

Peter Robinson Settlements 1823 & 1825

A British-Canadian Experiment

Economic Stress in the 1820's

- Close of the Napoleonic Wars
- Price of grain falling
 - Decline of world markets for Irish goods - Cotton replacing Linen
 - Decline of wealth in the City of Cork - Reduced trading center
- 1821 Potato crop failure
 - Reduced yield caused labor cuts
 - Both land owners and laborers could not support a family
- Increased population

Social conditions in Ireland in the 1820's

- Most people in Southern Ireland were Roman Catholic and restricted by penal laws
- Lands were confiscated unless the owner took an Oath of Allegiance to the Crown including forsaking their Catholic faith
- Division of lands to children (gravelkind) led to small plots of land too small to support a family
- Disapproval of mixed marriages (Catholic/Protestant)
- Catholic priests had to register with the government
- No new priests to be ordained, Bishops banned from the country
- Catholics could not run schools, hence "hedge schools" rose in secret
- Crime in cities was rising

Political Conditions

- Plantation operations in Ulster ongoing
- In spite of the loss of the Jacobite cause when Charles Stuart died in 1788 there was fear that the French would raise an Army in Ireland to invade England across the Irish Sea
- Great deprivation across the entire European continent after the Napoleonic Wars
- British politicians knew of the economic and social conditions in Ireland and knew that they needed to do something to alleviate it

British Government Experiment

- Need to relieve economic stress
- Need of Loyalists in upper Canada
 - New members of local Canadian militias to forestall a possible American invasion of Canada until the arrival of British troops

The Plan

- Reduce the destitute Catholic population in Ireland by transporting families to Upper Canada
- Prove that destitute people given an opportunity to start a new life in Canada could be successful
- Provide transportation and provisions on board, at government expense, to Upper Canada
- Provide medical service for each group – a doctor on each ship
- Provide tools and a year's rations for settlement on the land
- Provide 70 acres of land per family to be cleared and settled within 10 years to obtain the Land Patent

The Plan is Initiated

- In 1822 Robert Wilmot Horton, Britain’s Undersecretary of Colonial Affairs, contacted Sir John Beverley Robinson, Attorney General of Upper Canada (Ontario) and directed him to find a Canadian to oversee the project.
- Sir John approached his older brother Honorable Peter Robinson, M.P.P. for York.
- The two brothers left for England to work out the details with government officials there.
- With the plan laid out Peter left for Fermoy, County Cork in Spring of 1823.
- June 2, 1823 authorization from Britain came to begin recruitment.

The Memorandum

- A Memorandum was printed and distributed to Fermoy, Mitchelstown, Doneraile, Charleville, Kanturk, Mallow, and New Market and the villages within that circle.
- Noblemen and Magistrates acted as agents and accepted and reviewed applications
- The memorandum set the terms of the settlement.
- Irish Priests supported the scheme and even read and explained the memorandum from the pulpit.

The Terms of the Memorandum

- No one older than 45 would be accepted. Widows accompanying their family were excepted.
- Males between 18-45 would receive a ticket for 70 acres of land which he was expected to perform “duties of settlement and cultivation”.
- When the duties were completed he could acquire a patent to the land for a small fee.
- He would also be eligible to obtain an additional 30 acres adjacent to his property for the sum of £10 sterling within a 10 year period.
- As long as the land remained Crown Property the annual rent was 2 pence and would not take effect until 1828 (5 years later).

The Response

Over 50,000 applications were received during the three weeks prior to the first ships sailing.

1823 Embarkation Tickets - Cove of Cork – Point of Embarkation

- 600 Tickets issued, 460 appeared at the dock
- 108 were added from “standbys” at the dock
- 568 were on board the “Hebe’ and Stakerbury”

During the Voyage (reported by Peter Robinson to Parliament 1824)

“During the voyage nothing happened of importance; the rations were abundant and comfortable; the men were allowed cocoa for breakfast, and nearly half a pint of spirits, which was perhaps not too much. The women and children were allowed tea and sugar. The best proof of the attention paid to them on the voyage, arises from the good health which they enjoyed, as only one woman and eight children died in the passage, and these from the small-pox, which had unfortunately got into both ships, and not from any causes that could be attributed to their change of circumstances or situation. It may be worth remarking, as it is so characteristic of the fondness of the Irish people for potatoes, that the men preferred them to the cocoa, which they refused for several days to taste, till they saw the officers of the ship repeatedly breakfasting upon it. The children, during sickness, called constantly for potatoes, refusing arrow root or any other aliment more congenial to their situation; and nothing could prevail on man, woman or child, to eat plumb-pudding, which, as is usual on ship-board, was part of the Sunday's dinner.

Few of them would eat the best English cheese, and when it was served out as part of their ration, it was most commonly thrown overboard.”

Arrival in Quebec City, Canada

- Voyage took eight weeks and one woman and eight children died of smallpox during the voyage
- Several children were born on the ships during the voyage
- Medical aid was available on both ships with two surgeons and they continued as far as Prescott on the steamboats
- Several more children were born on route to the settlement and after arrival there
- Some who survived the crossing died soon after in the Ottawa Valley, probably, due to the fact, that they were not fit to make the rugged trip overland

Areas Settled in Ontario

1823 Bathurst District

Ramsay Twsp, Goubourn Twsp, Huntley Twsp, Pakenham Twsp

1825 Newcastle District

Emily Township, Otonabee Township, Ennismore Township, Douro (Dummer)Township, Ottawa, Marmora Township, Asphodel Township

Travel from Quebec City - 1823

- From Quebec City they traveled by steamer to Montreal without setting foot on land until they arrived at Montreal
- They then traveled 10 miles overland by foot and wagon to Lachine where they camped for two days
- At Lachine they traveled by bateau for about 7 days to Prescott in smaller groups – for people who had never been in small boats it was a frightening experience
- Upon arriving in Prescott they received rations and three days encampment
- Then 60 mile rugged overland route north to the Bathurst District took four days by foot and wagon

First Settlement Issues

Many “useful articles” were found at the King’s Stores in Franktown for the settlers. More than half of the land in the District had already been settled by Scots from Glasgow area and disbanded soldiers (1817-1819). 182 lots were found for the new settlers in various townships

Ramsay 82, Pakenham 29, Bathurst 1, Lanark 2, Beckworth 5, Goulbourn 26, Darling 3, Huntley 34
Log homes for the families were completed by November 1st

Spring 1824

- Some lands upon the spring melting were found to be too rocky or swampy to farm and the lot had to be traded – some people left the area
- By March 1826 eight heads of families had died, some children were born but some died early
- Those men who were skilled tradesmen managed to accumulate money by working in nearby communities and on the canal under construction at Kingston
- The majority of settlers stayed on their land

Ballyghiblin Riots of 1824

- In Ramsay Township where some Irish (Roman Catholic) were settled a portion of the area had already been settled by Scots (Presbyterians)
- It was mandated that all able-bodied men of age were to meet periodically for militia training
- The Scots felt the Irish were privileged due to the government aid
- On April 24th (the King’s Birthday) a fight broke out between them at Morris’s Tavern
- Things escalated over the following week and culminated on Sunday while the Irish were celebrating mass in a private home
- The home was fired upon by the Scots and one Irishman died as a result – no shots were fired from the home
- James Fitzgibbon, Assistant Adjutant-General came and investigated

- Officers of the 4th Regiment were found guilty of allowing liquor to their men
- Four Scots were convicted of riot and fined 4 Pounds Sterling and sentenced to two months in jail
- It was found that the Irish were not at fault
- After this resolution tempers quieted down and the two communities got along
- Without the resolution, the 1825 settlement would probably not have taken place

1825 Embarkation - Travel from Quebec City - 1825

- From Quebec City they traveled by steamer to Montreal
- They then traveled 10 miles overland by foot and wagon to Lachine
- At Lachine they traveled by bateau to Kingston in smaller groups
- The people then stayed in a tent village awaiting Robinson
- In the hot weather some people fell ill with ague and fever (malaria/fever) and died
- 11 August 500 people departed by steamboat and landed at Coburg the following day
- The 12 mile overland route north to Rice Lake was so poor it had to be rebuilt over a period of 10 days and two “scows” made with wheels to traverse the road and then the lake
- The water in the Ontonabee River, on the North side of Rice Lake, was low that year and a new 60’ boat had to be constructed to make the trip

The 1825 Route

The Emigrants - 1,859 Irish people settled in the Newcastle district of Ontario

67 settled in the Bathurst district

30 remained with friends at Kingston

5 were absent at Cobourg

145 died at sea and in Canada

15 children were born at sea

54 born in Canada

A handful jumped ship in Montreal or elsewhere

5 families were Palatine settlers from Limerick (Dulmage, Lowes, Miller, Switzer, and Teskey)

Composition of Settlers

Most were farmers, 89 at least were tradesmen of one type or another

Bakers 2, Blacksmiths 8, Butchers 4, Carpenters 12, Clerks 4, Coopers 4, Engineers 2

Fishermen 4, Masons 9, Millers 1, Millwrights 1

The Catholic Parish

- From 1823-1842 Catholic Mass was celebrated in private homes frequently visited by Father John MacDonald of Glengarry County
- 1842 St. Mary’s Catholic Church was established in Almonte
- The original church went up in flames in 1869 and was rebuilt in stone and still stands today
- 104 pioneers and their children are buried in St Mary’s church Cemetery

The Great Fire of the Summer of 1870

That summer was extremely dry, no rain had fallen for weeks. Creeks and swamps were completely dried out. Fires were burning out of control all over Eastern Ontario. In August a huge fire swept through settler townships of Pakenham, Fitzroy, Goulbourn and Huntley. 100 area families were left with no food or shelter. Some towns were completely wiped out.

1870-1871 Scarlet Fever Epidemic

Later Emigration

- From 1850-1880 almost every family from the Settlement had at least one family member in the USA
- Some descendants came to Michigan (the Twomey, Mahoney, Torpey and Murphy families) and settled in Washtenaw County

- As parents died and the farm was left to the first son the other children married or moved on to other parts of Ontario or to the US
- Popular areas to relocate in the US beyond Michigan were the Dakotas and Minnesota

Myths

The Irish were lazy and shiftless

Not all Irish were rogues and not all the rogues were Irish!

The settlers had a lot of drive and determination to succeed

Following the first year of settlement settlers had...

Cleared 1264 acres of land

Acquired 33 oxen, 65 head of cattle and 143 hogs

Produced 64,000 bushels of potatoes and 9,000 pounds of maple sugar

Few people stayed on the land

Some people died on route

Of the 2,500 people who came to Ontario in the 1823 group 34 died and in the 1825 group 182 died by 1828 through illness or accident

Widows and widowers quickly remarried

Some land was too poor to farm and Robinson helped them to relocate

Some people were tradesmen and lived in the towns and established businesses

Words of Caution About Records

Some names may be misspelled

Illiteracy

Mistakes by clerks

Changes made by the family later

Conversion of the Gaelic name

The name on the ticket did not match the person

Some people decided not to go and sold their ticket (illegally) to someone else

Some people used the surname of the stepfather and later changed back to their birth name

If a close relative or fiancée need to come the family would “adopt” them

A wife too young to be the mother of a child

Wife could be a second wife (stepmother)

Widowers usually married quickly to care for children

A married couple too young to have these children

Could be brothers or sisters of either....or cousinsor nephews & nieces

Place of birth, residence or registration centre

Most recruiting centres were in County Cork but some people came from Tipperary, Limerick, Kerry and Aterford

Some siblings show from different places and probably had attained work outside of their community

Remember that in Ireland villages and towns have Civil and Ecclesiastical Parishes. It could be either.

The Records:

Reports of Progress

Survey of Emigrants 1828

Embarkation Tickets

Passenger Lists

Church Records

Cemetery Markers & listings

Census Records

Land Registry Records

Other Places to Look

- While building the Rideau Canal in the late 1820s, Colonel John By sent a questionnaire to many Irish living in the Ottawa Valley (including the Bathurst Robinson immigrants) asking if they had relations back in Ireland who might be interested in coming to Canada. The responses are invaluable for making family connections between Ontario and Ireland, including exact places of origin. The file was published as The McCabe List by the Ontario Genealogical Society.
- Details of Peter Robinson's Transport of Emigrants to Canada; British Parliamentary Papers, 1825, V11, (20), pp. 185-86, 221-24, 459-64.; CMSIED 9601054
- There is an extensive collection of business records and correspondence relating to the selection, transport, and settlement of Robinson's Irish Emigrants has survived in the British National Archives, the Archives of Ontario, and in a remarkable cache kept by Robinson and donated by his family to the Peterborough Historical Society in 1899.
- *Sir Robert Wilmot-Horton fonds* in the Library and Archives of Canada (1828 Surveys of settlers)
- Website <http://peannairi.com> - Peannairi is a community forum dedicated to engaging the public in original research of early settlements in Upper Canada.