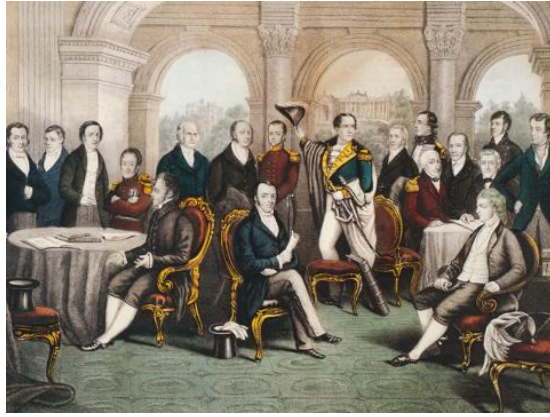




0. SOCIETY OF UNITED IRISHMEN - Story Preface

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2. SOCIETY OF UNITED IRISHMEN

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As the British Parliament's rule of Ireland became more and more adverse to the interests of the Irish people, a group of individuals formed the Society of United Irishmen in Belfast. The point of this Society was to unite Irishmen, no matter their religion, to pursue political reform.

Initially, the United Irishmen was an open and constitutional society, but following the French Revolution - and its radicalism - the United Irishmen was formally repressed in 1794. Such repressive action did not quell the concerns of the Irishmen. In fact, it spurred the development of an even more militant form of republicanism - a desire to completely free Ireland from British control and transform it into its own Republic.

As unrest grew, including in rural areas, a rebellion erupted in 1798. This rebellion, during the summer of that year, was timed to coincide with a French naval invasion on Ireland's west coast. That, however, was unsuccessful. Many of the Irish patriots, seen in this picture - including Robert Emmett - were either found guilty of treason or were forced to flee Ireland altogether. Image, by a now-unnamed artist, is online via Wikimedia Commons.

Although Ireland had its own parliament, the British government did not allow Irish Catholics—about three-quarters of the population—to vote. Theobald Wolfe Tone, an Irish lawyer, believed this religious discrimination had to end.

When Tone became a lawyer in 1789, George Washington was serving as America's first President, and French citizens were revolting against their monarchy. Words like *liberty*, *equality* and *justice* were on Tone's mind.

After observing the Irish Parliament in session, Tone was convinced that his country was controlled by Britain. He believed Irishmen serving in Parliament were concerned more about British interests than Irish interests.

Tone realized change would not occur without serious political activism. He decided to use his legal skills to become a political activist.

Centuries before technology disseminated "the news," political cartoons and pamphlets were the vehicles which aroused a citizen's emotions. Wolfe Tone wrote *An Argument on Behalf of the Catholics of Ireland* which endeared him to the Catholic population.

In the pamphlet, Tone argued Ireland should be:

*Free from Britain
and
Free from religious oppression*

To achieve that goal, Tone and two other Irish Protestants (James Napper Tandy and Thomas Russell) co-founded the Society of United Irishmen in 1791. Tone and his colleagues wanted to downplay religious differences, since England was effectively using those differences to control the country. As Tone said later, he

wanted:

To break the connection with England...and to assert the independence of my country - these were my objects. To...substitute the common name of Irishman in place of the denominations of Protestant, Catholic, and Dissenter - these were my means.

George III, who was still king of England in 1791, was no more interested in Irish independence than he had been interested in American freedom. Besides, the “catechism” United Irishmen were teaching was threatening to British interests:

*What have you got in your hand?
A green bough.*

*Where did it first grow?
In America.*

*Where did it bud?
In France.*

*Where are you going to plant it?
In the crown of Great Britain.*

It wasn't long before Britain banned the United Irishmen and exiled Wolfe Tone.

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/SOCIETY-OF-UNITED-IRISHMEN-Wind-that-Shakes-the-Barley)

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Media Stream



James Napper Tandy

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

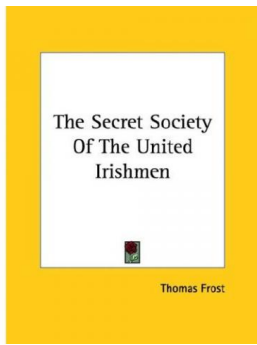
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Thomas Russell

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The Secret Society of United Irishmen - by Thomas Frost

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