

Our Immigrants' Son: An Irish Prose Poem about the Remarkable Life and Extraordinary Times of My Great-Grandfather, Michael Joseph Murphy & How You Can Write Your Own Family Story

John Francis Patrick Murphy

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This is an important reminder that immigrant narratives are a vital part of America's present and future, not just its past.

John Francis Patrick Murphy traces his family's history in America and encourages others to explore their own histories in his biography *Our Immigrants' Son*.

On a rainy day in 1845, two Irish immigrants arrived in Boston to begin a new life in the promising New World. This is the beginning of the Murphy family's American journey. The author, a direct descendant of these immigrants, explores the events and the values that saw his ancestors through hard times, and that continue to guide the family today.

The narrative spotlights three Murphys: Patrick and Mary, who left Ireland in the mid-nineteenth century, and their son Michael, who was born and raised in America. Evocative descriptions resurrect the long-gone places frequented by the hard working Murphys: the modest homes where they lived so happily, the POW camp where Michael waited out the end of the Civil War, the factory where Michael and his son served as corporation inspectors for decades. Discussions of relevant historical events—including the Great Famine, the callousness of the American Industrial Revolution, and the Civil War—add context to the family's experiences. Plenty of photographs, news clippings, and other materials further show what their lives were—or might have been—like, though some such photographs repeat unnecessarily.

As they strove for the better life America offered, the Murphys clung to constants, like their belief in God, and the Merrimack River that still powers their original hometown of Lawrence, Massachusetts. These constants emerge as recurring themes. The use of prose poetry—which combines both prose and poetry, both fact and informed fiction—facilitates the emphasis of these topics. The author uses all of the above to highlight different, broader recurring themes: for example, the mistreatment immigrants always seem to face despite the unquestionable value that their presence and experiences bring to the United States. These parallels create a sense of continuity and unity with the past—as important reminders that immigrant narratives are a vital part of America's present and future, not just its past.

In the final part of the book, Murphy explains his creative process and advises anyone wishing to discover and chronicle their own family history. It's an insightful addition with useful tips for aspiring writers and genealogists.

The Murphy clan has now spread across the United States, finding success and happiness in their own ways. But they have not lost their connection with the past—nor will they ever, thanks to the author's diligent research and devotion to preserving his ancestors' brave, difficult journey. *Our Immigrants' Son* is a genre-blending historical biography about how hard work, strong faith, and plain old good luck helped an Irish American family thrive.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (December 15, 2020)

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