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State Aided Emigration from Ireland to Canada in the 1880s

GERARD MORAN

There has been a dramatic upsurge in interest in Irish immigration to Canada in recent years. The works of Cecil J. Houston and William J. Smyth, Bruce Elliot, Donald Akenson and Thomas Power have opened up a long neglected area.¹ These studies indicate that most Irish immigration to Canada in the nineteenth century came from Ulster. Only during periods of crises, such as the Great Famine and the distress of 1879-82, did people from the rest of Ireland, and especially the west, look to Canada as an escape from their poverty. Nowhere was this more evident than with the British government's assisted emigration schemes to North America in the early 1880s.

Frequent attempts were made throughout the nineteenth century to encourage Irish emigrants to settle in Canada. In 1823 the British government helped 508 Irish Catholics from the Kingston estate in north Cork, Limerick and Tipperary to settle in the Ottawa Valley, and in 1825 the government assisted Peter Robinson to bring immigrants from the Munster Blackwater region to settle in Peterborough.² However it was only during periods of great economic crises, such as that of the Great Famine, that there was a noticeable increase in the numbers leaving Ireland which resulted in assisted emigration coming to prominence. Landlords accepted such prospects because they encountered difficulties in getting their tenants to pay their rents and the only alternative was wholesale eviction.³ Included in this group of landlords was the British crown itself which helped over 400 people leave estates at Boughill and Irvilloughter in Co. Galway and settle in Canada.⁴

In the second half of the century the central Canadian and provincial authorities made largely unsuccessful attempts to entice Irish immigrants to Canada.⁵ The Canadian government was fostering an immigration policy to populate the western provinces and were intent on calling one of the colonies, New Ireland. It was a period when Irish immigration to Canada had been considerably reduced as the United States and Australia had become more desirable destinations. Once a chain migration had been established to these centres, Canada's attractiveness dissipated. The Irish were now more interested in settling in the large cities of the United States where work and wages were more readily available than in Canada's rural landscape. However, events in Ireland in 1879-82 temporarily altered this.

The period 1879-82 was one of great destitution in Ireland, especially in the west, and only the Great Famine of the 1840s surpassed it in intensity. The failure of the potato crop, the reduction in seasonal migration remittances from Britain and increasing American agricultural competition combined to create

a near famine situation, especially in the west of Ireland where the population had difficulties surviving at the best of times. The problem of poverty was compounded by overcrowding and the unviable structure of the holdings on some of the poorest land in the country. Opinion differed as to the smallest viable agricultural unit on which the average family could survive, but it was generally agreed to be between 15 and 25 acres.⁶ Taking 15 acres as a minimum level, 72 per cent of the holdings in the poor law union of Belmullet, 69 per cent in Clifden, down to 54 per cent in Galway; and 51 per cent in Oughterard, were regarded as uneconomical in 1881. Between 1861 and 1881, when farms in the rest of the country were being consolidated, all of these unions recorded an increase in the number of holdings under 15 acres.⁷ It was conceded in most quarters that even if these holdings were provided rent free, the tenants would still be unable to survive on them. In the best of seasons one-quarter of the Connemara holdings were unable to provide sufficient potatoes to feed the families for more than nine months of the year. The distress of 1879-82 was most severe in those unions where a high proportion of the holdings were under 15 acres. James Hack Tuke, a Yorkshire Quaker and philanthropist, pointed out that the condition of those occupiers was so acute and the holdings so small that in the best of times the tenants would be on the verge of destitution and during bad seasons they faced starvation.⁸ The most graphic account of the problem was provided by the medical officer of Roundstone:

Some are sunk in such poverty that they dare not stir out of their houses. They are ashamed to hold up their heads, and lie still in their nakedness and hunger. Many have only one meal on alternative days.⁹

SIZE OF HOLDINGS IN POOR LAW UNIONS IN THE WEST OF IRELAND, 1881

Poor Law	Under 5	5-15 Acres	15-30 Acres	Over 30	Total
Belmullet	838	994	315	397	2,544
Castlereaugh	1,318	3,430	1,517	697	6,962
Clifden	848	1,784	601	520	3,753
Galway	1,196	1,586	1,180	1,098	5,060
Newport	1,134	807	465	455	2,861
Oughterard	491	1,092	754	748	3,085
Swineford	916	4,558	2,316	475	8,265

Source: *The Agricultural Statistics of Ireland for 1881*, H.C. 1882, 1xxiv, [c 3332], pp. 19-20.

This period of distress brought about renewed calls to provide remedies for poverty and congestion. An immediate response of the Canadian government was to provide \$100,000 for use in long term relief operations, such as the building of 26 harbours along the western coasts of Ireland so that fishing could be encouraged.¹⁰ Nevertheless both Vere Foster and James Hack Tuke, who had been actively involved in the relief of distress during the Great Famine and again in 1879-82, called for a new approach to the problem. They advocated state-aided emigration as a solution. The essence of their thinking was that poverty could not be ameliorated through radical changes in the land laws, since the average holding along the western seaboard was incapable of maintaining the average family. As it would be impossible to convert the majority of small tenant farmers into peasant proprietors with economical units, the only alternative was to be found in emigration. They also argued that in addition to improving the position of those leaving it would help increase wages at home, as it would reduce the number of workers seeking a limited supply of work.¹¹

Foster and Tuke's ideals dovetailed into a new immigration policy being implemented by the Canadian government. In December 1880 the government was finalizing a scheme which would give European immigrants a free grant of 160 acres in Manitoba, with the option of taking up an adjoining 160 acres. Ireland was a natural base from which to target Irish farmers to settle on these lands because of the severe distress and overpopulation that was being experienced in many parts of the country. Ireland could also supply the agricultural labourers and railway workers for which there was a constant demand in the western parts of Canada. Under the terms of the legislation the Canadian government wanted a systematic level of emigration from Ireland.¹² The proposals also received the endorsement of the Archbishop of Toronto, John Lynch, who had been an ardent opponent of Irish immigration to North America between 1860 and 1880, especially immigration to urban rather than rural areas.¹³ Lynch's attitude changed because of the decision of the Prime Minister, John A. MacDonald, to offer a large tract of land in Manitoba for Catholic settlement. He now saw the possibility of having a Catholic community which would be served by its own priests and not by Protestant clergy. His enthusiasm for the immigration scheme was such that in the spring of 1881 he travelled to Ireland and recommended that Irish farmers should settle in Canada.¹⁴

This new approach to combat distress was seized upon by the Gladstone administration, which was refusing to initiate new public works programs. It argued that money was being wasted on schemes for the relief of distress and that such projects only perpetuated the problem of poverty. Although the government and private charities had spent a considerable sum in the relief of distress during 1879-82, £2 million in 1880 alone, it appeared to have made no fundamental difference to the lives of the people. The potato failure

of 1882-83 further convinced the government that a new approach to the relief of distress was needed.¹⁵

It was James Hack Tuke who introduced the concept of assisted emigration based on his earlier plan. Tuke, and his friend and fellow Quaker, W.E. Forster, Chief Secretary of Ireland for Canada, in September 1880 discussed the prospects of Irish farmers settling in Manitoba. As a result of this meeting Tuke spent two months visiting the mid-western states of the United States, Western Canada and the Northwest Territories in the autumn of 1880, investigating the possibility of Irish emigrants settling in these regions.¹⁶

Tuke's visit indicated his dedication to these schemes, unlike the assisted emigration schemes carried out during the Great Famine. Neither he nor Vere Foster were prepared to unload the Irish problem in North America. Both travelled to North America to ascertain the type of lifestyles the emigrants could expect.¹⁷ They wanted to see firsthand the categories of people required in America and those most likely to succeed. Both men realized that demand was greatest for labourers and domestic servants, particularly in the west.

Under the proposals worked out between Tuke and the Canadian authorities the latter promised that the Irish emigrant on payment of a £2 fee to the Canadian Dominion Land Office would receive a grant of 160 acres of land and be given assisted passage from Liverpool to an American or Canadian port. While such proposals were generous for the period it failed to take into consideration that those people whom Tuke wished to help did not possess even so small a sum because of the distress of the previous two years. While the British government agreed to pay this money the proposal foundered because of the Canadian government's refusal to take responsibility for the collection of the £2 grants which was to be paid in installments by the emigrants.

Tuke was not deterred by this setback. In February 1881 he set out his ideas on assisted emigration in an article entitled "Irish Emigration" in *The Nineteenth Century*. He stated that the only solution to the poverty of the poorer classes in the west of Ireland was through emigration and this had more to recommend it than "scattering the people in Ireland." He added:

... what seems to me to be needed is that families be assisted from overcrowded parts of Ireland under careful and systematic supervision, but should be continued under the charge of properly qualified agents in Canada, whose object it should be to give assistance for the emigrants.¹⁸

Tuke's plan regarding the emigration of whole families was revolutionary. Hitherto people such as Vere Foster had contributed significantly to assisting individuals to emigrate. This policy was also being considered by the American authorities, for they believed that the emigration of individuals was not in the

best interests of Ireland because the strong departed and the old and weak were left behind. It thus favoured the emigration of whole families.¹⁹

The innovation value of Tuke's ideas meant that there were no precedents for the scheme. Given the complexities of the proposed operation and the suddenness with which Tuke was to implement the scheme in May 1882, one has to admire his dedication and determination to the scheme. His determination was evident in his decision in February 1881 to go ahead and institute a public subscription to aid aspiring emigrants from the west of Ireland, at a time when the government was dragging its heels on the issue of funding such a scheme. Tuke estimated that it would cost £100 for a family of five to emigrate and provide for them in Canada over the first winter until they would plant and harvest their first crop.²⁰

Tuke's article in *The Nineteenth Century* and the ongoing poverty in the west of Ireland brought about by large scale evictions in the opening months of 1882 brought together a group of influential Englishmen who espoused the concept of assisted emigration. They were headed by the Duke of Bedford, and included a number of leading politicians, such as W.H. Smith, W.E. Forster, H.S. Northcote and Samuel Whitbread, and they established an emigration committee, the Tuke Committee, in London on 31 March 1882. Its aims were to foster emigration of whole families from the poorer districts of the country and to provide them with financial assistance to leave.²¹ The money was to be raised by private subscriptions and £8,000 was contributed on the night the committee was formed, the Duke of Bedford and the Duke of Devonshire each providing £1,000.

In April 1882 Tuke launched his assisted emigration operations in the Clifden poor law union. There was widespread poverty in the area and the local poor law guardians had passed a resolution in February 1882 supporting the assisted emigration concept. Indeed they were in the process of securing a loan from the Local Government Board to finance such a scheme. Within a week of Tuke's arrival in Clifden, a total of 1,276 people had applied to him for inclusion in his scheme.²² It reinforced the evidence of other advocates of assisted emigration, such as Vere Foster, that there was a great demand for such schemes in the west of Ireland. Foster wrote:

... there is at present a desire amounting almost to a mania, among the juvenile portion of the population in the West of Ireland to emigrate to America, but they are without the means of gratifying their desires, while the demand for female domestic servants and for labourers and mechanics in America is practically illimitable.²²

Tuke's efforts were nearly thwarted from an early stage, when the Clifden guardians suddenly withdrew their loan application to assist emigration.

While Tuke wished to promote an organized policy of selective emigration to America, the guardians, however, wanted the greatest possible number of people to emigrate at the lowest possible cost. The guardians suspension of the loan meant that the Tuke Committee had to spend £5,000 of its funds assisting the population of Clifden. People who were previously included in the lists now found themselves excluded because of the paucity of money. Nevertheless Tuke helped over 1,300 people sail to America between April and June 1882; 226 of them leaving for Canada.

From the outset Tuke laid down certain guidelines which were subsequently incorporated into the assisted emigration schemes of 1883 and 1884. Only families were to be aided, provided most of their members were over 12 years of age. Tuke considered it important that there be a sufficient number of breadwinners in each family. Only families engaged in agriculture were to be assisted and then only those most likely to succeed. At least one member of the family had to be able to speak English.²⁴ No workhouse inmates were to be included and it was hoped that the emigrants would be able to pay part of their passage fares themselves. The emigrants would be issued with new clothes, be transported from their homes to the ports of embarkation, be given overnight accommodation and be provided with similar treatment at the American ports until they reached their final destinations.

Tuke's experiences in Clifden convinced him that the scale of the project was so vast and the demand for emigration so great that it was beyond the scope of any private organization to bring about any fundamental change in the ordinary lives of the people.²⁵ It had cost the Tuke Committee £1,315 or £6/1/8 per person to assist the first 200 emigrants. Tuke estimated that 100,000 people needed to leave over a five year period, involving a total outlay of 700,000. He also realized that the provision that the emigrants should contribute part of their own fares would never be realized because of the poverty in the region.²⁶ As most of the people were in debt to shopkeepers and landlords, they did not have the money to supplement their fares.

However, the popularity of the scheme in Clifden and the demand for emigration spurred the Gladstone government to become actively involved. Government ministers became convinced that a new approach to the relief of distress was required and it could no longer provide unlimited funding for potato seeds supply schemes or the issuing of grants to the poor law unions.²⁷ When the emigration proposals were debated in the House of Commons in July 1882 most English MPs took the view that assisted emigration was the panacea to endemic poverty in Ireland.²⁸ Consequently, the government gave £100,000 for state-aided emigration under the 1882 Arrears of Rent Act. A total of 42 unions were scheduled for aid along the west coast. Initially the Tuke Committee was invited to administer the emigration schemes in Clifden, Oughterard, Newport and Belmullet, an area with a combined population of 46,000 people. The government was to provide £5 towards each emigrant, with

the committee honouring the shortfall.²⁹ It was conceded that the poverty in these unions was such that only an outside body could realistically help the people. The Tuke Committee was the only organization experienced in the administration of the large scale emigration. The rest of the unions involved were to be controlled by the Local Government Board emigration committee and the poor law guardians.

The closing date for applications for assistance was 31 January 1883 and 6,500 people, 14 per cent of the total population, applied in the four unions administered by the Tuke Committee: 2,420, or 15 percent of the population, of Belmullet; 1,700 (12 per cent) in Clifden; 1,560 (21 per cent) in Oughterard and 740 (8 per cent) in Newport.³⁰ It was at this point that Tuke tried to persuade many of the emigrants to settle in Canada. This was despite the fact that Canada had never been a major attraction for emigrants from the west of Ireland. A survey of the years 1876-1881 shows that only 179 emigrants out of a total of 26,682 from Galway and Mayo travelled to Canada.³¹ All of those who supported state-aided emigration agreed that the schemes should be directed towards Canada and the mid-western states of the United States, rather than to Britain or the urban centres in North America. On his visit to northwest Canada in the autumn of 1880 Tuke became convinced that assisted emigration to this region would benefit both countries, as this region was underpopulated and had vast, rich agricultural lands. In December 1882 Tuke wrote to Archbishop Lynch of Toronto and asked him to publicly support the settlement of state-aided emigrants in Canada.³² It was hoped this would gain support among the Canadian population. No evidence exists to show that Lynch gave this approval. Nevertheless, under the 1883 scheme all the Tuke emigrants would be sent to Canada unless they could show evidence that their friends and relations in the United States would support them. Of the 5,409 people assisted by Tuke in that year some 1,850 went to Canada. It represented 35 per cent of those leaving Belmullet and Newport, 38 per cent from Clifden and 29 per cent from Oughterard.³³

As the railway system opened up Manitoba, 250 million acres of prime agricultural land became available free of charge, whereas unimproved land was costing 10/- to 30/- an acre in the mid-western region of the United States. Also, a steady stream of agricultural labourers was required at high wages. The expansion of the railway system helped those people who did not seek a livelihood on the land as railway companies, such as the Canadian Pacific Railway, were constantly seeking unskilled labour at pay rates of up to \$2 a day. Prospects for girls working as domestic servants were also encouraging with wages of up to \$25 per month available in Winnipeg, while in Toronto they ranged from \$7 to \$12. Thus the emigrants had the prospects of a good livelihood in Canada.³⁴

Further support for emigration to Canada came from British politicians. They favoured the concept of Irish emigrants settling in Canada rather than in

the United States, where it was felt the Irish developed strong nationalist ideals and blamed Britain for Ireland's problems.³⁵ This attitude could be ended if the emigrants settled in Canada where they would assimilate with other communities rather than become ghettoized as in the United States. The majority of Irish emigrants to Canada before 1880 had taken up farming so that there were few Irish ghettos that the Irish could move to. One of the most notable transformations in the views of an Irish nationalist in Canada was that of the Young Irelander, Thomas D'Arcy McGee, who became an ardent supporter of the British presence in Canada in the 1860s.³⁶

The emigration to Canada highlights the willingness of the people to leave Ireland and settle in any country that would accept them. The United States was closed as a destination to anyone without sponsors. A chain migration had not yet come into effect from these regions of the west of Ireland which could be of some benefit to the aspiring emigrants. Therefore, Canada remained the only option open to many. Letters from Canada from those who had left in 1882 proved to be one of the most important incentives to aspiring emigrants. These people gave their Irish relations relevant information as to the conditions they endured on their boat trip across the Atlantic, of conditions in Canada, the extent of employment opportunities and the wages available for non-agricultural labour. They were also important as they could provide some financial assistance to those who wished to leave. They were so happy to be away from the perennial distress that they immediately wrote home to their friends and relations commenting on how good their new position was. They, more than the government officials or emigration agents, had an important impact on the destinations chosen by the emigrants. Now emigrants followed on foot of information sent home by earlier travellers.³⁷ Most of those assisted in 1882 were happy that they had settled in Canada, as exemplified in the letter of one Belmullet emigrant living in Toronto:

If you give me a present of a house and farm in Tipp I would not go back to it. . . . I could not describe it to you, Its more like Paradise, the very smell of the trees growing all along the foothills here would do you good.³⁸

A similar approach was noted from Patrick Barret of Elly, Binghamstown South, Belmullet, who wrote from Winnipeg that his sons were earning 7/- a day, his house cost him £2 a month, the cost of beef was only 7/ a lb and butter 35 cents.³⁹

This happiness was also evident in the emigrants' attitude as they left Ireland, displaying a light-hearted and joyous appearance when departing. Tuke himself remarked: "One would suppose the people were going for a picnic, they are so cheerful and happy."⁴⁰ As whole families were leaving and no immediate members were left behind, there was little to be sad about. This

contrasts greatly with the image of Irish emigration, especially that of the American Wake, that has permeated the Irish consciousness.

Tuke approved of the fact that the Canadian authorities were prepared to look after the people sent to its jurisdiction. Their whole approach was more centralized than the fragmented attitude adopted in the United States. All of the emigrants arriving in Canada came to the port of Quebec, while those disembarking in the United States came to Boston, New York and Philadelphia. The government employed agents in Quebec who met the emigrants, ensured they were well cared for and travelled with them on the trains to their final destinations.⁴¹ This approach helped many emigrants to make up their minds to leave: the actual decision to emigrate was easier said than done. Fear of the unknown created a reluctance amongst many to leave. They desperately needed an organization that would help them when they arrived in North America. Vere Foster and many of his clerical supporters frequently referred to this problem. One can thus understand why those assisted by the Tuke scheme were so happy to leave. Tuke also ensured that the emigrants arrived in Canada at a time which allowed them to settle in before the advent of the harsh winter. Most left Ireland before June and had plenty of time to adjust before winter. According to Tuke's information, Irish immigrants settled in 14 centres in Canada; most of them in southern Ontario, and Manitoba and the Northwest Territories. Still, despite the best efforts of Tuke and the local authorities to persuade them otherwise, as in the case of Carrick on Shannon poor law union, most emigrants decided to settle in the United States rather than in Canada. Over 90 per cent of the 400 emigrants assisted from Carrick on Shannon chose the United States as their destination.⁴²

The emigrants were encouraged to settle in Canada in preference to the United States because it placed less restrictions on the type of person that it was prepared to accept. From the outset the American government was more selective and said it would not take Irish paupers. It would only accept those with friends and relations in the United States who would look after them. This in itself caused problems as some sources in Ireland maintained that criminals and paupers were being sent to Canada.⁴³

While there were many advantages in recommending the emigration of the poorer groups to Manitoba, there were difficulties that had to be considered. The most of important of these was that those who became railway labourers had to survive on the wages of seven months work over a twelve month period because of climatic conditions. Also the Irish had never experienced the severe winter conditions that prevailed in Manitoba.⁴⁴ Furthermore labourers could be expected to travel up to 100 miles in search of work, especially those working on the railways. An additional problem was how the indigenous population in Canada would respond to such a large influx of Irish labourers who undoubtedly would reduce wages in the labour market. Consequently a period of planning and education was required to ensure there would be no hostility between

native and newcomer. Eventually this was overcome by ensuring that the emigrants' itinerary was well-planned by officials on both sides of the Atlantic and that large numbers of Irish immigrants did not settle in the one area. This planning ensured that the Irish were easily assimilated into Canadian society and not ghettoized as did their American counterparts. The success of the scheme depended on this rigorous planning beforehand.

Of the 17,188 people assisted from the 41 unions along the west coast, 5,522 settled in Canada. A perception still prevailed in Ireland that there was little difference between life in Ireland and that in Canada because of both countries' connection with the crown. Also, there were few existing connections between the west of Ireland and Canada. Those who wished to be close to friends and relations wanted to emigrate to the United States. The tendency existed for people in one part of Connacht to go en bloc to the same part of the United States, such as from Clifden to Pittsburg and Cois Fharriaga to Portland, Maine.⁴⁵

While emigration under the 1882 Arrears of Rent Act ended in June 1883, demand remained for another such scheme to be introduced. Consequently, on 25 July 1883 Tuke appealed to the government for further funding to continue the emigration. The Tuke Committee said they were satisfied that in many districts no other form of relief, other than their removal from their holdings, could be provided for the people. There were also indications from the Canadian authorities that they were happy with the scheme, for in May 1883 the Canadian Pacific Railway company unveiled plans to bring over 50,000 Irish people to the Northwest Territory and give each family 100 acres of land. The emigrants would receive implements, horses, cattle, food and all the necessities for starting off life in the area. After three years the emigrant would repay the company \$550.⁴⁶ This positive response resulted in a provision being inserted into the Tramways and Public Companies Act of 1883, making an additional £100,000 available for emigration purposes. This was subsequently reduced to £50,000 because of the insistence of the Irish Parliamentary Party that an equal amount of money be made available for migration purposes within Ireland.

EXTENT OF STATE-AIDED EMIGRATION TO CANADA IN 1883 UNDER THE TERMS OF THE 1882 ARREARS OF RENT ACT.

Poor Law Union	Number sent to Canada	Poor Law Union	Number sent to Canada
*Belmullet	657	*Newport	286
Castlereaigh	193	*Oughterard	240
*Clifden	541	Tralee	331
Galway	489	Tuam	189

Kenmare	195	From 31 other <u>Scheduled Unions</u>	<u>2,241</u>
Killarney	160	Total	5,522

*Indicates those unions administered by the Tuke Committee.

Source: Annual Report of the Local Government Board for Ireland, being the Thirteenth Report Under the Local Government Board (Ireland) Act, H.C. 1884-5, [c 4400], xxxiv, p. 12.

The terms of the 1883 act were largely similar to those of its predecessor, the only differences being that the maximum amount payable was increased to £8 per emigrant and the Tuke Committee assumed responsibility for the schemes in Swinford and parts of Galway poor law unions. However, despite the continued demand for assisted emigration within the west of Ireland, a number of powerful opponents now made their positions known, ultimately contributing to its demise. The most important of these in Ireland were the Catholic Church, the Irish Parliamentary Party, and the local merchants and shopkeepers.⁴⁷

While controversy within Ireland contributed to a diminished enthusiasm for assisted emigration, a change in attitude in the host countries also occurred, especially in Canada, which exacerbated its decline. While the Tuke Committee and the poor law unions differed in their approach to the schemes there were also contrasts within the unions themselves. The objective of the scheme had been to assist poor people in congested districts with holdings under 20 acres to better themselves in North America, but it was claimed that the guardians refused to consider any applications unless they were inmates of the workhouses for at least six months.⁴⁸ Some unions regarded the schemes as a means of curbing their debts and getting rid of long-term paupers, while others adopted a more conscientious approach. The latter were only prepared to accept those who stood a good chance of succeeding in North America and refused to assist people who would become destitute there. Unions, such as Carrick on Shannon, were reluctant participants in the whole process and only became involved because of the demands of the local population who wanted to avail of the opportunity to leave. Such unions adopted a more humanitarian philosophy to the schemes than their more materialistic minded counterparts. Thus it was nearly impossible for the union authorities to send their paupers away, as the euphoria to emigrate became so great that it spurred everybody into wanting to leave. Those who failed to meet the criteria for assistance still demanded that they be settled in America. Poor law unions now had an opportunity to be rid of paupers who otherwise would have been a permanent burden on the rates. Inevitably many were sent who should have remained at home. They were of the wrong calibre and there was little chance of profiting from a colonization program. During 1883 many of these paupers were sent

to the United States and consequently the American authorities adopted a more selective approach to the calibre of emigrant it would take. Those emigrants who were refused admittance into New York were forced to return to Ireland. An examination of a number of cases shows that blame lay with the poor law guardians, as in the case of Mary Brennan and Mary Clifford of Caherciveen Union. Both were workhouse inmates for a long period, and while they had children there were no spouses to support them.⁴⁹ The guardians had broken the guidelines on two counts: the emigrants were not part of a normal family unit and they would probably have become a burden on the state. For a long time they had been paupers, indicating their inability to maintain themselves, even during prosperous periods. Neither had any letters from friends and relations in the United States who would assist them. Considering the numbers that left Ireland under the schemes the numbers that had to return were exaggerated by the opponents of the schemes. Officially, of the 17,000 people assisted to North America in 1883, only 50, or 13 families, were sent home by the American authorities and most of these originated from Kerry and Donegal.⁵⁰

As time went on the poor law unions began to send their paupers to Canada. By mid-1883 the Canadian authorities became more selective in the calibre of person they were prepared to accept. The authorities were becoming aware of the number of Irish poor being sent to Canada, and resorted to the American remedy of returning them to Ireland. This played into the hands of the opponents of the emigration schemes, lending substance to their allegations that only the best of the Irish were being allowed into Canada.

The change in attitude within Canada also became obvious with the investigation by the Canadian government into the conditions of the newly arrived Irish in the Conway St. district of Toronto at the end of 1883. As the winter of 1883-4 was exceptionally severe many of the emigrants in Toronto were totally destitute. It was reported in December that thirty-six families from Galway, May and Kerry were in grave circumstances. Many were woman and children who had remained in the city while their men folk had gone in search of work on the railways. They had not heard from them or received money for many weeks. The extent of their distress can be seen in the newspaper account:

Daily at 12 o'clock the soup kitchen is surrounded and invaded by a mass of men, women and children, the rags which serve as their clothing waving with the wind, and their gaunt cheeks and hollow eyes telling only too truly of their famished condition. They receive the loaf or half-loaf which is to lessen the pangs of hunger of three or four persons for twenty-four hours, and disperse to their wretched homes.⁵¹

The reports failed to differentiate whether the emigrants were assisted by Tuke or other groups. As far as the Canadians were concerned they were all the one and the principle of assisted emigration was the issue, not the manner in which the emigrants were catered for. No cognizance was taken that the Tuke emigrants were better prepared for emigration than most other groups. While they were poor, they certainly were not paupers. Unfortunately, the Canadians were unable to distinguish that they were better equipped than those assisted by the poor law unions. Such reports of poor Irish families in Toronto resurrected memories of the destitute, disease stricken Irish who had arrived in Canada during the Great Famine. Once again the Canadians felt that Ireland was using their country as dumping ground for its problems.⁵² As a result some schemes were abandoned such as those proposed by the Canadian Pacific Railway Company to bring 50,000 Irish emigrants to Canada.

The Tuke Committee attempted to counteract these allegations with an investigation, for Tuke realized that if they went unchecked intending emigrants to Canada would be reluctant to leave. It was important to allay the disquiet of the Canadians. Unfortunately, it was more difficult disprove the accusations as they had originated from an Irish priest in Toronto. Investigators were sent to Toronto and found that only three of the Tuke families were badly off. Nevertheless, Canadian opinion had been swayed against assisted emigration and there was little that Tuke and the other supporters of the schemes could do to counteract this.

The emigrants had in fact experienced difficulties of another nature in rural Canada in 1884, due to the downturn in agricultural activity. The demand for intensive labour had also plunged dramatically because of the increasing mechanization of Canadian agriculture. This resulted in a decline in agricultural labourers' wages, down \$7 to \$257 from the previous year.⁵³ The prairie lands of Canada had thus proved to be unsuitable for the cottier class from the west of Ireland.

The future of the Tuke scheme was now in jeopardy. The divisions between Archbishop John Lynch of Toronto and the Canadian authorities, cannot be overlooked.⁵⁴ In October 1883, Lynch stated that Canada could no longer accommodate poor people. Lynch was supported by the Toronto clergy, for on 12 November they passed a resolution opposing the way that poor families were being dumped in Toronto, with no-one to care for them.⁵⁵ From the outset the archbishop had suspected that the Irish poor law guardians might use the emigration schemes to offload their problems. He maintained that large numbers of Irish people in Canada actually fell away from their faith because of a shortage of priests to administer to them. Lynch also pointed out that the emigrants arrived in North America in poor condition and were then subjected to lodgings in loathsome tenements. He also claimed that the environment was unfavourable to them as they were not used to working

outdoors in rural areas in an alien climate.⁵⁶ This provided the west of Ireland bishops with the required ammunition to launch an all out attack on the schemes.

It thus came as no surprise when the Canadian government decided in March 1884 to withdraw from the assisted emigration project. Its decision was influenced by the manner in which emigrants were apparently dumped in Canada, often in a wretched state. The Tuke Committee was left with little alternative but to pass a resolution on 13 June 1884 calling on the government to suspend the schemes until there was an upturn in the Canadian economy. There is little doubt but that the Canadian government's statement prompted this action, as Tuke was not prepared to place all the emphasis on settlement in the United States.

The emigration scheme under the Tramways and Public Companies Act of 1883 was not as successful as those of the previous years. A total of 6,348 emigrants were aided, 2,678 by the Tuke Committee. Of these only 750 (11.8 per cent), 178 from the areas supervised by Tuke, went to Canada. The problems of the winter of 1883-4 and opposition from within Ireland and Canada had made Canada an unattractive area for settlement.

EXTENT OF STATE-AIDED EMIGRATION TO CANADA IN 1884 UNDER THE TERMS OF THE 1883 TRAMWAY AND PUBLIC COMPANIES ACT.

Poor Law Union	No. of emigrants to to Canada	Poor Law Union	No. of emigrants to Canada
*Belmullet	24	*Newport	13
Castelreagh	8	*Oughterard	0
*Clifden	26	*Swinford	115
Galway	0	Tralee	169
Kenmare	140	From other 31	
		<u>Scheduled Unions</u>	<u>207</u>
Killarney	48	Total	750

*Denotes Unions administered by the Tuke Committee.

Source: Annual Report of the Local Government Board for Ireland; being the Thirteenth Report under the Local Government Board (Ireland) Act, H.C., 1884-5, [c 4400], xxxiv, p. 12.

The schemes of the 1880s must be regarded as a missed opportunity to establish emigration to Canada on a more permanent basis. A system had been put in place since 1882 which could have been used to help undecided emigrants settle in Canada where they would be properly catered for. However, sending emigrants through the poor law unions to Canada proved to be a

mistake and undermined the whole assisted emigration concept. Paupers were aided without reference to their character and without securing employment for them prior to their departure. This created resentment within the host country, and must be regarded as a short term expedient which did little to inspire confidence in the schemes. The co-operation of the colonial authorities, especially with the poor law guardians, was not sought and the emigrants were never submitted to them for inspection. The sending of emigrants to take possession of virgin land, without provision being made to maintain them until the first harvest was gathered, resulted in many becoming destitute. The Canadian authorities were too willing to accept unsuitable emigrants for land who were unable to adopt to the new farming techniques of the region. It saw the poverty in Ireland during 1879-82 as an opportunity to colonize the new lands of Manitoba, when it was clear that the people of the west of Ireland were unsuitable. Too much was being attempted in too short a period of time. A more co-ordinated approach over a longer period may have brought about more positive and long term results. Such a system may also have stifled the widespread opposition that killed the schemes in both Ireland and Canada. The overall effect was to seriously diminish Canada's potential as a base for Irish emigrants. This was at a time when the demand to help emigration remained, evident from Vere Foster's correspondence in the spring of 1884.⁵⁶

The assisted emigration schemes failed in its objective of initiating a chain migration process from the west of Ireland to Canada. While the level of emigration from Mayo and Galway to Canada between 1885 and 1889 was higher than during the 1870s, accounting for 488 persons out of a total exodus of 38,690, it never achieved the levels that one would have expected from the numbers that left between 1882 and 1884. As whole families left few close relations remained at home who would ask for assistance to emigrate. As people left in a family group there was little need to keep up contact with Ireland. In those instances where the emigrants continued to correspond with friends and relations at home it tended to be of a short-term nature. Once the emigrant assumed new responsibilities, such as marriage and a family of his own, contact with Ireland finally ended.

The assisted emigration schemes to Canada must not be regarded as a complete failure. One of its principal achievements was that it provided the people of the west of Ireland with another avenue in which to overcome destitution through emigrant remittances. From an early stage the emigrants from Mayo and Galway remitted money to their relations in Ireland. In most instances they realized the privileged position they had been given and felt a duty to help those who remained in Ireland and were less fortunate than themselves. It was estimated that in 1883-4 £12,000 was received in Clifden union, much of this coming from Canada, from those assisted by the Tuke Committee.

NOTES

- ¹ See Cecil J. Houston and William J. Smyth, *Irish Emigration and Canadian Settlement: Patterns, Links and Letters* (Toronto 1990); Bruce S. Elliott, *Irish Migrants in the Canadas: A New Approach* (Kingston and Montreal, and Belfast 1988); Donald H. Atkinson, *The Irish in Ontario: A Study in Rural History* (Kingston and Montreal 1984); Thomas P. Power (ed.), *The Irish in Atlantic Canada, 1780-1900* (Frederickton, New Brunswick 1991).
- ² Donalk MacKay, *Flight from Famine: The Coming of the Irish to Canada* (Toronto 1990), pp. 62-116; Houston and Smyth, *Irish Emigration and Canadian Settlement*, pp. 47-9; Jean S. McGill, *A Pioneer History of the County of Lanark* (Toronto 1968), pp. 89-101.
- ³ See N.L.I., MS 27,738, *Lord Palmerston Papers*, Letters of Lord Palmerston to J. Kincaid, dated 10 Feb. 1862. Palmerston was prepared to give each person on his estate £5 if they would emigrate to Canada.
- ⁴ See Eilis Ellis, "State-aided emigration schemes from the Crown estates in Ireland c. 1850" in *Analecta Hibernica*, xxii (1960), p. 334.
- ⁵ See Houston and Smyth, *Irish Emigration and Canadian Settlement*, pp. 99-103; Gerald J. Stortz, "Archbishop Lynch and New Ireland: An unfulfilled dream for Canada's North West" in the *Canadian Historical Review*, xviii (Oct. 1982), p. 82.
- ⁶ See evidence of Col James Daly and James Kilmartin in *Report of the commission of inquiry into the working of the landlord and tenant (Ireland) Act, 1870, and the amending acts; with the evidence, appendices and index, (Bessborough Commission)*, H.C. 1881, [c 2770], xviii, p. 652, q. 21,002; J.H. Tuke, "Ought emigration from Ireland to be assisted" in the *Contemporary Review* (April 1882), p. 4.
- ⁷ S.H. Cousens, "The regional variations in population changes from Ireland, 1861-'81" in *Economic History Review*, xvii (Dec. 1964), p. 311.
- ⁸ J.H. Tuke, 'Emigration from Ireland', in the *Contemporary Review* (April 1882), xli, pp. 695-700.
- ⁹ *Connaught Telegraph*, 8 April, (1882), p. 5; Tuke, *With the emigrants*, p. 136; For an account of the condition of the people in Oughterard and Carraroe in June 1882, see *Nation*, 10 June (1882), p. 2.
- ¹⁰ See Gerard Moran, "Famine and the land war: Relief and distress in Mayo, 1879-'81, pt. 2" in *Cathair na Mart*, vi (1986), p. 123; *Report of the joint committee, selected from the committees of the Duchess of Marlborough Relief Fund and the Mansion House for relief of distress in Ireland, to administer the sum of 100,000 dollars, voted by the parliament of the dominion of Canada, towards the relief of distress in Ireland*, H.C. 1881 (326) lxxv, pp. 3-25.

- ¹¹ *Hansard.*, (June, 1882), ccliv, col. 652; P.A. Sheehan, "The effects of emigration on the Irish church," in *the Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, iii, no. 18, (Oct. 1882), p. 605; Galway Vindicator, 27 May (1882), p. 3.
- ¹² See *Boston Pilot*, 26 Feb. 1881.
- ¹³ On the opposition of American bishops, and especially Lynch, to Irish immigration see Stortz, *Lynch and New Ireland*, pp. 614-7; Houston and Smyth, *Irish Emigration and Canadian Settlement*, pp. 74-7; Toronto Diocesan Archives, *Archbishop Lynch Papers*, LAE0701, "The evils of wholesale and improvident emigration from Ireland."
- ¹⁴ Stortz, *Lynch and New Ireland*, p. 613.
- ¹⁵ M. McNeill, Vere Foster, 1819-1900: *An Irish Benefactor* (Belfast 1971), pp. 78; 190-1.
- ¹⁶ T.W. Wemyss Rewid, *The Life of the Rt. Hon. William Edward Forster*, ii (London, 1888), p. 274; W.P. O'Brien, *The Great Irish Famine in Ireland and a Retrospect of the Fifty Years, 1845-'95* (London 1896), p. 178; Edward Fry, *James Hack Tuke, A Memoir* (London 1899), p. 133; Tuke, "Irish Emigration" in *The Nineteenth Century* (Feb. 1881), p. 359.
- ¹⁷ For Vere Foster's trip to North America in 1881 see N.L.I., MS 13,552, *William O'Brien Papers*, Vere Foster speech in Belfast, 22 Jan. 1883.
- ¹⁸ Tuke, *Irish Emigration*, p. 358.
- ¹⁹ N.L.I., *Despatches from the United States Consuls in Dublin, 1870-1906*, xiii (1870-1881), Report from B.H. Barrows to First Assistant Secretary of State, dated 16 Dec. 1879.
- ²⁰ Tuke, *Irish Emigrants*, p. 364.
- ²¹ W.P. O'Brien, *op. cit.* p. 178; *Nation*, 8 Apr. 1882, p. 6.
- ²² For an account of Tuke's operations in Clifden between April and June 1882, see Gerard Moran, "James Hack Tuke and assisted emigration from Mayo and Galway in the 1880s" in Mary Clancy, ed. *The Emigrant Experience* (Galway 1991), pp. 73-7; Idem, "From Connaught to North America: State-aided emigration from Galway, 1879-1890" in Raymond Gillespie and Gerard Moran (eds.), *Galway: History and Society* (Dublin, forthcoming).
- ²³ N.L.I., MS 13,552, *William O'Brien Papers*, Mr. Vere Foster's Second Irish Female Fund, 1880-'83, pp. 2-3.
- ²⁴ *Reports and Papers relating to the Proceedings of the Committee of "Tuke's Fund" for Assisting Emigration from Ireland during the Years 1882, 1883, 1884* (London 1884), p. 175.
- ²⁵ *Emigration from Ireland; being the Report of the Committee of Mr. Tuke's Fund* (June 1882), p. 20.
- ²⁶ Fry, *op.cit.*, p. 187.
- ²⁷ *Hansard*, 3rd series, cclxvi, [27 Feb. 1883], col. 1069.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, cclxxi, [6 Jul. 1882], cols 1654-6, 1666-7.

- ²⁹ Sydney Buxtan, "Mr. Tuke and his Work" in *The Contemporary Review* (Jun. 1896), p. 867.
- ³⁰ *Emigration from Ireland, being the Second Report of the Committee for "Mr. Tuke's Fund"* (London, Ju. 1883), p. 97.
- ³¹ Ulster still provided most of the Irish emigrants who settled in Canada in this period, with 6,725 or 71 per cent coming from that region.
- ³² *Emigration from Ireland; being the Second Report of the Committee for "Mr. Tuke's Fund,"* p. 6.
- ³³ See N.L.I., MS 13,552, *William O'Brien Papers*. Mr. Vere Foster's Second Irish Female Fund, 1880-3, p. 3.
- ³⁴ See *Hansard* [23 Apr. 1883], cclxxviii, col. 870.
- ³⁵ See Gerald J. Stortz, "The Catholic Church and Irish nationalism in Toronto, 1850-1900," in Robert O'Driscoll and Lorna Reynolds (eds.), *The Untold Story: The Irish in Canada* (Toronto 1987), pp. 872-3. The extent in which Irish Catholics in Canada showed themselves to be more loyal to the British Crown than their counterparts in the United States can also be seen in the case of one of the leading Irish Canadian newspapers, *The Toronto Mirror*; see Curtis Fahey, "Irish Catholics and the political culture of Upper Canada: *The Toronto Mirror*," in O'Driscoll and Reynolds, op. cit., pp. 816-9.
- ³⁶ For the importance of emigrant letters to relations at home in enticing them to settle in North America see Houston and Smyth, *Irish Emigration and Canadian Settlement*, pp. 92-5.
- ³⁷ *Emigration from Ireland, being the Second Report of the Committee for "Mr. Tuke's Fund,"* p. 6.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 30-1.
- ³⁹ *London Times*, 11 June. 1883.
- ⁴⁰ N.L.I., MS 13,552, *William O'Brien Papers*. Mr. Vere Foster's Second Irish Female Fund, 1880-3, p.
- ⁴¹ See N.L.I., *Despatches from United States Consuls in Cork, 1800-1906*, ix. Jan. 1883-June. 1886, no. 49, Enclosures in 6, A. O'Connor, Carrick on Shannon Union to J. Piatt, dated 13 July 1883.
- ⁴² N.L.I., *Despatches from the United States Consuls in Cork, 1800-1906*, ix, no. 49, enclosure no. 4, John C. Minahan (Limerick) to Jon J. Piatt, dated 16 Jul. 1883.
- ⁴³ For the climatic difficulties that Irish emigrants had to endure in Canada see Houston and Smyth, *Irish Emigration and Canadian Settlement*, pp. 135-7.
- ⁴⁴ For the level of emigration from Cois Fharraige to Portland, Maine, see Seamus Grimes and Michael Connelly, "The migration link between Cois Fharraige and Portland, Maine, 1880s to 1920s" in *Irish Geography*, xxii, (1989), pp. 22-30.
- ⁴⁵ *Boston Pilot*, 2 Jun. 1883, p. 1, 1 Sept. 1883, p. 1

- ⁴⁶ For an account of these groups' opposition to assisted emigration see Moran, "Tuke and Assisted Emigration," pp. 85-7; Idem, 'From Connaught to North America', (forthcoming).
- ⁴⁷ See N.L.I., *Despatches from U.S. Consul in Cork to Washington, 1800-1906*, ix, 1883-6, no. 24, John J. Piatt to John Davis (Washington), dated 25 July 1883.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, ix, 1883-6, no. 49, enclosure no. 2.
- ⁴⁹ *Annual Report of the Local Government Boards for Ireland; being the twelfth Report*, H.C. 1884, [c4051], xxxviii, p. 50; Hansard, cclxxxii, [27 July. 1883]. col. 780.
- ⁵⁰ *Nation*, 5 Apr. 1884, p. 5; *Tuam News*, 11 Apr. 1884, p. 4.
- ⁵¹ See MacKay, *Flight from Famine*, pp. 288-9.
- ⁵² *Nation*, 27 Sept. 1884, p. 2.
- ⁵³ For Lynch's change in attitude towards assisted emigration, see Stortz, *Lynch and New Ireland*, pp. 622-3.
- ⁵⁴ Toronto Diocesan Archives, *Lynch Papers*, LAE 0516, memorial from parish priests of Toronto to Lynch, dated 12 Nov. 1883.
- ⁵⁵ *Galway Express*, 20 Oct. 1883, p. 3; *Nation*, 11 Dec. 1883; *Tuam News*, 7 Dec. 1883; *Boston Pilot*, 22 Dec. 1883, p. 1.