

sustained from the available food supply for even a further dozen years. In summary, the Great Famine was the product of social conditions that resulted in over-population coupled with economic forces that drained the tenants of all the wealth they created.

The rapid demise of Gaelic as the spoken language in the latter half of the 19th Century was caused by the need to know English to communicate abroad. Children earmarked for emigration received an elementary education at 'hedge schools' and from the early 1870s in Government sponsored national schools.

Those who emigrated from the mid-1850s onwards usually went to live at first with relatives who helped secure employment through social contacts with the membership of the Ancient Order of Hibernians and Clan na Gael. The latter body (sometimes called the United Brotherhood), which dominated the former, was an Irish-American revolutionary oath-bound organisation that supported the Fenian movement founded in New York in 1867. It was not difficult to foster the Fenian cause of Irish Independence among the arriving immigrants from Ireland.

CHANGES IN LAND OWNERSHIP

The existence of the landlord system was perceived as the cause of Ireland's problems. County Mayo experienced partial crop failures in the last years of the 1870s. The Irish economy was then in a state of recession. Tenants were forced to use their cash reserves to provide food for their families and pay their rents. The prospect of largescale eviction and famine again loomed close.

Mayo's largest newspaper at the time was 'The Connaught Telegraph' edited and owned by James Daly the son of a wealthy farmer from Boghadoon near Lahardane. The paper's popular appeal was due to its radical anti-establishment content. In October 1878 the paper publicised the establishment of the Mayo Tenants' Defence League founded by its editor. At the same point-in-time the Mayo born I.R.B. prisoner Michael Davitt was released from prison in England and returned to Mayo and met with his friend Daly. That winter the Roman Catholic Parish Priest of the South Mayo parish of Kilvine, one Canon Bourke, attempted to raise the rent on his family's estate in that parish. The following February some of his tenants met with Davitt and Daly and other anti-landlord radicals including John Keane and J.W. Walsh and the nationalist Patrick W. Nally in Nally's Hotel, James Street, Claremorris and a monster protest meeting was planned to be take place at the South Mayo village of Dry Mills on April 20th. Daly gave the meeting advance publicity in his paper.

The meeting was chaired by Daly himself. Speakers included John O'Connor Power, the local Member of Parliament, Thomas Brennan of Dublin, J.J. Loudon B.L. a wealthy Westport landowner and lawyer, Matthew Harris of Ballinasloe and John Ferguson of Glasgow. It was attended by about 10,000 tenant farmers from all over the west. As a result of the gathering the rents on the estate were reduced. In the wake of the meeting the village was re-named Irishtown and the first chapter in story of modern Ireland began to unfold.

Charles Stewart Parnell, an up-and-coming and extremely able Protestant nationalist M.P., was persuaded to join the infant organisation. Parnell's saw the potential of the emerging mass movement as an opportunity to further his political career.