

Scottish Emigration to the Ottawa area, 1784-1826

This paper examines two articles regarding Scottish emigration to Upper Canada between 1784 and 1826. The articles are “Peopling Glengarry County: The Scottish Origins of a Canadian Community” by Marianne McLean and “The Politics of Emigration: Scotland and Assisted Emigration to Upper Canada, 1815-1826” by Michael E. Vance. For the sake of brevity, these articles will be referred to as “McLean” and “Vance” respectively.

These articles are of particular interest to historians in the Ottawa area. They provide information regarding the two major Scottish pioneer settlements, Glengarry County (east of Ottawa), and Lanark County (to the west of Ottawa). The following table summarizes the context of the emigrations, as outlined by the authors:

	McLean	Vance
Characteristics of Emigrants	2,500 subsistence farmers from the Scottish Highlands to Glengarry County before 1815	4,000 weavers and artisans from the Scottish Lowlands to Lanark County after 1815
Emigrant Organization	No financial assistance, organized by families, led by Highland patriarchs. Catholic and Presbyterian	Financially assisted, organized by emigrant societies. Presbyterian and Anglican
Reasons for Emigration	maintain traditional economic lifestyle and culture	economic opportunity for politicized emigrants

McLean’s goal is to identify the precise geographical origins and the context of the emigration of the Glengarry settlers. Her research finds that they came from Inverness and the western islands of Scotland. Their lifestyle had been threatened as a result of the defeat of the Jacobites in 1745 and subsequent clearances of tenants from their traditional homesteads. Isolated and Gaelic-speaking, their social and economic structure still reflected the influence of a clan-based society with a minimum of English “civilizing”. Their society existed during a time of mercantilist philosophy -- a nation’s population was part of it’s capital stock and was an asset to be retained at home. Emigration was discouraged both at the central government level and by local leaders such as Lord Glengarry and the Earl of Breadalbane. However, small family-based groups of Highlanders sent representatives to Greenock and Glasgow to charter ships and arranged to pick up emigrants from scattered highland ports.

Vance emphasizes the political aspects of assisted emigrations after 1815. He describes the emigration of Scottish artisans from the industrial neighbourhood of Glasgow. This region had been profoundly affected by the depression which occurred at the end of the Napoleonic wars. Mostly weavers, these disgruntled urban Lowlanders became active in early labour politics and formed Emigrant Societies, as an extension of their craft guilds. Their home environment was more advanced than the Highlanders and exhibited strong effects of English culture, law and politics. This facilitated the creation of politically involved emigrant societies who interacted with the

local gentry and members of parliament to influence emigration to Upper Canada. After 1815, the British government changed its attitude toward domestic population levels and, instead of discouraging emigration, tried to direct it towards places of strategic importance in the colonies. Earl Bathurst, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, was a proponent of settling Lanark County in Upper Canada under the aegis of the military and administrative centers at Perth and Lanark Villages. The townships of the Bathurst District had already been surveyed and the settlers, in common with the Highlanders at Glengarry, would supply a ready and loyal militia presence in Upper Canada as well as furnish staple goods (particularly lumber) to the mother country in exchange for British manufactured goods.

By 1815, the Glasgow and Edinburgh area was well served by roads and canals and the Clyde River ports became the central point of embarkation for emigrants.¹ The Navigation Acts had been used as a tool to control emigration. In 1803 the price of transatlantic fares was increased and higher on-board standards (e.g. medical supervision and improvements in passenger rations) were implemented to deter emigration. These regulations were relaxed by 1820 when it became apparent that only the more desirable class of passengers, those possessing capital and initiative, would emigrate.

Both authors have chosen the year 1815 as a demarcation point in their studies. The combination of the two articles provides a useful study of Scottish emigration to the two eastern Ontario communities - both a spatial and a temporal analysis. Vance remarks about the radical (reform) politics which occurred in the Lanark settlement during the 1830's, a continuation of the political protest of Scotland.

Glengarry County is flat and fertile, ideally suited for the traditional Highland cattle farmers, supplemented by winter work in the logging industries across the Ottawa River in Lower Canada. Lanark County is hilly, rocky and contains many rivers and lakes. This area, building on the textile industry background of its settlers, became a center of Eastern Ontario's textile industry. The rivers allowed the construction of mills at Carleton Place, Lanark Village and Almonte. The Highlanders and Lowlanders were both able to continue their economic traditions in their new country.

There were also political and religious differences between the two communities. The Lowland emigrants came from an environment of a well-developed English political and legal system. The earlier Glengarry Highlanders had far less exposure to English ways. There was less religious tension in the Glengarry settlement. The common Scottish heritage of the highland Catholics and Presbyterians, abetted by the friendly intercession of the Catholic Bishop Alexander MacDonnell, superseded religious differences to a large degree (although inter-denominational marriage was rare). In contrast, the Lanark settlers were already highly politicized (Vance) on their arrival in Canada and settled close to many Irish and English Protestants. There were incidents of armed conflict with nearby Irish Catholics (the 1823 Peter Robinson settlers) as early as 1824.

¹ James M. Cameron, *The Role of Shipping from Scottish Ports in Emigration to the Canadas, 1815-1855*, 141

McLean emphasizes that the Glengarry immigrants were kinship-based, and a culturally homogeneous group. This is reflected in the retention of Highland traditions in Canada. Today, the Glengarry community has a much higher proportion of persons who speak Gaelic well, are Presbyterians, send their children to Scottish dance classes and participate in Highland Games. In contrast, among the Lanark County descendants of the Lowlanders, there are almost no Gaelic speakers - their ancestors spoke English as their first language - and the Scottish tradition has become closely integrated with their Anglican and Methodist neighbours.

The articles by Marianne McLean and Michael Vance provide well documented background allowing readers to better understand the different types of early Scottish emigration to the Ottawa area.

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