



Human Geography

Effects of the Irish Potato Famine

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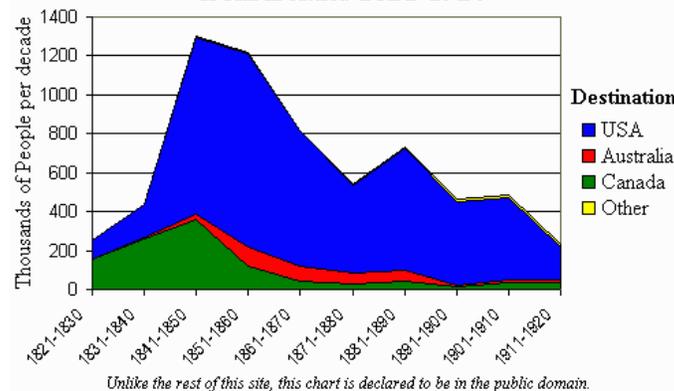
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Directions: Read the article below about the Irish Potato Famine and answer the questions on the back of this page.

One of the most obvious effects of the famine was emigration. Although the famine itself probably resulted in about 1 million deaths, the resultant emigration caused the population to drop by a further 3 million. About 1 million of these are estimated to have emigrated in the immediate famine period, with the depression that followed continuing the decline until the second half of the 20th century. These migrants largely ended up in North America, with some in Australia and in Britain.

Between 1845 and 1855, 1.5 million people left for good. In 1845, emigration was at the pre-famine rate of 50,000 per year. In 1846 100,000 left. It peaked in 1847, when 250,000 left. Over the next 5 years it averaged 200,000 per year, before the numbers fell off. By 1855, the rate was down to 70,000 per year [6].

Destination of Overseas Emigrants from Ireland 1821-1920



In the period over the famine decade 1841-1850, 1.3 million people emigrated overseas [1]. Of these, 70% went to the USA, 28% to Canada and 2% to Australia. Most people paid their own fares to make the trip, although perhaps 3% had their fares paid by their Landlords [6]. The cheapest fares were to Canada, around 55 shillings, while a fare to the USA cost between 70 shillings and £5 (100 shillings)[3]. There were two ways one could travel; either in a standard class or steerage. Standard passengers had berths and could walk on the deck. Steerage passengers were crowded together below decks and often could not use the deck. For many emigrants, steerage was the most they could afford.

Of course, Irish emigrants did not all go overseas. Although not as many as went to America, hundreds of thousands of Irish emigrated to Britain. Some went on from Britain to America, but many settled there. Because Ireland and Britain were then part of the same country, no migration figures were recorded on Irish Sea traffic. However, the 1851 census in Britain shows around 400,000 Irish-born living in Britain [5]. The map shows where these emigrants were concentrated. As you can see, most settled in the port regions around Liverpool, Glasgow and London. Even today, people in Liverpool and Glasgow have a higher-than-average interest in Irish affairs.

Irish Settlement in Britain in 1851

