



San Francisco Irish Famine Memorial

an tOIRTEA MÓR

Presentation for the San Francisco Recreation & Park Commission

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San Francisco Irish Famine Memorial

AN GORTA MÓR

Purpose of the Memorial

The San Francisco Irish Famine Memorial Committee was formed in April 2013 with a vision to memorialize the victims and the survivors of "The Great Hunger" (An Gorta Mor) that occurred in Ireland from 1845-1852.

The SF Irish Famine Memorial Committee is supported by a broad coalition of Irish organizations and friends of the Irish Community in San Francisco.

The Memorial will serve to educate locals and visitors alike about that period in history and about the cause of the starvation and death of over a million people and lead to the emigration of over a million more people to leave Ireland.

This Memorial will also serve to thank the State of California, and City of San Francisco for the welcome and for the opportunities that were afforded the Irish upon their arrival.

While the Memorial will serve to educate, thank and connect the Irish of Northern California with their immigrant past, it will also acknowledge the many contributions of the Famine-era Irish to their new homeland. There are over seventy million Irish diaspora in the United States that trace their roots back to the consequences of the Great Hunger; the West Coast result which can be seen all around the city.

Other Great Hunger Memorials are erected throughout the world. In America, most of the large major port cities have monuments that honor the events that lead to the emigration. SF deserves to serve as a shining example of the westward migration of the Irish.

This booklet will provide a small sampling of the other major cities that have honored their Irish immigrants, and serve to remind us all that hunger still persists in the world today, and that we are fortunate to be in such a great land of plenty.



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REASONS FOR IMMIGRATION

Irish immigration to the United States bloomed in the 1840s and 1850s due to the potato blight and economic depression in Ireland. Hundreds of thousands of Irish people left their homeland, and many came to California during the Gold Rush. Irish immigrants made up the majority of San Francisco's working class, constituting 13% of San Francisco's total population and over 21% of the labor force in 1870. By 1880, approximately one-third of the city's population was of Irish descent.

Their gradual ascent up the social ladder served as a model for later immigrant groups. When the Irish first arrived in San Francisco, German immigrants were the other major ethnic group. The Germans came with more resources and did better economically. The Irish immigrant community, however, soon became the prominent influence in city politics. This was due to several factors: because they were native English speakers; because they understood the U.S. political system (based on the British system they came from); and because of their sheer numbers. In 1867 San Francisco's mayor was an Irish Catholic, Frank McCoppin. The Irish political mobility was also aided by the fact that unlike the East Coast, California had much less entrenched bigotry against the Irish. The same was true for sentiments about Jews, and later, Eastern European immigrants. This provided more opportunities on the West Coast.

The Catholic Church was vital to the Irish community. By the early 1900s, a full 75% of the Catholic clergy were Irish immigrants. Mission Dolores became a predominantly Irish church after 1906 with the Irish influx into the neighborhood.

This is why their Great-great-great grandfather or grandmother (a surprisingly high number of immigrants were single women) came to America. The Potato Famine, or *An Gorta Mor* (this is how you say it in Irish) became the single point of reference for anyone who escaped it, and the memory of the famine remained fixed in the minds of the immigrants and ultimately, their offspring. It is the historical birthing place of the ideas and attitudes that Irish Americans have towards power and self-determination.



San Francisco Irish Famine Memorial an gorta mór

Well Known Early Irish Pioneers that Contributed to San Francisco

1843: Jasper O'Farrell arrived in SF on a ship by way of Chile and became the City Engineer who laid out the SF Street grid of the present day City.

1843: James Graham Fair was an Investor and part of the Bonaza silver mining company, with two other well-known Irish men, William S. O'Brien and James C. Flood. The Fairmont was named in his honor. The Flood building for his family.

1849: Peter Donahue, industrialist arrived on the Steamship "Oregon" from Peru, and built steel works, shipbuilder and the origins of present day PG&E.

1854: Sr. Mary Baptist Russell, Roman Catholic nun arrived in SF to provide social services, medical care, and education in the City.

1885: Michael O'Shaughnessy arrived in SF and served as City Engineer, built our water system and much of our Municipal railway infrastructure.

1887: Fr. Peter Yorke, a Catholic priest who came from Dublin and supported the oppressed during the Teamsters strike of 1901. He also founded the local newspaper called *The Leader*.

There are many more recent names that can be added to the list of Irish who have served, and continue to serve honorably to our great city today. SFPD Past Chief Thomas Cahill, SFFD Present Chief Joanne Hayes-White, Past Mayor Frank Jordan just to name a few.



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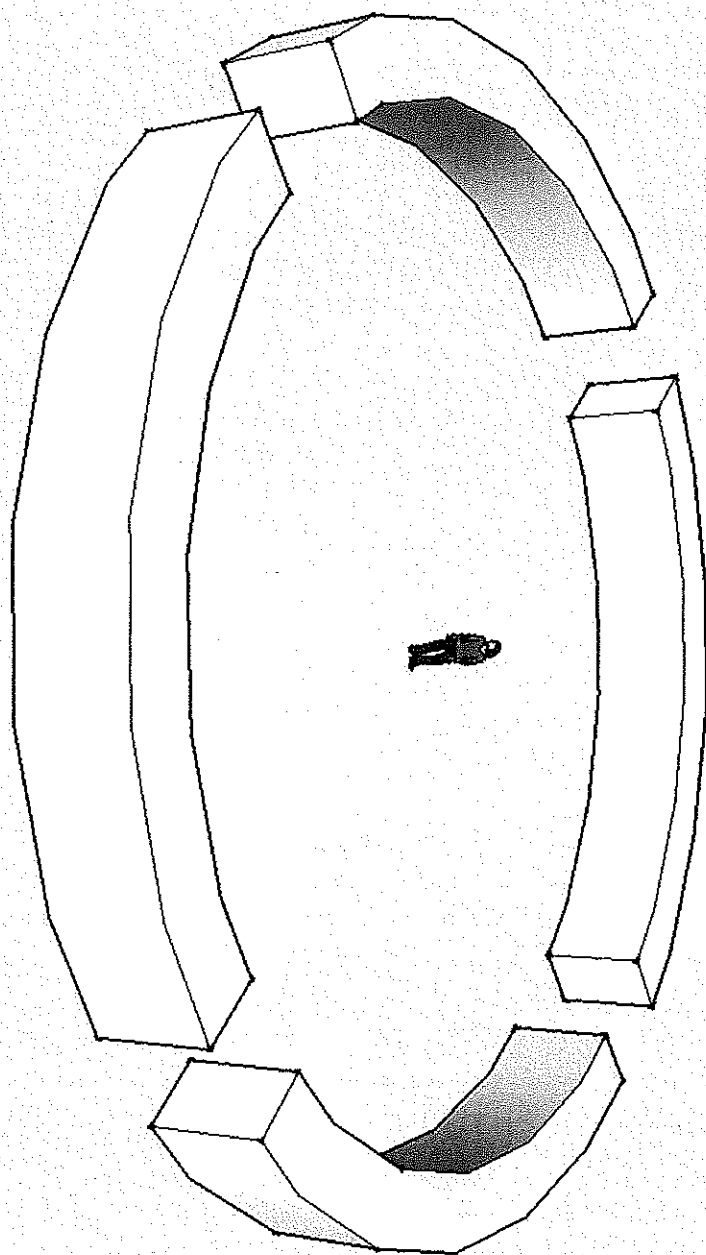
THE MEMORIAL

The basic layout of the memorial is planned as a stone and /or metal surfaced circle with a life-size statue in the center on a pedestal. The structure will be 2 feet thick, the outside may have writings or possible works of art that can reside in the 2 foot area.

The circle will be broken into four sections, representing the circle of life broken by the Famine. Each of the four sections will represent one of Ireland's four provinces: Connaught, Ulster, Munster, and Leinster. The diameter of the circle will be 32 feet with openings 3 feet wide. The sides would be 7 feet in height made of stone, possibly Irish Connamara marble (as found in St. Patrick's Church on Mission Street).

In the center of the ring will be a bronze or stone statue of a young Irish woman immigrant of the mid-19th Century, representing the many thousands of young Irish who led the move to America after the Famine. A young woman is represented because history shows that more women than men survived the trip, and also to give honor to the many women who worked as domestic help to support their families. The statue would be set on a stone pedestal of 3 or 4 feet and would be a life-size representation, standing between 5-6 feet tall, for a total height of 8-10 feet.

The inside walls will have panels with written information and representations engraved into the stone (or bronze inlaid) regarding the Famine and the story of the Irish in San Francisco. These panels will give a visual depiction of key figures and events from the history of the Famine Irish and their descendants, with special focus on the themes of perseverance and overcoming the odds, the great gifts and contributions in California, and our present-day obligation to the poor.





San Francisco Irish Famine Memorial

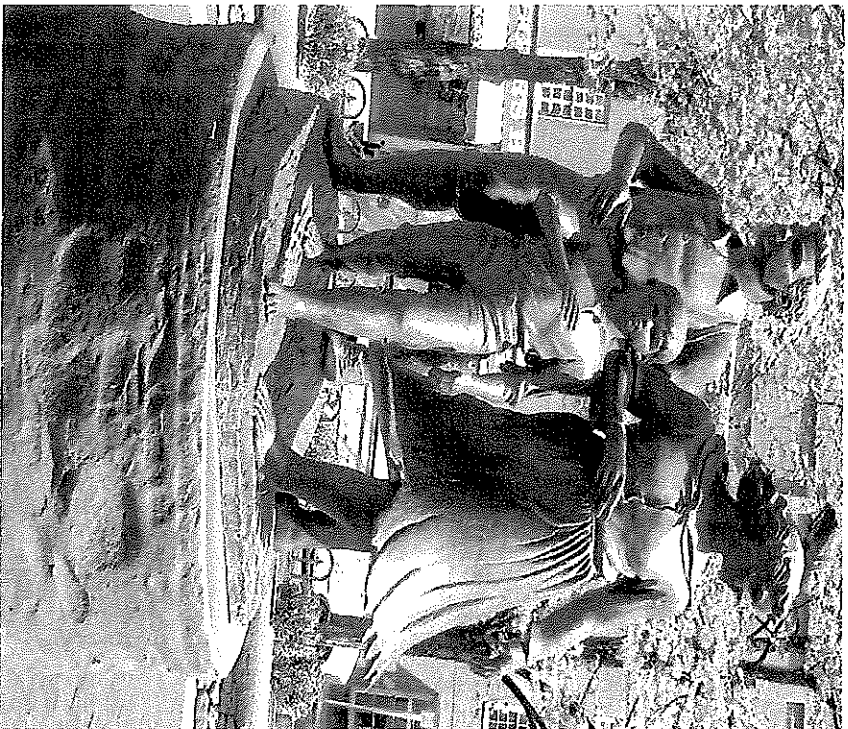
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Boston, MA



The memorial includes eight narrative plaques about the Famine and two groups of figures, one deeply affected by the Famine, and the other looking healthy and well fed. The sculpture by Robert Shure encourages us to reflect on similarly unjust conditions that persist today. The memorial was unveiled in June 1998.

Philadelphia, PA



The Memorial portrays the indefatigable spirit of the Irish and its eagerness to engage the challenges of a new world. It serves as testimony to the rich heritage of the Irish-American people who proudly claim their Irish legacy.

This Tribute not only commemorates the past, but also recognizes the contributions made to the growth of this nation by the survivors and their descendants. It educates and inspires present and future visitors to the site. Cost approximately \$3 million

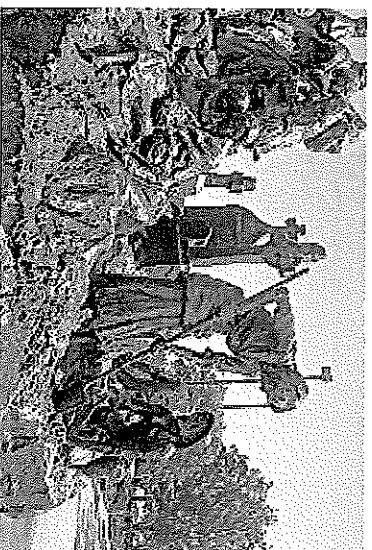
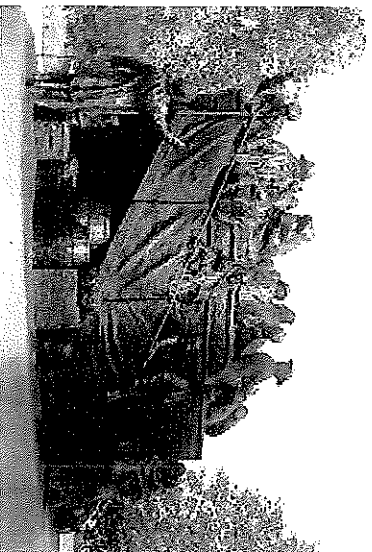
Philadelphia Memorial Background

The centerpiece of this project is a monumental bronze sculpture set in a 1.75 acre dedicated park.

Glenna Goodacre, the artist who sculpted the Vietnam Women's Memorial in Washington, D.C., created the monument, including 35 life-sized figures.

The bronze work measures a spectacular 30 feet long by 12 feet wide and 12 feet high. The memorial depicts the cruel starvation which claimed one million Irish lives between 1845 to 1850; the harrowing journey to America taken by a million more; and the indomitable spirit of those who arrived safely and resolved to face the challenges of life in a new world.

Co-chairs were Governor of Pennsylvania, Edward G. Rendell and Reverend Nicholas S. Rashford, S.J., former President of Saint Joseph's University, Philadelphia.



Buffalo, NY

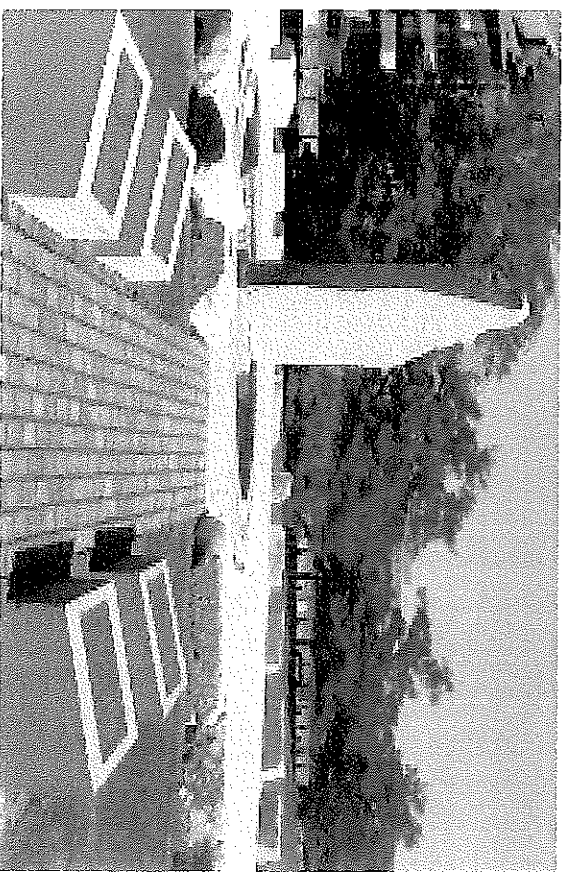
The granite standing stone from Carraroe, County Galway, is set off center to represent the Irish Diaspora. The well surrounding the standing stone symbolizes "The Great Silence" -- that period following in the Famine when no one dared speak of it.

The biblical inscription in Irish below the standing stone is an expression of a culture and language and a memory nearly lost. It translates... "If these were to be silent, the very stones would cry out."

The circular memorial field, filled with names of Famine victims, those who survived, their descendants and friends symbolically ends "The Great Silence."

Those stones left blank honor the unknown who died as a result of An Gorta Mor.

Thirty-two limestone boulders form the monument's outer ring. They represent Ireland's thirty-two counties. These rough-hewn stones, a gift of the people of Cork, once formed Penrose Quay in Cork Harbor. Upon these, many emigrants walked to make their journey from Ireland, some for the last time. Dedicated in 1997.



New York, NY

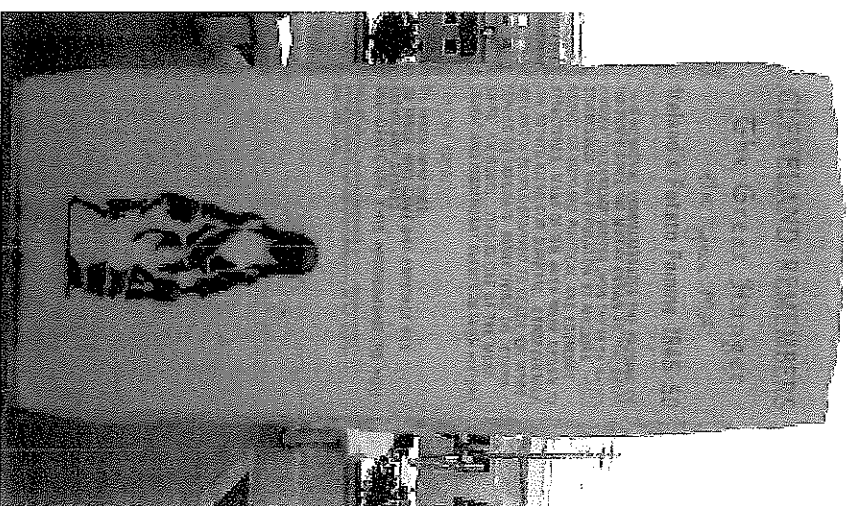
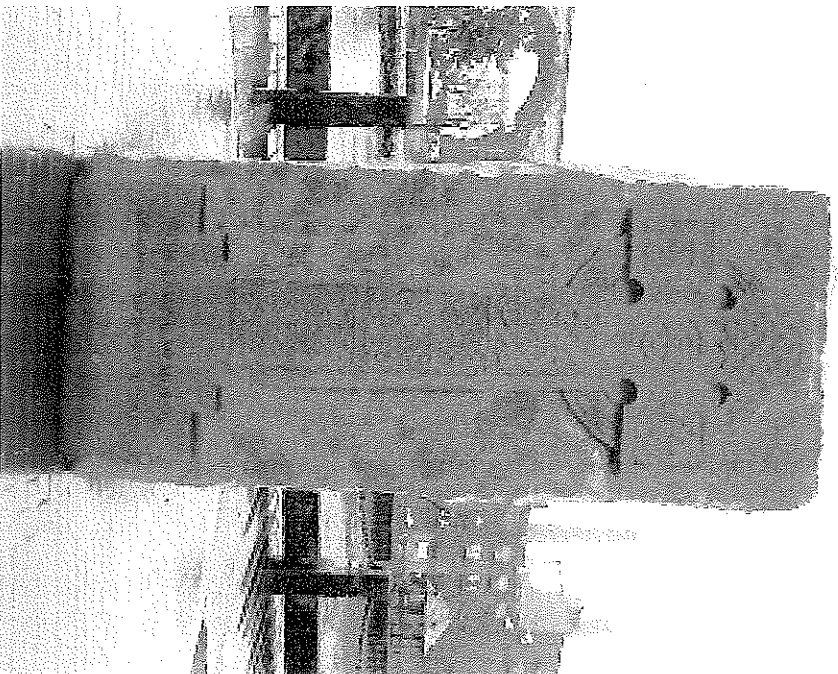


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New York Memorial Background

- Financed by the Battery Park City Authority – cost \$5 million
- Sculptor Brian Tolle was among 13 artists selected from an initial review of 150 portfolios and one of five awarded a \$10,000 stipend to create a model and proposal for the site
- He chose as collaborators Juergen Riehm and David Piscuskas of 1100 Architects of New York and Gail Wittwer-Laird, a landscape architect
- The only conditions were that the memorial be:
 - A contemplative space —
 - Retain the harbor view —
 - Incorporate description

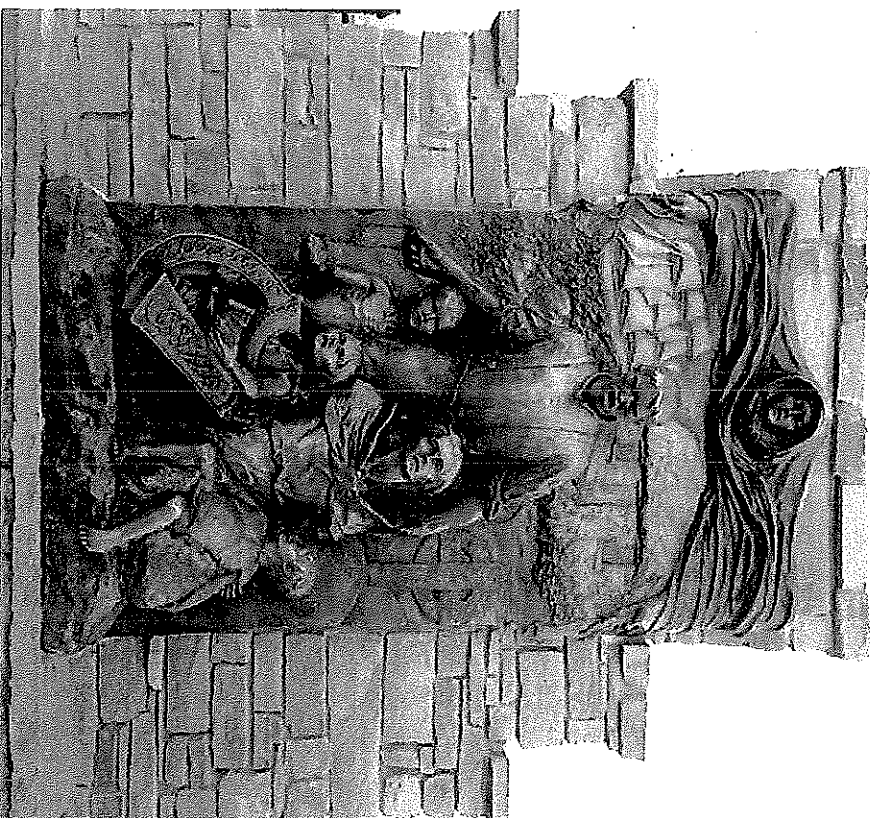
Cleveland, OH



The Cleveland Irish Famine Memorial, on the East Bank of the Cuyahoga River, the area known as The Flats. Part of this memorial was designed by Lakeland Community College librarian Paula Blackman. The memorial was dedicated September 16, 2000.

Chicago, IL

Designed by Fr.
Anthony Brankin, a
pastor at a local
parish in the
Chicagoland area



On October 24, 1999, Gaelic Park dedicated a memorial monument. The memorial monument, which was commissioned and paid for, by Gaelic Park. It depicts an Irish destitute family being evicted from their home, while it was being burned to the ground

Portland, OR

The Memorial is a Celtic High Cross modeled after the ancient Cross of the Scriptures in County Offaly which was carved in 916 A.D.



The cross stands 14 feet tall and is divided into biblical and secular panel scenes

The remastered replica was hand carved in Donegal Town by stone sculptor Brendan McGloin. The Memorial was dedicated by Mary McAleese, President of Ireland on December 13th 2008.