



Projects on Irish history get personal for Rogers High School students

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NEWPORT – When Rogers High School students undertake projects on Irish history, many of them are learning about the history of their families.

Anna Murphy, Emily Murphy, Julia D’Amore and Michael Phelps completed a project together for their freshmen honors World History Class that is now on display at the Museum of Newport Irish History, 648 Thames St. The museum is open Thursdays through Sundays from noon to 5 p.m.

“I liked the course because I learned more about my Irish heritage,” Anna Murphy said. “My dad, Todd Murphy, and my mother, Meredith Moriarity, are both totally Irish.”

“My grandmother, Dorothy O’Connell, told me how important it is to learn about Ireland,” she said. “Both of her parents were from Ireland.”

“I didn’t know how devastating the famine in Ireland was until we did this project,” Phelps said.

His mother, Grainne Phelps, comes from County Dublin and teaches math at Rogers High School.

One of the requirements of the World History course taught by Stephen Ferris is that they complete a project on the Irish famine.

“It introduces the freshmen to the kind of research and work they will have to do as juniors when they prepare projects for National History Day,” Ferris said.

“They’re totally visual,” he said about the exhibits. “You look at them, read them and learn about the famine.”

There are about 40 students in the two honors World History classes, but Ferris has chosen five projects for display in the museum this month.

This is the third year that students have done projects about the Irish famine, but the second year the students have displayed their work at the museum.

Kayleigh Mosher completed a project with Jaden Petrie and Emelie Kroger.

“History is my favorite subject,” Mosher said. “We’ve had world history units before, but never with in-depth research like we did this year.”

“I read a book about Irish history in the eighth grade, but I’ve learned a lot more with this project,” Petrie said.

Peyton Gardner and Amanda Scott completed solo exhibits now on display.

They highlighted key time periods as the famine and its consequences developed during the years 1845 to 1852. The first report of the potato blight appeared in August 1845, which was serious.

But when the blight reappeared in August 1845, three-quarters of the crops were lost and the rate of emigration from the country escalated.

During those famine years, about 1 million people died and another 1 million more emigrated from Ireland, causing the island’s population to drop by around 25 percent — with some estimates going as high as 30 percent, the students found out during their research

Myrsine McKeon, Peyton Fitzgerald and Emma Patterson also completed a joint project exploring this massive loss of life.

“I could not believe how many people died from starvation as a result of the famine,” McKeon said. “There was just so much suffering.”

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