



Heading for the maple bush - the old-fashioned way

MULTICULTURALISM: THE IRISH IN CANADA

Irish historians cite evidence that their ancestors landed in Canada centuries before the Norsemen sailed along the Labrador coast. Moreover, Irish documents reveal that as early as 1594, fishermen were sailing between Ireland and Newfoundland. In neither case, however, did a permanent settle result. The first Irish settlers arrived during the French régime in the late 17th century, and Irish Catholics soon became a significant minority in New France and later Quebec.

Meanwhile on the Atlantic coast, Irish immigrants began arriving in small groups but in numbers sufficient to influence the character of the areas they settled. By 1760, Irish immigrants and their descendants formed about one-third of the population of Halifax, and a significant element in the colony of Newfoundland. During the 1760s, Alexander MacNutt, an Ulsterman, obtained extensive land grants in Nova Scotia and brought 470 Ulster Irish into the colony. The impetus of his emigration scheme led to further migrations from Ulster during the rest of the 18th century.

However, it was in the mid-nineteenth century that desperate over-population, repeated failure of the potato crop, and collapse of the traditional textile industry in Irish cities, brought about large-scale emigration to the new world. Upper Canada, later the Province of Ontario, took the initiative between 1825 and 1827, to assist the settlement of 2600 immigrants near the town of Peterborough. Nearly all the new arrivals were young farmers and their families who quickly adapted to life in the backwoods of Upper Canada. The favourable publicity surrounding this settlement was enough to induce thousands of other Irish families to journey to Canada without government help. Operating independently, Colonel Thomas Talbot, from one of the most famous families of the Anglo-Irish aristocracy, succeeded