

The Irish Texans



Margaret Heffernan Borland was a child in the first group of McMullen-McGloin colonists in 1829. Thrice widowed, she became a rancher in Victoria County. In 1873 she led a drive of her own cattle up the trail to Kansas, but died of "trail fever" shortly after reaching her destination.

The Irish have early connections with Texas and a long history filled with oppression, violence, ingenuity, faith, literature, music, and exciting stories.

Long under English domination, the Irish have often left their homeland, in numbers large and small, to find fortune elsewhere. The ad interim governor of Spanish Texas in 1767 was Hugo Oconór, whose name leaves no doubt of origin. He was not the only Irish soldier or administrator or adventurer to enter the service of another country more congenial than England. Some were independent agents. Philip Nolan of Belfast was well known for efficient horse trading and illegal mapping in Spanish Texas. The latter occupation led to his death in 1801.

Father Juan Agustín Morfi, with a name as obvious as any Irish priest, came on a government inspection trip to the Texas area in 1777. His History of Texas is one of the earliest and best accounts of the land and people.

Nearly in the same tradition, Father Michael Muldoon, born in Ireland but in the service of Spain's Catholic Church, arrived with Don Juan O'Donaju in the New World. O'Donaju became the last viceroy of Mexico; Father Miguel stayed. After Spain's expulsion Father Muldoon became priest to Austin's colony in 1831. In the colony under Mexican rule, everyone was Catholic—officially.

Many Anglo colonists saw Muldoon as a friend, others not. But Muldoon became well known for interceding on the Anglos' behalf in political and military situations. Notably, when Stephen F. Austin was jailed in Mexico on

suspicion of inciting the colonists to insurrection, Muldoon visited President Antonio López de Santa Anna, helping secure Austin's release. Muldoon was in and out of Texas and by 1839 called himself "Vicar General of the Catholic Communities of the Free and Independent Republic of Texas."

Irish families settled in small groups in many areas of Texas but made up the greatest percentage of the San Patricio and Refugio colonial populations before the Texas Revolution. Here, McMullen and McGloin as well as Power and Hewetson in 1828 were allowed to set up colonial areas north and west of modern Corpus Christi and bring in Irish families. Rumor, and some fact, attest that the Catholic Irish were seen by the Mexican government as good, loyal buffer colonies between themselves and the troublesome Anglos. Even so, many Irish were members of Stephen F. Austin's colony to the east, and after the start of the revolution, the Mexican army became well aware on which side the Irish stood. Not their side. The Irish colonists near present Corpus Christi lived in one of the lines of march for the Mexican army. In today's terms, the Irish became excellent guerrilla soldiers.

Even their music was revolutionary. At San Jacinto two fifers and a drummer played "Will You Come to the Bower." The music is a British army tune, and the words are an Irish love song by Sir Thomas Moore, whose "Irish Melodies" were popular in Europe, particularly among Irish nationalists. The lyrics, by today's standards and very unlike some other Irish love songs, are only mildly suggestive. Some verses were later printed in Texas schoolbooks.

Texas Irish, during the revolution, did not spend their time singing. Some 25 Irishmen signed the early Goliad Declaration of Independence, 11 died at the Alamo, 14 were with Fannin at Goliad, and about 100 fought at San Jacinto—a seventh of Sam Houston's army. Texas became a defended home.

In the next 50 years, Ireland was wracked by economic oppression and famine. The old country sent many settlers to Texas.

Many of the Irish were offered prejudice in place of welcome. The later 19th century Irish, arriving in substantial numbers after other established groups—as well as being Catholic, strange talkers, and considered “dumb” in stereotypes of the day—received the worst jobs: day labor. Many people said, sneeringly, that Irish immigrants arrived with a shovel in one hand, a potato in the other. Some Irish replied that if they had held that potato, they would not have come in the first place. In Texas, Irish crews worked east to west on the Southern Pacific railway. This route, the second transcontinental link in the U.S., was finished near Langtry. Many other crews in railroad building were Chinese, but the railroad handcar, the velocipede, was called the “Irish Mail.”

Some of the Irish were not called stereotypical. Margaret Heffernan Borland was a child of the first group of McMullen-McGloin colonists in 1829. Thrice widowed, she became a rancher in Victoria County. In 1873, she led a drive of her own cattle up the trail to Kansas, but died of “trail fever” shortly after reaching her destination.

Margaret Mary Healy Murphy, born in Kerry County, moved with her family to West Virginia, then Matamoros, Mexico. There, Margaret married John B. Murphy and they moved to Texas. By 1873, Margaret had created “Mrs. Murphy’s Hospital for the Poor,” dealing with the underprivileged from any background, largely Blacks. After her husband’s death—who had been an staunch supporter of her activities—Margaret expanded the center. Local prejudice ran high, but the religious order of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Ghost was established—the first such religious order in Texas to educate Black children. The original school opened by Mother Margaret Mary in San Antonio is now the Healy-Murphy Center for education and care.



Margaret Mary Healy Murphy, c. 1870, who founded the first religious order in Texas to educate black children –Today the Sisters of the Holy Spirit work out of about 40 missions in three states, and their multifaceted program is nondenominational and multiethnic. The original school opened by Mother Margaret Mary in San Antonio is now the Healy-Murphy Center for educating school dropouts.



The Shamrock Hose Company fire-fighting unit for “Irishtown” in Corpus Christi.

The Irish, in fact, entered most lines of work. John William Mallet, a Dubliner and professor of analytical chemistry, supported the South as a Confederate cavalryman after working as a chemist for the Geological Survey of Alabama in 1855. He became a professor of chemistry and physics and faculty chairman for the first session of the new University of Texas, never renouncing his European citizenship.

Today, more than a half million Texans identify themselves as Irish—direct descendants or recent arrivals. A number of Irish fraternal and social organizations exist in Texas, including the Irish Cultural Society of San Antonio; the Harp and Shamrock Society of Texas, a division of the Ancient Order of Hibernians; and chapters of the Friendly Sons and Daughters of St. Patrick.

Irish Artists

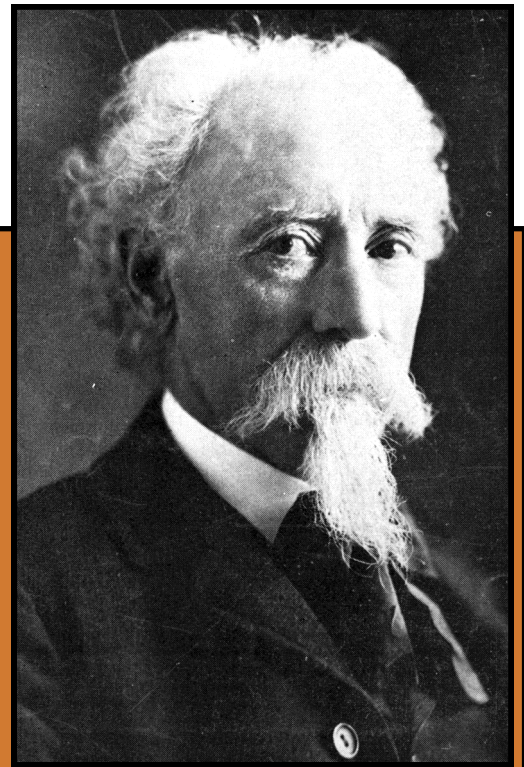
Art—writing, painting, sculpture, music, dance—has always been part of Irish life. Harry Arthur McArdle of Belfast came to Texas after he had established himself as a producing artist, following a stint as a draftsman for the Confederate States of America Navy and serving as topographical mapmaker for General Robert E. Lee. Settling at Independence, Texas, with his wife, Jennie Smith of Virginia, he taught art and developed an interest in Texas history. He soon secured commissions to paint notable Texans and Texas events. Well known are his portraits of Sam Houston and Jefferson Davis. His battle scenes, such as Dawn at the Alamo and The Battle of San Jacinto, both of monumental size, hang in state capital buildings in Austin. They are not historically accurate, but have created heroic myth.

Of Irish descent but born in Illinois, Charles Franklin Reaugh (the name Castlereaug was shortened by the family) became Texan through a parental move to Kaufman County. Reaugh (said “Ray” in Texas) sketched cattle, particularly longhorns, as a child, then began art training in St. Louis. He studied thereafter in Paris and Holland.

Returning to Texas, Reaugh set up a studio at his parents’ home in Dallas, spent as much time as he could in field sketching, and taught. His students were expected to camp out with him, in rain or heat, with the rattlesnakes in West Texas.

Favoring pastels because they could be used with some ease in the field, he captured the cattle, sunsets, plains, and mountains of the state. Also an inventor and photographer, Reaugh patented a rotary industrial pump design and supported the Dallas Art Association. But most of his talent was invested in art. He invented new pastels, drawing paper and boards, a portable easel, and supply boxes—necessities for the artist who works outside a studio.

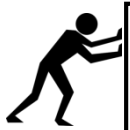
Reaugh remained devoted to field painting. “It is the beauty of the great Southwest as God has made it that I love to paint.” he said. He is called “dean of Texas Artists”—and “Longhorn Leonardo.”



Harry McArdle

NAME: _____ DATE: _____ PERIOD: _____

The “push-pull” theory says that people migrate because things in their lives *push* them to leave, and things in a new place *pull* them.
Instructions: Decide what political factors push and pull people. Complete the graphic organizer below using the word bank.



Social Push Factors

Social Pull Factors



WORD BANK

- | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------|
| Religious Persecution | Close to Family |
| Religious Freedom | Lack of Schools |
| Education Available | Far from Family |

Irish Settlers in Texas

The Irish have a long history of being controlled by outside forces. In 1602 the Irish lost the Battle of Kinsale to the English. For the next 320 years, the English controlled Ireland and denied its people opportunities for education and political representation. The Irish also experienced religious persecution under English control. The Anglican Church was the official Church of England, while the Irish were predominately Catholic.

The Irish attempted to overthrow English rule many times. Each time the Irish were defeated, a new wave of emigrants left Ireland. Some Irish moved to France, Spain and Austria, and then later waves of immigrants moved to New Spain and Texas.

Many emigrants left Ireland in the 1840s as a result of The Potato Famine. Potatoes were the main staple of the Irish diet, and when crops failed, starvation and sickness destroyed the population. 750,000 Irish died as a result of the famine and another 2 million emigrated. Many believed that the British failed to respond to the seriousness of the Potato Famine, and some Irish moved to Texas in search of a better life.

Describe the role of the British in Ireland.

When the Irish immigrated, where did they go?

How did The Potato Famine affect the Irish?

Digging Deeper

Using *Texans One and All: The Irish Texans*, answer the following questions about why Irish immigrants moved to Texas and what their life was like in the state.

Why did early Irish immigrants, such as Hugo Oconór and Michael Muldoon, find opportunities in Texas in the 18th century? What did they have in common with the Mexican government?

After Mexico lost control of Texas, the Irish were treated very differently. What were some stereotypical beliefs about the Irish in the late 19th century?

What kind of work did many Irish immigrants do when they came to Texas in the 1800s?

In what ways do Irish Texans preserve their cultural heritage?

Geography Skills

Use your textbook to find the locations mentioned as significant to the Irish experience in Texas, and label them on the map below.



- San Patricio
- Refugio
- Corpus Christi
- Langtry
- Victoria County
- San Antonio

Although it may sound like a Spanish name, San Patricio is named after an important figure in Irish culture. Who is San Patricio named in honor of and why is he important to the Irish?

Summarize What You Learned

Write 2 sentences to summarize what you learned about Irish Texans and social push and pull factors.
