

Journey To New Lanark

Earl of Buckinghamshire - 1821

[The following reminiscence of the voyage and inland journey from Glasgow to the Lanark Society settlement, appeared in the December 23, 1892 edition of the Perth Courier. The author, who arrived as a child in 1821, is unknown having signed only as 'Pioneer'.]

In the years 1818 and 1819 there was a great agitation both in England and Scotland among the working classes for reform. Thousands who had been living on the labors of generations then unborn caused quite a glut in the labor markets of the country. Hundreds were groaning under it and in order to improve the conditions of the working class the cry of vote by ballot, extension of the franchise and repeal of the Corn Laws was the universal demand of the Reform Party at that time. All of this has been conceded to the people long ago but not until several noblemen fell martyrs to the good of their country and fellow man.

After the termination of the French and American wars the government of Great Britain, in order to colonize what was then called Upper Canada, entered into a plan of sending out emigrants to Canada, giving them 100 acres of land and rations for a year but that plan did not work well.

However, a few thinking individuals conceived the idea of emigration to Canada, met and discussed the matter and after little societies were formed in the city of Glasgow and neighboring towns in the County of Lanark, Scotland. After being organized by electing one of themselves president to do the business of the society, it was resolved to petition the government to see what they would do in the matter.

Accordingly, a petition was drawn up and, after being well recommended by members of Parliament and others as to the respectability of the petitioners, it was then duly laid before the government.

In reply the government made the following proposal: they agreed to take them from the Clyde to their destination in Upper Canada, give each male emigrant 21 years or older 100 acres of land, a little store of implements to begin with and ten pounds per head, children half that amount to be paid in two installments as soon as the parties were located on the land. The money was to be paid back after ten years, the government retaining the deed as security for the same. It was likewise stipulated that each passenger pay into a fund three pounds per head for the purpose of provisioning the ships, children one half that amount and that each passenger be allowed a certain weight of luggage per head.

This last clause caused many to abandon the society altogether and to go out by other ships where they could get their goods and effects taken along with them but the majority agreed to the government's proposals and the presiding officer was authorized to notify the government to that effect.

The British government then had the townships of Ramsay, Dalhousie, Lanark and North Sherbrooke surveyed and laid out for the immigrants. The village of Lanark was to be the grand stopping place for immigrants when they arrived. So early in the year of 1820 a ship was sent up called the *Prompt* and set sail from the Clyde in the month of April, and after a journey of about three months they were landed at Lanark Village or rather where Lanark Village was supposed to be as it was then an unbroken wilderness. They suffered much and I have been told that the snow was on the ground before some of them got into their shanties. But, as we did not come out until the following year, I will confine my remarks principally to what took place under my own knowledge and what I have been told by my parents and others I can rely on.

So, in the year 1821, two ships were sent up called the *George Canning* and the *Buckingham* [Earl of Buckinghamshire], each ship to carry 600 emigrants. We came out in the *Canning* and left the city of Glasgow early in April on a steamer and were landed at Greenock where a ship was awaiting us. After a day or two engaged in taking on supplies and being examined by authorities and found to be sufficiently supplied we were then granted liberty to sail.

The order being given the anchor was weighed and we set sail on our wearisome journey to cross the Atlantic. On the second day out all hands took the last lingering look at the blue mountains of auld Scotland and on the third day a little gale sprang up, the ship sailed badly and the seasickness began to set in and vomiting was the order of the day. There was much grumbling amidst the women but after a few days the sickness began to wear off although there were some that got sick with every gale that blew.

With regard to our fare, it consisted of meal porridge morning and evening. A man stood over it with a large hand spike and stirred the mess while another man shoveled in the meal. After being duly cooked the order was given "come on boys" and each got their allowance according to the number of their tickets. They likewise got their allowance of black strap (West Indian) molasses for the porridge and tea biscuits for the day. They also got their allowance of water but, as each family had little private stores of their own, by getting a little water warmed at the galley they could make things a little more palatable.

Our beds were arranged all around the ship each passenger being allowed so much space. They were two tiers deep and all luggage was piled in the center so you can easily see we were very much crowded.

Our captain was a man of very sound judgment he gave every encouragement to harmless amusements, but no rowdyism was allowed and the greatest harmony prevailed. The weather was generally good. Only on one or two occasions when the sea broke over the ships was the order given to shut down hatches which caused great alarm between decks as we were then in darkness but as soon as the water was swept away the light of day was admitted again.

By this time, we were nearing the banks of Newfoundland and we passed two large icebergs that had broken loose from the northern shore and were driving south to destiny. A few days later one of the sailors called out "land in sight". There was a big rush to see America but they were all disappointed as it was only visible from the mast head but in a day or two it was visible from both sides. Shortly a little boat was seen approaching us. This brought a pilot who came on board and was given charge of the

ship by the Captain and after a pleasant sail up the St. Lawrence we cast anchor opposite the city of Quebec after being blown by the winds of heaven and the craft of man for seven weeks and three days. There was great rejoicing by all hands. Boats were lowered and there was a big rush to the city to get fresh supplies.

On the day following, a large river steamer came along side and after being all transferred bag and baggage we set sail for Montreal the head of the shipping navigation at that time. It was a splendid boat everything was bright and clean and looked like a palace in comparison with the old dingy *Canning* we had so long been confined in. In due time we arrived at Montreal where a fleet of boats awaited to take us to Prescott .

Each boat was manned by two Frenchmen one on the bow and the other in the stern the men plying the oars; and when we came to the rapids long ropes were attached to the boats and the men going ahead hauled up the boat while the Frenchmen guided it through amongst the boulders. At night we landed, did a little cooking and slept as best we could some on the bank and some under the tarpaulin on the boats.

After several days of such navigation we at length arrived at Prescott when we were huddled into sheds and old barns and every place that could offer a little shelter. Here we had to remain until a sufficient number of carts and wagons, horses and oxen could be collected to take us to Lanark and when ready we started out on our long paddle through the mud to our destination.

Nothing particular happened en route only the heavy rains made the roads most miserable. One anecdote I have been told. A witty teamster with a yolk of oxen and wagon got stuck in the mud. He was standing on the banks indulging in a volley of oaths at his miserable condition when the minister came along. "What's that you are about" the minister asked. "Preaching the gospel in the wilderness by God" the teamster replied. The minister only laughed but went to work and helped him out of the mud. I think we were three or four days in getting through to Lanark when we found some old acquaintances who gave us a hearty welcome.

Pioneer