of isolation for people or animals that have arrived from elsewhere or been exposed to contagious disease. **V.** put in quarantine. Origin C17: from Ital. *Quarantina* ‘forty days’, from *quaranta* ‘forty’.

**Grosse Ile**, or Quarantine I, 2.9 km long by 1 km wide, 46 km downstream from Quebec City in the ST LAWRENCE estuary. The island is a wooded Appalachian ridge sculpted by coves and capes. In 1646 the Ile de Grace was ceded to Gov Charles Huault de MONTMAGNY. Usage transformed the name from Grace I to Grosse Ile. In 1832 the deserted island became a quarantine station where 51 146 IRISH and ENGLISH immigrants were examined (of the total of 61 800 received in Canada.) In 1833 the station received 21 732 immigrants; in 1834, 30 945. Some died of CHOLERA. In 1847 the Irish famine sparked emigration despite a typhus EPIDEMIC. Irish immigrants endured 6-12 weeks in inhuman conditions in 221 ships to reach Grosse Ile quarantine station medical superintendent Dr George Mellis Douglas and his team removed some 4500 corpses from the ships and examined 68 106 immigrants, of whom 5424 died. Ships had to be sent to Point Saint-Charles, Montreal, where 6000 Irish immigrants died and are buried. Several doctors, priests and nuns, died and many orphans were adopted by French Canadian families. In 1937 the station was closed. Since secret bacteriological research began there in 1947, and access was forbidden, now the Island is run by

**Books:**

O’Gallagher, Marianna, Grosse Ile, Gateway to Canada 1832-1937.  
 O’Gallagher, Marianna, I Witness Grosse Ile 1847.  
 O’Driscoll, Robert and Reynolds, Lorna. The Untold Story: The Irish in Canada.

## Parks Canada as a historic site and museum.

Serge Occhietti, The Canadian Encyclopedia p. 941.

### Questions:

1. What caused the famine of 1847?
2. Why were the Irish evicted from their land?
3. What are “Coffin Ships”?