

ULSTER HISTORY CIRCLE



**KELLY'S CELLARS, BANK STREET, BELFAST
(Meeting place of the United Irishmen)**

In 1791 a group of merchants and tradesmen set up the Society of United Irishmen in Belfast. This was followed a month later by a second club in Dublin. The Belfast club was initially composed of Presbyterians while the Dublin one included Catholics and Episcopalians. The Society was dedicated to changing the existing political order under which the Lord Lieutenant and an Irish Parliament representing only the land owning Episcopalian class exercised political power. The society's three main aims were constitutional reform, union among the Irish people and the removal of all religious disqualification.

The aim of Irish independence from Great Britain was a later development, when it became clear, through the Irish government's brutal repressive measures, that reform was not possible. That momentous decision was taken in June 1795 on Cave Hill above Belfast by Wolfe Tone, Henry Joy McCracken, Thomas Russell, Samuel Neilsen and a number of other United Irishmen

The following year widespread suppression escalated, with the smashing of presses of the Northern Star, set up in 1792 to disseminate the view of the United Irishmen, and with arrests and executions, and the internment of many of the leaders.

The uprising of June 1798 was a failure with decisive defeat of the forces of the United Men at Antrim and Ballynahinch. The leaders of the two battles, Henry Joy McCracken and Henry Monro were executed and despite a brief attempt to raise the country again in 1803, the movement was effectively finished. The failure of the rebellion led immediately to the passage in 1800 of the Act of Union. Originally intended to include Catholic Emancipation for Ireland, this legislative fusion of Great Britain and Ireland has signposted the political geography of these islands ever since.

Kelly's Cellars, where the United Men met from time to time, is the original building and still a tavern, serving a great pint of 'your only man' (Flann O'Brien).

[The Ulster History Circle erects blue plaques in public places throughout the province to commemorate people who have made a significant contribution to the community locally, regionally or in the wider world. Not all are well known and many have been forgotten in the place where they were born or worked.]