

CAIN Family

The year was 1849. The *Sardinia* a 'Black Star Line' sailing vessel carrying 202 mostly Irish passengers from England and Ireland landed at the port of New York in late October. One of those passengers was a 15 year old boy by the name of Martin Cain¹, another was possibly his brother Robert, aged 18. They arrived in America at the tail end of the dreadful famine which along with diseases like typhus and cholera, had been decimating Ireland for almost half a decade, 1849 being the worst year of the most devastating effects of cholera. There is very little doubt that it is because of these circumstances that Martin (and a brother Robert?) left Ireland without their parents, who had quite possibly been two of the over one million casualties during these devastating times, in an attempt to make a better life for themselves in America.



Area of the Port of New York on the south tip of Manhattan Island. Map is from the front cover of Cutler and is entitled "Lower Part of New York City, 1851. Heavy broken line marks the waterfront below City Hall park in 1784. Area filled in prior to 1820." The docks of the Black Star Line are in the upper-right quarter of the figure.²

First Generation

1. Thomas CAIN. Thomas Cain and Ann³ married somewhere in Ireland before 1833 and became the parents of at least one son, Martin. It is unknown if they had any more children, as it is also unclear whether or not the Robert Cain who shows up on the same passenger list as Martin is related to him. The closeness of their ages and their having the same last name makes it a tantalizing possibility. Unfortunately, Robert disappears from public records shortly after his arrival to America. Maybe he succumbed to one of the many diseases that showed up quite frequently on the overly crowded ships at that time and died shortly after their arrival, or maybe he traveled further on to Canada or another foreign local hoping to make his mark on the world. Until we can find more information on Martin's origins in Ireland, his parents and any siblings he might have had will continue to remain a mystery.

Children:

2. Robert (~1830-)[?]
- +3. Martin (~1833-)

Second Generation

3. Martin CAIN. In 1849 at the age of 15⁴ Martin Cain traveled to America landing at the port of New York in early fall. From there he eventually made his way up to Rhode Island where many Irish immigrants were heading as there was an increased need for factory workers, and laborers on the railroads and canals. Textile mills and metal factories were beginning to make a major impact on the landscape of Rhode Island at this time. If he wished Martin could look forward to working 14 hour days making only a few dollars a week in one of these factories.

We first find Martin in Coventry, Kent County, Rhode Island in 1850⁵ working as a laborer, although it is not stated at what he is laboring. There is a good possibility he is employed at a textile mill. Like most of the early Irish immigrants he would have been employed as unskilled labor or a mill worker.

His work in the mill would have been difficult and unhealthy. With a workday that started before sunrise and ended after sunset; air that was full of lint particles that, over time, "often caused respiratory disease. The mills were usually cold and drafty in winter, hot and humid in summer; dirty, noisy, and uncomfortable at all times. Corporal punishment by overseers was a common practice. The danger of working near machines was always present. Workers often lost fingers, arms, or scalps to the devouring machinery."⁶

About a year or two after Martin settled down into his new life he met his soon to be first wife