

The Old Immigrants

[THE 19TH CENTURY WAY WAS NOT SMOOTH]

Most 19th century immigrants to Canada came from the British Isles. Before 1900 there were many immigrants and few tourists and it was easy to tell them apart; the occasional tourist was almost surely a wealthy Englishman or American out to bag a moose or catch a trout. The immigrant was usually Scottish, English, Irish or Welsh and he was seldom well off and often desperately poor. He and his wife and children travelled on slow ships, often in squalor amidst triumphant disease. Here are some random passages from a book entitled *British Emigration to British North America, the First Hundred Years*, by Helen I. Cowan, published by the University of Toronto Press.

"The year of 1812 had shown the colonies' need for an increase in population. While the war was still under way, Lord Bathurst, secretary for war and the colonies, consulted . . . officials about his plan for turning to the advantage of the empire, the spirit of emigration which . . . prevailed in the Scottish Highlands. . . . According to some few theorists, the vast undeveloped wastelands of the colonies could be used for the good of the whole empire, of the landlords with overcrowded estates, of the manufacturers seeking new markets, of a government striving to quiet agitators. . . .

"In anticipation . . . terms for 'Settlers Proceeding to Canada' were drawn up . . . the Chancellor of the Exchequer . . . assured the House

At the top, left, are the first members of the famed Doukhobors to come to Canada. They came as religious refugees from Russia in 1899, aboard the ship Lake Huron. Free land brought future farmers. The pioneers shown in the middle, left, were awaiting the land-rush starting gun in Saskatchewan near the turn of the century. Most immigrants did not have motor cars and when they moved to settle the plains they lived in whatever shelter they could find. In the middle picture, right, is the Barr colonist camp in Saskatoon. The year is 1903.

The new world homes borrowed their style from the lands left behind. Theodosy Wachna, once of Galicia, built these in Stuartburn, Manitoba. Even before he built a proper home, the immigrant farmer cleared the land. The Dutchmen, at the lower right, are ready to chop the bush.

. . . that no encouragement to emigration had been given, but that . . . 'the object of the government was merely to direct those determined to emigrate and change their destination from the United States to His Majesty's possessions.'

"Under the heading, 'Liberal Encouragement to Settlers', the first official notice . . . appeared in the Edinburgh newspapers on Feb. 25, 1815 . . . the inducements offered . . . were liberal: transportation to the colony; free grants of 100 acres of land to each head of a family, and to the sons on coming of age; rations for eight months or until establishment; axes, plows and other implements at prime cost; and a minister and school teacher on government salary. In return the emigrant was to produce a satisfactory recommendation of character . . . and deposit . . . on his departure 16 pounds for himself and 2 pounds for his wife, the whole sum so deposited to be returned two years later in Canada when he was satisfactorily settled on his land.

". . . The best example of a well-conducted emigration during the first half of the 19th Century is that from Sussex . . . where the Earl of Egremont . . . brought about the formation of the Petworth Emigration Committee in 1832. The purpose . . . was not to shovel out paupers but 'to remove from the minds of persons of all classes the notion that emigration to Canada is banishment, and to cherish the idea that it is only a removal from a part of the British Empire, where there are more workmen than there is work to be performed, to another, a fertile, healthful and every way delightful portion of the same empire, where the contrary is the case.'

". . . At the end of the period, one of the most controversial clearances . . . took place from the estates of Lord Palmerston and Sir Robert Gore Booth in County Sligo . . . the emigration agent at St. John . . . accused Gore Booth of shovelling out the old and infirm and asserted that Lord Palmerston's emigrants wore the foulest rags and the children appeared stark naked. Some of the emigrants at once became public charges and the citizens of St. John protested in shocked surprise that a minister of the Crown would permit such heartless treatment. . . . Whatever may have been the fate of the individuals in the New World, Palmerston's property enjoyed the benefit of the removal. Within the year its tenants were described as prosperous in contrast with the multitudes. . . ."