

FROM IRELAND THEY CAME

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The Administrators of British North America came to the conclusion, as a result of the War of 1812, that two things needed to be done to secure the country. The building of an inland waterway to link Montreal with Lake Ontario away from the guns on the St Lawrence and populate the area with persons whose loyalty was to British interests.(1) During the war it was rumoured, that American raids in the Johnstown District were aided by the former American population and that desertion was higher in the militia from that area than elsewhere in Upper Canada.(2) As a result, the flow of American settlers was stopped in June of 1815 by the administration decreeing that, “not in any case grant land to subjects of the United States”.(3)

As it turned out, the British Authorities required the population of Ireland to help solve both problems. The settlement of Irish immigrants as a buffer to the American settlers along the Rideau corridor and as the labour force to build the waterway from Montreal to Lake Ontario.

The first group of Irish settlers were disbanded soldiers from the 100th Prince Regent’s County of Dublin Regiment which had been raised in 1804 in the County of Ulster(4). Land grants were given in Goulbourn and Beckwith Townships to those who did not wish to return to Ireland. In 1818, two more groups of immigrants arrived from Ireland. Richard Talbot organized 72 settlers from Tipperary that received land in Goulbourn Township and a party from Wexford, Carlow and Kilkenny that settled in Beckwith and Drummond Townships.(5)

Overpopulation, unemployment and the removal of persons from land they had occupied for years was causing the Magistrates throughout Ireland many problems. Emigration was recommended as a solution, or at least a part of the solution to the problems in Ireland. Lord Kingston, a prominent landowner in southern Ireland, wrote to the Colonial Secretary suggesting the following. “One of the great misfortunes of Ireland is an overpopulation and I think you may help us at a very small expense to government if you will send out a few families to Canada and provision them for one year on land given them by the Government...I could get you thirty industrious families in a short time...well calculated for settlers and they would soon have many followers.”(6) The British House of Commons, after much debate, in 1825 voted 30,000 pounds to assist in sending Irish emigrants to Canada.(7)

Peter Robinson brought in 568 government assisted immigrants to continue the program of settling the area along what would become the Rideau Canal with non-American sympathetic population. In 1823, Robinson selected these people from Tipperary, Limerick, Clare and Cork and relocated them to their own land in Ramsay and Goulbourn Townships, Upper Canada.(8)

Robinson was very optimistic about these settlers and in 1825 brought in another 182 families. He felt that giving them land of their own and a stake in the country would help solve a problem in both Ireland and Upper Canada. To prove how right he had been; 12 years later, at the time of the Upper Canada rebellion, the loyalty of Robinson’s Irish settlers in the Rideau Townships brought bitter comments from the rebel leader William Lyon Mackenzie.(9)

A petition from George Johnston to the Governor General, the duke of Richmond, reveals the kind of progress made by one of the Wexford families. In six years, he stated that he had cleared and improved 20 acres of land, built a dwelling house and barn. He further states that he has a wife and seven children and that his Aged Mother had arrived from Ireland, all of whom he maintains from this farm. He had been instrumental in 10 families and relatives of his, arriving from Ireland and settling near him.(10) This petition, along with an affidavit, was written by Johnston to prove that he had improved the 100 acres he lived on in order to get the deed and actual ownership of the land.

Johnston pointed out that he had been instrumental in other settlers immigrating from Ireland. This chain migration led people from southern Ireland to settle along the Rideau Corridor from Kingston to Bytown (Ottawa) to be near relatives, friends or neighbors from Ireland. Johnston and most of the Wexford settlers spoke English with an accent. Many others, however spoke only Gaelic. In the old burying ground in Lyndhurst there are three markers carved in Gaelic. The people that spoke only Gaelic settled in groups but there was always someone in the group or living nearby who could interpret when needed. In an area in Beckwith Township, early census takers filled in nationality for some citizens as, "Eoghnacht", which is Gaelic for descendant of the King of Munster. These early census indicate that over half of the population of the Rideau Townships were Irish.

Immigration to Canada from 32 Irish Counties, between 1815 and 1820 was over 26,000 (11) and most were settled as buffers to the American immigrants in Upper Canada.

The plan for the water route from Montreal to Lake Ontario was to use the Ottawa River to the Rideau River, then south to Merrickville, next through the Irish River to the Bastard Lakes, down Whitefish River to the Cataraqui River and finally into Lake Ontario. It was from this plan, that many of the Irish were settled along this route. Names of places such as; New Dublin, Kilmarnock, Balleycanoe, Newboyne and Dublin Corners still show the Irish influence.

In 1825, the waterway route was changed to pass through what would be called the Rideau Lakes to connect the Cataraqui River with the Rideau River.(12) Many of these lakes did not exist and were just large swampy areas with creeks passing through them. The plan devised by Col. John By called for the construction of dams backing up the water and flooding the swamps to create lakes. Water pressure lift locks would be used to bypass the dams. The entire 200 kilometer long system with 47 locks and over 30 dams was constructed by private contractors under the supervision of the Royal Engineers. There was almost 40 kilometers of canal to be dug by hand, thousands of trees to be cut from lock sites through the area to be flooded, stones to cut and haul, and locks and dams to be built. Manpower in the wilderness of Upper Canada did not exist. It had to be brought in from somewhere.

The finding of the canal construction grave yard at Chaffey's Lock began an in-depth search as to who was buried there and their numbers. In several places between Kingston Mills and Newboro, skeletons have been unearthed. The Township of South Crosby road crew while opening a gravel pit at Jones Falls came across several human remains. The OPP when called in ascertained that the findings had been interred for over 100 years. While digging a house foundation near Brass Point Bridge, remains were uncovered and the OPP stated that they had been there for more than 100 years. Near Brewers Mills more skeletons were unearthed which also proved to be more than 100 years old. At Chaffey's Lock there were rows of unmarked stones found in a wooded area not far

from the lock. These stones were the same as those used in building the lock and came from a quarry near Elgin. The question then was, who were these people buried along the Rideau route?

From various secondary sources, it was possible to ascertain that a number of the Irish workers died of swamp fever; or as suggested, in several sources from malaria. This gave a clue, as to some of the deaths and burials. The first requirement was to find some idea of the number of burials at these various sites.

Site examination using electronic equipment has been completed and a grave location plan of each grave yard exists.(13) The Chaffey's site contained 79 or more bodies, Davis Lock has only 3 for certain, Jones Falls has well over 200, Brass's Point has 19 or more, Upper Brewers has 46 or more, lower brewers has 24 or more and there are two more sites that have, as yet, to be examined.

When we think of the Rideau Canal and Chaffey's Lock, it immediately brings to mind a picture of peaceful lakes and a quite and charming little hamlet. Graceful boats and canoes filled with happy people glide leisurely by enjoying the warm summer days. The only concern might be an occasional swat at a buzzing mosquito.

A hundred and seventy five years ago this was not the case. Mosquitos carried deadly malaria to the unknowing Irish immigrants who provided the pick and shovel labour to build the Rideau Canal. Hundreds of swamps and small streams existed before the dams were built that created the beautiful cottage lined lakes that now cover the area.

Malaria was thought to be a fever caused by bad air from the swamps. It was not known until 1838 that a mosquitos biting a person carrying the disease passed this infection on to its fertilized eggs. Each new mosquito hatched from these eggs became a carrier. When it bit someone else, the disease was passed on. It is hypothesized that malaria was brought to Canada by British troops during the War of 1812/14, as it began to appear around York (Toronto) at that time. Malaria continued in Canada until the last case was reported in 1870.

The marshland along the Rideau route had always been a mass breeding ground for mosquitos. When malaria was introduced into their system, the insects became killers of plague proportions. The contractors' labourers living in tents and then poorly constructed huts were the insects' victims. Added to this was the fact that the disease was unknown and prevention and treatment unavailable or misguided at best.

Captain Savage's report, dated 6 September 1828, states that, "at Kingston Mills, 100 men ill and 12 dead. Brewers Mills, work at a stand still. Chaffey's Mills, contractor and many men ill. Davis Mills, many men ill. Jones Falls, work stopped because of illness, except at quarry six miles from site. Isthmus, one of contractors very sick, several deaths, only four men on the job. Ottawa River side, Rideau Lake, epidemic less severe, but many sick". (14) The result was the large number of grave sites of these workers now being discovered.

The Irish Ambassador to Canada, Donal Denham, dedicated these rediscovered grave sites in memory to those Irish canal builders, at a ceremony, on July 21, 2001, in Chaffey's Lock.

The graves are located a few hundred metres from the lock at Chaffey's in a fenced-off half acre of land containing rows of unmarked stones. They are all similar in size and cut from the same stone quarried in Elgin and hauled by oxen to Chaffey's for the construction of the lock and dam.

They stand just beyond the wrought iron fence which encloses the graves of Samuel Chaffey and his wife Mary Ann.

Three years ago, in an effort to ascertain the number of these stones, The Chaffey's Lock and Area Heritage Society began brush cutting to clear years of fallen trees from the area. Two years ago, with the aid of a ground sonar unit, it was established that 79 graves existed in the cleared area. Then came the hardest task, to find out who was buried under the unmarked gravestones.

Construction of the Canal at the Chaffey's Mills site began in 1828 and that summer the fever we now know to be malaria struck the workers. Its symptoms, in the words of sufferer John MacTaggart, include "dreadful vomiting, pains in the back and loins, general debility, loss of appetite, so that one cannot even take tea. After 8 to 10 days came, fits of trembling...For two or three hours before they arrive, we feel so cold that nothing will warm us; the greatest heat that be applied is perfectly unfelt....Our bones ache, teeth chatter, and the ribs are sore...We then commonly have to vomit, the trembling ends, and a profuse sweat ensues."(15)

In the third week of August, 11 men died from the dreaded fever. John Sheriff, the contractor, had 81 workers and 70 of them were listed on the time sheets as off the job sick with the fever.

In September 1828, a report from the Isthmus (now Newboro) states, " 12 dead at the Isthmus (.) two contractors have only 4 men at work and the remainder to (too) ill to work".

The following notice appeared in the October 2, 1828, Montreal Gazette, " At Chaffey's Mills, near Brockville, on the 23rd ultimo, John Sheriff, esq., Contractor on the Rideau Canal. Mr. S.'s death was occasioned by the prevailing fever".

The fever, actually malaria, was thought to be caused by bad air and that one person could infect another. For that reason, the bodies of the dead were buried immediately, often with little or no ceremony. Several letters in The Governor General, Lord Dalhousie's files, mention such disposal of bodies of the fever victims.(16)

Malaria deaths were occurring so rapidly that in the fall of 1828, half- acres plots of land from the Military Reserves at lock construction sites between The Isthmus and Kingston Mills were set aside as burial locations. A 1853 Ordinance Map shows such a burial plot at Chaffey's Mills in the same location as the Chaffey family plot.

A letter dated March 10, 1829, from Bishop Macdonell of Kingston to Bishop Plessis of Quebec stated "There is a need for something for the Mission of Brockville and Prescott, because of the large number of Catholics being interred from the fever on the Rideau Canal without proper rights and burial".(17) Father John Macdonald of Perth tried to do the best he could under the circumstances. The fever victims were buried before he even knew about them. There are, however, numerous items in the Perth Parish Registry for 1828 to 1832, of masses being said for persons who had died in Crosby. This covers both North and South Crosby Townships making it impossible to define which location those that died worked. It could have been Chaffey's, Davis, Jones Falls or the Isthmus, all of which are in Crosby.

Col. John By, the man in charge of the Rideau project, tried to alleviate the problem of the supposed malaria-causing bad air around each of the construction areas. He ordered the trees cut back 250 feet from each of the sites. This actually made matters worse, as pools of ground water formed providing more locations for mosquitos to hatch.

The fever deaths continued to rise. It became so bad that those recovering from the fever ran away from the job as soon as they got strong enough, without even waiting for their pay. They probably died somewhere else, because once it is in your blood, malaria is a recurring disease.

The foreman of works on the canal was an Irishman named Francis Pinhey. He was responsible for bring in many Irish carpenters who worked on the construction of the lock gates. The crew who built the materials from wood, such as bridges, lock gates and waste weirs moved from lock to lock like the smithies and were not attached to the contractors crews at each lock. Pinhey's carpenters were paid 5 shillings per day; and even with that amount, he had difficulty maintaining a full crew.

John Haggart became the new contractor for Chaffey's Mills after Sheriff's death . He was hard pressed to keep enough men on the job to complete the work, Robert Drummond, at Kingston Mills and John Redpath, at Jones Falls had the same problem. Advertisements for labourers ran continuously in the British Whig, Brockville Recorder and the Montreal Gazette. After the devastating summer of 1828, no records of the number of deaths were kept by these contractors. This is not surprising as they were having a hard enough time getting workers without publicizing or tallying the deaths.

The three men contracted Peter Robinson to act as their agent and hire the needed manpower. He made two trips to Ireland and returned with several hundred men each time. Whether recruited in Ireland or at the immigration docks, the offer of 2 shillings and 6 pence per day enticed new bodies to replace the ones that had fallen.

Reverend William Bell of Perth, made several trips to Kingston along the line of the canal construction. His diaries tell of the hardship and disease he encountered at the work sites. His description of the Irish immigrants sleeping 6 to 8 in a tent with a dirt floor and usually without blankets. This stimulated Col. By to withhold some of the contractors' payments to buy blankets for those poor unfortunates.(18)

In an August 1830 entry, Reverend Bell describes the large number of huts at Kingston Mills inhabited by Irish labourers who, "supplied much of the pick-and-shovel labour" for the canal. The 1830 census indicates that 101 of these huts existed at Kingston Mills. (19) The Kingston Chronicle calls the Irish workers location, "Evergreen Village".(20) Bell also observed that hospitals, doctors and medicines were not provided by the contractors for their workers. The two hospitals established were for the military only. A record was kept for each job site showing the number of sick and off the job. The return for Chaffey's for August 1 to September 15, 1830 or could be 1831 indicates that out of a total work force of 81, 70 were off the job during that period, listed as sick.

The official return of the sick for Kingston Mills to the Isthmus, for 1830, August 1 to September 15 shows that from a work force of 1316 men, 787 were off with the fever and 55 men died during the same period. (21)

During the 4 year construction period, between 2,500 and 4,000 men worked on the canal each year. In "British Immigration to North America", Helen Cowan cites the figure of 2,700 for the total work force on the Rideau in 1829. The largest single group of workers was from Ireland. After the completion of the canal, General Sir Richard Bonnycastle, British Military Commander in Kingston, wrote to Lord John Russell about some of Col. By's problems with the construction

of the Rideau. He states that one of the major holdups, was the fever and that 1,000 Irish immigrants died during the construction of the Isthmus, Chaffey's Mills, Jones Falls and Kingston Mills.(22)

These facts clearly show that the cemetery at Chaffey's Lock was the final resting place for a large number of malaria victims who died building the Rideau Canal. Most of them were men who had left Ireland with the intent of making enough money to send for their wives and families. Families that never heard from them again.

The graves found by the South Crosby road crew at Jones Falls were totally unmarked and are on private land that had been farmed for over 100 years. The site is across the road from where John Redpath built a log structure to house some of the more seriously ill workers. The first lockmaster at Jones Falls, Peter Sweeney, mentions the grave yard located across from what he terms as the hospital.(23) The term hospital is not quite what we visualize today. Although Col. By tried to have hospitals constructed along the route, he was turned down by the British Authorities in London, who stated that the contractors employees are the responsibility of the contractor. Redpath's solution was this log building with no doctors, nurses or anyone but their mates attending to the sick. Redpath, also constructed buildings to house the labourers, similar in size to the one used for the sick, 30 feet by 40 feet with accommodation for 20 men. (23)

The site of the burying ground at Kingston Mills has never been located. In describing the construction of Kingston Mills, Robert Drummond states that 500 men died during the five year period of construction. (24) The Ordinance maps for this location do not show any grave yard they only outline the immediate area around the Lock Station.

The grave yards at Brass Point Bridge and at Brewer's Mills are both located on private property and as yet, not a lot of work has been done on identifying the numbers. The property owners are aware of the grave sites and have allowed some inspection and soundings on their property. They are a little uncertain as to what they want and how publicity, as to the actual location, would effect their families lives.

When construction on the canal was completed, most of those surviving settled on the land promised to them when they were brought to Canada. This created a corridor where 60% of the population were Irish and in four townships, March, Goulbourn, Huntley and Marlborough 80% were Irish. Donald Akenson states,"that for the most part, the Irish Immigrants were land hungry, they were a rural population with a single mindedness for land acquisition." At this point, his statement is shown to be correct. Later arrivees gravitated more to town and city life.

From 1825 to 1830, 79,142 Irish emigrated to Canada. Not all of them stayed in Canada as about 25% crossed the border to the United States.(25) There really was not a border, as far as emigration was concerned, until 1855. Prior to that approximately 1/4 of all Irish Immigrants crossed into the United States after arriving in Canada. There was regular ship service between Kingston and several Lake Ontario ports in the U.S. and many immigrants used this route to reach their destination.

Word of the cholera plague raging in Europe reached Kingston in the summer of 1831, and the town fathers became concerned that the only accommodation for the sick was in a small blockhouse run by the Female Benevolent Society. Many suggestion were made, but no action was taken on any of the recommendations put forward.

When the plague reached Quebec City, a public meeting was called and they appointed a committee of management on June 14, 1832 to take precautions against the disease and launch an appeal for funds. Kingston even tried a blockade to keep emigrants out of the town. The emigrant society of Montreal made protests to the local magistrates that such actions were illegal in preventing British Subjects from landing and the Port was declared open.

All vessels, however, were required to stop outside the harbour before docking, for examination by a Medical Officer. This made little difference as there was no segregation of immigrants who were potential carriers as they were housed in inadequate army tents and leaky ramshackle sheds hastily thrown up on the shore. Prior to any hospital, temporary sheds were put up along the shore, near the present Yacht Club and Murney Point, so that the Benevolent Society could ease some of the suffering. Various Kingston sources state that 10% or 400 of the city population died from the plague in 1832. Figures on the immigrant deaths in Kingston vary, as every total was based on estimates as no real figures seem to have been kept.

C.M. Godfrey, in the "Cholera Epidemics in Upper Canada", states that, "40,000 Immigrants came to York during the Summer of 1832".(26) Given the transportation system, they would have been in Kingston for transshipment during that period. The Board of Health figures show that one in every two hundred died of cholera and one in 500 died while traveling to their destination. This means that 280 deaths occurred in total and the York Board of Health reported 205. At some point between Gros Isle and York, 75 persons were buried on route. The Board of Health gave a figure of 1,379 cases in Upper Canada and state that 558 deaths occurred.(27) Popular belief at the time was that the number of reported deaths was greatly reduced by the board, and newspaper articles suggest that given the inadequacy of reporting, the Board's figures are about half. James A. Roy, in "Kingston the King's Town", states; "Four hundred persons were carried off--one tenth of the population of Kingston"(28). Dr. Machar records that at the height of the epidemic, he spent entire days in the Upper Cemetery burying the dead, some 3 to a grave.

The Board of Health figures show that 500 of their number died on route, many of whom would have been buried along the Rideau. The Town of Kingston passed a Bylaw which stated that no ship or barge could enter the harbour with dead on board. This Bylaw said that all bodies must be buried no less than 5 miles from the Town. That would put them at the lock station at Kingston Mills.

The canal operation would lend itself to the dead being buried at the lock stations. The lock records show, for instance, that the Steamer Bytown, with barges St. George, Carrillon and Hope, arrived at Chaffey's at 6:00 a.m. on May 21, 1835, with 206 immigrants on board. The four vessels took just over 2 hours to pass down and left at 8:10 a.m.. All of the passengers had to get off their barge while the locking took place. Thus there was two hours to bury any unfortunate family member. The same holds true for all lock stations and at Kingston Mills the stop over would have been for 6 hours.

What is probably the largest grave yard on the Rideau has not yet been located. I refer to the one at Kingston Mills. Many of the Rideau grave yards are shown on the Ordnance Survey maps, drawn in 1853 for the turnover of the Rideau from the British Military to the Government of the Canadas. No site is shown as a burial ground on the Kingston Mills map. Estimates would indicate that this site would have had more than 800 burials between 1825 and 1850. The land around the lock station is private property much of which contain houses. The owners would not be pleased to

have a search for a grave yard in their front yards. With this in mind, the Kingston Irish Folk Club has asked Parks Canada for permission to put a Celtic Cross at the Lock Station at Kingston Mills to mark the deaths of so many.

In the ten years following 1832 over 262,000 Irish emigrated to Canada.(31) Of this total, 60% came through the port of Kingston by-way of the Rideau Canal. The advertised rate for immigrants aboard open barges was; “12 shillings and 6 pence per person, which included 50 pounds of personal baggage”.(32) The average barge carried 60 to 80 passengers and took 6 days and nights to make the journey from Montreal to Kingston. In 1840, 32,000 immigrants came to Canada, 12,000 entered the province via the Ottawa-Rideau route, 1,400 of whom stayed in the Ottawa Area, 3,000 stayed in the Kingston area, while the remaining 6,600 passed to the western parts of the province around Toronto, Hamilton and London. (33). Immigrants for the next few years passed through Kingston to more promising land in western Canada West (western Ontario).

Throughout 1846, news of the great famine in Ireland appeared regularly in the pages of the Kingston Papers. During January and February of 1847, columns appeared almost weekly describing the, destitution in Ireland and the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. The Canadas agreed to accept 100,000 immigrants to ease the suffering.(34)

Soon the papers were carrying the shocking stories of the sick and dying arriving in Canada. Stories like that of the ship “*Virginus*”, which left Liverpool with 476 Irish Immigrants crowded into steerage. The “*Virginus*” was a vessel designed to carry Canadian timber to England and would normally return with nothing but bricks in her hold for ballast. After a 63 day voyage, she arrived at Grosse Isle with 158 of her passengers dead and while waiting to disembark at the quarantine station, another 19 died. During the passage aboard the barges, towed by the steamer “*Meteor*”, up the Ottawa River and down the Rideau Canal to Kingston, another 49 fell victim to the deadly famine fever. From the original party, only 250 arrived in Kingston and most of those were so ill that they had to be helped from the ship to the fever sheds.(35)

Following the cholera epidemic in 1832, the city had seen the need for a hospital and plans were developed to build on the site of where the present Kingston General Hospital is located. The new three story building was constructed but it was used for many other purposes than a hospital. The building even served as the Parliament Buildings from 1841 to 1843. By the fall of 1845 the ladies of the Benevolent Society had equipped two wards which were to of little consequence to the large numbers needed during the summer of 1847.

Steamboats on the Rideau Canal pulled the barges carrying the immigrants. At each lock a rate of a pence per head was paid by the ship owners. The lock master had to count each person in order to tabulate the lockage fee, thus providing an accurate record of the numbers being transported. During the summer of 1847, a total of more than 30,000 passed down the Rideau to Kingston and another 10,000 came by way of the St Lawrence. Emigration records show that more than 49,000 arrived in Kingston, most on route to destinations farther west. Kingston was the transshipment point between the Rideau Canal, St Lawrence and the Lake Boats.

During the summer of 1847, more than 49,000 immigrants arrived in Kingston. Over 30,000 of these came by way of the Rideau. Dr. R.A. Kelly, Medical Officer of Health, after examining the records has produced an estimate that one in four were stricken with typhus and that 20 to 40% of those died. This figure suggests that as many as 5,000 died in the summer of 1847. How many are buried along the Rideau is a question that only estimates can produced.

Margaret Angus states in, *The Old Stones of Kingston*; “ Immigrants, continuing to pour into the country, brought the severe cholera epidemic in 1847. Emergency hospital facilities and nursing quarters were hastily put up. These brought some comfort to the sick and many irate protests to the City Council from householders near the temporary buildings”((29). Letters to the Editor in the *Kingston Newspapers* continued to paint the scene of the destitute dying even as their barges sat in the harbour waiting to be unloaded. Kingston Town Council passed a law which stated that barges with dead on board must bury them at least 5 miles from the city before they could enter the harbour(30).

In June of 1847, a large number of Irish Immigrants stricken with typhus were crowded into the partially opened Kingston hospital. Many of those victims died and were buried on the hospital grounds. The *Brishish Whig* describes this site as, “The need to bury in Kingston about 1400 Irish immigrants who died of typhus”. (36) A monument, the Angel of Mercy, was erected in 1894 to mark the spot. This monument along with the bodies were moved in 1966 from the hospital grounds to St. Mary’’s Cemetery. (37)

On Tuesday, June 8, 1847, Dr. G.M. Douglas, the medical superintendent at Grosse Ilse, wrote to A. C. Buchanan, the Chief Emigrant Agent ...”out of the 4,000 to 5,000 (immigrants) that left this place since Sunday, at least 2,000 will fall sick somewhere before three weeks are over”. “Good God, what evils will befall the city wherever they alight”. Douglas’’ letter was printed in Upper Canada newspapers notifying the public of what dangers were in store.(38)

Approximately 2,500 infected immigrants arrived at the Kingston docks each week and soon filled the fever sheds on the shore behind the old Molson Brewery and Murney Point. Children who had lost both their parents wandered the streets and begged for food and money. Temporary shelters were put up at the foot of Alfred Street and still hundreds received no care. The Sisters of St. Joseph arrived and opened the Hotel Dieu in a building located at Sydenham and Johnson Streets but they too soon had more than they could handle. Horsey’’s *Kingston History* relates the memories of citizens describing the death carts passing through the streets loaded with the bodies of the immigrants as they headed for the Upper Cemetery.

The Governments emigration plan was to have these newly arriving families dispersed to the rural areas of Upper Canada where they would become farm labourers and eventually acquire their own land. For two main reasons this did not happen; first most were too ill to leave the cities in which they found themselves and second the farm jobs that the authorities thought existed disappeared. Country residents were afraid to enter urban centres. The normal farmer’’s markets were badly supplied and merchants of all kinds noted the slack in trade. The *Canadian Farmer* article, which was reprinted in many papers, stated the farm view as; “ to hire cadaverous-looking emigrants just from hospital or fever shed is by no means thought desirable”. Even without the fever, a 100,000 immigrants was far greater than the farm population could absorb as labourers and the Emigration Departments infrastructure could handle. As a result, the poor, sick and dying immigrants massed in the towns or haunted the countryside as wanders and outcasts.

During the summer of 1847, over 100,000 embarked on ships for Quebec. The Executive Council of the Legislative Assembly released figures that, 5,282 died in passage and that 11,543 died in quarantine hospitals, emigrant hospitals and Board of Health Facilities for a total of 16,825 deaths.(39) This figure does not include those who died in the streets of towns like Kingston or wandering the country-side looking for the farm jobs that were none existent.

The Imperial Government did assume the cost of the Public Debt in Canada West for the relief provided by the Legislative Assembly. The amount of almost 187,000 pounds did not in any way cover the total expended by towns like Kingston, nor could it bring back the lost citizen and unfortunate immigrants.

In the twenty five years, between 1825 and 1850, Canada opened it's doors to 703,884 Irish Immigrants, the largest number arriving in 1847, which was the worst year of the Irish famine. Unfortunately many of those lie buried in places like the Upper Cemetery in Kingston. It is unfortunate today that we can only guess at their numbers and we will never know all of their names. It is fitting that markers be placed so that future generations will know the sacrifices made by these immigrants in helping to create this country.

Canada owes a debt of gratitude to its Irish immigrants. Despite heavy obstacles, these people had the courage and determination to made the voyage across the Atlantic. For many, the hopes of a better life for their families never materialized; and for those that survived, more hardships were endured before they were settled. Some left home and their families in Ireland never heard of them again as they were buried in unmarked graves. It is a fitting tribute that while these immigrants may be gone, they are not forgotten by Ireland and those Canadians of Irish decent. Their sacrifices have earned a proud place in Canada's history.

NOTES

- (1) Glen Lockwood, "Rear of Leeds and Lansdowne" pg. 114.
- (2) National Archives, RG5, vol. 21, reel C-4544, pg. 9055-7.
- (3) Ibid, vol. 23, reel C-4545, pg. 9956.
- (4) Bruce Elliott, "Irish Migrants in the Canadas a New Approach", pg. 120-1.
- (5) Lockwood, pg. 126.
- (6) Ontario History, Vol. LV, Number 1, March 1963, "A New Look at the Peter Robinson Emigration of 1823", Peter L. and Monica Maltby, letter Lord Kingston to Lord Bathurst, June 20, 1822, pg.18.
- (7) Kingston Chronicle, July 3, 1825.
- (8) Ontario History, Ibid, pg. 15.
- (9) Ibid, pg. 21.
- (10) National Archives, RG5, A1, vol. 43, Upper Canada Sundries, reel C-4603, pg. 20890-3.
- (11) "A Study of the Available Statistics", Number 6 in the General Register Office's "Studies on Medical and Population Subjects", London: HMSO, 1953, pg. 95.
- (12) National Archives, MG12, WO44, vol.19, pg. 88-9
- (13) Parks Canada have investigated two of the grave sites with electronic equipment and three others have been examined with ground penetrating imaging equipment.
- (14) National Archives, MG12, WO44, vol. 15, pg.19-20
- (15) John MacTaggart, "Three years in Canada: an Account of the Actual State of the Country", vol. 1, pg. 17 - 8.
- (16) National Archives, MG24, AI 2, Dalhousie Paper, vol. 18, part 1, Couper to Dalhousie, 20 August, 1829.
- (17) Queen's University Archives, Roman Catholic Diocese of Kingston Papers, Bishop Macdonell to Bishop Plessis, 10 March, 1829.
- (18) Queen's University Archives, William Bell diaries, vol. 6, pg.176.
- (19) National Archives, 1830 Census, Pittsburgh Township, Midland District.
- (20) Kingston Public Library, Kingston Chronicle, 8 June, 1827, pg. 2 and 22 June, 1827, pg. 3.
- (21) National Archives, MG12, WO44, vol. 18, pg. 482.
- (22) Robert Moon, Editor, "Colonel By's Friends Stood Up", Sir. Richard Bonnycastle, pg. 86.
- (23) Rideau Public Library, Elgin, Peter Sweeney's diary, pg. 42.
- (24) National Archives, MG29, B6, vol. 1, Drummond Papers, pg.9
- (25) Donald Akenson, "The Irish in Ontario, A Study in Rural History, pg. 237.
- (26) C. M. Godfrey, "Cholera Epidemics in Upper Canada", pg.37.
- (27) Ontario Archives, Isaac Wilson diary, 30 January, 1833, pg.67.

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- (33) Brian Osborne, "The Settlement of Kingston's Hinterland" in To Preserve & Defend, Essays on Kingston in the Nineteenth Century, pg. 72.
- (34) Toronto Globe, 6 March, 1847.
- (35) British Whig, 10 July, 1847.