

The Peter Robinson Settlers- Summary by Dr Paul McCotter

Families were not forced to leave, but applied to take part in this assisted emigration. However, increasing poverty, reducing circumstances and the backdrop of severe unrest played a part in their decision to bid farewell to their beloved homeland and embark on this epic journey, albeit incentivised by the promise of a new life in a distant land. The Peter

Robinson assisted emigration scheme was one of many such schemes during the nineteenth century, where emigrants from Ireland to overseas were 'assisted' with funding or other facilities in order to set up life in a new country.

It has been estimated that as many as 300,000 emigrants availed of such schemes.

In this instance, the scheme was funded by the British Government and under the direction of its employee, Peter Robinson, involved a total of eleven ships taking emigrants from Cobh to Ottawa and Ontario, Canada in the years 1823 and 1825.

The stimulus for this scheme came from a number of factors. The depression following the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 saw the agricultural economy falter while at the same time the introduction of the Corn Laws that same year kept food prices artificially high. Both factors operated against a background of a steep rise in population assisted by the new 'super-food', the potato.

The Tithe Composition Act of 1823 added further pressure to the peasant farming community as the obligatory tithe payments from farmers to the Protestant Church were linked to the Corn Laws and so kept high.

The most common occupation listed for emigrants in the Robinson scheme was the term 'reduced farmer', a term which seems to mean a farmer forced off the land by low prices for agricultural produce and high landlord rents.

Robinson was specifically instructed to target the 'disturbed baronies' of North Cork, that is, places where agrarian outrages and lawlessness among the rural peasantry were common. Most of the emigrants were farmers, reduced or otherwise, the remainder being made up of labourers and tradesmen.

All were required to be 'paupers', that is, having no means of their own.

The majority of emigrants hailed from northern Co. Cork and southeastern Limerick, but there were others from Tipperary, Kerry and Clare, as well as one from Wicklow and another from Kilkenny.

Robinson established "recruitment centres" across North Cork including Charleville, Mitchelstown and Doneraile within the Ballyhoura area and all villages and rural areas within those circles or a 15 mile radius. Conditions were set as to the "selection" process which included no one older than 45, thus families tended to be young with many small children undertaking the journey, which some did not survive. The response to the recruitment in 1825 was 50,000 requests for approx. 2,500 spaces indicating just how dire the circumstances were at this time.

The descendant population of the settlers is estimated to be 100,000 people.