

IRISH AMERICA



August/September 2010

AN GORTA MÓR SPECIAL

The Irish America special issue on the Great Famine (June/July 2010) is deeply moving for its breadth and depth. It provides well researched and compelling accounts of why so many left Ireland, the response of the British government and the experiences of those who arrived in America. I bought several extra copies to give to my relatives to better understand the migration experience of our ancestors from Co. Waterford in the 1840s.

In his meditation on the Irish Hunger Memorial in New York City's Battery Park, historian Simon Schama wrote: "But the grassy hill, a piece of the auld sod stripped of sentimentality but not of emotion, is also meant as a space for meditation: how could the greatest famine in 19th-century Europe have persisted in the backyard of the wealthiest empire in the world?" ('A Patch of Earth', in *The New Yorker*, August 19, 2002).

I began to read your special issue the day after Prime Minister David Cameron apologized in the Parliament for the Bloody Sunday massacre of 1972 when 14 innocent people were killed in Londonderry, Northern Ireland. He laid the entire blame on the British army and said that the shootings were "unjustified and unjustifiable". Some day the British government might add, "The persistence of the Irish famine in the 19th century was unjustified and unjustifiable."

Robert F. Lyons

Kennebunkport, Maine