

Book Review – They Changed their Sky’

Edited by Michael C Connolly

This book with the enigmatic title looks at the story of the Irish in Maine and contextualises the Scots Irish as a distinct sub-group within that overarching descriptor. The title actually comes from a line from the ancient classical poet – Horace – “they change their sky but not their soul who cross the ocean”.

The preface for the book is written by a Maine public representative who is no stranger to these shores – Senator George Mitchell. In this interesting foreword Senator Mitchell expresses recognition of the fact that the story of the Irish in Maine begins, “with the earliest Irish settlers, mainly Scots Irish Presbyterian from the northern province of Ulster who arrived in the late eighteenth century”. George Mitchell is in no doubt that the Story of these people is one which must be told and not forgotten – “my work for peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland has taught me that historical amnesia never succeeds in the long term and, therefore, it is imperative to chronicle the experience of this group”. Two chapters of the book are of particular interest to us –

- a ‘The Scotch Irish of Provincial Maine:
Purpooduck, Merrymeeting Bay, and Georgia’ by R Stuart Wallace
- b ‘Ireland along the Passamaquoddy: Rathlin Islanders in Washington County, Maine’
by Fidelma M McCarron

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This is a clear read - scholarly yet easy to follow.