

19 November 2012

HUMANITARIAN VOYAGE OF CAPTAIN ROBERT BENNET FORBES INCLUDED IN NEWLY PUBLISHED *ATLAS OF THE GREAT IRISH FAMINE*.

Pictured at right: Testimonial from the County and City of Cork, Ireland, sent to Captain Robert Bennet Forbes in August 1847 in gratitude for his humanitarian journey to the region in April of that same year. The top of the harp depicts the Father Mathew Tower and USS Jamestown flanked by the Royal Standard of Great Britain and the American flag. The gilded wood frame contains a paper document; 33 x 20 inches; FHM permanent collection.



The 1847 humanitarian voyage of Captain Robert Bennet Forbes to County Cork, Ireland, is included in the new *Atlas of the*

Great Irish Famine published by the Cork University Press in Ireland.

Captain Forbes and his brother, John Murray Forbes, China Trade merchants living in Milton, Massachusetts, took the lead in an effort to transport tons of food and provisions from Boston to Cobh, County Cork, Ireland at the height of the Great Famine.

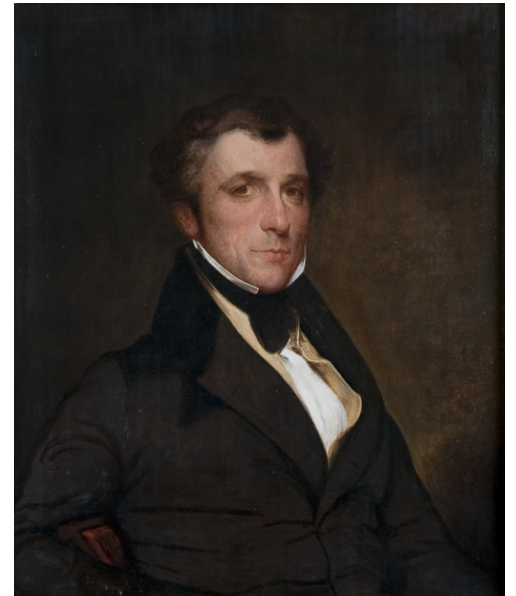
The 710 page Atlas, edited by John Crowley, William J. Smyth, and Mike Murphy of the Geography Department at the University College Cork (UCC), explores “a reconstruction of pre-Famine Ireland onwards ... by the use of over 150 highly original computer generated parish maps of population decline, social transformation and other key themes between the census years 1841 and 1851; and through the use of poetry, contemporary paintings and accounts, illustrations and modern photography,... to achieve a greater understanding of the event and its impact and legacy.”

Marita Foster, historian, acting Head of the International Education Office at UCC, and contributor to the Atlas, writes on page 413, “The USS Jamestown, captained by Robert Bennet Forbes, arrived in Cork Harbour on 12 April 1847 carrying much needed relief. Its cargo included cornmeal, rice, flour, bread, beans, peas, oats, rye, pork, ham, and sixteen barrels of clothing.”

Ms. Foster and Laurence Geary, Senior Lecturer in the Department of History at UCC, have visited Forbes House Museum in recent months while compiling research in Boston on the Famine and 19th century Irish history.

A gathering of influential community leaders and businessmen at Faneuil Hall in 1847 prompted the Forbes brothers to take action. Dr. Catherine Shannon, Professor Emeritus at Westfield State University in Massachusetts, an expert on Forbes' voyage, writes:

“... Boston Mayor Josiah Quincy hosted on 18 February 1847 a large meeting of 4,000 of Boston's wealthier citizens in Faneuil Hall where they heard graphic reports of the unfolding crisis in Ireland. Appeals were made to the audience to give generously as part of their Christian duty and obligation. Thus was formed the New England Relief Committee which included Captain Robert Bennet Forbes, his brother John Murray Forbes and a number of other influential businessmen, bankers, and civic leaders, such as Abbot Lawrence, Patrick Tracey Jackson, Thomas Lee, and then Harvard President and former US Ambassador to Britain, Edward Everett. It was Everett's speech that convinced the Forbes brothers to take a leading role, and within two days the Forbes had devised a plan to petition the United States Congress to transfer the naval warship USS Jamestown, then lying idle in the Charlestown Navy Yard, to the control of the New England Committee so that food and supplies could be shipped from Boston to Ireland. Captain Forbes offered to command the ship without recompense and to recruit the necessary officers and crew... Although aged only 43, Forbes had more than two decades of successful experience as a sea captain, and thus he enjoyed the full confidence of his congressional supporters as well as the Boston relief committee.”



The Forbes House Museum in Milton is a Greek revival mansion built in 1833 for Margaret Perkins Forbes, whose construction was financed by Robert Bennet and John Murray Forbes, Margaret's China Trade merchant sons. It has in its permanent collection that wheel of the USS Jamestown and other gifts given to Forbes in gratitude for his voyage.

A reception and presentation to release the Atlas in Boston was held on Friday, 16 November 2012 at the Boston College Club in Boston with Dr. Michael Murphy, President of University College Cork, in attendance. A presentation was given by Dr. William J. Smyth, Emeritus Professor and former Department Chair of Geography at the University College Cork and co-editor of the Atlas.

Photo above: Portrait of Captain Robert Bennet Forbes, circa 1840, at the age of 36, painted in Canton, China by Kwan Kiu-cheong (or Lamqua). Oil on canvas; 30 x 26 inches; FHM permanent collection.

For more information on the *Atlas of the Great Irish Famine* visit the Cork University Press website at [http://corkuniversitypress.com/Atlas of the Great Irish Famine /357/](http://corkuniversitypress.com/Atlas_of_the_Great_Irish_Famine_/357/) or visit <http://greatirishfamine.ie/>.

The Atlas is published in North America by New York University Press; call the customer service department at 800.996.6987.

For more information on Captain Forbes' 1847 Humanitarian voyage to County Cork, or the museum's Irish Workers oral history project, call our office at 617.696.1815. Call the Museum to reserve a place at one of our tours held on Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday at 1pm and 3pm.

For more information on programs, events, membership and group tours at Forbes House Museum, visit our website at www.forbeshousemuseum.org.

Visit the website for the museum's latest project, the China Trade Trail, linking ten China Trade sites in Greater Boston at <http://forbeshousemuseum.org/chinatradetrail.html>.

