

THE ILLUSTRATED NEWS

A PUBLICATION OF IRELAND'S GREAT HUNGER MUSEUM



The Great Hunger

The Great Hunger took place between 1845 and 1852. It is one of the saddest and most important events in Irish history. During the Great Hunger, over one million Irish people died and close to two million people emigrated. This emigration led to large numbers of people with Irish ancestry in countries all over the world today.



An Gorta Mór by Robert Ballagh

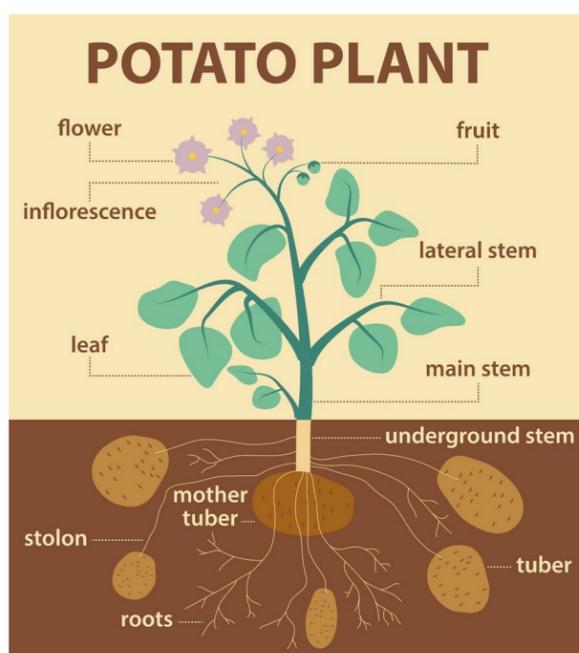
Causes of the Great Hunger

The Great Hunger was caused by a plant disease that ruined potato plants. This disease was named phytophthora infestans. It was also called 'the blight'. The blight was first seen in Ireland in 1845. The potatoes looked normal when they were planted, but when the farmers went to harvest them the potatoes came up black and rotten. The blight spread very quickly and affected large amounts of potato crops all over Ireland. Many Irish families relied on potatoes as their main source of food. Irish farmers grew other crops too, but everything else was sent to England to pay the farmers' rent. The Irish farmers did not have anything to eat when the crops were bad. The blight lasted for seven years which meant that millions of people starved.

Why Did People Eat So Many Potatoes?

A grown man in Ireland would eat up to 14 pounds of potatoes a day. Potatoes were many people's only source of food. But why potatoes?

During the 16th and 17th centuries, England invaded Ireland. The native Irish people were forced to move to the west coast, where the land was rocky and the soil for farming was not as good. Most land in Ireland was now owned by English landlords. These landlords rented the land to the Irish at very high prices. The Irish often used the good land to grow things like wheat and corn that they would sell to pay their rent. This left the farmers with a small piece of land to grow their own food. Potatoes took up very little space and were very nutritious. One acre of potatoes could feed a family of four for a year. Potatoes also grew well in the rocky soil. At least two-thirds of the farmers in Ireland grew only potatoes for themselves and their family.



A diagram of the potato plant

A View from the Times



FUNERAL AT SHEPPERTON LAKES.

Sketches in the West of Ireland
By Mr. James Mahony, February 20, 1847

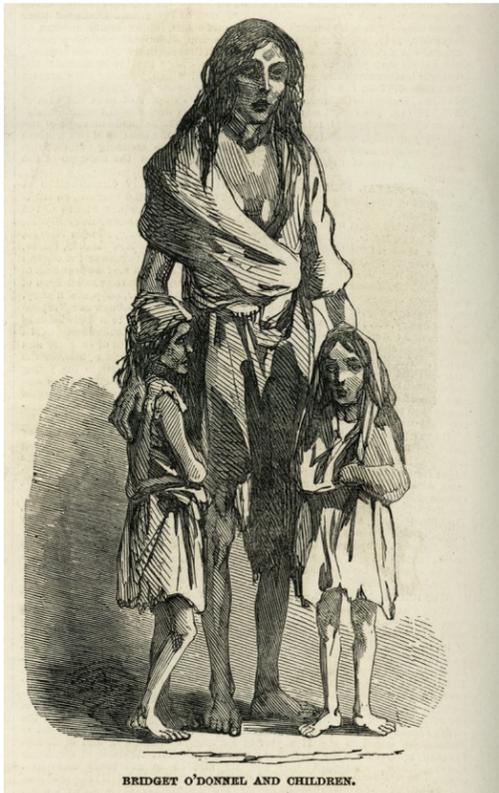
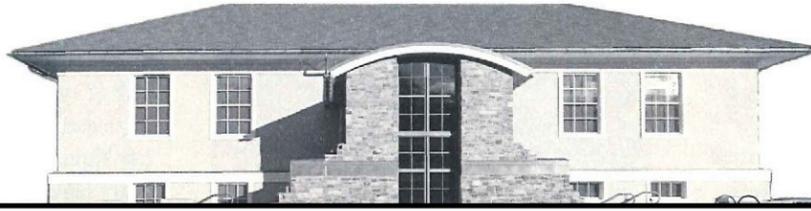
"After leaving Clonakilty, each step that we took westward brought fresh evidence of the truth of the reports of the misery, as we either met a funeral or a coffin at every hundred yards, until we approached the country of the Shepperton Lakes. (See the Sketch.) Here, the distress became more striking, from the decrease of numbers at the funerals, none having more than eight or ten attendants, and many only two or three."

Illustrated Newspapers

Photography was invented a short time before the Great Hunger. It was not used in Ireland yet. There are no known photographs of the Great Hunger. Newspapers that wanted to report on the events of the Great Hunger had to rely on illustrations. They would send journalists to the area they wanted to know about, and the journalist would write down what they saw and draw sketches of the landscapes and the people. Readers depended on these articles and illustrations to learn about what was happening in Ireland. Many of these artists did not know how to draw a person who was starving. The artists did the best they could, but there was no way to show how terrible conditions in Ireland really were.

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Bridget O'Donnel and her Children, December 12, 1849

What Happened to the People?

The population of Ireland was more than 8 million in 1841, 4 years before the Great Hunger. By 1851, the population was expected to be at 9 million, but it had dropped to 6 million people. More than 1 million people died from starvation and related diseases. More than 2 million people left the country. People continued to leave long after the Great Hunger ended. By 1921, 4.5 million people had left Ireland. The population was cut in half by a combination of death and people leaving the country. Ireland's population has still not returned to pre-Famine numbers today.

Ireland's Population

1841—8 million

1851—6 million

1871—4 million

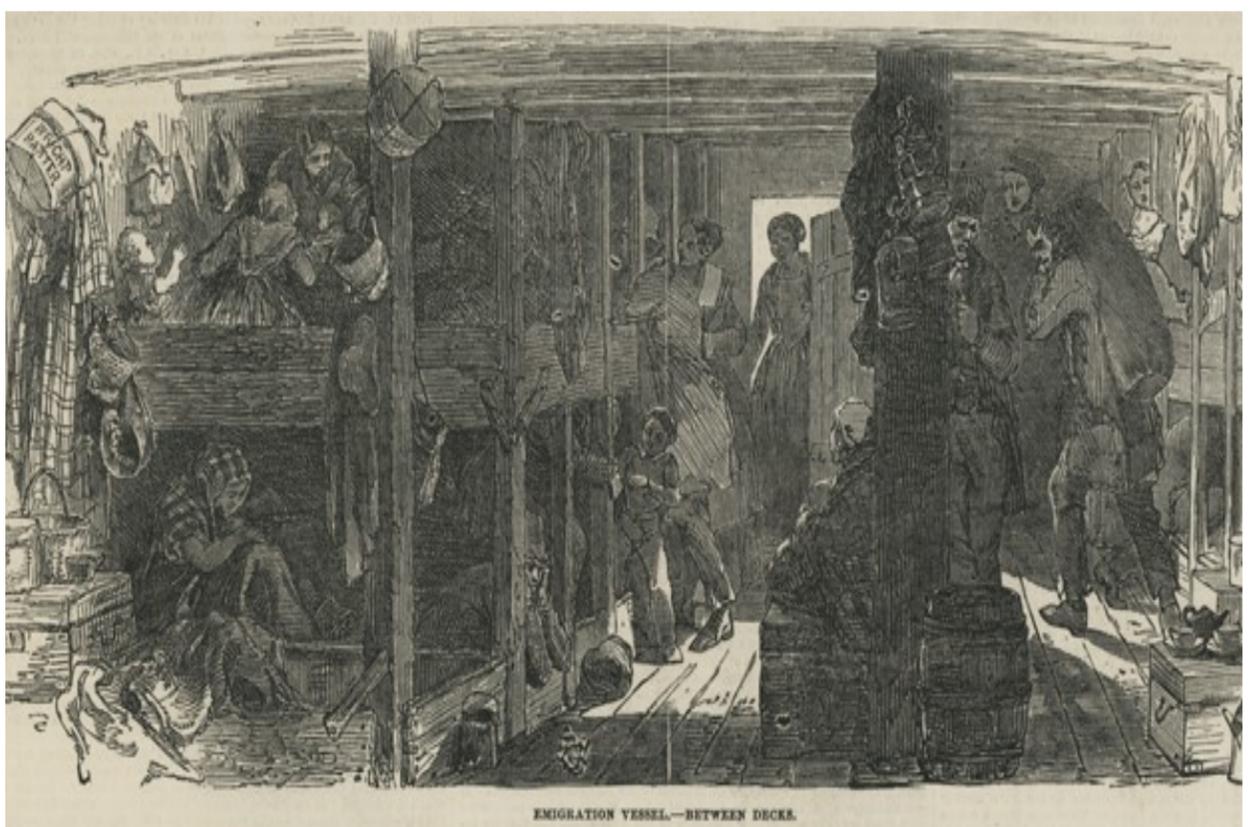
2017—4.75 million

Eviction

When the Irish could not afford to pay their rent, their landlords in England would often evict them. This meant that the landlords would force families out of their homes. After eviction many people lived in small shelters made from holes in the ground, or were left with no shelter at all. Roughly 350,000 people were evicted during the Great Hunger. Landlords wanted to evict their tenants because they could make more money using the land to graze cattle. Landlords would often burn the roofs of the houses so that no one could continue to live there. By forcing out the poorest Irish people, landlords made the effects of the Great Hunger much worse. Many people died of hunger, lack of shelter, or disease.

Emigration

Emigration is when someone leaves their country and moves to live in a different country. People emigrated for two reasons. Some left because there was not enough food or jobs, and others because their landlord had evicted them. Some landlords also paid to put the Irish living on their land on a boat headed for the United States, Australia, or Canada. Emigration was not always a good solution. Ships were overcrowded, and many people died before reaching their new home. Disease spread quickly onboard because people were packed in so close together. These ships became known as "coffin ships" because so many people died aboard them.



The Depopulation of Ireland. Emigration Vessel, Between Decks, May 10, 1851