

A NEW LAND, A NEW HOPE

The yellow flag, Susanne McSweeney. Illus. Brenda Clark. PMA Books, 1980. 32 pp. \$6.95 cloth. ISBN 0-88778-204-3.

The yellow flag is a well written and illustrated piece of historical fiction that portrays the fate of an Irish emigrant family from their meagre existence in famine-stricken Ireland in the mid 19th century to their eventual arrival in Canada where their father is waiting for them. Ireland during the famine was desolate. Poverty and death, disease and desperation were commonplace. Emigration was the only way out if you were fortunate enough to have the health and the "passage money," Brigid's family was lucky to have both. Father had sent money to cover the cost of the voyage and its arrival filled the mother and two children with high spirits and dreams of better things to come.

The realistic description of the voyage in the "coffin ship" is most effective. Many of the passengers were destined never to see the shores of Canada because of the dreaded outbreak of cholera. The author, Susanne McSweeney, appropriately shows how scarce and unpalatable food and low spirits make a rallying point within a strong religious bond so characteristic of Ireland. [Pages 15 and 16 clearly illustrate this point.] Religion has always been an integral part of the cultural/social/political life of Ireland.

Throughout the book, Miss McSweeney effectively uses tension to anchor the reader's attention. I, for one, was on tenterhooks on more than one occasion, especially when the mother of Brigid and Lucy developed cholera and was confined to Grosse Island. I hoped desperately that she would not die, leaving her children stranded in a new land while their father awaited them further inland.

For young readers, the characterization is appealing. Brigid and Lucy are delightful little girls displaying thoughts, anxieties and the impishness any 8 to 11-year-old can identify with. The formidable but kind Madame Chaperon and the empathetic Father Kelly are wonderful, always stepping in at the right time to solve urgent problems.

Brenda Clark has done much to enhance this book with her skillful and attractive illustrations. Certainly *The yellow flag* is guaranteed to delight any reader, and to enrich any child's understanding of the Canadian/Irish bond. *Mary O'Sullivan-Condon was born in Cork City, went to college in Dublin, and taught elementary school in Ireland, before coming to Western Illinois University in 1981. She has given papers on Methodologies in the U.S.*