

## From Emigrant Fever to the Great Northwest

## The Emigrant Fever

In the year 1849 occurred the failure of the Irish potato crop, which was followed by a pestilence scarcely less formidable than the plague of the middle ages. The population of the Emerald Isle is said to have shrunk from seven to four and a half millions in that single year, in some small degree due to emigration, but mainly from actual famine. How awful the record of anguish, terror and suffering comprised in these brief words!

Well do I remember daily helping groups of freshly arrived emigrants sitting and lying about on Wellington Street and near the Emigrant Office on the corner of Scott and Front streets - fearful objects, most of them; young infants reduced to mere skeletons, their haggard mothers vainly striving to soothe their feeble wailings, the fathers more like spectres than living men. There was a vacant piece of land opposite my house, in which some slight temporary shelter was provided and rations of food dealt out to the unhappy creatures, who used to come to my garden well for water.

Alderman G.W. Allen, then a young man, was among the most active in removing the sick and dying to the hospital. Even when the police and hospital servants shrunk terrified from the loathsome task, he carried the fever-stricken wretches in his arms from their squalid beds to the cabs, which he had hired at his own cost to convey them to the hospital.

The Toronto city authorities acted well on the occasion, Mayor Gurnett especially being untiring in the work. The clergy and medical men of Toronto generally did their duty nobly, at the sacrifice of their own lives in numerous instances. Among the martyrs to duty will be remembered the names of Bishop Power, Dr. Grasett, Dr. Hamilton, Rev. W.N. Ripley - and yet no public memorial has been erected in their honour.

## The Village of Carlton, 1853

In 1853 the village of Carlton consisted of two taverns, a blacksmith shop and a dozen frame dwellings, which possessed a questionable reputation such as that now enjoyed by other small suburbs of Toronto. Young men of the labouring class met to play quoits and tenpins on Sunday. Firearms were heard at all hours. Respectable women could hardly pass along the plank road without annoyance. The late Rev. Kennedy, then Secretary of the Diocesan Society, saw these things, and resolved if possible to reform them. Calling to his aid a young clergyman then just ordained - the Rev. Walter Stennett (later Canon Stennett of Cobourg) they organized meetings for divine services in the open air, amidst the tall pines and oak undergrowth of the Pine Plains. Half a dozen wooden forms, an old desk, an earthen basin, and some other trifles constituted our whole preparations for worship. And right blessed were they! Sunday after Sunday throughout that summer - in winter transferring our furniture to a room in an old labourer's dwelling - one or other of those two worthy servants of the Most High continued their ministrations. Sunday after Sunday did "hymns and psalms and spiritual songs" take the place of low ribaldry and obscene blasphemy, until Carlton ceased to be a by-word and a shame to the neighbourhood, and has ever since borne a fair character for sobriety, order, and the observance of the laws of