

So Far From Home: The Diary of Mary Driscoll, An Irish Mill Girl, Lowell, Massachusetts, 1847 (Dear America Series)

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In another installment of the series that brings history to a personal level for young readers, a young Irish immigrant girl shares her experiences as a worker at the Lowell Mill.

Barry Denenberg is a critically acclaimed author of nonfiction and historical fiction. His historical fiction books include titles in the Dear America, My Name Is America, and Royal Diaries series, many of which have been named NCSS/CBC Notable Social Studies Trade Books for Young People. His nonfiction books have covered a wide array of topics, from Anne Frank to Elvis Presley.

Barry Denenberg lives in Bedford, New York, with his wife and daughter. Grade 5-8. The story of 14-year-old Mary Driscoll's escape from the famine in her native County Cork, Ireland, and her new life working in a textile mill in Lowell, MA, is presented in brief diary entries dated from April to November 1847. The purpose of using a diary format seems to be to allow enough white space on the page to keep readers from being daunted by the flat language and plodding plot. The author uses expressions and Irish-like syntax to give the effect of an Irish girl's language. Unfortunately, the effort does not convey the rhythm of Irish speech. Despite the book's shortcomings, it is chock-full of historical facts and background. Denenberg works in the natural and political causes of the Irish potato famine, the dangers and discomforts of overseas passage, and class differences in 1840s America, among other themes. An appendix includes more historical information, such as a popular song of the day and pictures of the architecture and fashions.

Rebecca O'Connell,
Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh

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