

# Emigrant Letters

c/o Sister Mary Clare Curry, O.S.U.

June 4th, 1904

Dear Margaret,

I received a letter from your son John asking me [to] pay his passage well I would have answered that letter long before this but I knew you would have no welcome for the answer when I failed to send the passage [money] the honest truth is am not able to do it . . . to give you an idea of how I am situated last Christmas I borrowed 25 dollars from my brother John and I owe it to him yet and I owe more money besides that, so don't blame me for sending this useless letter.

I showed the letter to John and told him how ye were situated telling him how your son would be better off to be in this country than in Ireland as ye were very poor there but he did not say he would or would not pay it . . . he might do something later on. One thing certain this is a very bad time of the year to come out here business is very slack and were are going to have a very warm summer the best time to come is the end of August or September . . . Now don't be displeased at what I have told you as I have said nothing but what is true and when he comes here he will find out I told no lie—

“I was never found in bed later than half past three o'clock every morning and that continued for seven years and I assure you it was not for pleasure I got up at that hour so when a man is employed here he gets plenty of hard work”

—Still a person having to be looking for work in Ireland is better off here in case he minds himself. . . .

Yours affectionately,  
**Bryan Clune**  
308 East 44th St

June 17th, 1904

Dear Mrs. Curry

No doubt but you will be surprised to get a line from me, but I feel sorry that we are not able to comply with your request in sending John's passage but perhaps after a little time John will. Bryan has already spoken to him about it, of course Maggie—

“You have no idea of how hard it is to raise a family here, it takes more than one can earn to keep them.”

—but there is advantage here then for the children they have a home then and are brought with the custom of the country. Bryan acted wise in coming out here [A]fter a little time there will be three of them fit to work only for Mary now we could not keep the others at school. I see by John's letter his guide smart I'd be so glad to see him. I hope pat and all the other children are well and John will find we are telling the truth when he comes here.

Your friend,  
**Sarah**

308 East 44th St

*Like a great many emigrant letters, these first three from Sister Mary Clare Curry's great-granduncle Bryan, great-grandaunt Sarah, and great-granduncle John Clune, warn Sister Mary's father, John Curry, that he will be worked nearly to death in America. He came anyway in September 1904.*

*Bryan and John Clune were illustrious Fenians. John Clune smuggled 200 rifles into Clare in 1865. His brother Bryan Clune took over the county Fenian organization when John was arrested for his part in the 1867 Rising. Both Bryan and John wound up in New York. John came via Bermuda, where he had been transported to a penal colony. (He had originally been sentenced to hang.) In New York, John Clune supported himself first with carpentry jobs, was appointed a municipal court officer, and in 1887 co-founded and served as first president of the County Claremen's Association.*

—Editor

*Court of General Sessions of the Peace  
City & County of New York  
Clerk's Office*

*New York June 17<sup>th</sup> 1914*

Mrs. M. Curry

Dear Sister,

I received a letter from your Son John some days ago stating that he would like to come to America—

**“Now I wish to state that I do not want to encourage him in any way or manner to do so, for he will get nothing in the way of employment except hard work and long hours at present.”**

—However if he has made up his mind to come here and is not satisfied to remain at home, I enclose a passage ticket from Queenstown on the White State Line. This passage is good in any of the companys steamers. I also enclose a post office order for £20.0 to pay his way to Queenstown and buy himself some good clothes when he is coming. He can get the clothes much cheaper at home and better quality than he can get here.

John Cullow is also sending for his sister so both of them can come together. I think it would be better for them to wait until the month of August so that the warm weather would be partly over but they can please themselves in that line.

Let them write a few days before leaving home stating the name of the steamer they are coming in and the date of her sailing so that I can go and meet them when they land. In case I miss them they can take the 2nd Av Elevated Train at the Battery and come out 42nd St. Bryan lives at 308 East 44th Street a few streets from there. . . .

Yours affectionately,

**John Clune**

2087 Bathgate St

*Note: Bathgate Street is in the Bronx, a few blocks south of Fordham University.*

*All four letters have been printed verbatim, with passages enlarged and quotation marks added for emphasis. This final letter, from Sister Mary's uncle Matt Curry, was addressed to her grandmother and uncle (another Bryan) in Miltown Tulla, County Clare.*

Sept 24 1914

Dear Mother

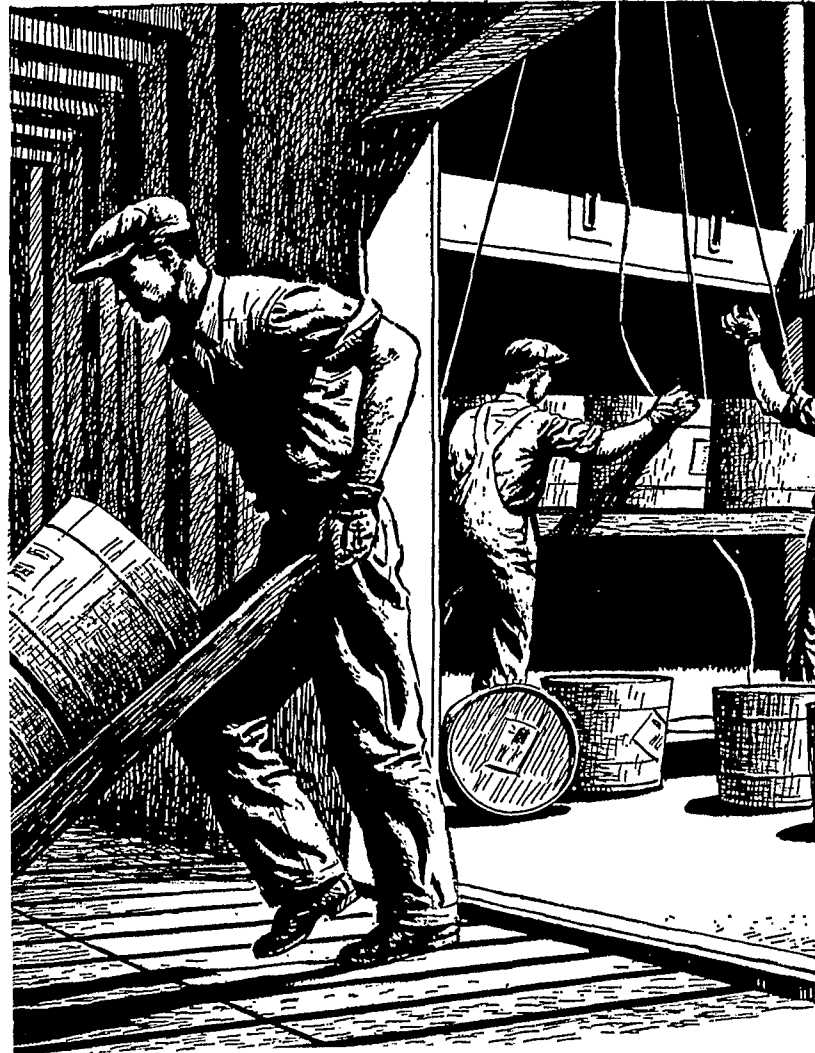
We received your more than welcomed letter and was proud to know that ye were in good health and we are all here at Present T.G. Mother you seem to be very uneasy when you are not getting a letter from Patt you seem to think that there is something wrong with him Mother do not be thinking any thing of the kind Patt is stronger and healtier than any one of us here every Sunday after dinner Mike Patt and myself have a sparing match and he can knock the two of us out one after the other. . . .

We were over to see neddy Corry the night he landed he gave us great accounts about home he live with Jim bob I go over nearly every night the[y] live only a mile from us I am working every day in the Adams I said in my last letter that I would tell Bryan the kind of a job I had last In the first place I was going ten miles to work and the first days work I done was shoveling snow inside in an ice house where it was freezing 5 degrees below zero - zero is a certain temperature in the weathe that you could not live in if it was freezing zero in Ireland cattle horses and people would fall dead if they were out for an hour in it [I]n New York last winter it was only 5 degrees above zero and the horses and cattle were falling dead and lot of people two well where I worked for nine months was ten times colder than that it was where they used preserve all kinds of meat and butter for the round of year and they have machinery making the ice winter and Summer the snow would be faling down off the ceiling into your back and with the heat of your body run into water and then your clothes would freeze and stiffen up we used to have 2 heavey suits of clothes and an overall on us that was 3 suits of clothes and we used be as cold that we could not clap our hands under our arms [W]e should stay inside in that store all the winter from 1/2 seven till 11 at night lifting barrells of meat and butter piling them up to the ceiling making room for all that was coming in and then their was a lot more going out think of it Bryan—

**“those barrells of butter were 8 hundred weight and only two men would have to lift that barrell. . . .”**

“4 feet high that is higher than the big table at home and then we should put smaller ones on top and the weight of them was 3 hundred weight and to keep doing that lifting from 1/2 past 7 in the morning till 10 and 11 at night and you frozen with the cold and your two shoes full of water. I think you would feel a bit tired at night”

—they would think it great work for 4 men if the[y] put 8 hundred weight in a car at home but I Thank God Bryan I was never afraid of work and when I got into it I never let a man best me in lifting a barrell [W]hat ever weight any man would take up. I was able to take the other end of it with him altho I was the smallest and youngest on the job every man a lot bigger than Blake and the lightest of them weighed 14 stone weight [A]ll the rest were heavier men but as big as they were not one of them could best me lifting any weight [S]ome of the days John was home I was shoveling out snow and Ice we should shovel it out once a week we should keep two pair of gloves on the whol time a pair of wollen and a pair of leather with iron rivets on them Bryan when you would take off your old clothes in the night to go home you could leave them standing against the wall they would be frozen so hard and then in the morning they would be soft and wet so we should put them on as we had no place to dry them I never knew what it was to have a dry stocking in that job every day your shoes were full of water and your feet freezing off you I see big men coming in their for the winter and the longest they would work was one hour the reason I left it was I was afraid I might get rumatism as every body used get rumatism in it—



“I recon I done more work their in one week than I done at home in 6 months”

Bryan you think it strange to be shoveling snow in the summer and to go ten miles to work you have as much news here as you would get in the Clare Champion No more at present but all of us are in the best of health T.G. Hoping to hear from ye soon.

From you[r] loving Son  
**Matt**  
 85 East 108 St  
 c/o Mrs. Clune  
 New York City

Sister Mary Clare Curry, O.S.U., has taught elementary students in schools throughout New York. Currently, she is librarian of the Academy of Mount St. Ursula in the Bronx.