## THE IRISH ARRIVE



- 0. THE IRISH ARRIVE Story Preface
- 1. BACKGROUND
- 2. FIVE POINTS
- 3. LIFE IN FIVE POINTS
- 4. THE BOWERY

## 5. THE IRISH ARRIVE

- 6. GANGS AND TAMMANY HALL
- 7. DEAD RABBITS vs. THE BOWERY BOYS
- 8. BILL THE BUTCHER
- 9. MURDER OF BILL THE BUTCHER
- 10. MONK EASTMAN AND JOHNNY SIROCCO
- 11. 1863 DRAFT LAW
- 12. 1863 DRAFT RIOTS
- 13. REACTION TO THE RIOTS
- 14. HISTORICAL FACTS, PEOPLE AND PLACES



Irish people were forced to leave their villages and settle elsewhere, including in America, when the "Irish Potato Famine" (known as "The Great Hunger" in Ireland) caused a national calamity between 1845-1849. This illustration—from the May 10, 1851 issue of *The Illustrated London News*—depicts Irish people leaving their village. Online via Vassar College.

In 1845, a blight ruined Ireland's potato crop. A single-crop failure should not have caused a deadly famine. A <u>national disaster</u>, however, quickly followed when other crops—which had NOT failed—were exported by British owners of Irish farms.

With nothing to sell, potato farmers had no money to pay rent. Landlords <u>evicted families from their homes</u> as starving mothers begged for food. Fathers, trying to provide some type of shelter for their families, <u>carved "hovels"</u> out of Irish bog. <u>Death had descended</u> on the Emerald Isle.

Those who survived had one thought: <u>leave Ireland</u>. Within four years, a million people fled the country. But "Famine Ships" became "Coffin Ships" as already ill people could not survive the crossing to America. By the time ships arrived in Boston or New York, they were far less crowded than when they had left Europe.

Once in New York, immigrants from the same country tended to live in the same neighborhoods. And young men from those neighborhoods tended to form gangs. Among the most notorious gangs, in the mid 1800s, were those from the Irish section of Five Points.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

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Media Stream



Even after the potato blight was no-longer ruining the crops of Ireland's tenant farmers, villagers could not cope with the ongoing impact of their economic distress.

A reporter and artist, working for *The Illustrated London News*, witnessed an entire village of people who were leaving their homeland. The story and sketch (shown above) is in the <u>ILN's May 10, 1851 issue</u>. The following is an excerpt from the article: ...I came to a sharp turn in the road, in view of that for which we sought, and of which I send you a sketch, namely, the packing and making ready of, I may say, an entire village—for there were not more than half-a-dozen houses on the spot, and all their former inmates were preparing to leave.

Immediately that my rev. friend was recognised, the people gathered about him in the most affectionate manner. He had a word of advice to Pat, a caution to Nelly, a suggestion to Mick; and he made a promise to Dan to take care of the "old woman," until the five pounds came in the spring to his 'Reverence' to send her over to America.

Then ensued a scene of tears and lamentation, such as might have softened a much harder heart than mine or that of the priest. He stood for awhile surrounded by the old and the young, the strong and the infirm, on bended knees, and he turned his moistened eyes towards heaven, and asked the blessing of the Almighty upon the wanderers during their long and weary journey.

Many were the tears brushed quietly away from the sunburnt cheeks of those who there knelt, and had implicit faith that the benediction so fervently and piously asked, would be vouchsafed to them.

It is hard to fathom the depths of despair which these people had to endure, both those who left and those who stayed behind.

Click on the image for a better view.

Illustration, and quoted passage, from the May 10, 1851 issue of The Illustrated London News.

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## Illustration - Eviction of Peasantry in Ireland

Image, described above, online courtesy Vassar College.

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