

Finding Molly Johnson:

Catholics and the Fate of Irish Famine Orphans, 1847-48



During the worst years of the Irish Famine migration to British North America, in 1847-8, nearly 1,700 Irish children were orphaned after the deaths of their parents and guardians, at sea, in quarantine stations, in “fever” sheds, and emigrant hospitals. Without a basic state-sponsored social safety net upon which to rely, the colonies heavily depended on the Churches to aid the stricken refugees and take care of the children. The Catholic Church, its clergy, religious, and laypersons, played an indispensable role in caring for these children. While each colony approached the massive influx of Irish Catholics differently, the Church was consistently on the front lines as the principal agent of orphan placement in what, to that time, was Canada's worst refugee crisis.

October 16, 2025 | 7 p.m.

Scotiabank Conference Theatre, Sobeys Building

Public lecture hosted by the Department for the Study of Religion.

Reception to follow.



GUEST SPEAKER:

Mark G. McGowan, PhD, FRSC

Emeritus Professor of History and Celtic Studies, University of Toronto

Principal Emeritus, St. Michael's College

For more information, contact religion@smu.ca

