

Marshall Letter

1824

[Letter from Lanark Settlement Superintendent William Marshall to Lord Dalhousie, Secretary for War & the Colonies concerning the settlement of Peter Robinson's Irish immigrants in the Township of Ramsay.]

Lanark, 25 April 1824

My Lord:

I have the honour to acknowledge your Lordship's letter of the 10 April, which only reached me the 22nd.

The people Mr Robinson brought with him were generally of as bad a description that I could not entertain a very favourable opinion of an experiment which appeared to me better calculated for the benefit of Ireland, than to promise any advantage to Canada, excepting so far as regards the money expended in support of this undertaking.

Some of them have already left the Settlement and no doubt many others will follow, when the rations cease, and I trust will find their way to the U. States.

A great portion have been very idle during the winter, lingering round the depot in the Township of Ramsay, selling their rations for rum, and scenes of drunkenness and turbulence have been very common in that quarter.

They league together and commit frequent acts of violence towards the peaceful settlers frequenting the mill or residing in that neighbourhood. A system of terror seems to be established and no person is safe who opposes, or informs against them. A constable cannot venture to serve a warrant in the ordinary way, and on a late occasion the Deputy Sheriff was accompanied by an armed party to arrest some of them who had been guilty of an assault of a bad description.

Mr Robinson appears to have been very zealous and attentive, but I am afraid too indulgent, which probably has rendered them more difficult to control. He seems to have had a very difficult part to play in this business. He was aware of their turbulent character and thought to gain them by kindness. He knew also of great anxiety of Government to promote this emigration, and he had good reason to suppose that unless people sent home favourable accounts of their situation and treatment none others would follow. He informed me such was the infatuation it was with difficulty they were persuaded to embark. They were afraid of being entrapped on board a ship for some horrible purpose.

They are all housed and have been supplied with blankets and implements from the stores here by order of the Lieutenant Governor. They arrived in a miserable destitute condition and Mr Robinson found it necessary to supply them with shoes and other articles of clothing.

They are with two or three exceptions of the lowest class. Indeed, they are all of Bucks(?) people from the County of Cork. They frequently make a boast of this and seem to glory in it. They are chiefly settled in Ramsay, Huntly and Pakenham.

One bad consequence of their coming among us is that the Orangemen are roused and I am informed steps are taken to form a Lodge in Perth.

Mr Robinson who embarked from New York 1st March is expected to return in Summer with 1,500. They will it is said be sent to some Townships in the North of Midland district near the Marmora Iron Works. I should consider it highly dangerous to settle so great a number in any one place. It would be safer to scatter them as much as possible.

I have thus, My Lord, expressed my honest sentiments regarding these people founded upon the general reports of their conduct, yet notwithstanding my unfavourable opinion I have some hopes that when, on the ceasing of their rations, they are left to their own resources, the worst disruptors will leave the country and the others discovering their advantages in becoming proprietors of the soil may change their habits and become peaceable Settlers.

I am glad to say that the people under my own charge are improving their conditions. A considerable quantity of wheat was sold out of the settlement this winter and none can feel want unless where misfortunes have occurred. They are quiet and peaceable in their conduct and seem to have entirely forgotten their old politics.

My Lord

I have the honour to be

Your Lordships obt. servant

W. Marshall

To The Earl of Dalhousie