

BOSTON IRISH FAMINE MEMORIAL @ 25

On Sunday, June 28, 1998, 7,000 people gathered in downtown Boston for the unveiling of the Boston Irish Famine Memorial, as part of the 150th anniversary of An Gorta Mór (The Great Hunger), that swept through Ireland between 1845-49.

The unveiling marked a special moment in the life of the city, bringing together generations of the Irish Diaspora, alongside a variety of New Englanders from every walk of life and background. A Vietnamese and Rwandan immigrant were among the speakers of the day, an acknowledgment of modern day refugees who continue to seek solace in Boston.

The twin statues by sculptor Robert Shure juxtaposes an Irish family dying of starvation in Ireland, alongside a second Irish family, depicted as making their way in America with optimism and resolve, while looking back sadly at the family left behind.

Eight narrative plaques encircling the statues tell

the story of An Gorta Mór, from the horrible living conditions of 19th century Ireland, caused by absentee landlordism and colonialism, to the heroic efforts made by Bostonians to alleviate the suffering. The final plaque, *Lest We Forget*, reminds us that famines continue to decimate suffering populations today.

The project was spearheaded by Irish immigrant Thomas J. Flatley, a successful businessman from County Mayo, and a selection of Irish-American cultural leaders, university presidents, historians, business leaders and art administrators. As part of his legacy, he and his family established the Irish Famine Memorial Fund at Boston College, whose mission is to provide financial or material support to BC alumni and others who are working to alleviate poverty, disease, famine, and illiteracy across the globe.

Located at the corner of Washington and School Streets in downtown Boston, across from the Old South Meeting House, the Memorial is along the city's Freedom Trail and is part of Boston's Irish Heritage Trail. This spring, as part of the 25th anniversary, the Flatley Company and the Flatley Foundation completed restoration work on the memorial statues, narrative plaques and the park itself, so generations of new visitors can come to know and appreciate the story of the Irish in Boston. A 25th anniversary memorial service will be held at the site on June 28, 2023.

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