

Following the Footsteps of Exile: Quebec Joins the Global Irish Famine Way

By Kelley O'Rourke
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"Every journey begins with a single step." Along Ireland's National Famine Way, those steps have become a powerful act of remembrance.

This spring, during the Global Irish Civic Forum in Ireland, I had the privilege of visiting Strokestown, County Roscommon—the birthplace of the National Irish Famine Way—and meeting both its founder, Caroilin Callery, and her father, Jim Callery, whose vision and dedication helped transform one of Ireland's most significant stories into an international journey of remembrance.

While there, I drove much of the 165-kilometre National Famine Way, following the route taken by 1,490 tenants who were evicted from the Strokestown estate in 1847 by Major Denis Mahon. Forced to walk to Dublin before boarding famine ships bound for Canada, England, and beyond, their journey has become one of the defining stories of the Great Irish Famine.



Jim Callery, Kelley O'Rourke & Gregg Thomassin at the Strokestown museum.
Image Credit for both photos: Kelley O'Rourke



Kelley O'Rourke & Gregg Thomassin standing beside one of the Bronze Shoes along the National Famine Way Trail in Colehill, Ireland.

Driving the route offered a remarkable appreciation of the landscape, but it also left me with a deeper realization—this is a journey that should be experienced on foot. Next year I hope to return to Ireland to walk (or perhaps cycle) the entire trail during the 2027 International Conference and Walk of Remembrance.

From Ireland to Quebec

The National Famine Way has grown into the Global Irish Famine Way, linking communities around the world connected by the Great Hunger through the symbolic Bronze Shoes installations.

Each pair of Bronze Shoes represents far more than a monument. They symbolize departure, loss, hope, resilience, and the journeys made by hundreds of thousands of Irish emigrants whose lives were forever changed during the Famine.

The Canadian Irish Migration Preservation Network (CIMPN) is proud to be working with the Global Irish Famine Way to recognize these sites throughout Quebec and, eventually, across Canada through the [Irish Mile™](#), our interactive digital heritage map made possible through funding from the Secrétariat aux relations avec les Québécois d'expression anglaise (SRQEA).

Each Bronze Shoes location added to the Irish Mile will include links that connect visitors directly to the National and Global Irish Famine Way, allowing them to explore both the local history and its place within the wider international story.

Canada's Growing Network

Canada continues to embrace the Global Irish Famine Way, with Bronze Shoes sites representing places where Irish emigrants arrived, settled, and built new lives.

Officially Unveiled

- Ottawa, Ontario
- Hamilton, Ontario
- St. Catharines, Ontario
- Saint John, New Brunswick
- Saint-Colomban, Quebec

Installed and Awaiting Official Unveiling

- Grosse Île, Quebec
- Québec City, Quebec
- St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador

Currently in Development

- Montreal (temporary location at St. Patrick's Basilica under consideration before the future Black Rock – Montreal Irish Monument Memorial Site)



Future Montreal Irish Monument Memorial Site where 6000 Irish Famine refugees are buried near the Black Rock. Image credit: Montreal Irish Monument

- Toronto

Early Planning

- Richmond, Quebec
- Lotbinière, Quebec
- Prince Edward Island
- Kingston, Ontario

Exploring Future Locations

- Smiths Falls, Ontario
- Tamworth, Ontario
- Rawdon, Quebec

Additional New Brunswick Communities Under Discussion

- Moncton / Irishtown
- Shippagan
- Middle Island (Miramichi)
- Beaubears Island

- Riverside Park (Fredericton)
- St. Andrews / Harwood Island

Interest has also been expressed by communities including Peterborough, Arnprior and McNab Township, Sheenboro, and Mayo, Quebec.

As this remarkable network continues to expand, each community will contribute its own unique story, creating a shared international remembrance of the Irish diaspora.

Looking Ahead to 2027

The next major gathering of the Global Irish Famine Way community will take place in Ireland in May 2027.

Events will include:

- International Conference at the National Famine Museum (May 13–16)
- National Walk of Remembrance along the National Famine Way (May 16–22)
- Closing international gathering at EPIC – The Irish Emigration Museum in Dublin (May 23)

It promises to be an extraordinary opportunity to bring together historians, genealogists, heritage organizations, descendants, and communities from around the world who continue to preserve and share the stories of Irish migration.

A Journey That Continues

One of the most inspiring aspects of meeting Caroilin Callery was seeing how a single local heritage project has grown into an international movement connecting communities across several continents.

As Caroilin remarked after learning about the Irish Mile project, linking each Bronze Shoes location to its own digital story creates another pathway for people to discover not only local Irish history but also the wider story of the Global Irish Famine Way.

For those of us preserving Irish heritage in Canada, every new Bronze Shoes installation represents another chapter in a story that began in Ireland almost two centuries ago—but continues today through the descendants who remember, preserve, and share these remarkable journeys.

The footsteps of exile have become footsteps of remembrance, linking Ireland and Canada one community at a time.