

The Shanachie



Vol. XXXI — No. 2 — 2019

This drawing from the Illustrated London News depicts Irish families waiting to board a ship for America during the Great Hunger in the late 1840s and the early 1850s. Thousands of Irish found a new home in Connecticut.



Connecticut and the Irish Great Hunger of 1845-1850

In April 1848, the *New Englander*, a New Haven-based journal of current events, published a lengthy article describing the starvation and suffering rampant in Ireland for the fourth consecutive year. One sentence in the article told simply but effectively how Connecticut was being affected by the tragedy across the Atlantic Ocean: “We have heard the cry of the famishing ... and we have even encountered in the streets of our own cities, the gaunt, haggard forms of men, women and children who fled from the jaws of famine at home ...”

Turning the clock back 171 years to a time when “gaunt” and “haggard” Irish refugees wandered about the streets of Connecticut is a sort of jolting reminder. The Irish Great Hunger which was the cause of that wandering was not just a terrible event in a far-away land, but also a significant milestone in Connecticut history.

For more than 200 years in colonial times and the early national period, Connecticut had remained a fortress of Puritan religion, politics and culture. The people driven from Ireland by the famine were the first of many waves of immigrants who in the latter years of the 19th century and early years of the 20th century transformed Connecticut into a state filled with diversity.

The number of Irish in the state multiplied from approximately 5,000 in 1845 at the beginning of the Great Hunger to 27,200 just five years later, according to the returns of the 1850 U.S. census. And that was only the beginning of the impact of the Great Hunger.

From 1850 to 1860, the state’s Irish population doubled again to 55,000. By 1870, the number of Irish natives in the state had again increased significantly to 70,630, about 13 percent of the entire state population of 537,000.

The Irish arrival in large numbers coincided with the beginning

of the American industrial revolution. Manufacturing was rapidly supplanting agriculture as the mainstay of the economy in both urban and rural sections of the state. The Irish refugees found work in all of the factories and the Irish women labored as domestic servants.

The going was not easy. “New England taken as a whole,” suggested one writer in the *North American Review* in 1851, “is the hardest soil for an Irishman to take root and flourish in. The settled habits of the people, the untainted English descent of the great majority, discrepancies of religious faith and forms and a jealousy of foreign intermixture of any kind all operate against those who would seek to engraft themselves on the Yankee stem ...”

Nativist politicians and journalists did, indeed, rail against the dangers supposedly posed by these strange Celts just as they would later rail against newcomers from southern and eastern Europe, Asia, the Mideast and Latin America

But the Connecticut Yankees and the Irish newcomers found ways to negotiate the differences and to this day Connecticut remains one of the most Irish of the 50 states. For that reason, this entire issue of *The Shanachie* is devoted to the Irish refugees from the Great Hunger and to the Yankees of Connecticut who made room for them.

For the same reason, page 8 of this issue contains a coupon which readers can use to become members of the Great Hunger Museum in Hamden. Founded in 2000 by Quinnipiac University, the museum is the only such facility in the United States to preserve the history of the famine and the role that America and especially Connecticut played in adopting those Irish fleeing from that terrible tragedy.

Puritan humanitarian & priest aided Connecticut relief effort

During the famine, the people of Ireland had no greater friend than a Connecticut Yankee named Elihu Burritt. Born in New Britain in 1810, Burritt's roots went back to 1650 when his Puritan ancestors were among the settlers of Stratford.

As an apprentice blacksmith, Burritt was also a lover of learning studying languages, math, astronomy and the sciences. He eventually went to Worcester, Mass., started a newspaper, the *Christian Citizen*, and began to write and work in humanitarian projects such as abolition of slavery, temperance and peace initiatives.

In 1846, he traveled to England to organize the League of Universal Brotherhood. In London, he followed reports of the Great Hunger engulfing Ireland and subsequently went there to see for himself and write accounts of the suffering for his newspaper.

In Dublin in early 1847, he wrote, "At noon I went to the soup kitchen and there first came into contact with the famine-stricken people. A crowd of haggard, unwashed and ragged people crowded the narrow passage ... Children with old rusty tin cups, basins and boilers were almost trampled upon in the struggle for food."

In Kilkenny, he wrote, "The country was beautiful and nature seems to have done all that she could for the happiness of humanity. But the people ... appeared to be worse housed and fed than the beasts ..."

'Distress and destitution'

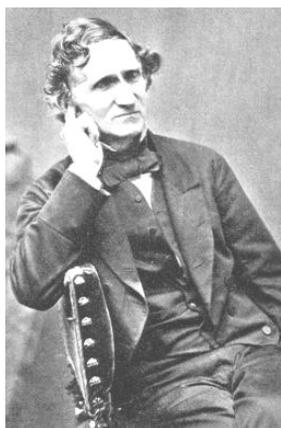
In Cork, he wrote, "The country people are pouring in from every direction ... 30,000 are now living on charity ... The work-house is filled to overflowing and about 5,000 are around its premises ... This morning we renewed our work of visiting the abodes of distress and destitution. In almost every hovel we entered, some one was lying prostrate with fever ... There they lay upon the most filthy straw ..."

Burritt understood clearly the economics that made such suffering possible. Under the guise of *laissez-faire* — a free market system — English merchants were making top dollar selling wheat and livestock grown in Ireland to England and European nations while Irish families starved to death.

He urged Americans to mount a crusade to prevent the continuation of the suffering

and dying: "Shall these people starve when there are in the United States 106,000,000 bushels of wheat, 163,500,000 of oats, 417,750,000 of Indians corn? ... Forbid it, heaven! Let all the ships in the Atlantic ports, waiting for freight, spread their wings and fly to the relief of Ireland."

Burritt's letters and dairy entries were important but not alone in mobilizing help for Ireland in the United States. Especially during the early years of the famine stories and editorials in Connecticut newspapers



Elihu Burritt



Theobald Matthew

created sympathy which led to an outpouring of aid from every corner of the state.

By March 1847, parishes in the Catholic Diocese of Hartford had sent \$3,600 which was divided among the four archdioceses in Ireland for the suffering peasants. Among the individual parish contributions were Hartford, \$898; New Haven, \$664; Bridgeport and Norwalk, \$222; Norwich and New London, \$223.

At a public meeting in New London, the aldermen appointed a 20-person committee which in turn conducted a street-by-street collection. Bolstered by circulation of a letter titled "Address to the Ladies of America," from women in County Cork, the collection totaled \$780.65.

An editorial that appeared in the *New Haven Palladium* thanking Ireland for providing "so many stout hands to build our railroads and forward our internal improvements," was an incentive that encouraged residents to donate \$875, \$250 and \$327 in three canvasses.

In some communities, residents donated food for two U.S. Navy ships — the Macedo-

nian and the Jamestown — that were taken out of mothballs and sent to Ireland. The residents of the Great Hill section of Derby donated eight barrels of corn and one barrel of rye; those of Southbury, five barrels and one bag of corn; two barrels of rye flour and one barrel of rye.

Ecumenical spirit

Rural communities pitched in too. In Wethersfield, "a friend of the Irish" gave \$5. The people of Rockville pledged \$255.24. In Farmington, a mother, moved by a letter in a newspaper about two Irish children dying in their sleep, went door to door seeking donations. In the ecumenical spirit, Protestants in Voluntown donated \$15 and Catholics \$12. In Hartford, appeals from the pulpits of city churches raised more than \$1,000: Unitarian Church, \$91; Methodist Episcopal, \$30; Universalist Church, \$33; North Church, \$171.33; St. John's Church, \$143; Christ Church, \$365; Centre Church, \$344.56.

Ecumenism worked also in Norfolk in Litchfield County where the campaign to aid the Irish was led by Edward Ryan, an Irish immigrant businessman, and the Rev. Joseph Eldridge, pastor of the Congregational Church. Ryan and his kinfolk John, Matthew and Charles Ryan were natives of Kilkenny. In 1836, they bought a woolen mill in Norfolk and later a general store. Irish residents met at the store and pledged \$225 for Irish relief. Meanwhile, Eldridge not only urged his congregation to contribute, but pledged \$15 himself. His wife pledged another \$5 and other members of the parish added \$80.

The Congregationalists and Catholics combined their donation and sent them to New York where the money was used to purchase flour which was shipped specifically to Father Theobald Matthew, the famous temperance priest. Father Matthew, who had studied in Kilkenny and was assigned there when ordained as a Capuchin priest, responded to Ryan, "How delightful to see good men of every religious creed thus acting in the spirit of the Saviour, whose precept is, 'My dear little children, love one another' ... How I desire to take by the hand and to my bosom the truly Christian minister, the excellent Mr. Eldridge. May the Lord bless him and all who sympathize with the sorrows of afflicted Ireland."

Tidal wave of emigrants fled to Land of Steady Habits

Irish people were accustomed to crop failures and most of them could survive one bad season. But when the potato crop was destroyed by a fungus in three out of four years — 1845, 1846 and 1848 — about a million out of Ireland's eight million plus population died.

That the deaths were not double that many was due only to the fact that an estimated 1.1 million Irish emigrated. The vast majority — about 80 percent — came to the United States, while others settled in Canada and Australia. While they were described as “emigrants,” they were more truthfully “refugees,” people fleeing for their lives from a homeland they loved.

The outflow was actually greater after the years of the crop failures. From 1845 to 1848 about 582,000 fled. In 1851 and 1852, a total of 623,301 left with 1852, the largest immigration: 368,764.

Costs and dangers of emigration

The cost of a steerage ticket was £3 or £4. In the best of circumstances the voyage to New York or Boston was six weeks. In bad weather, it could be two months or more. In steerage, the usual practice was for four people to sleep in a six-foot square compartment.

Even to the last moment, passengers were not safe from landlords, tax collectors and sheriffs. In Galway City, the ship *Albion* was about to sail for New York in March 1847 when a bailiff came aboard with a warrant for a passenger who owed his landlord the price of one hundred weight of meal. The passenger resisted and the bailiff came back first with a squad of policemen, then with a detachment of soldiers of the 49th Regiment who conveyed the passenger to the city jail where he remained without money to pay the debt.

Passengers also were subjected to all kinds of scams. One of the few accounts left by those who came to Connecticut is that of Phil Reilly who emigrated in 1851, and later became a policeman in New Haven. Reilly wrote: “We reached St. John, New Brunswick. The provisions had become exhausted and to get rid of the expense of feeding the passengers any further, the captain boldly announced that he had arrived in New York.” When passengers learned of the deception, they locked the captain up and brought authorities aboard. A compromise was arranged to provide provisions and sail



In May 1851, a reporter of the Illustrated London News witnessed this scene: a priest giving a blessing to half a dozen families ... “He had a word of advice to Pat,” the reporter wrote, “a caution to Nelly, a suggestion to Mick ... he promised Dan to take care of the ‘old woman’ until the £5 came in spring to send her over to America ... Then ensued a scene of tears and lamentations ... The priest stood surrounded by the old and young, the strong and infirm ... and he turned his moistened eyes to heaven and asked the blessing of the Almighty upon the wanderers during their long and weary journey. Many were the tears brushed quietly from the sunburned cheeks ...”

the ship on to New York.

Only one ship, the New London whaling vessel *Dromo* is recorded as bringing emigrants from Ireland to a Connecticut port. In the spring of 1847, the *Dromo* sailed to Norfolk, Va., to take on cargo, possibly relief supplies for Ireland. It returned late that summer, docking at New London with 43 male and 31 female emigrants. The *New London Morning News* reported the passengers to be “much superior to the great body of Irish emigrants ... in good health and spirits and will mostly leave in a few days for their different destinations.”

Shipwrecks

During the famine years, 59 emigrant vessels were shipwrecked, some before their voyage had fairly begun. The *Ocean Monarch* caught fire in the Mersey River as it was leaving Liverpool on Aug. 14, 1848. Of 322 steerage passengers, 176 perished.

The brig *Carrick* sailing from Sligo to Quebec was wrecked on the Gaspé Peninsula in May 1847 with loss of 132 passengers.

The *St. John* sailed from Galway in September 1848 bound for Boston with 120 emigrants. It arrived safely off Provincetown on Oct. 7, but that night a fierce gale drove it toward Grampus Ledge and tore it

to pieces. Several rowboats made it safely to land, but 99 passengers died.

In the 10 years from 1845 to 1855, an astounding 892,000 Irish entered the United States through New York City. Before being allowed to disembark, they passed through the quarantine station on Staten Island. Thousands were detained at two hospitals there suffering from ship's fever and other maladies.

In the spring of 1847, Boston authorities took over Deer Island in the city's harbor and constructed shanties so sick Irish emigrants could be removed from South Boston. By year's end, papers published the names of 350 who died on the island.

That same spring, the first ships to arrive at Grosse Isle, the Canadian quarantine station in the St. Lawrence River near Quebec, carried almost 700 Irish emigrants with ship's fever and other diseases. By the end of May, 36 emigrant ships were backed up in the middle of the river waiting to unload 13,000 emigrants. When the ships finally docked, the quarantine station was so overtaxed that sick passengers were merely left on the beach to die. It is estimated that 3,000 died there in the summer of 1847.

Irish provided manpower for state's industrial revolution

An Irish visitor to Connecticut in 1848 wrote that when manufacturing began to replace farming as the main component of the state's economy, "Irishmen were called in to dig the deep foundations of huge factories, to blast the rocks, to build the dams; and when the great structures arose, the children of Irishmen were called to tend the spindles or the furnaces."

The *Hartford Times* in 1855 put a dollar value on the benefits of the massive Irish influx triggered by the Great Hunger. "The foreign emigration is of incalculable value to this country," the newspaper wrote. "Without it, our canals, railroads and other great works would be seriously retarded. Without it, our manufacturers could never compete with foreign labor and would be compelled to shut their factories. It is worth more to our national prosperity than an annual donation of \$50,000,000 in gold."

The most urgent need of the state at that moment in its history was manpower; the most pressing need of the Irish refugees was what they never had in centuries of English occupation of their homeland — a chance to prosper.

Emigrant guide praised Connecticut

Father John O'Hanlon in a book published in 1851, *The Irish Emigrant's Guide to the United States*, painted an impressive picture of the employment opportunities waiting for those Irish who settled in Connecticut. "The valley of the Connecticut River is extremely fertile and the remainder of the soil good and well cultivated ...," O'Hanlon wrote, "All kind of manufactories are carried on such as those of cotton and woolen goods, iron works, leather, paper, coaches, weapons, clocks, axes, buttons, hats, combs and tinware ... In 1840, there were 116 cotton and 115 woolen factories ... and the value of manufactured goods \$13,669,139."

The returns of the 1850 U.S. census are full of evidence of the linkage of the industrial revolution in Connecticut and the diaspora of Irish fleeing starvation. In Norwich, Irish brothers Peter, Patrick and James Donley, all in their 20s, are listed with at least 25 other Irishmen working in the woolen factory. In Enfield, Irish natives Patrick Slowey, a loom cleaner, Alexander McMaster, a spinner, Francis Murphy, a day laborer, and Dennis Clark, a weaver, are with many others listed as employees of the carpet mill. In the same town, John Riley,



Not all Irish emigrants flocked into cities and labored in factories. In the 1840s and 1850s, Irish emigrants settled in rural Southbury, CT, and bought farms. In the 1860s, six farms owned by Irish families were spread along Dublin Hill Road in the White Oak District of the town. The sign is not only a street marker but a reminder of the history of those who fled Ireland during the years of the Great Hunger.

Hugh O'Brien, Patrick McWade and John Carney are among many Irish working in the gunpowder plant. In Greenwich, Rory Mckintyre, Thomas McNally James Dyer and James McBride work in a wire factory. In nearby Norwalk, John McKeads, Henry Grady, Frank Bresnan and others make a living in shoe factories. In Newtown, a comb manufacturer named Douglas Squires also ran a boardinghouse where lived Irish-born employees Owen Feney, Michael and John Hayes, Daniel Kelly and John Sinen.

Mines and quarries employed numerous Irishmen. The work force at Ames mines and ironworks in Salisbury, Litchfield County, included 31 Irish miners, two colliers, 10 forge men, two furnace men and two refiners. The census lists more than 25 Irishmen working at the copper mine in Bristol. The brownstone quarries in Portland across the Connecticut River from Middletown had a workforce of 1,500 men. So many of them were Irish that Portland became a town where the Irish language was spoken and even taught in the schools.

Industrial work in that era was characterized by long hours and dangerous conditions. One Connecticut axe manufacturer said he employed Irish grinders because the death rate from accidents was so high that he had trouble finding New England Yan-

kees to do the work.

One constant hazard was that of having a limb sucked into machinery that had no protective devices. Irishman Timothy Mullan lost his left arm in a water wheel at Whitlocks Works at Plymouth Hollow. In Stamford, Barney McIntyre died after his leg was drawn into a machine used for rolling metal at the Mianus Iron Works. A 16-year-old Irishman, Frank Downes, died in a similar mishap at a New Haven lock factory as did Nicholas Welch at a woolen mill in Middletown.

Explosions were frequent and deadly. At the gas works in New Haven, John Bary and Thomas Lane were severely burned when a drum they were about to clean exploded. In Stamford, the explosion of an eight-ton steam boiler at the Cove Extract Works killed, among others, Irish emigrant William Dawson, and severely wounded his brother Michael. The explosion destroyed the building, lifted the boiler 20 feet in the air and deposited it 60 feet away. The Dawsons had arrived in the United States just three months before. The worst boiler explosion of that era was at the Fales & Gray car factory in Hartford in March 1854. The blast ripped through a section of the factory where 100 men were working. Eighteen were killed, seven of them Irish. Fifty were injured,

Ships and railroads

In the harbor at Bridgeport, Irishman Michael Gulick died after being struck on the head by a loose coal tub while at work on a ship in November 1853. He had been saving money to enable his wife and four children to join him and was intending to send for them soon.

During the famine era, railroad construction was booming in Connecticut. The feverish nature of the work as communities vied for valuable freight and passenger connections was captured by the *New Haven Palladium's* description of a scene in October 1848 when the last few miles linking New Haven and Bridgeport were being laid "Night and day for the last weeks the hands of the Northampton Company have plied the shovel and rails and accomplished in seven days a labor which one unacquainted with modern advances in the art of annihilating valleys and hills would have thought could not have been accomplished in a month."

Irish women in demand as domestic servants

“Here was a poor Irish housemaid ... who touched our feelings extremely,” wrote an Englishwoman, Lady Emeline Stuart Wortley, regarding an encounter at a hotel in Bridgeport during a tour of America in 1850. “We had watched her with compassion in the pouring rain milking the cows ... When she came in with our tea, we asked her questions about her leaving Ireland, and she appeared delighted to talk about the ‘ould country’ ... She seemed to think it the most beautiful and charming place on the face of the globe.

“Every time we saw her after that, we had a little talk about ‘the fair Emerald Isle.’ and ... when I gave her a little gratuity, she fairly burst into tears and thanked me most heartily; but, I verily believe, more for talking to her about the ‘beautiful ‘ould country,’ and displaying interest in her simple history, than for the trifle I presented her with. She sobbed out as we took leave, ‘Och, sure my heart warmed toward ye from the first, when I found ye was from the ‘ould countries,’ thus cordially uniting the land of the Saxon with her own far-off Erin.”

Bright, efficient and caring

Those two paragraphs say much about one of the most universal stereotypes of Irish-American history: the Irish servant girl, thousands of whom found refuge in the United States from the horror of the Great Hunger. The paragraph sketches a portrait of a bright, efficient and caring young female exiled to difficult and menial labor in a country far distant and far different from the land of her birth, and longing for any contact that would remind her of hearth and home.

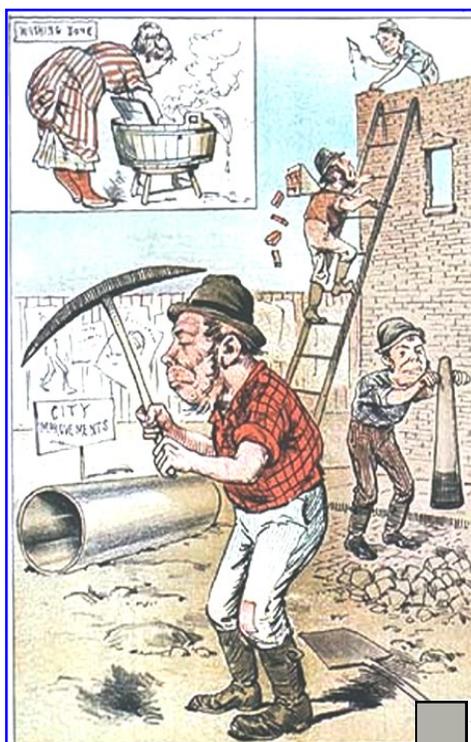
The *New York Tribune* estimated in 1845 that of the 10,000 to 12,000 domestic servants in New York City, 7,000 to 8,000 were Irish. The figures certainly grew substantially in New York during the huge influx of the famine era. And the number of Irish women servants in Connecticut at that time was almost certainly in the thousands too.

A mistake by a census taker in Norwalk in 1850 provides some evidence. The instructions for census takers that year were to list the name, place of birth and occupation of every male, but only the name and place of birth, but not the occupation of females. In Norwalk, a census taker erred and listed the occupations of women as well as men.

There were in Norwalk that year, 3,766

Irish natives, 8 percent of the town’s population of 4,651. Irishwomen outnumbered Irishmen 213 to 163. Of the Irishwomen, 58 were listed as having occupations; 57 of them were servants. The only Irishwoman not a servant was a nurse.

The Irish female servants were mostly young: nine were age 15-19; 28 were 20-24; nine were 25-29; nine were 30-45. Two of them were under the age of 15. They were employed in a wide variety of households including those of: grocers, lawyers,



For all the valuable work Irish men and women did, nativists could not resist depicting them as simians, that is, looking like apes and monkeys.

farmers, manufacturers, clergymen, and a boardinghouse keeper.

What is known for certain in Norwalk, thanks to the error of the census taker, can reasonably be inferred in other Connecticut towns and cities, namely that when young Irish-born women are found living in the homes of other families, it is likely they are there as servants.

In cities, dozens of Irish women are thus listed. In the returns for Waterbury, one page alone lists 25 Irish women in the homes of clerks, machinists, merchants, carriage makers, joiners and physicians. In

Pomfret, a rural village in eastern Connecticut, 28 Irish-born women are listed living with farm families. And in New London, nine Irish women live in the homes of officers of the U.S. army garrison at Fort Trumbull. Two are in home of Major George Taylor, commandant of the post.

Despite their presence in so many homes, the Irish servants were often maligned in very nasty ways. The nativism that periodically raises its ugly head in the United States was hard on them, portraying them in some artwork as looking like apes, heavyset and muscular and dull in intellectual capacity.

‘Raw Irish peasantry’

In a book about housekeeping, the famous sisters Catharine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe of Hartford complained about “the raw Irish peasantry,” who, they declared were not only incompetent but overbearing. They said an Irish servant could not accomplish from dawn to sunset the work that a girl of New England Puritan stock could finish by noontime. The Beechers described one Irish servant as “a creature of immense bone and muscle, but of heavy, unawakened brain.”

Those comments were nasty and demeaning, but they were based to an extent upon an unfortunate reality: Irish girls, thanks to centuries of English rule in Ireland, did come from backgrounds less than ideal to prepare them for domestic service. The standard of living of Irish peasants was far below that of affluent New England families and Irish servants entered the home of their new employers without understanding of the latest appliances much less the niceties of fine living.

To nativists, their lack of sophistication was the least of the flaws of Irish servants. Far more serious was their Catholicism. Rumors spread of Irish housemaids who rushed babies off to be baptized Catholics as soon as the family turned its back and who told family secrets to priests in the confessional. One Protestant in Boston warned that a servant girl “had heard me and others talking over the subject of popery occasionally” and “the priest made her tell what she had heard ... Many a rich family in Boston and all their private affairs are thus exposed to the Roman priesthood by the Catholic servants they employ.”

Refugees brought Catholic faith with them

On April 4, 1844, the year before the famine began in Ireland, Father William Tyler was installed as first bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Hartford. The new diocese included Connecticut and Rhode Island, and was carved from the Boston Diocese, which had been founded in 1808.

Established to provide for the slow but steady increase of Catholics in southern New England, no one could have predicted that within two years the new diocese would be confronted with a tidal wave of refugees fleeing from the Great Hunger in Ireland.

Bishop Tyler's original flock totaled just under 10,000 souls, 4,817 in Connecticut, 5,180 in Rhode Island. But by 1847, just halfway through the Great Hunger, a Baptist periodical was amazed at the multiplication of Catholics: "We can remember the time when there was not a single half dozen Roman Catholics in Hartford ... Now we have a Catholic congregation of some 1,500 ... and we hear of their establishing more churches in many of the manufacturing towns in the state ..."

Witnessing the dedication of St. John's Catholic Church in Middletown in 1852, an observer wrote: "Dedication of churches to Catholic worship are now almost of weekly occurrence throughout the country, but nowhere more so than in the Diocese of Hartford ... Localities in this state where five or six years since a Catholic priest was a rare sight, are now supplied with churches, pastors and congregations ..."

Bishop Tyler left no stone unturned to deal with the crisis. In a plea for financial support to the Society for the Propagation of the Faith in Paris, he wrote, "Almost without exception (the Catholics are) Irish who have been driven to this country by poverty ... A great number arrive every year ... They readily undertake the hardest labour to make a living and readily contribute to support the priests who serve them. But they are poor and need support to build churches and school-houses and to establish religious institutions ..."

In a visit to Ireland in 1847, Tyler was able to enlist the first of many Irish-born priests for the Hartford Diocese from All Hallows College at Drumcondra near Dublin. The college was founded in 1842 specifically to train seminarians for foreign missions. Father Michael O'Neill was one of those recruits. Fresh out of Drumcondra, he

became the first resident pastor of the Catholic church in Waterbury with responsibility for missions in towns up and down the Naugatuck River Valley.

Until that year, Catholics in Waterbury who wished to attend Mass did so in the private home of one layman, Michael Neville. Masses were said there only when Father James Smyth periodically rode his sorrel horse the 20 miles northwest from New Haven.

Fortunately in summer 1847, Waterbury's Episcopalians put their St. John's Church up for sale in order to build a bigger house of worship. The Catholic community jumped at the opportunity and paid \$1,500 for St. John's and hired a contractor to move it to the corner of East Main and Dublin streets.

Father O'Neill arrived in town that autumn. He boarded with the Neville family and assumed the double challenges of establishing what eventually became Immaculate Conception parish while transforming the Episcopalian house of worship into a Catholic church. "So energetically did he labor," reported one historian of the Hartford Diocese, "and so generously did his flock cooperate that on Christmas Day 1847, he had the happiness of offering for the first time within its walls the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass ..."

Another of the original priests from All Hallows College was Father Luke Daly, a native of County Cavan. Assigned first to Holy Trinity Church in Hartford, Daly in May 1849 became the first pastor of St. Mary's Church in New Britain with his territory including Farmington, Plainville, Newington, Bristol, Forestville, Collinsville, New Hartford, Tariffville and Simsbury.

Father James Lynch, another All Hallows graduate, ministered to towns in western Connecticut. In 1845, he came from Bridgeport in Fairfield County to say Mass in the home of Bridget Dunning in Sharon in Litchfield County. He also was responsible for

a group of 15 to 25 Catholics in Stamford who complained of his infrequent visits although he had said Mass there on 11 Sundays in one year.

Bishop Tyler died in 1849 and his successor, Bishop Bernard O'Reilly in 1851 added a new dimension to the spread of Catholicism by arranging for five Irish Sisters of Mercy to come to Connecticut from the Diocese of Pittsburgh. Led by Mother Frances Warde, a native of County Leix, Sisters Teresa Murray, Baptist Coleman, Camillus Byrne and Lucy Lyons established both convents and subsequently schools in Hartford and New Haven.

The sudden burst of Catholicism in what was New England's most Puritanical stronghold caused much debate and controversy. A letter to the editor of the *Hartford Courant* in 1855 painted an alarming situation. "The Roman Hierarchy is an organization managed in secret for the aggrandizement of an Apostate Priesthood and wholly antagonistic to Human Rights," charged the writer who signed his letter "American."

A Farmington resident, using the initials M.A.L., wrote a five stanza poem titled "Papists in Our Midst" on the dangers of the Catholic clergy. The final stanza summarized:

"Watch then husbands, fathers, brothers!
"Watch this hated Romish faith!
"Watch, ye wives, sisters, mothers!
"Watch! And fight it unto death."

Other Protestants set about to convert the Irish Catholics, while admitting it to be a difficult task. James H. Cooley, described as "Missionary to the Irish Romanists in Waterbury," wrote in the *American and Christian Union* newspaper: "Your missionary has been in the field six months. He has made an average 100 visits a month among the lowly, held 45 prayer meetings, preached 35 times and lectured five times on Romanism. We have had during that time six conversions."



This caricature of a Catholic bishop shows him arriving in America wearing a papal crown and carrying Vatican decrees and other propaganda.

Families shattered in headlong flight from starvation

The floodtide of refugees from the Great Hunger in Ireland separated thousands of families, in part because the impoverished Irish came to America not in families but individually. A father or mother would scrimp to save enough money for passage, then save what money they could and send it home to pay fare for family members, one by one if necessary.

The sometimes heartbreaking hardships can be found in various documents from that era. On one page of the 1850 census returns for New London, CT, a handwritten note records the names James, William and Thomas Kelly, ages 30, 3 and 2; and James and Mary Kane, 32 and 31, Jonathan Kane, 1. The note reads: "These persons constituted a family on 1 June 1850 ... Yesterday, Aug. 9, it is understood they dispersed, some to Massachusetts, some to New York." The list of deaths that occurred during the census taking suggests why the family was thus broken up — the death of Roseanna Kelly, apparently the mother.

Another case of an uprooted Irish immigrant family was reported in North Haven where a town official noted: "Some time last September or October an Irish family on their way to Boston stopped at North Haven with a sick child unable to go further and within a day or two another of the family was taken sick and both under the doctor's care and the whole family consisting of six persons were provided for by the selectmen of our town for about a month."

Family members missing

One valuable resource for locating individuals and families lost under such circumstances were want ads in newspapers, especially Irish American newspapers. The *Boston Pilot*, weekly of the Boston diocese, published in each issue columns of advertisements under the caption "Information Wanted." The ads listed the names of those being sought, details of their home towns in Ireland, when they sailed for or landed in America and the addresses of those who placed the ads. It was hoped that the missing might see the ads and respond.

In the 1980s, a group of researchers in Boston set out to copy and republish in a number of volumes thousands of these advertisements. The researchers indexed the ads by names, dates of immigration, counties and towns in Ireland, and states

and towns in America. Their work, published in several volumes by the Irish studies program at Northeastern University and the New England Historic Genealogical Society, is a testament to the magnitude of sufferings during and after the famine. Listed below is just a tiny sample of the Connecticut ads in the *Boston Pilot*.

"Information wanted"

Dec 23, 1848 - Information wanted of Patrick Sullivan, 20 years old, native of County Kerry, who sailed from Cove of Cork, 10 November 1847, in ship *Malvina*, Capt. Maloney; was wrecked and driven back to Cork; sailed again on 6 January 1848, and not heard from since. Information respecting him will be thankfully received by his father, Michael Sullivan, Bristol Coppermine, Hartford County, Ct.

April 28, 1849 - Information wanted of Ellen and John McCanna age 12, of Dundrum, Co. Armagh, These children left the Bellevue Hospital, April 17, 1847, Their father, Daniel McKenna, died in the hospital on the 27th of the same month ... (Contact) their mother Ellen McCanna, (address) to James McClelland, Norwich, Ct.

Jan. 6, 1849 — Information wanted of Patrick McAneny, Ennis, County Clare, who was in the employ of Mr. Carmichael, contractor, at Barryville Pennsylvania in June last. Any information respecting him will be received by Henry Roche, New Haven, Ct.,

Oct. 26, 1850 — Information wanted of William, John, James and Elizabeth Moran of the parish Of Abbeyleix, Queens County. They sailed from Ross in May 1847 and landed in Montréal. When last heard from were in Bavery, Sheffield, Canada West ... (Contact) Ann Moran, address, Michael Neville, Waterbury Ct.

Sept. 28, 1850 — Information wanted of Bridget Looby, native of County Tipperary, parish of Latin, who left Ireland 17th March last and landed either in New York, Boston or Québec. Information respecting her will be thankfully received by her brother, John Looby, Wolcottville, Litchfield County, Ct.

July 21, 1849—Information wanted of James McCormick, a native of County Roscommon, Frenchpark, left Greenwich, Ct., in June 1848 ... his mother, Bridget McCormick, Greenwich, Ct.

Sept. 30, 1848 — Information wanted of John McGrath, stone mason, from Naas,

sailed from Dublin, the 4th of May last with Mary Banan, maiden name, Mary Lawless, from the parish of Allen, Co. Kildare. ... address James Banan, Falls Village, Ct.

Aug. 14, 1847 — Information wanted of William Collins of Templebrien, Co. Cork, who left home last May for Boston, in company with his son and son-in-law, ... address his son John Collins, Derby, New Haven County, Ct.

June 8, 1850 — Information wanted of Thomas Donahue of Ballyegran, Co. Limerick, town of Rossmore, who sailed from Liverpool in November 1848. Last heard of in Ohio ... address his brother, William, care of Michael Smyth, West Cornwall, Ct.

Aug. 25, 1849 — Information wanted of Patrick Heraty of Co. Mayo, who landed at Boston about the 1st of July last ... address his sister. Direct to Mrs. Mary Burke, New London, Ct.

Aug. 12, 1848 — Information wanted of Thomas and Patrick Conlon, the former who came to this country about May 1846 and the latter about a year after. When last heard they were living in the vicinity of Boston. Direct to Winifred Conlon, care of Prof. John Johnston, Middletown, Ct.

Mother, child united in Willimantic

It is impossible to know how many of these stories of people lost and families dispersed ended sadly or happily, but one did end with a joyous reunion at the railroad station in Willimantic, CT.

A young girl by herself clutching in her hand a letter sent from Willimantic some months before arrived at the railroad station in that Windham County city in late 1853, according to the *Derby Journal*.

The letter, reported the newspaper, indicated it had contained a draft to pay for the little girl's passage from Ireland. Passersby read the letter but did not know how to help the girl. Then a young woman entered the station and "looked searchingly around until her eye fell on the little stranger." The young woman darted to the child and clasped her in her arms.

Mother and daughter had been separated about three years before. When they left the depot in Willimantic, they were entwined in each other's arms, kissing and pouring out with tears most tender expressions of love and joy.

Clip coupon

and send to:

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NAME _____

STREET _____

TOWN, CITY _____

STATE/ZIP _____

The Shanachie

Published quarterly by the
Connecticut Irish-American
Historical Society
P.O. Box 185833
Hamden, CT 06518
(203) 392-6126
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[https://www.facebook.com/CTIrish
American Historical Society](https://www.facebook.com/CTIrishAmericanHistoricalSociety)

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a tradition
to the future."

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