

ECHOES OF 1818

A tale of emigration

THE writing of this article is a direct consequence of events that took place in the early 1800s. It is the true story of two brothers, Peter and Edward Nowlan who left the Ballon-Rathoe area sometime around 1818, and eventually made a life for themselves in the wilds of New Brunswick. This story would perhaps never have been written were it not for the fact that, at some time during Peter and Edward's lifetime, a letter came from Ireland addressed to Peter, the eldest of the two. As the story goes, neither Peter nor Edward could afford to pay the postage-due for the letter and hence it was left unclaimed. No further letters were received and the story of the unclaimed letter was passed down from generation to generation. The author of this article, a descendant of Peter, was always struck by the inherent sadness of this story and determined to research further his Irish roots. What follows is an account of Peter and Edward's journey to Canada, their early adventures and eventual settlement.

FACTORS INFLUENCING EMIGRATION

1. Aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815)

During the American Revolutionary War, the religious affiliation requirements for British soldiers had been relaxed and so it was that, in 1803, when war broke out between Britain and France, many more Irish men than ever before did volunteer or were "pressed" into service to fight on the Continent. By 1815, when hostilities finally ended with the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo, thousands of Irishmen were serving in the British Army and Navy.

Also, during the many long years of war, the need to supply food to the armies had led to increased tillage of

the land and, in Ireland, a focus on growing potatoes. This in turn had prompted most of the Irish rural population to choose the potato as its new staple food, a decision that proved to be an unfortunate one. From 1816 to 1818, particularly bad winters resulted in failed potato crops and in those two years one person in eight contracted smallpox or typhus. In 1817 alone, it is believed that between 50,000 and 65,000 died as a result of famine or famine-related diseases. Homecoming soldiers and sailors found no work and starvation was staring them in the face.

2. Aftermath of the War of 1812 in America (1812-1814)

The War of 1812 had pitted the emerging United States against the British North American Colonies. Although most of the hostilities had been focused along the border between the United States and Upper Canada (Ontario), the war had served to alert Britain to the real danger of invasion from the south, along the 1000-mile of undefended border its Colonies shared with the United States.

Concurrently faced with the problem of what to do with soldiers returning from the Napoleonic Wars, Britain soon realized that some of the returning soldiers might be used to build up defences in British North America. Already in 1815, a proclamation had been posted in Edinburgh inviting unemployed soldiers and young men to resettle to Upper Canada (Ontario) or Lower Canada (Quebec). Free passage, a 100-acre lot and provisions for 6 months were offered. This generous offer, with minor adjustments, was maintained until 1819 by which time the British government had realized that the wished-for emigration would occur whether it provided assistance or not.

During this period of assisted emigration, it is believed that as many as 13,000 people boarded ships to Halifax, Nova Scotia, the closest mainland port of entry for the British Colonies in North America. According to a list compiled in 'Ross in November 1817, approximately 5,500 people were preparing to emigrate from the counties of Carlow and Wexford.

Besides the emigration efforts of the British government, colonial governments themselves were also doing their part to attract settlers to their corner of the world. This was certainly the case for the government of New Brunswick who, in 1816, approved four thousand dollars to support immigration, and subsequently hired ships to bring out settlers. To prospective settlers they offered 100 acre lots at very low prices and, as an added enticement, each applicant, if desired, could pay for his lot by working on roads which, at the time, were practically non-existent in the province.

3. An Active Lumber Trade with British North America

At the outset of the Napoleonic wars, Britain realized that its heavy dependence on Baltic timber made would make it vulnerable to an economic blockade by the Baltic countries. To prevent this from happening, in 1807, the British parliament placed a 275% levy on all Baltic timber imports. Overnight, timber from British North America became much more cost-effective and by 1809 Canadian timber exports to Britain had more than tripled from 27,000 loads to 90,000 loads. In 1818, when Peter and Edward emigrated, the high



by **ROGER NOWLAN**

tariffs on timber imports from the Baltic region were still being levied and the timber trade with British North America was in full swing, employing approximately a quarter of Britain's merchant tonnage.

At the time, the main lumber route between the British Isles and British North America was the one from Liverpool, England, to Quebec City in Lower Canada (Quebec) with a few stops along the way. On an outbound journey, lumber ships were loaded with manufactured goods for sale in the Colonies stopping at ports along the south coast of Ireland to pick up men and provisions (e.g. at the ports of Wexford, Youghall or Cork). Once across the Atlantic, ships would generally stopover in Charlottetown Harbour to take on provisions and to unload some of the goods before finally heading on to Quebec City. Once in Quebec City, any remaining goods were unloaded and the ship loaded with lumber for the return journey.

4. New Brunswick, a Favoured Destination for Emigrants

In 1818, the Province of New Brunswick was a prime destination for emigrants from the British Isles. Only in the mid-to-late 1820s did the tide of emigration shift to the 'Canadas' (Upper and Lower Canada, i.e. Ontario and Quebec) and the United States.

In an emigration brochure from the early 1800s, New Brunswick is

described as follows:

... "a great part of the country is still a complete wilderness, but the soil in general is extremely rich and fertile"

... "the immense forests which cover the country are principally composed of pine, birch, beech, and maple, with some others; the trees are of enormous size, and considered the finest in America; the land is very level, having few hills, and none that can be properly called mountains."

... "This province is well watered by numerous rivers, the principal of which are, St. John's, Miramichi, Nipishight, Magadavic, Richibucto, Oromocto, Petit Coudiac, and several others, which are navigable for a considerable distance into the country."

... "the scenery on the rivers, lakes, and cataracts, is picturesque and beautiful - often wild and romantic. Wild animals are very numerous in the woods, and amongst others are bears, moose, deer, foxes, tiger-cats, racoons, porcupines, martins, beavers, otters, hares, weasels, etc. etc. Fish is very abundant on the coast, and in the rivers and lakes. Cod, haddock, mackerel, salmon, shad, bass, etc. etc. are the principal, but there are many others."

... "The government price of land in the forest is 3 shillings per acre, but improved land can be had in various parts at moderate rates,

near the chief towns land is very valuable, and brings very high prices."

... "The staple trade consists of exports of timber of every description in gross and in plank, staves, &c., salted fish, and ship building."

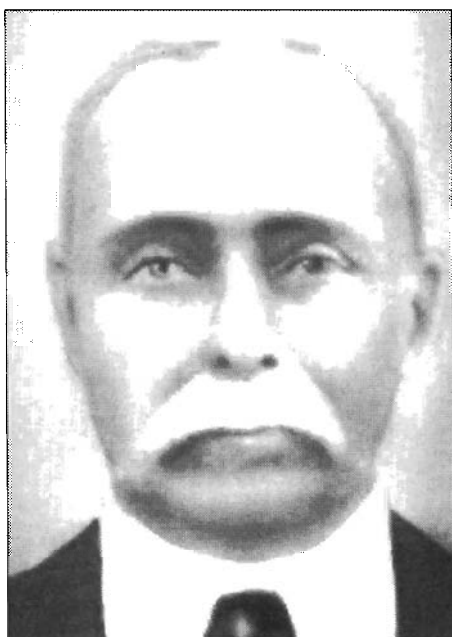
With such a glowing report on what awaited the new emigrant, it is no wonder that many Irish were enticed to leave their homeland. Although, to the modern reader, the report may sound somewhat exaggerated, the author believes that, for the time period, it was a fairly accurate description.

THE JOURNEY

Peter and Edward do not appear to have been part of any organized emigration effort although talk related to these organized emigration efforts must have surely influenced their decision to emigrate. Out of the 5500 people mentioned earlier, preparing to emigrate from Counties Carlow and Wexford in November 1817, thirty-four are known to have been Nowlans.

In Peter and Edward's case, family tradition holds that they found passage to the Colonies working on a lumber ship and that, once there, they jumped ship. Family lore further suggests that they boarded the lumber ship in Cork but it is not known exactly where they jumped ship. An educated guess, however, would be Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island (PEI), which, at the time, was a usual stopover for lumber ships bound for Quebec City. Two further pieces of circumstantial evidence support this theory. Indeed, in one account of the brothers' arrival, mention is made that they came over to New Brunswick from Prince Edward Island. There is also a land petition made by Edward Newland to the New Brunswick government in December 1819 wherein he states that he arrived in the 'Colonies' in 1818. The use of the word 'Colonies', instead of the generally expected word Province, strongly suggests that he first arrived in a neighbouring Colony/Province such as Prince Edward Island.

The port of Richibucto-Village where Peter and Edward first resided is not far from Charlottetown, PEI,



William, a son of Peter Nowlan(d)



Marie Marthe, a daughter of Edward



Logging in New Brunswick late 1800s

and it is surmised that, after jumping ship, Peter and Edward moved on to this out-of-the-way village in the neighbouring Colony of New Brunswick seeking to avoid being picked up by the Charlottetown port authorities.

THE EARLY YEARS IN THE RICHIBUCTO AREA

After their arrival, Peter and Edward stayed a few years in the Richibucto area before moving on. In those early years, like many of the new arrivals, they most likely worked on the docks in the small port of Richibucto-Village or in the nearby larger port of Richibucto, loading and unloading the many ships, which were coming and going. It is also possible that they worked in one of the many lumber mills that were cropping up along the Richibucto River and its tributaries. They may also have been involved in the local fishing and ship-building industries that were very active in the area at the time.

Richibucto-Village, the area of New Brunswick where Peter and Edward first resided, is on the south side of the Richibucto River close to Indian Island so named because of its long-standing Micmac population. In

fact, in earlier days, the whole area at the mouth of the Richibucto River had been a summer gathering place for Micmac Indians and early settlers had avoided the area judging it to be too risky for business and settlement. However, by the early 1800s, more adventurous settlers had encroached on their territory, thereby creating a very uneasy tension between the settlers and the local Micmac population.

In the years prior to 1818, there had been several flare-ups of violence. In one case, a settler had brought prize-winning sheep from Scotland only to have them killed by wild dogs. These wild dogs, however, belonged to the local Micmacs and they retaliated by cutting the throats of the settler's oxen and threatening to ambush the settlers. Only by skillfully surrounding the women and children of the local Micmacs and threatening to harm them did the settlers avoid further retaliation and end the feud.

It is not known when the tension between the Micmacs and the settlers finally did ease but it certainly still existed when Peter and Edward arrived on the scene, as attested by an account handed down from genera-

tion to generation. As the story goes, one day, as Peter and a friend were walking through the woods, several Micmac Indians took after them. Peter managed to escape, hiding in a hollow tree trunk but his friend was less fortunate. From a distance, Peter heard him call out "Peter, I'm dead!"

SETTLING-DOWN IN THE BUCTOUCHE AREA

Within two years of their arrival, Peter and Edward began looking for land on which to settle. Already in December 1819, Edward and his future brother-in-law, Olivier LeBlanc, had applied for land a bit further south in the area of Buctouche, but their first petition seems to have gone unanswered. A second attempt made in October 1822 proved successful and by December 1824 Edward had clear title to a 200-acre lot along the upper reaches of the Buctouche River in an area now known as Ste-Marie-de-Kent. In the meantime, he had also married Isabelle LeBlanc, Olivier's sister, in Richibucto-Village on January 14, 1822. Given the wilderness state of the property it is likely that Isabelle initially stayed in Richibucto-Village and only joined her husband and brother Olivier once some of the land had been cleared and the beginnings of a house built.

Peter, the older of the two brothers, does not appear to have petitioned for land in those early years. Rather, it seems that he either inherited or purchased a piece of land from his father-in-law. On August 25, 1828, in nearby Richibucto, Peter had married Modeste Jaillet, the daughter of Jean-Pierre Jaillet, a pioneer of the Buctouche area who owned a piece of land at the mouth of the Little Buctouche river. It was on this piece of land that Peter settled. Although the land had initially been granted in 1805 to his father-in-law, Jean-Pierre Jaillet (alias John Shayer), in later land records Peter Nowlan is listed as the owner.

Edward Nowlan (1798-1871) and Isabelle LeBlanc (1794-1861) had five children: Marie-Marthe (1822), Ursule (1824), Scholastique (1826), Pierre (1827) and Jacques (1832).

Peter Nowlan (1796-1878) and Modeste Jaillet (1800-1883) had four children: Thomas (1831), John

(1834), William-James (1837) and Pierre (1840).

Both Peter and Edward seem to have chosen mixed farming (hay, potatoes, vegetables, chickens, etc.) as their main preoccupation, although they probably also did some logging and fishing to meet their families' needs.

LIVING IN A "LUMBERIN' COUNTRY"

By 1818, when Peter and Edward appeared on the scene, logging and lumbering were being pursued along all of New Brunswick's major rivers and on most of the smaller rivers including the Richibucto and Buctouche rivers.

During the winter months, trees would be cut and hauled over the snow to the nearest river system. In the spring, after the ice had gone from the rivers, the 'drive' began. Logs from all the various tributaries of a river system would be floated down-river forming one large mass of logs that twisted and turned with the current. Sometimes men could also be seen jumping from log to log, pushing on the logs to prevent them from jamming. Eventually, all these logs would be collected at a 'boom' made up of large logs chained together and fastened to 'stanchions' built at various spots in the river. Mills were usually situated close to the booms and, throughout the summer months, the logs would be cut to proper lengths, or sliced into squared timber. The milled wood would then be floated further down the river either as large rafts or on scows for eventual loading onto lumber ships or use by shipyards.

The place in Ste-Marie-de-Kent where Edward and Isabelle settled later became known as Kent Boom, indicating that, at one time, a 'boom' stretched across the river, catching those logs which were floated down from the upper reaches of the Buctouche river. Nearby, but across the river and a bit upriver, is a place called Coates Mills where, at the time, some of the logs captured by the 'Kent Boom' were processed.

All this logging activity so close to Edward's property must surely have attracted his attention and that of his brother Peter who, in 1845, purchased 200 acres of land in Coates Mills.

Given the location of the property, actually quite near to the Coates' mill, it is likely that, by 1845, the land purchased had already been cleared and offered the potential of becoming prime farmland. This would certainly have been of interest to Peter who, in 1845, had four children, all boys, ranging in age from 5 to 14. It is not currently known what land transactions transpired between Peter and his four sons but, for the moment, it appears as if the three eldest sons, Thomas, John and William each obtained land from their father at Coates Mills. Following the custom of the day, it is likely that, in exchange for working the land as lads, each obtained a share of the Coates Mills property upon getting married. On the other hand, the youngest son, Pierre, seems to have remained on the original piece of land settled by Peter at the mouth of the Little Buctouche river, working it with his father and eventually inheriting it.

LOOKING BACK AT THE FAMILY'S IRISH ROOTS

From marriage records in New Brunswick, it is known that Peter and Edward's parents were a James Nowland and a Mary Glory of County Carlow. Ballon-Rathoe parish records further reveal that James Nowlan and Mary Clory were married in the parish on September 29, 1793. A Denis Hayden and a James Brennan witnessed the marriage. A John Nowlan born to a James and Mary Nowlan on December 28, 1794, is believed to have been an older brother to Peter and Edward.

A deeper search of Ballon-Rathoe parish records further reveals that Mary Glory had been previously married to a John Glory (sic Clowry) on

November 1, 1784, and that her maiden name was actually Shortall. The witnesses for this marriage had been a Maurice Dawson and a James Wall.

Based upon Peter's marriage record in New Brunswick, it is known that his father, James Nowland, died sometime before 1828 but that his mother, Mary Nowland (née Shortall, alias Glory/Clowry) died sometime later.

SYNOPSIS AND CONCLUSION

Much time has elapsed since Peter and Edward last saw Ballon Hill and said Adieu to their parents. However, it is hoped that, in time, the mystery of the unclaimed letter may yet be solved. Who sent the letter? What happened to those left behind?

Many of the Chronicle's readers will no doubt be descendants of relatives and friends of Peter and Edward and it is hoped that telling Peter and Edward's story will help to fill a gap in their understanding of pre-famine Irish emigration from the Ballon-Rathoe area.

As regards the author's family, it is recognized that, due to insufficient and sometimes non-existent records (e.g. for the period during the 1798 Rebellion), the fate of James Nowlan(d) and Mary Shortall, Peter and Edward's parents, may never be known. However, in this regard, the author is happy to report that, through active participation in the activities of the modern-day Nolan Clan, some semblance of a family reunion has been possible. Also, two visits to the Ballon-Rathoe area (1997, 2004) and contact with modern-day Nolan descendants in the area have further helped the author to bridge the gap to the land of his ancestors and those left behind so many years ago.

AUTHOR

Roger Nowlan, a retired engineer /civil servant, lives in the area of Ottawa, Canada, and is the current Secretary of the Nolan Clan founded in 1995 by a handful of local Carlow enthusiasts. In his spare time, Roger also maintains a worldwide website (<http://onolanclan.org>) for the Nolan Clan whose members now number over 100 and are found in Ireland, the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada and Australia.

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