

Introduction – Slide 1

Good morning. My name is Katherine Diamond, and I am the Project Manager, Grant Coordinator, and Researcher for the Canadian Irish Migration Preservation Network's Preserving and Showcasing Irish Heritage in Québec project.

It is undeniable that Irish migration has left a profound imprint on the cultural and historical landscape of Canada. Within the province of Québec, the first landscape many Irish immigrants encountered on their journeys to North America, the legacy of Irish immigration remains visible in cemeteries, settlement sites, memorials, and community institutions. While many of these sites are known to locally to the members of the communities in which they reside, their historical connections to transnational migration networks aren't often discussed. Despite the fact that thousands of Irish immigrants have settled in the territory that now comprises the modern province of Quebec since the seventeenth century, their historic roles as settlers, builders, community leaders, and cultural contributors are often scattered across local histories and remain difficult to visualize as part of a broader migration story.

Thesis/Presentation Overview – Slide 2

This presentation will examine how digital mapping can be used to document and interpret the transnational dimensions of Irish migration across Québec through the development of the Canadian Irish Migration Preservation Network's (CIMPN) Irish Mile Digital Interactive Map. The project brings together archival and genealogical research, oral history interviews, and community-based heritage documentation to map sites connected to Irish settlement and commemoration across the province. By visually linking locations such as cemeteries, historic settlements, and memorial sites, the Irish Mile reveals patterns of both movement and settlement that connect Ireland to Québec and to other destinations across Canada and North America.

Project Overview & Goals – Slide 3

The Irish Mile Digital Interactive Map is a part of a larger initiative, the Preserving and Showcasing Irish Heritage in Québec Project, which has been financially supported by the Secrétariat aux relations avec les Québécois d'expression anglaise (SRQEA). This project at large aims to preserve and promote Irish heritage in Quebec through a wide-reaching digital and educational initiative.

The project's primary goal is to create an interactive map of Irish sites, including monuments, cemeteries, museums, buildings, trails, and historical markers. This bilingual map, entitled, of course, The Irish Mile, will compile historical documents, photographs, and oral interviews in order to document the historical presence of Irish communities across the province.

However, the map will also accompany the CIMPN's fully bilingual website, which will serve as a central hub for the project's activities. On top of hosting The Irish Mile map, the website acts as a digital news board and archival repository for Irish organizations across the province. In this way, the CIMPN hopes that The Preserving and Showcasing Irish Heritage in Québec Project will connect historical Irish communities throughout Québec- and even beyond.

Finally, the prioritization of public education will round out The Preserving and Showcasing Irish Heritage in Québec Project. Through offering education outreach, hosting events, and publishing newsletters about the project's development, the CIMPN intends to highlight Irish immigration's place in building contemporary Québec's rich and diverse cultural identity. In this sense, my presentation today is vital to the CIMPN's goal of sharing cutting edge heritage tools which use accessible mapping softwares in order to democratize the historical research process for all members of the community, from academics, to students, descendants and beyond.

What Is the Irish Mile? – Slide 4

The Irish Mile Interactive Mapping Project launched on January 27th, 2026, and continues to expand. Named after the old unit of Irish measurement, or the modern equivalent to about 1.27 modern miles, the Irish Mile was dedicated to more than the forgotten measure of distance. It was also named for the vital, if sometimes historically forgotten, impressions left by Irish immigrants on the land, the language, and the culture of the communities they helped shape. Built from historical documents, photographs, and oral interviews, the fully bilingual interactive map is constantly in development, with several dozen heritage sites having been added since its initial launch date.

Methodology and Research – Slide 5

Our methodological approach to creating the map was based on two research streams: accessing primary sources and calling for community input. The CIMPN was founded on an interest in the ability of genealogical research to aid in the preservation of public heritage spaces, such as cemeteries. When the founding members of the CIMPN first began to conduct their own genealogical research in the city of Saint-Colomban, located in the Laurentides region of Quebec near Montreal, their own genealogical connection to the first Irish settlers in the area and their interest in the other families that immigrated to the area from Ireland propelled their preservation work forward, leading to them retrieving, restoring, and presenting a large number of discarded headstones from the nineteenth century. This interest in genealogical study is at the core of the CIMPN's approach to researching sites for the Irish Mile: a physical space is only as important as the people who have, and continue to, inhabit it. Therefore, it was vital for the researchers and the digital map development team to prioritize the history of individuals, families, and communities when researching heritage sites to the Irish Mile Digital Map.

In terms of source identification, the CIMPN's team of researchers and volunteers made use of historical sources, such as toponymical surveys, censuses, and cemetery records in order to establish the location of Irish settlements across Quebec and reveal consistent patterns of transatlantic migration. However, the CIMPN also encouraged members of the public to reach out to us with information regarding settlements with a historical Irish presence. This permitted us to expand our research to sites in the province that may have had little to no formal research conducted on them, but lived on through the oral histories of the descendants of those original settlers.

Currently, we have categorized our research into seventeen distinct ‘site types’: Towns, Churches, Monuments, Museums, Parks, Trails, Historic Houses, Plaques, Schools, Cemeteries, Statues, Historic Sites, Mausoleums, Spotlights, Traditions, Heritage Routes, and Historic Figures.

Website Navigation – Slide 6

With accessibility being one of the primary tenets of the Irish Mile Digital Mapping Project, the CIMPN’s choice to adopt the MapMe software was due to its ease of navigation for both our map developers and visitors to the website.

Each site appears with a unique location tag associated to the category to which it belongs. Users can generally explore the map by zooming into and out of the map, and hovering their cursors over a location tag to see the site’s name; clicking the tag will reveal all the media associated with the site, including its geographical location, some photos, and a short write up exploring its Irish history.

However, for more specific searches, users are able to explore the map using two separate techniques. If a user wants to explore every site belonging to a specific category in the map, they can simply click on one (or multiple) category options from the drop-down list on the lefthand side of their screens and sort through the results. On the other hand, if a user has a specific search term they have in mind, such as “Quebec City”, they can type that term into the search bar and see every single instance of that term appearing in the map.

You can also use a combination of these search methods. For example, you can choose a category, such as “Towns”, and then type in a search term, such as “Famine”. This will reveal a number of towns in Quebec who’s pattern of immigration align with the period around the mid-nineteenth century, or the Famine years.

Saint-Colomban Case Study – Slide 7

Our research, alongside the sites provided to us by members of the public, revealed that patterns of Irish settlement in the province were incredibly varied. As Quebec historically demonstrated religious tolerance towards both Catholic and Protestant citizens, Irish immigrants of diverse religious, linguistic, and economic backgrounds settled in rural or undeveloped areas in order to take advantage of the province’s rich farmlands and forests. The historical appearance of mixed French and Irish communities can still be detected through toponyms, or place name, which have preserved the interactions and cohabitations between Irish immigrants and French settlers. For example, the parish and cemetery of Saint-Colomban were named in honour of Saint Columban. However, the contemporary spelling of Saint-Colomban- with an ‘o’ instead of a ‘u’- reflects French Canadian spelling conventions and the modern French-speaking population.

The CIMPN’s study of Saint-Colomban and its integration into the Irish Mile Digital Map is a formidable case study which displays how digital mapping technology can aid in tracking, preserving, and showcasing transnational networks of migration to the public.

The Saint-Colomban Parish and Cemetery hold profound historical and cultural significance, particularly for the Irish Catholic community that settled in Lower Canada in the early 19th century. The roots of the parish trace back to the 1820s, when Irish immigrants arrived in Montreal and gradually moved to rural areas such as Saint-Colomban to establish farming communities.

Following years of political unrest, famine, and economic hardship, many Irish families sought a new life in Canada. Encouraged first by Father Richard Jackson and followed by Father Patrick Phelan, both belonging to the Sulpician order, settlers from Kilkenny, Carlow, Kildare, Tipperary and other counties began arriving in the region now known as Saint-Colomban in the early 1820s.

Father Patrick Phelan, a native of Ballyragget, Kilkenny, named the new parish *Saint-Colomban* to reflect the monastic spirit of renewal, learning, and resilience. His decision was deeply intentional: it connected the hardships and faith of the Irish settlers with the long-standing legacy of Irish spirituality and missionary effort.

By 1825, there were at least 250 Irish immigrants living in the region. However, renewed migration to the area during the mid-nineteenth century can also be traced thanks to surviving letters between settlers in Saint-Colomban and their family networks in Ireland. Thomas Barrett, who had left the village of Ardnaglass in County Sligo during the 1830s, received a desperate letter from his youngest daughter Mary, who feared for the survival of herself, her husband, and her children due to the destruction brought on by the famine. In one correspondence with her father, Mary described her community suffering from starvation, ending her letter with a chilling plea: “For God’s sake take us out of poverty, and don’t let us die with the hunger.”

By March 1847, Thomas Barrett contacted local Reverend John Falvey. Though Barrett nor Falvey could not afford to pay for the passage of the Barrett family to Canada, Reverend Falvey soon wrote a letter of his own, pleading with politician Charles John Forbes to intervene in the case of the Barrett family. After a visit from Thomas Barrett, Reverend Falvey wrote to C.J. Forbes. In a stunning display of political dedication to the parish of Saint-Colomban, on April 23rd, 1847, Charles John Forbes managed to connect with the governor general of British North America. By May of 1847, a mere two months after Thomas Barrett received his daughter’s initial letter, the Rush family - including Mary, her husband Michael, and their three children - arrived in New York City. Soon after, the family was reunited in Quebec.

The Barrett family is historically remarkable due to its display of the transatlantic community networks between Ireland and Canada which facilitated the migration of thousands of immigrants to Quebec. However, its addition into a digital mapping software which visualizes its relationship to other Irish settlements can help researchers, genealogists, and descendants draw the often intangible links between people, places, spaces, and historical documents. Furthermore, being able to visualize Saint-Colomban alongside other towns with major historical Irish populations makes migration patterns chartable on a physical and temporal scale. Finally, the CIMPN’s approach of combining both formal historical research alongside submissions from the public helps democratize the digitization process, allowing small towns with less-documented histories share space with Irish immigration hubs like Quebec City.

Outcomes and Community Impact – Slide 8

As of the time of writing this presentation, 170 heritage sites have been logged on the Irish Mile Digital Interactive Map. However, the successes of this project have not been limited to the digital sphere. Due to the CIMPN's dedicated work developing and promoting the Preserving and Showcasing Irish Heritage in Québec Project, the Global Irish Famine Way, which was launched in 2024 at The Irish Emigration Museum, honoured Saint-Colomban with a pair of Bronze Shoes. This historic initiative uses Bronze Shoes as markers to honor the journey of Irish emigrants during the Great Famine of 1847 and to recognize their resilience and contributions in new lands. The CIMPN's research work on the community of Saint-Colomban revealed the burial of two Irish famine victims, John (age 4) and Mary Phelan (age 2) who died in 1847 are buried in the historic section of the Saint-Colomban cemetery. The nonprofit's work on this heritage site and others opens the doors for dozens more historically forgotten Irish sites across the province to be brought to public attention and honoured for their contributions to Quebec history.

The Preserving and Showcasing Irish Heritage in Québec Project has also connected the CIMPN with various institutions across the province. In October 2025, the nonprofit collaborated with students at Concordia's School of Irish Studies to provide them with a hands-on tutorial on headstone cleaning and cemetery preservation. Furthermore, members of the CIMPN team and volunteers from the School of Irish Studies walked in four Saint Patrick's Day parades across Ontario and Quebec this past Green Season. Perhaps most significantly, the CIMPN has assisted in mapping the Trinity Cemetery in Gore Township and performed cemetery cleanings at Quebec City's own Beth Israel Ohev Shalom Cemetery. We hope the Preserving and Showcasing Irish Heritage in Québec Project will connect us with further community heritage sites in the near future in order for our work to help preserve the future of the diverse sites that have helped shape Quebec history.

Future Directions – Slide 9

The future of the Irish Mile Digital Interactive Map and the Preserving and Showcasing Irish Heritage in Québec Project as a whole look bright. On June 3rd, 2026, the CIMPN's very first bilingual oral interview with historian Ryan Young, conducted by researcher Samara O'Gorman, was published on the Irish Mile Map alongside our site marker for Montreal's historic Simon Fraser house. This summer, we intend to publish several more oral interviews on Irish heritage sites in the province, both well-known and hidden gems. By the end of the summer season, we hope to have two hundred heritage sites logged on the digital map, with many more exciting entries to come.

Conclusion – Slide 10

In summary, the Irish Mile Digital Interactive Map is a tool which can assist in visualizing the unique transatlantic connections between Irish settlements in Quebec and the origin points of the immigrants who populated them. The documentation of these varied sites not only traces the geographic spread of Irish migrants across the province, but also analyzes ways in which diasporic communities have preserved memory, identity, and belonging through acts of

commemoration and storytelling. Furthermore, it permits local individuals and communities of Irish descent to take active roles in describing their communities and qualifying their hyphenated identities as Irish-Quebecers and Irish-Canadians within the broader historical record. In this sense, digital mapping can serve as a tool for both heritage preservation and public, all while contributing to a wider understanding of historical Irish migration patterns and contemporary diaspora networks in Canada.