

My great great grandfather, James Fleming, was born in County Wexford, Ireland, in the 1830s. Growing up, he worked in Rosslare Harbour, fixing ships and loading cargo. By the time he turned 22, he was working as a sailor on ships taking immigrants to the United States.

In the fall of 1862, one such ship left Ireland and docked in New Orleans in March 1863. After the immigrants had disembarked, James and his crew decided to stay docked for a few days before sailing back to Ireland. The day before they were set to leave, Confederate soldiers approached and asked if they could hand over their ship. Knowing there was no way to deny the proposition, James and his crew were forced to abandon the boat.

Stranded in the States without much money, there was no way he could pay for a ticket back to Ireland, so he decided to stay in America. He traveled north to Arkansas, eventually settling in what is now the city of Texarkana.

Because of the sudden and unintentional immigration, James brought very little from Ireland and left his family behind without getting a chance to say goodbye. It was not until 1872 that they finally learned he was in America. Before that, his family and friends simply assumed his ship had sunk during the voyage in 1862.

I believe that stories like this are important because they are an important part of both familial and national history. Without them, we would have no knowledge of our roots, and no way to understand our country's past.