

The Irish repay a 150-year-old debt

By Aia Andonovska
Arts and Life Editor

In 1847, the Choctaw people and Navajo First Nation dug deeply into their pockets and hearts and were the first to help the Irish during the great potato famine. Together they collected 170 dollars to send to starving families. They had heard about their struggles from across the Atlantic and graciously decided to help. Now, 173 years later, the Irish have graciously returned the favor.

Over 40 people have fallen victim to the COVID-19 virus in the Navajo nation. There has been a spike in cases related to the water crisis as well. An estimated 40 percent of the Navajo do not have running water and the current drought in the southwest has not helped this issue at all. As this crisis has intensified, the Navajo and Hopi together have set up a GoFundMe in an effort to raise money for bottled water.

Hundreds of Irish have donated to the cause and as of May 5, the fundraiser has collected more than 1.8 million dollars to aid with clean water, food and health supplies to the Navajo Nation and Hopi Reservation. Many of these Irish donors have cited the kindness that occurred in 1847 as the cause of their generosity now.

"I'd already known what the Choctaw did in the famine, so short a time after they'd been through the Trail of Tears," Sean Callahan, 43, an Apple administrator in Cork City who made a donation, said on May 5. "It always struck me for its kindness and generosity and I see that too in the Irish people. It seemed the right time to try and pay it back in kind."

Gary Batton, chief of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, said in a statement on Tuesday that the tribe was "gratified and perhaps not at all surprised to learn of the assistance our special friends, the Irish, are giving to the Navajo and Hopi Nations."

"We have become kindred spirits with the Irish in the years since the Irish potato famine," he said. "We hope the Irish, Navajo and Hopi peoples develop lasting friendships, as we have."

The Navajo Nation has had one of the worst coronavirus outbreaks in the United States. There have been more than 2,700 cases and at least 70 deaths as of May 4. The high rate of diseases such as diabetes and scarcity of running water as well as several generations living under one roof enabled the virus to spread at an exceptional speed.

It is not surprising that the ordeals of Native American tribes resonate with people in Ireland. It is estimated that one million Irish people, mainly poor tenant farmers, died of hunger or



The Kindred Spirits Choctaw Monument in Midleton, Ireland. (Courtesy of Ognyan Yosifov)

disease from 1845 to 1849, and another million emigrated in that period or shortly afterward.

A sculpture stands in Cork to commemorate

this friendship between the Choctaw and the Irish that began in 1847. It was dedicated in 2017 in Midleton, Ireland.

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because every time all my friends and I were together, in the dorm, around campus, or even off campus in places like Asheville, were so much fun and great to be a part of, and they will be memories I will keep for a very long time," said Dickerson. "Some people say that the friends and connections you make in college are ones you will keep for a lifetime, and I really and truly believe that. I am so happy and grateful for everyone I met and interacted with during my time at Brevard College."

Dickerson's senior project was quite an interesting one. His project was titled "Chaos in Kentucky: The Trial of Bob Madon." "I worked with Julie Carter to create a Reacting to the Past style role-immersion game in order to act as a pedagogical tool to help teach other disciplines, such as communication, political science, and criminal justice, other than just history," said Dickerson. It centered around Robert Madon, the former mayor of the small town Pineville, Kentucky, and his first trial. They learned about in a LINC class with Wilkey.

One important lesson Dickerson has learned during his time at Brevard is not to take things too seriously. He says to get work done but don't spend too much time worrying about it. Once it's done, spend time with friends and enjoy yourself.

He also says college is a great place to grow

as a person. "I really learned a lot about viewing myself, people and my friends in many different ways that I didn't before," said Dickerson. He experienced different viewpoints in different situations and learned a lot about himself that way. "Through all of my experiences and interactions that I have had at BC, I have really learned to have much more confidence in myself and everything I do," said Dickerson.

He has some advice for younger students at Brevard and those looking to attend. "Spend as much time outside on campus, off campus, and in the community as much as possible with friends. When you think back on your time in college, you want to think about the time with friends and experiences you had more than just the work you did," said Dickerson. "Also, experience as much as you can, be as involved and as active as you can, participate in almost anything and everything and make the most of the four years that you have."

Dickerson is unsure of his path for the future. After graduation he has given some thought to studying communication and/or English in graduate school. Marketing and advertising have also been something he has thought about going into.

No matter what he does, he is determined to continue with his passion. "I want to do writing, whether it's in journalism, creatively, or a combination of the two," said Dickerson.