

Irish women establish a union

After 1865, the Irish settled in all four neighborhoods touching the Union Stock Yard. Sixteen Irish women organized the Maude Gonne Club in 1900 at the University of Chicago Settlement House, named after a radical Irish nationalist. Many of these women worked in the canning departments of the packing plants where they were first hired in the 1870s. The club eventually became a female union, Local 183 of the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen. By the 1904 Packinghouse Strike, Local 183 had almost 2,000 members, about 80% of all women working in the packinghouses. While Irish women originally dominated the union, by the time of the strike, the membership proved to be very diverse and included Slavic and African American women. Pictured here are members of Local 183.



Irish women during the 1904 Stockyards Strike, 1904 — Chicago Daily News collection, Chicago History Museum DN-0000984

Irish family spotlight: the Crosby family

In the late 1860s, Famine Irish immigrants Peter Crosby and Rosanna O'Connor put down roots in the Jesuit parish of the Holy Family on Chicago's West Side. But with Peter's steady employment as a hog driver in the stockyards, the Crosby family moved south, first to 3503 S. Wentworth Avenue in Nativity parish, and finally in the 1890s as homeowners at 5129 S. Union Avenue in Visitation parish. Richard Crosby (1871-1961), wearing a bow-tie, and his brother Michael (1879-1962), seated front row, followed their father into the "Yards" as hog buyers and speculators.

The economic prosperity evident in this 1880 photo, however, did not guarantee long lives for the Crosby sisters. Rosanna Crosby (1870-1933), top right, lived the longest of the girls. Mary Crosby Skerrett, in the checked dress, died in 1911 after the birth of her sixth child. Catherine Crosby McGrath, holding baby Lizzie, died in 1913, survived by three of her children. Annie Crosby, at left, died at age 18 in 1894, and Lizzie Crosby died at age 19 in 1901.



Crosby family circa 1880. Rosanna Crosby is at the top right. Mary Crosby Skerrett is in the checked dress, Catherine Crosby McGrath is holding baby Lizzie, and Annie Crosby is on the left.

Photo courtesy of Patricia Skerrett Land.