The Northern Irish tradition of painting murals dates back at least to the nineteenth century when images of Protestant “King Billy” (William III of Orange) riding a white horse were painted on walls to commemorate the defeat of the Catholic King James II at the Battle of the Boyne on July 12, 1690.

Not all murals were political, but political ones gained popularity in the late 1960s during “The Troubles”—the unrest between Loyalist (Protestant) and Republican (Catholic) factions in Northern Ireland.

During the late twentieth century, most murals were painted by community-based artists on the “gable-end” of one- or two-story row houses in areas such as The Falls Road and The Shankill Road in Belfast and The Bogside in Londonderry, or Derry. Murals marked boundaries, denoting areas as either Loyalist or Republican. Prior to a relaxation of tensions in the 1990s, many were designed and paid for by paramilitary groups. More than 2,000 murals have been documented in Northern Ireland since the 1970s.

With the return of peace, murals became a somewhat unexpected tourist attraction. Today, through government-funded and private inter-community programs, divisive murals are being painted over and replaced with less controversial images.