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Forgetting Ireland

Bridget Connelly

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Forgetting Ireland

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Forgetting Ireland Bridget Connelly
Forgetting Ireland is both a history and mystery, a story of western Ireland's Connemara coast and of Graceville, a small town in western Minnesota. In 1880, at the height of Ireland's second famine, a ship of paupers was sent from Galway to take up land granted them by a Catholic bishop in Minnesota. There they encountered the worst winter in the state's history and nearly froze to death in shanties on the prairie. National and international newspapers featured their plight as the welfare scandal of the year, and priests and politicians traded accusations as to who was responsible. The immigrants were at last removed from the colony; their name became the town's shorthand for lying, drunken failures.

By chance more than a century later, Bridget Connelly, who grew up in Graceville, discovers her Connemara past. As Connelly uncovers the deliberately suppressed history of her family's emigration, she exposes an old scandal that surrounded the settling of the land around Graceville, one that pitted Masons, Protestants, Germans, and Yankees against Irish Catholics — and one that set lace-curtain Irish against the Connemara paupers. She also learns of an archbishop who was, according to farmer lore, 'worse than Jesse James'. In this compelling combination of history and memoir, Connelly tells stories of an epochal blizzard, a famous Irish bard, an infamous Irish woman pirate, feuding frontier communities, and an archbishop's questionable legacy. She also learns why her family tried so hard to forget Ireland.

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