

FIRST CAME THE IRISH, THEN CAME THE ITALIANS:

Irish and Italian Immigration to Rhode Island

LLC Course

Spring 2026

When

Monday, 1:00-3:00 PM at the Shriners Center

March 16 – May 18, 2026

Coordinators

Joe Petteruti

Bob McMahon

Course Description

For 200 years immigrant groups decided to make Rhode Island their home.

Two of the largest groups are the Irish and Italians who started arriving in great numbers in the nineteenth century. This course will first look at their emigration. What conditions in their countries inspired them to leave? How did they get to the US and to Rhode Island?

We will explore their experiences in Rhode Island. Where did they settle? What discrimination did they face? How did they sustain cultural identities through churches, schools, social clubs, food, and music? Where did they work? How did politics become a pathway for success? We will also look at some “success stories” from Irish and Italian immigrant families in business and politics.

Course Format

In Session 1, the co-coordinators Joe Petteruti and Bob McMahon will discuss why they are presenting this course and discuss their backgrounds. We will ask the participants to talk about their backgrounds and talk about why they are taking the course. We will also explain the topics and what class expectations are expected.

Sessions 2 and 3 will be presented by the co-coordinators. We will have a guest speaker, Raymond McKenna, who will be the presenter of Session 9. One of the class participants, Dr. Edward Iannuccilli will be the presenter of Session 10.

We will ask the other participants in the class to pick one of the ten topics listed in Sessions 4A and 4B through 8A and 8B and to make a presentation. **Readings/Resources** for the course are provided in this packet to help you decide what topic you'd like to choose and present. The coordinators will assist you in thinking about the content, photos, and format of your presentations.

Guidelines for

Presentations You are welcome to present by yourself or in a team of two. Your session should be no longer than 40 minutes to allow for 15-20 minutes for questions.

- You may use any presentation format: power point, flip charts, or handouts. You may also point the class to a reading or web site prior to the class.
- No matter what format you use, audiovisuals will strengthen your presentation. Photos, maps, video, or recordings are some ways to provide interest.
- Please use research from a variety of sources, not just Wikipedia.
- Please think about how to stimulate class discussion.
- The co-coordinators are available to assist you.

Irish and Italian Immigration to Rhode Island: Course Schedule

	DATE	TOPIC	ISSUES TO EXPLORE*	PRESENTERS
1	March 16	1A Introduction to Class 2A Ireland Emigration	<i>Introductions and review of course.</i> <i>Events that propelled Irish emigration</i>	1A Joe Petteruti and Bob McMahon 1B Bob McMahon
2	March 23	2A Irish Emigration 2B Italian Emigration	<i>Conditions they left behind as seen through James Joyce's <u>Dubliners</u></i> <i>Events that propelled Italian immigration</i>	2A Sidney Okashige 2B—Class Member
3	March 30	3A Irish Immigration in RI 3B Italian Immigration in RI	<i>When did they arrive; the immigration numbers over time; where did they settle and why. A preview of Joe's book <u>Car Man</u></i>	3A—Bob McMahon 3B—Joe Petteruti
4	April 6	4A Irish Discrimination 4B Italian Discrimination	<i>In housing, work, voting, social life, religion</i>	4A-class member 4B-class member
5	April 13	5A Irish Workplaces 5B Italian Workplaces	<i>Types of work; variations among places; male, female, and child labor; political patronage; jobs and chain migration</i>	5A-class member 5B-class member
6	April 20	6A The Irish & Religion 6B The Italians & Religion	<i>The role of the Catholic Church and schools; the Diocese of Providence; re-settlement and the local churches</i>	6A-class member 6B-class member
7	April 27	7A The Irish & Politics 7B The Italians & Politics	<i>The journey into local, state, and national politics; successes and scandals</i>	7A-class member 7B-class member
8	May 4	8A Cultivating Irish Identity 8B Cultivating Italian Identity	<i>The role of social clubs, festivals, parades, music and dance</i>	8A-class member 8B-class member
9	May 11	Growing Up Irish	<i>The experience of Raymond McKenna growing up in an Irish-American household</i>	Raymond McKenna
10	May 18	Growing Up Italian	<i>The experience of Dr. Edward Iannuccilli growing up in an Italian-American household</i>	Dr. Edward Iannuccilli

*See accompanying pages for resources.

Irish Immigration Sources: Deeper Dive into Issues

General Reading for this Class

The Irish in Rhode Island: An Historical Appreciation. Patrick T. Conley (A copy of this will be given to everyone in the class on March 16)

[The Irish of Rhode Island \(Part I, 1638-1921\) - Online Review of Rhode Island History.](#) Patrick T Conley

[The Irish of Rhode Island \(Part II, 1922-1999\) - Online Review of Rhode Island History.](#) Patrick T. Conley

[From Emyvale to Providence A Deep Dive Into a 19th Century Chain Migration - McKenna, Raymond](#)

Irish and Italians in Providence, RI, 1880-1960, Rhode Island History Journal, Vol 28, 1969. Leo Carrol

The Famine

Journey to America: The Ellen Taggart McMahon Emigration from County Armagh, Ireland. Bob McMahon (See Chapters 3 and 4. This family narrative will be distributed to the class on March 16)

An Atlas of the Great Irish Famine. John Crowley, William Symth, and Mike Murphy

Literature and the Irish Famine, 1845-1919. Margaret Kelleher

The Famine Ships. Edward Laxton

Under the maxim, "A picture is worth a thousand words", see various You Tube videos under The Irish Famine, especially The Great Irish Famine (1996), Vintage Broadcasting System. Pick and choose. Some of them are very good.

Not Forgotten in their Affliction: Irish Famine Relief from Rhode Island, 1847. [2002 Winter.pdf](#)

Irish Discrimination in Rhode Island

I have a packet of Providence Journal articles from 1870 to 1890 demonstrating the types of discrimination endured by RI Irish.

Irish Titan, Irish Toilers. (Chapter 2). Scott Molloy. I have a copy of this chapter to hand out.

No Landless Irish Need Apply. Patrick T. Conley [2010 SumFall.pdf](#)

[The Irish of Rhode Island \(Part I, 1638-1921\) - Online Review of Rhode Island History.](#) Patrick T Conley

[Editors at Providence Journal Discriminated Against Irish-Americans - Online Review of Rhode Island History.](#) Patrick T. Conley

Dorr Rebellion

[Politics, Bigotry and Nativism Rhode Island's Catholic Irish in the 1842 Dorr Rebellion - YouTube](#)

The Catholic Church in Rhode Island: A Refuge for Immigrants

These sources apply to both Irish and Italian immigrants in Rhode Island

Catholicism in RI: The Formative Era. Patrick T. Conley and Matthew J. Smith. A copy is available for those interested.

Catholicism in RI & the Diocese of Providence 1780-1886 (Volume 1) Robert W. Hayman

Catholicism in RI & the Diocese of Providence, 1886-1921 (Volume II). Robert W. Hayman

Newport's Early Irish Community and Rhode Island's First Catholic Church

Rhode Island Catholicism: A Historical Guide. Patrick T. Conley. A copy is available for those interested.

Ballots and Bibles: Ethnic Politics and the Catholic Church in Providence. Evelyn Savidge Stone. A copy of this is available for those interested.

Irish Immigrants in the Rhode Island Workforce

Irish Titan, Irish Toilers. Scott Molloy. A story about the US Rubber Company in RI. A copy is available for those interested.

2025 09 22 Molloy, Scott Toil and Trouble: The Irish in the Rhode Island Labor Movement: 1830-1930's- YouTube

Trolley Wars: Streetcar Workers on the Line. Scott Molloy. A copy is available for those interested.

2021-10-25 The Irish Bridget: Irish Immigrant Women in Domestic Service in America, 1840-1930

Ourselves Alone: Women's Emigration from Ireland, 1885-1920. Janet Nolan. A copy is available for those interested.

Irish Immigrants and Politics

Irish and Italians in Providence, RI, 1880-1960, Rhode Island History Journal, Vol 28, 1969. Leo Carrol This publication illustrates how social mobility into the middle class by Irish and Italian immigrant translated into ethnic political power.

Ballots and Bibles: Ethnic Politics and the Catholic Church in Providence. Evelyn Savidge Stone. A copy of this is available for those interested.

One potential sub topic is to look at individual Irish politicians, such as Arlene Violet; former Congressman John Fogarty; former governor, US Senator, and former Attorney General under Harry Truman, J Howard McGrath; or retired RI Supreme Court Judge, Florence K. Murray...see below.

Island Girl: Justice Florence Kerins Murray

Interview of Justice Florence K

RI politicians have taken an active role over many decades in supporting Irish independence and in supporting the Irish Catholics in Northern Ireland...I have a packet of Providence Journal articles that illustrate this. This could easily be seen as political grandstanding to get voting from the RI Irish.

Irish Identity

Irish organizations, festivals, parades, Irish essay contests, Irish music—you name it, the Irish in RI used to be a cultural force. I have a packet of Providence Journal articles that illustrate this. The Irish identity in RI has largely faded, except for Newport. Why did this happen?

Italian Identity

Rhode Island boasts the highest concentration of Italian-Americans in the United States, with roughly 20% claiming Italian heritage (Johnston 50%). There is a deep influence of this identity in state's culture, politics and culinary scene.

Italian Immigration

Images of America - Federal Hill, Joe Fuoco. A photographic journey of the Italian immigrants who came to Federal Hill. A copy is available for those interested.

Images of America - Cranston, Lydia L. Rapoza and Bette Miller A photographic journey of the Italian immigrants who came to Cranston. A copy is available for those interested.

Italian Americans in Rhode Island Arcadia Publishing

Growing up Italian-Grandfather's Fig Tree and other Stories, Ed Iannuccilli

Whatever Happened to Sunday Dinner...and Other Stories, Ed Iannuccilli

Italian Immigration to Providence, The Steamship Historical Society of America www.shiphistory.org

Ships -Italian Immigration to U.S (Italian Immigration to Providence) - Watch on YouTube

Italo-Americans of Rhode Island Volume II Ubaldo Pesaturo (available at the RI Historical Society) also available on Internet Archive www.archive.org (PDF)

The Voices of Italy: Italian Language Newspapers and Radio Programs in Rhode Island, Alfred R. Crudale

From Paris to Providence fashion, art, and the Tirocchi dressmakers' shop, RISD Museum of Art, Susan Hayes Editor, 2000. This book is available from Joe Petteruti. It's on loan from the John D. Rockefeller Library at Brown University.

Aboard the Fabre Line to Providence, William Jenning 2013 (online only)

The Fabre Line brings thousands from Italy to Rhode Island online at www.warwickhistory.com

Italo American Club of Rhode Island (1896) is the oldest Italian chartered club in Rhode Island www.Italoamericanclub ofri.com

DePasquale Square The Heart of "Little Italy." www.rhodetour.org

Rhode Island's Italian American Political Pioneers, Russell Desimone www.smallstatebighistory.com

The RI Historical Society Library (Robinson Research Center) is on 121 Hope Street, Providence, RI (401 273-8107) and the Rhode Island Archives is located at 33 Broad Street, Providence, RI (401 222-2353. Call before visiting as the hours are somewhat limited.

