

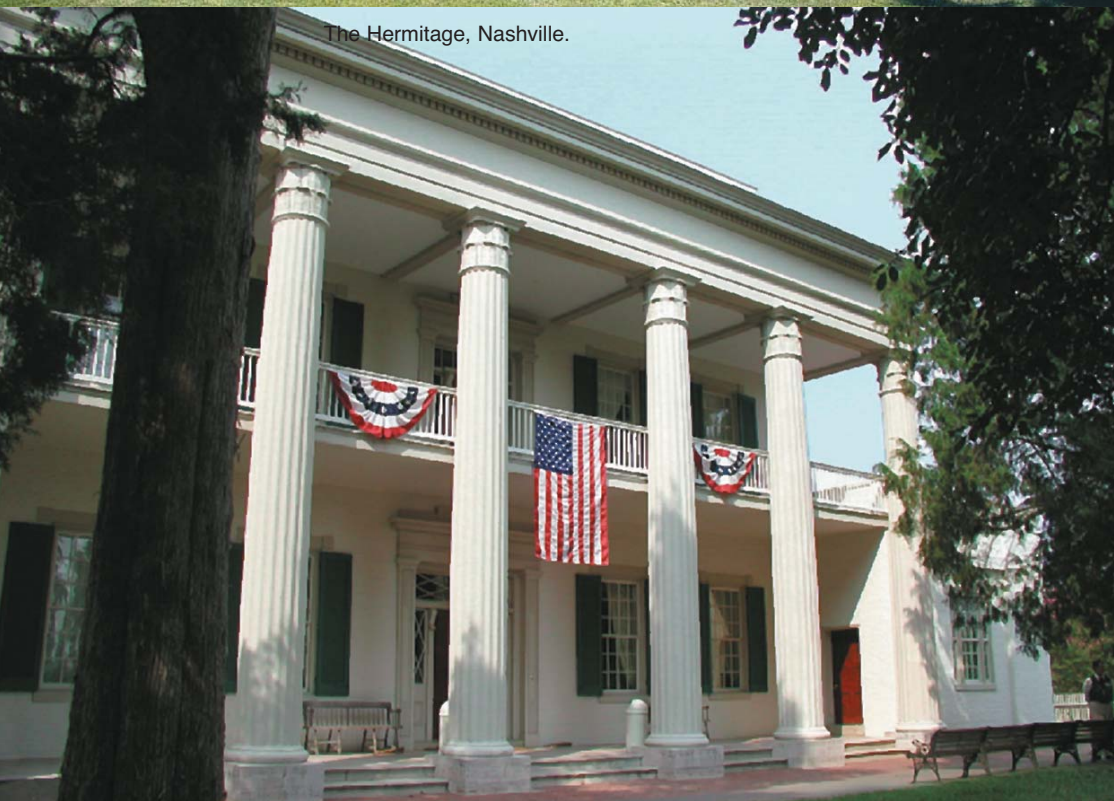
1806 1613 BELFAST
NASHVILLE
SISTERCITIES SINCE 1994



**THE
BELFAST
STORY**



Belfast City Hall, opened on 1 August 1906.



The Hermitage, Nashville.



1806 1613 **BELFAST** **NASHVILLE** **SISTER CITIES** SINCE 1994

When General Dwight Eisenhower was made a Freeman of the City of Belfast in 1945, he said that he viewed that distinction as 'a token of our common purpose to work together for a better world'.

A few years later, in 1956, and animated by the same spirit, Eisenhower, by then President of the United States, launched the American 'Sister Cities' programme. In 1994 as part of that same 'Sister Cities' programme, Nashville and Belfast agreed a Memorandum of Understanding promoting cultural, tourism and business development opportunities between the two cities. The ties which bind Nashville and Belfast together are not hard to find. Nashville, founded by James Robertson and John Donelson, like Belfast, is in origin an Ulster-Scots city. Ulster-Scots have continued to play a significant role in the history of the city. Ulster-Scots language has influenced the speech of Nashville and Tennessee and both cities share a musical heritage which is celebrated annually with the Belfast Nashville Songwriters Festival.

As we work together in Eisenhower's 'common purpose' to create that better world, we have much to learn from each other, much to share and much to enjoy together.

THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

Founded by Sir Arthur Chichester as a market-town for English settlers, contemporaneously with the Jamestown settlement in Virginia, and granted a charter in 1613, Belfast inherited a Gaelic name and rapidly became a magnet for adventurous Scots. By the 1640s Scottish Presbyterians heavily outnumbered English Episcopalians and dominated the public life of the town.

Shortly after the execution of King Charles I in January 1649, the Presbytery of Belfast published a document condemning the King's 'murder' and other actions of the English Parliament and declaring their support for the Solemn League and Covenant drawn up by their Scottish co-religionists. On behalf of the English Parliament John Milton, the Latin Secretary of the Commonwealth, responded by vigorously denouncing the town's 'blockish presbyters' for their pains and dismissing Belfast as 'a barbarous nook', a place 'whose obscurity till now never came to our hearing'.



Sir Arthur Chichester.

The author of *Paradise Lost* was by no means unjust in his observations about Belfast's 'obscurity'. For most of the seventeenth century Belfast was dwarfed in importance by Carrickfergus. Seventeenth-century maps invariably described Belfast Lough as Carrickfergus Lough. When William of Orange arrived in Ulster in June 1690 he landed at Carrickfergus, not Belfast.



John Luke's mural depicting the history of Belfast, the tympanum of the dome of the City Hall.



Carrickfergus Castle.



King William III.

THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Eighteenth-century Belfast was 'a Presbyterian town, cultured and radical in politics'. In 1752 Bishop Pococke found only 60 Church of Ireland households out of 400, the rest being all Presbyterian. In 1776, the year in which St Anne's parish church was consecrated, Belfast had five Presbyterian churches while the Church of Ireland had only one.

Such was the flourishing cultural life of Belfast that contemporaries styled Belfast 'the Athens of the North' in conscious imitation of Edinburgh. Francis Joy

founded the Belfast News Letter - the longest established newspaper in the English-speaking world and the first newspaper in Europe to publish the text of the U. S. Declaration of Independence - in 1737. Belfast Academy, subsequently Belfast Royal Academy, was founded in 1785 to provide 'the sons of gentlemen' with 'a liberal education'. The Belfast Reading Society was founded in 1787. In 1792 it widened its objects and became the Belfast Society for Promoting Knowledge

which still exists as the celebrated Linen Hall Library.



Entrance to Linen Hall Library.

Belfast was radical in politics because its overwhelmingly Presbyterian population was excluded from political power by the ruling Anglican and landed elite. This grievance propelled some 250,000 Ulster Presbyterians to seek a new life for themselves and their families in the New World during the course of the eighteenth century and prompted those who stayed in Ulster to follow the progress of the American Revolution with keen interest and sympathy.

Exclusion from political power did not prevent Belfast Presbyterians from prospering in industry and commerce. Arthur Young, the agricultural reformer

and author, who visited the town in 1776, noted that Belfast 'vibrated' with the linen manufacture. In 1791 Wolfe Tone was greatly impressed by William Sinclair's state-of-the-art mill and bleach green which he described as 'a noble concern'. In the same year John Ritchie, a Scot, came to Belfast, started a shipyard, bringing over skilled workmen from Scotland, and thereby laid the foundations of Belfast's great shipbuilding industry.



Growing prosperity, a flourishing intellectual life and political exclusion constituted a potentially explosive mix. In October 1791 Dr William Drennan and a group of radical Belfast Presbyterians, inspired by the ideals of the French Revolution, founded the Society of United Irishmen. Their aim was the achievement of parliamentary reform, religious equality and

free trade. In June 1798 some Belfast Presbyterians resorted to armed rebellion. The most important consequence of the 1798 rebellion was the Legislative Union (between Great Britain and Ireland) of 1800 which abolished the venal and corrupt Parliament in Dublin. Ironically, the reforms sought by the United Irishmen were realized by the Union itself.

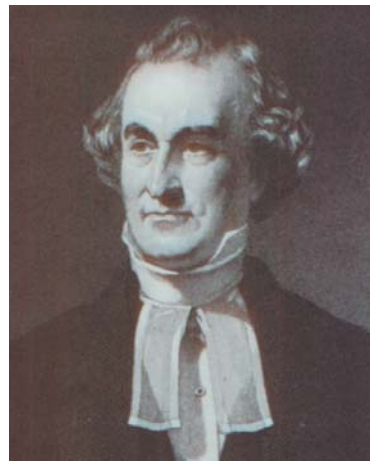
THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Belfast and its environs flourished economically under the Union. It was the only part of the island to experience the full vigor of the Industrial Revolution. Even if Belfast in the 1790s could be fairly described a market town with harbor facilities, the town was sufficiently important for the newly-independent United States to appoint a Consul in 1796, making Belfast one of the oldest U. S. Consulates. By the 1820s Belfast was a modern industrial port. William Makepeace Thackeray, the author of *Vanity Fair*, found Belfast in 1842 'hearty, thriving and prosperous as if it had money in its pocket and roast beef for dinner'.

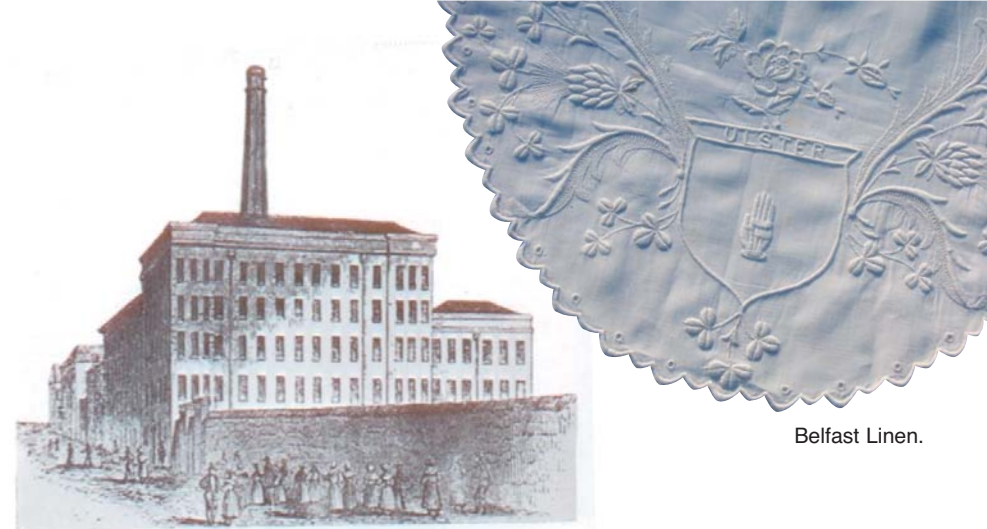
The previous year Revd Dr Henry Cooke, the pre-eminent Presbyterian minister of the era, comprehensively repudiated Daniel O'Connell's case for Repeal of the Union by recourse to Belfast's experience under the Union:

Look at the town of Belfast. When I myself was a youth I remember it almost a village. But what a glorious sight does it now present - the mastod grove within our harbor - our mighty warehouses teeming with the wealth of every climate - our giant manufactories lifting themselves on every side - our streets marching on, as it were, with such rapidity that an absence of a few weeks makes us strangers in the outskirts of our town. And all this we owe to the Union.... In one word more, I have done. Look at Belfast and be a Repealer, if you can.

When the Union came under threat from the mid 1880s onwards, Belfast Chamber of Commerce played an important role in combating the Home Rule threat. The Chamber stressed that Ulster's wealth and prosperity was due to the 'security and protection'



Dr Henry Cooke.



Belfast Linen.

Andrew Mulholland's Linen Mill, York Street.

afforded by Parliament since the Act of Union and the 'frugality and enterprise' of its people.

The three great pillars of nineteenth-century Belfast's prosperity were shipbuilding, linen and engineering. Two great firms - Harland & Wolff and Workman, Clark & Company - dominated the shipbuilding industry. Harland & Wolff was affectionately known as 'the big yard' while Workman, Clark & Company was called 'the wee yard'. However, some years the tonnage of shipping built by 'the wee yard' exceeded that of 'the big yard'.

Between 1770 and 1830 cotton spinning temporarily eclipsed linen and it was cotton which propelled Belfast into the factory age but the invention of wet-spinning process in 1825 encouraged the switch from cotton back to linen. Andrew Mulholland founded a massive spinning mill in York Street in 1829 after his cotton mill was destroyed in a fire the previous year. By the 1830s linen had displaced cotton as the main employer of labor in Belfast. By the 1850s Belfast - nicknamed 'Linenopolis' - had become the largest linen-manufacturing centre in the world, a development assisted in the 1860s by the shortage of cotton resulting from the American Civil War.

Engineering, Belfast's third great industry, largely developed in response to the requirements of the other two but not exclusively. Samuel Davidson went out to the Assam tea plantations in 1864. He returned to Belfast in 1870 to take out patents for tea-drying machinery and in 1881 he established the Sirocco engineering firm. By 1900 the Sirocco works had become the world leader in ventilation and fan manufacture.

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

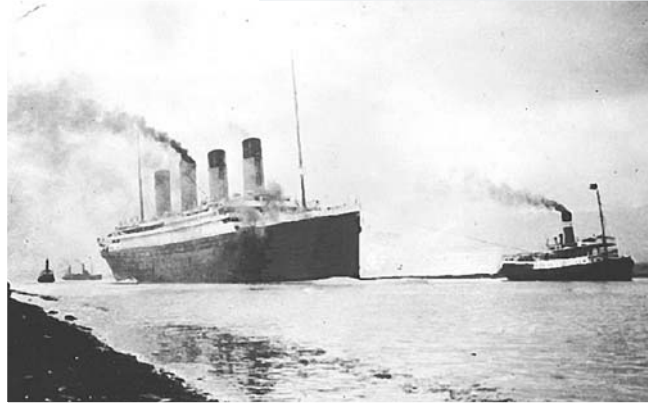
By the end of the nineteenth century Belfast - a city since 1888 - was part of a vast industrial complex that stretched from Lancashire (in England) to Lanarkshire (in Scotland). By 1914 Belfast could boast 'the greatest shipyard, rope works, tobacco factory, linen mill, dry dock and tea machinery works in the world.' Belfast was one of the major industrial powerhouses of the world. In Stephen Gwynn, the Nationalist Member of Parliament for Galway, recognised that 'Belfast, and the Ulster which is coming increasingly to centre about Belfast, is nearer to Scotland and more related to it than to Southern Ireland'.

However, the greater part of the twentieth century proved to be a grim century characterized by two World Wars, civil disorder and terrorism, depression and the decline of traditional industries. War production brought prosperity to the city but the war also brought tragedy: the carnage of the Somme in the Great War and the horrors of the Blitz in the Second World War. Economically, Belfast suffered grievously during the inter-war depression. Demand for linen contracted dramatically as fashions changed and people used fewer linen sheets and table cloths. The linen industry has never fully recovered. Demand for ships also

slowed down after a brief post-war boom. Workman, Clark & Company went out of business in 1935. Belfast experienced civil disorder and terrorism in the early 1920s accompanying the birth of the Northern Ireland state and the more protracted period of civil disorder and terrorism which dominated the final third of the twentieth century. The nineteenth-century's confident belief in the inevitability of progress received a severe jolt in Belfast, as elsewhere, in the twentieth.



Samson and Goliath cranes, Harland and Wolff.



The Titanic leaving Belfast for her sea trials, April 1912.



James Prinsep Beadle, 'Battle of the Somme, Attack by the Ulster Division, 1 July 1916.

THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Belfast people are renowned for their resilience and their dark humour. These are qualities which have served them well in the face of adversity. What challenges and opportunities the future may hold we cannot tell but with the advent of peace, renewed prosperity and the prospect of political stability, Belfast and its people perhaps can face the future with unbounded optimism and confidence.



Parliament Buildings, Stormont.



The luxurious Merchant Hotel.



Seamus Heaney, poet and Nobel laureate.



Welcoming the new millennium.



ULSTER-AMERICAN CONNECTIONS:

A Select List of Books and Booklets (compiled and annotated by Professor Michael Montgomery, University of South Carolina)

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- Montgomery, Michael & Anne Smyth, ed. 2003.
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America's Debt to Ulster



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