

The numbers who died on board 'coffin ships' is not known because proper records were not kept. What records were kept indicate that in 1847 17,465 deaths occurred as a result of typhus or cholera on board ship. This figure represents 18.5% of passengers on the documented vessels.

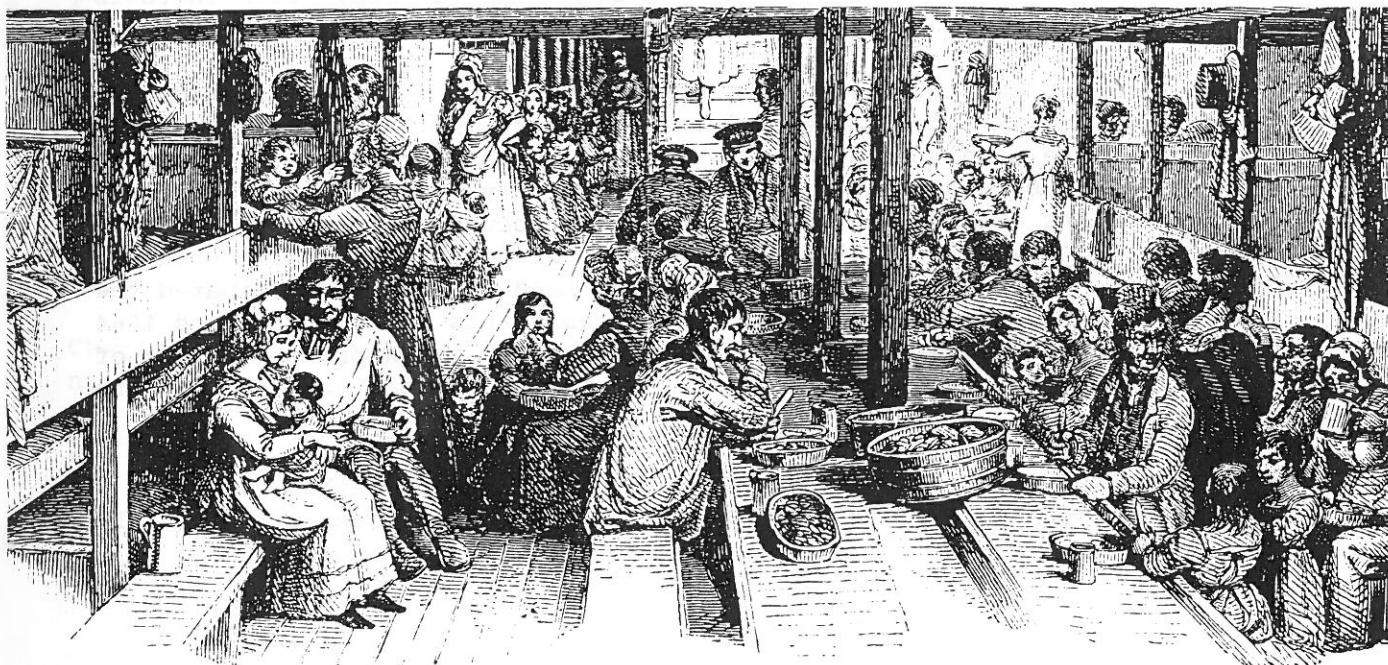
Emigration to Australia from Mayo in pre-Famine days was almost always the result of transportation sentences handed down in the local courts often for the pettiest of offences. By 1849 people were committing crimes in the hope of being transported. At Westport for instance Dominick Ginelly, aged 17, John Austin, 12 years, Charles Ruddy 15 years - "honest people's children from Clare Island" were found guilty of sheep stealing and transported. Michael Gavin, Thomas Joyce, Martin McGinty, John McGreene and John English, also found guilty of stealing asked to be transported. Mr. Michael Shaughnessy, the the Assistant Barrister, commented "I am satisfied that they had no alternative but starvation or the commission of crime". In the twenty years after the Great Famine a documented 390 Mayo people emigrated to Australia. The single biggest shipment being of eighty two female orphaned teenager girls in January 1850 aboard the "Panama".

IN THE WAKE OF THE GREAT FAMINE

In the years following the famine, emigration continued on a large scale and, ironically, the outflow drastically reduced the demand on land. This in turn reduced the cost of renting land and thus forced many landowners into bankruptcy.

While the potato remained the main item of diet, tenant farmers also kept cattle and sheep in mountainous and limestone areas.

The Great Famine had a number of effects which changed the pattern of social and political life in County Mayo. The dramatic reduction in population meant that land was cheaply available. This led to increased and more viable holdings and a consequent return to the keeping of animals and growing of corn. These in turn brought about the construction of enclosures mainly dry built stone walls and sod ditches. Holding were handed down from father to son intact when the father reached old age instead of being sub-divided as the sons reached the age of marriage.



Emigrants on an Australia bound vessel in the 1850s