

# *Pauper Emigration to Upper Canada in the 1830s\**

by Rainer BAEHRE \*\*

Pauper emigration to the Canadas peaked in the 1830s during the very period in which public concern over poor relief reached a climax in Great Britain.<sup>1</sup> In the mother country "the figure of the pauper, almost forgotten since, dominated a discussion the imprint of which was as powerful as that of the most spectacular events in history".<sup>2</sup> So argues Karl Polanyi. Yet, in general histories of Upper Canada the pauper is referred to only in passing.<sup>3</sup> Could it be that the pauper's role in Upper Canada was larger than has hitherto been assumed? As this appears to be the case this paper will examine how the problem of British pauperism was transported to the colony in the important decade before the Rebellion.

## I

The early decades of the nineteenth century witnessed growing political, economic and social turmoil in Great Britain. The general crisis heightened in the late 1820s, aggravated by a combination of fluctuating markets, overpopulation, enclosure, poor harvests, the displacement of

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<sup>1</sup> For example, see: J. R. POYNTER, *Society and Pauperism: English Ideas on Poor Relief, 1795-1834* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), p. xi; E. P. THOMPSON, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968); E. J. HOBBSBAMM, *Industry and Empire* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969), pp. 79-96; Brian INGLIS, *Poverty and the Industrial Revolution* (London: Panther Books, 1971); Karl POLANYI, *The Great Transformation* (Boston: Beacon, 1957), pp. 77-129; and G. M. TREVELYAN, *English Social History* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), pp. 476-98.

<sup>2</sup> POLANYI, *The Great Transformation*, pp. 83-84.

<sup>3</sup> Neither paupers *per se* nor the House of Industry are even mentioned in Gerald M. CRAIG, *Upper Canada 1784-1841: The Formative Years* (Toronto: McLelland & Stewart, 1963), and they receive only passing mention in G. P. de T. GLAZEBROOK, *Life in Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968); also see: Richard B. SPLANE, *Social Welfare in Ontario 1791-1893* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), p. 68; Margaret ANGUS, "Health, Emigration and Welfare in Kingston, 1820-1840", in *Oliver Mowat's Ontario*, ed.: Donald SWAINSON (Toronto: Macmillan, 1972), pp. 120-35; Edith FIRTH, ed., *The Town of York, 1815-1834*, 2 vols (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966), I: lxii-lxviii, 222-59; and Stephen A. SPEISMAN, "Munificent Parsons and Municipal Parsimony: Voluntary vs. Public Poor Relief in Nineteenth Century Toronto", *Ontario History*, LXV (March 1973): 33-49.

manual labour by machinery, child labour, dislocation, urban squalor, and declining wages among craftsmen.<sup>4</sup> Part of the legacy of this particular phase of the Industrial Revolution was the "social pauperization" of the British labouring class, "the destruction of old ways of life without the substitution of anything the labouring poor could regard as a satisfactory equivalent", according to E. J. Hobsbawm.<sup>5</sup> In some instances this transformation, which gave rise to the modern English working class, led to popular disturbances. Notable are the Luddites, Peterloo, several Irish insurrections, and the English agricultural uprisings of "Captain Swing" in 1830.<sup>6</sup>

Closely related to these developments were the spiralling costs of poor relief. Once, for example, the so-called "Speenhamland Act" of 1795 had guaranteed "a living wage" to some workers by supplementing their low wages from the poor rates.<sup>7</sup> However, the increase in pauperism with the Industrial Revolution, together with the claim that the Poor Law demoralized employers and workers alike by causing an overall lowering of wages and a preponderant reliance on poor relief, as well as creating a Malthusian scenario, led to constant debate among politicians and political economists. This debate culminated in the *Poor Law Report and Amendment* of 1834. The latter formally institutionalized the idea of restricting relief to the "deserving" poor, and excluded the "able-bodied" poor from relief, except under the jurisdiction of workhouse overseers. Moreover, the "moral architecture" of the workhouses, or Houses of Industry, were themselves restructured. Many persons seeking poor relief had to submit themselves to the new disciplines of incarceration which included having to work in exchange for aid. Not only vehicles for dispensing relief, these institutions became instruments of social control and socialization, integral to the creation of a free capitalistic labour market.<sup>8</sup>

The British debate on the nature of socio-economic problems was carried over to the colonies. During the 1820s and 1830s various prominent Canadians testified before the House of Commons in Great Britain as to the necessity of promoting emigration to British North America to help solve the problem of "surplus population". For example, Henry J. Boulton, Solicitor-General (1818-29) and then Attorney-General of Upper Canada (1829-33), wrote a short sketch of the province. In it he argued that the existing English Poor Laws should be replaced by a national scheme of

<sup>4</sup> THOMPSON, *The Making of the English Working Class*; INGLIS, *Poverty and the Industrial Revolution*.

<sup>5</sup> HOBBSAWM, *Industry and Empire*, p. 94.

<sup>6</sup> For example, see: THOMPSON, *The Making of the English Working Class*, esp. pp. 598-659, 744-80; Galen BROKER, *Rural Disorder and Police Reform in Ireland, 1812-36* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970); and E. J. HOBBSAWM and George RUDÉ, *Captain Swing* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1975).

<sup>7</sup> POYNTER, *Society and Pauperism*, pp. 33-39; Karl DE SCHWEINITZ, *England's Road to Social Security* (New York: A. S. Barnes, 1961), pp. 114-27; Richard A. SOLOWAY, *Prelates and People: Ecclesiastical Social Thought in England, 1783-1852* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), pp. 126-92; and S. G. CHECKLAND and E. O. A. CHECKLAND, eds, *The Poor Law Report of 1834* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1974).

<sup>8</sup> POLANYI, *The Great Transformation*.

emigration. "If we look at colonization only in a selfish point of view", he argued, "and not merely as a means of improving the condition of those who remain at home [England], and as a mode of relieving the wealthy from the burthen [*sic*] of providing for the poor, no other method, I feel satisfied, can be pointed out which will so essentially attain both these objects." Boulton promised that a million paupers, within a decade of arriving in Upper Canada, would acquire independence and prosperity, "creating an increased demand for our [England's] manufacture, instead of remaining a clog to the industry of the nation."<sup>9</sup> Archdeacon John Strachan, addressing the Select Committee on Emigration in 1827, spoke of the unemployed British labourer suffering "all the horrors of famine in the midst of plenty". In Strachan's eyes, Ireland verged on insurrection. As for beloved England, he asked,

What but the Poor Laws, and the active benevolence of the public, have prevented convulsions during the recent stagnation of trade and manufactures? and, if the redundant population continue to increase, and no vent be found for its removal, no exertions can prevent the most frightful consequences — consequences which cannot be contemplated at a distance without horror and dismay. Left without relief, his mind is paralyzed, and he sinks into despair, or, becoming fearless and hardened, he joins in tumult and insurrection.<sup>10</sup>

Another was Alexander C. Buchanan, an Irish aristocrat and the officially appointed British Emigration Agent at Quebec City (1828-37), who was closely affiliated with the Canada Company. Buchanan's personal concern was the "Irish problem". In a lengthy published letter to Wilmot Horton, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of the Colonial Office (1821-27), whom he as well as Boulton and Strachan supported, Buchanan tried to convince the British government to embark on a national emigration scheme. Buchanan argued that the Irish were saturating English and Scottish labour markets and unless a remedy be found, "must ere long reduce the labouring classes to one common mass of misery". He compared the condition of Ireland to that of the United States just before the American Revolution. Colonial discontent was rife. Buchanan blamed Great Britain for using her colonies solely for trade, defence and punishment. Yet, "in all enlightened states of antiquity", Buchanan contended, "colonies were considered useful in disburdening [his emphasis] the parent state of its surplus population, providing for its citizens who otherwise might disturb its tranquillity, and establishing new nations, united to the parent state by the sympathies of common origin."<sup>11</sup>

The perceptions of Boulton, Strachan, and Buchanan were typical of the day. To them, emigration, especially one which would remove Great Britain's "surplus" or "redundant" population, was a matter of some

<sup>9</sup> Henry J. BOULTON, *A Short Sketch of the Province of Upper Canada for The Information of the Labouring Poor Throughout England* (London, 1826), pp. 6-7, 16, 26, 30.

<sup>10</sup> John STRACHAN, *Remarks on Emigration from the United Kingdom Addressed to Robert Wilmot Horton* (London, 1827), cited in J. L. H. HENDERSON, ed., *John Strachan: Documents and Opinions* (Toronto: McLelland & Stewart, 1969), pp. 81-82.

<sup>11</sup> A. C. BUCHANAN, *Emigration Practically Considered with Detailed Directions to Emigrants Proceeding to British North America, Particularly to the Canadas* (London, 1828), pp. 5, 14, 63.

gravity which they regarded less a form of poor relief than serving overall economic, social and political needs.<sup>12</sup> Such an attitude, moreover, was evident at the highest levels of colonial government in Upper Canada. During the 1830s, for example, Lieutenant-Governor John Colborne (1828-36) and his successor, Francis Bond Head (1836-38) openly supported emigration. In 1832, Colborne commented that "no subject is more clearly connected with the immediate prosperity of the colony ... than the anticipated progressive increase in the number of Emigrants."<sup>13</sup> Referred to as the "Father of Emigration" in a newspaper biography in 1836,<sup>14</sup> Colborne wanted a national state-sponsored programme for bringing settlers, though the Colonial Office was to rebuff him gently because of domestic political considerations of their own.<sup>15</sup> When in 1840 Colborne reiterated his position to the Duke of Argyll, who was anxious to ask the former Lieutenant-Governor about possible emigration from the Scottish highlands, Colborne told the Duke that he regarded emigration as absolutely essential in protecting the welfare of Upper Canada. He added with some resignation that "a due consideration has seldom been given by the Colonial Department to the important question: how far the colonization of Canada could be carried out with profit to this country [England]".<sup>16</sup> Bond Head held a similar view.<sup>17</sup>

Ostensibly, every potential settler was welcome in Upper Canada during this period. The *Kingston Chronicle* declared: "let the poor come out as well as the rich; let them beg their way if they have no other means; better beg a few weeks than perish at home with hunger."<sup>18</sup> In an effort to encourage as many as possible to come, Allan MacNab, Chairman of a Select Committee on the Subject of Emigration, called on the Lieutenant-Governor in 1836 to fund someone for the expressed purpose of furthering knowledge about the colony in England. MacNab wanted the English to know how "a large proportion of poor labourers, that have been sent out of this Province by the charitable assistance of parishes and private individuals, have become freeholders and possess means of comfortable subsistence for themselves and families."<sup>19</sup> Given such an underpopulated region, it is not surprising that the tenet "Population is Wealth" was being widely touted.<sup>20</sup> The same was true in the United States where

<sup>12</sup> Peter BURROUGHS, ed., *British Attitudes Towards Canada, 1822-1849* (Toronto: Prentice-Hall, 1971), pp. 1-38.

<sup>13</sup> *Colonial Advocate* (Toronto), 8 November 1832.

<sup>14</sup> *Canadian Emigrant* (Toronto), 14 January 1836.

<sup>15</sup> Public Archives of Canada (hereafter PAC), Colborne Papers, MG24A40, 3/622-633, Hay to Colborne, 8 March 1834.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 26/7660-7663, Colborne to the Duke of Argyll, 8 October 1840.

<sup>17</sup> Sir Francis Bond HEAD, *A Narrative*, ed.: Sidney WISE (Toronto: McLelland & Stewart, 1969), p. 70.

<sup>18</sup> *Report of His Majesty's Commissioners for Inquiring into the Administration and Practical Operation of the Poor Laws* (hereafter *Poor Law Report*) (London, 1834), Appendix (C), Communications, No. 4, Report by Samuel Revans, p. 307.

<sup>19</sup> *Appendix to Journal of the House of Assembly of Upper Canada*, II (1839), Sundry Reports. Report of the Select Committee on the Subject of Emigration. Reported 7 December 1836.

<sup>20</sup> *Poor Law Report*, Report by Samuel Revans, p. 307.

settlers were being told to go west.<sup>21</sup> In a recent study of attitudes towards the poor in Upper Canada, the author found that "just as Upper Canadians continued to believe that emigrants would prosper in Upper Canada so did they continue to believe that the province itself would only prosper through an influx of emigrants."<sup>22</sup> Thus, Upper Canada was publicly depicting itself abroad as "the poor man's country".

There seems to have been a general desire, especially among colonials, for a programme of systematic emigration. Yet, the British government resisted direct involvement. This is *not* to say, however, that the British government was entirely hostile to the idea in the 1830s. In fact there is evidence to the contrary. As early as 1830, for instance, George Murray, the Colonial Secretary, asked one of his civil servants "to enquire into the state of the province ... as to the inducements it offers to emigrants from England". Subsequently, John Richards who had been told by Murray to look into the matter, confided to Colborne that the British government was extremely worried about the American threat to British possessions on the North American continent. Settlers had become necessary for defence. These would only come through emigration. Richards added, "the fact is that Great Britain can not [*sic*] afford to lose a single acre of her American Provinces."<sup>23</sup> In 1832 the Colonial Office was commenting on how it was "very satisfactory to learn that the feelings of the Province [Upper Canada] are so favorable towards the Encouragement of Emigration from this country".<sup>24</sup> Then, in the aftermath of the Rebellions, Lord Durham remarked in his famous report of 1839 that, "once peace can be restored, confidence created, and a popular and vigorous government established, I rely on the adoption of a judicious system of colonization as an effectual barrier against the recurrence of many of the existing evils."<sup>25</sup> Each of these documents associate emigration with defending the Empire, helping solve socio-economic problems, and maintaining political ties with Great Britain in much the same way as had colonial representatives such as Boulton, Strachan, Buchanan, Colborne and Bond Head.

Why, then, did the British government refuse to sponsor emigration as requested? To begin, direct support from government would have meant giving assistance to all emigrants — a very costly proposition. Additionally, the government was convinced that should it follow this course, only "the most infirm, or the least industrious" would likely leave Great Britain, thereby excessively burdening the colonies.<sup>26</sup> This concern for economy was entirely consistent, of course, with both the British government's

<sup>21</sup> Henry N. SMITH, *The Virgin Land* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970), esp. pp. 201-11.

<sup>22</sup> Robert D. WOLFE, "Myth of the Poor Man's Country" (M.A. thesis, Carleton University, 1976), p. 182.

<sup>23</sup> PAC, Colborne Papers, MG24A40, 2/484-488, John Richards to Colborne, 8 September 1830.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 3/702-704, Hay to Colborne, 25 January 1832.

<sup>25</sup> G. M. CRAIG, ed., *Lord Durham's Report* (Toronto: McLelland & Stewart, 1963), p. 172.

<sup>26</sup> BURROUGHS, ed., *British Attitudes Towards Canada*, p. 34.

approach to social issues at this time and with prevailing notions of political economy. Moreover, socio-economic "convulsions" facing the mother country were resulting in pressure from taxpayers to lower spending. For whatever combination of reasons, Lord Howick, Parliamentary Undersecretary in the Colonial Office in 1830, "energetically tried to reduce the current expenditure on colonial, civil, military, and ecclesiastical establishments".<sup>27</sup> Other factors included the British drift towards free trade imperialism. The expenses of colonial administration were not always balanced by revenue. Hence, hypothetical state support for emigration was sheer anathema to free traders whose beliefs were gradually gaining ascendancy.<sup>28</sup> In extreme instances, dogmatic liberal economists even "frowned on any plan that would deplete the labour supply, and bitterly protested all aid and encouragement to emigration by government".<sup>29</sup> Lastly, there were some who objected to shovelling out Britain's paupers on humanitarian grounds.<sup>30</sup> Thus, while enjoying hidden support, a national programme of emigration sponsored by the British government was publicly disavowed.

Accepted interpretations on emigration to the Canadas, perhaps because of the British government's reluctant response, have been as follows. Most arrivals came voluntarily and led to a gradual increase of population in the colony, but the impact of their departure from Britain was insignificant when compared to other events of the decade.<sup>31</sup> As well, G. M. Craig has concluded, "the tale of British emigration to Upper Canada [apart from the cholera sessions] does not have the dark hues to be found in some other phases of the population movement to North America ... Upper Canada was a place where a man could earn enough to accumulate, to better his condition." Emigrants were "welcomed by the residents and by the provincial government, and they were free to take part in its social and political life as equals, without any of the barriers that faced other immigrants in other times and places."<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, as the British government refused to assist emigrants directly, it is widely assumed that British policy had little effect either on the nature of emigration or on settlement in the colony in the 1830s. Such interpretations, I think, require a reappraisal.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 135-40; also see Peter BURROUGHS, *The Canadian Crisis and British Colonial Policy 1828-1841* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1972).

<sup>29</sup> W. S. SHEPPERDSON, *British Emigration to North America: Projects and Opinions in the Early Victorian Period* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1957), p. 19.

<sup>30</sup> For example, see: H. J. M. JOHNSTON, *Shovelling out the Paupers: British Emigration Policy 1815-1830* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), esp. pp. 57-124; Fred HITCHINS, *The Colonial Law and Emigration Commission* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1931), pp. 1-37; and Bernard SEMMEL, *The Rise of Free Trade Imperialism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 76-124.

<sup>31</sup> Helen I. COWAN, *British Emigration to British North America* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961); Norman MACDONALD, *Canada, 1763-1841: Immigration and Settlement* (London: Macmillan, 1939); and Edwin C. GUILLET, *The Great Migration* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963); WOLFE, "Myth of the Poor Man's Country", p. 21.

<sup>32</sup> CRAIG, *Upper Canada*, p. 130.

## II

Emigration to the Canadas during the 1830s peaked in the years 1831-32. This level was not exceeded again until the massive "famine Irish" immigration of the late 1840s.<sup>33</sup> Virtually all arrivals landed at Quebec City. In demographic terms alone, the eight-year period between 1829 and 1836 saw a doubling of the population of Upper Canada from 186,488 in 1828 to 374,099 in 1836. In addition, there were distinct differences in the ethnic origin of the newcomers (Table 1). Irish emigrants clearly predominated.

Table 1. — ETHNIC ORIGINS OF ALL EMIGRANTS AT QUEBEC, 1829-1836.

<i>Ethnic Origin</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>% of Total</i>
England and Wales	65,440	27.39
Ireland	141,168	59.10
Scotland	29,085	12.18
Others	3,188	1.33
Total	238,881	100.00

As for the yearly fluctuations in arrivals, these were affected by a variety of factors (Table 2). The great increase in emigration from 1829 to 1832, for example, was attributed at the time to the successful dissemination of information about Upper Canada by the Canada Company to interested parties in Great Britain.<sup>34</sup> The drop in emigration in 1833 was blamed on the five shilling tax on emigrants as well as the cholera epidemic of 1832.<sup>35</sup> For that matter the subsequent decline in 1835 followed a second cholera epidemic in 1834 in conjunction with supposedly misleading reports on the hardships of settlement in the colony.<sup>36</sup>

Table 2. — ETHNIC ORIGINS OF EMIGRANTS AT QUEBEC, EACH YEAR, 1829-1836.

<i>Ethnic Origin</i>	1829	1830	1831	1832	1833	1834	1835	1836
England and Wales	3,565	6,799	10,343	17,481	5,198	6,799	3,067	12,188
Ireland	9,614	18,300	34,133	28,204	12,013	19,206	7,108	12,590
Scotland	2,643	2,450	5,354	5,500	4,196	4,591	2,127	2,224
Others	123	451	424	561	345	339	225	720
Totals	15,945	28,000	50,254	51,746	21,752	30,935	12,527	27,722

Source: Baldwin Room, Toronto Reference Library, "The Annual Report from The Agent for Emigration in Canada For 1836".

<sup>33</sup> Indeed, with the exception of 1847, when emigration to the North American colonies reached 109,680, the number of arrivals for 1831-32 would never again be exceeded until well after Confederation. Although the gross emigration statistics are well known, no attempt has been made to break down these figures into various types.

<sup>34</sup> *Appendix to Journal of the House of Assembly of Upper Canada*, II (1839), Sundry Reports. Report of the Select Committee on the Subject of Emigration. Reported 7 December 1836.

<sup>35</sup> *Poor Law Report*, Report by Samuel Revans, p. 324.

<sup>36</sup> For example, PAC, Colborne Papers, MG24A40, 26/7660-7673, Colborne to the Duke of Argyll, 8 October 1840.

According to contemporary observers, the emigrants who arrived came from a cross-section of society. A small minority were the "capitalists" and "gentlemen of property". They most often travelled the more comfortable and shorter Erie Canal route from New York City into Upper Canada.<sup>37</sup> The large majority of other emigrants came the St Lawrence route and included "respectable" artisans, mechanics and tradesmen, who, together with the gentry and bourgeoisie were, in the opinion of emigration agents, few in number.<sup>38</sup> Then, there were the labourers, some well-provided for and giving "the appearance of steady industrious settlers"; others were servants, poorer labourers, and assorted destitute persons, with some outright paupers.<sup>39</sup> As shown in Table 2, the first massive influx of Irish, constituting the bulk of the emigrants, came in the 1830s, not the 1840s.<sup>40</sup>

It has been thought that the pauper class, the destitute emigrants, never made up a sizeable portion of those who came in these years.<sup>41</sup> One need only look, however, at the number of destitute persons relieved and forwarded by the Montreal Emigrant Society to appreciate how wrong this impression is. This society, formed in 1831 and located at the wharves of the Port of Montreal "where the Emigrants disembark from the Steam Boats", gave no money to emigrants and refused all aid to those intending to stay in the city. Rather, it "provided places for servants and labourers, and rendered assistance to families by providing passages to different parts of the Canadas, where it was likely they would find employment." No relief was ever given until the Society "was satisfied that the applicants were entirely destitute and entitled to assistance".<sup>42</sup>

The statistics compiled by the Montreal Emigrant Society — in light of its restrictive practices — give a conservative estimate of the number of destitute emigrants arriving in Montreal from Quebec City (Table 3). Over 30,000 persons received relief from the Society in the five-year period between 1831 and 1835. One-fifth of all emigrants coming this route (even taking into account the problematic 1834 figure) were utterly destitute, and thus "deserving" relief. Additionally noteworthy is the proportionately steady increase in destitute emigrants during these years, except for 1834. In drawing further from these figures, by comparing the years of highest and lowest levels of emigration, one discovers that the vast majority of

<sup>37</sup> *Poor Law Report*, Report by Samuel Revans, p. 316.

<sup>38</sup> Baldwin Room, Toronto Reference Library (hereafter BR), *The Annual Report from The Agent for Emigration in Canada For 1836. Extracts from the several Weekly Reports made to the Governor-in-Chief by the Acting Chief Agent for Emigration at Quebec, 18 June 1836, 27 August 1836.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, "Week ending 21st May 1836, 4 June 1836, 18 June 1836, 27 August 1836."

<sup>40</sup> This feature has been noted by H. SENIOR, "Ogle Gowan, Orangeism, and The Immigrant Question", *Ontario History*, LXVI (December 1974): 193-209; and Fernand OUELLET, *Lower Canada 1791-1840* (Toronto: McLelland & Stewart, 1980), p. 355.

<sup>41</sup> For example, WOLFE, "Myth of the Poor Man's Country", p. 32, writes: "It must be remembered, however, that assisted emigrants — that is, "paupers", properly defined — were never a sizeable proportion of the emigrants, in all probability."

<sup>42</sup> *Appendix to the Journals of the Legislative Assembly of Lower Canada* (hereafter JLA, *Lower Canada*) (1831-32), Minutes of Evidence, 25 January 1832. Jacob De Witt, Chairman of the Committee, 1831-32.

destitute emigrants (66.91% and 85.27% respectively) relieved and forwarded by the Society, were Irish.

Table 3. — DESTITUTE EMIGRANTS RELIEVED AND FORWARDED BY THE MONTREAL EMIGRANT SOCIETY, 1831-1836.

Year	Number Arrived	Number Relieved	% of Arrivals Relieved
1831	49,250	4,622	9.38
1832	51,422	10,244	19.92
1833	22,062	7,802	35.36
1834	30,127	4,152*	13.78
1835	11,539	4,543	39.37
Total	154,400	31,363	20.31

Sources: *Journal of the Legislative Assembly of Lower Canada* (1835), Appendix W, Montreal Emigrant Society Report, 1835; BR, *Report of the Special Sanitary Committee of Montreal Upon Cholera and Emigration for the Year 1834* (Montreal, 1834).

\* The Montreal Emigrant Society was totally without funds until July 1834, more than half-way into the emigration season. Observers commented that the proportion of destitute emigrants was greater than ever before, which means that the number of persons relieved was likely much higher.

The ethnic composition of destitute arrivals continued to be dominated by the Irish from one year to the next (Table 4).

Table 4. — ETHNIC ORIGINS OF DESTITUTE EMIGRANTS (HIGHEST AND LOWEST YEARS OF RELIEF).

Ethnic Origin	1832		1835	
	Number	% of Total	Number	% of Total
England	2,365	23.09	462	10.17
Ireland	6,854	66.91	3,874	85.27
Scotland	856	8.36	203	4.47
Wales	169	1.65	—	—
Other*	—	—	4	.01
Total	10,244	100.01	4,543	99.92

Sources: *Journal of the Legislative Assembly of Lower Canada* (1835), Montreal Emigrant Society Reports, 1832 and 1835; *Poor Law Report* (London, 1834), Appendix (C).

\* There were three from Halifax and one from New Brunswick in 1835.

Of interest is the nature of the emigrants themselves. In 1836, for example, a year with an average flow of emigration, 16.7 percent of the emigrants were initially parish-assisted and by definition destitute, and 83.3 percent were voluntary arrivals. Of this entire group, 52.1 percent were male, 28.2 percent were female, and 19.6 percent were under fourteen and of either sex.<sup>43</sup> Assuming for the moment that all the females were married, then at least 6,634 men were single. Of these, and qualitative evidence supports this contention, many were undoubtedly paupers. This probably accounts for the poor, single Irish labourers mentioned by contemporaries in the period preceding the 1837 Rebellion.

<sup>43</sup> BR, *The Annual Report from The Agent for Emigration in Canada For 1836*.

The many thousands of destitute newcomers who received relief from the Montreal Emigrant Society did not automatically go to Upper Canada. In almost every instance, pauper emigrants were handed but "a pound of Oatmeal ... to satisfy one adult per day" and a ticket to some destination where work might be procured. It is highly likely, therefore, that most emigrants went immediately to their stated destination. A look at the route from Quebec City through Montreal during years of high, low, and an average volume of emigration in the 1830s suggests the subsequent dispersion (Table 5).

Table 5. — DESTINATION OF EMIGRANTS, 1832, 1833 AND 1836.

Destination	1832		1833		1836	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Lower Canada	10,200	19.7	3,310	15.7	9,600	34.6
Upper Canada	35,000	67.6	15,500	73.4	13,000	46.9
United States	3,346	6.5	2,100	9.9	4,973	17.9
Died of Disease	2,350	4.5	—	—	88	0.3
Returned to U.K.	850	1.6	208	1.0	67	0.2
Total	51,746	99.9	21,118	100.0	27,728	99.9

Sources: *Journal of the Legislative Assembly of Lower Canada* (1835), Montreal Emigrant Society Reports, 1833 and 1835; *Poor Law Report* (London, 1834), Appendix (C); BR, *The Annual Report from The Agent for Emigration in Canada For 1836*.

One sees that in 1832-33 over two-thirds of all emigrants went to Upper Canada from Montreal. The pattern for 1836 is somewhat different because settlers were encouraged by the British American Land Company to come to the Eastern Townships of Quebec and discouraged from coming to Upper Canada by Bond Head's stoppage of supplies.<sup>44</sup> Consequently one-third stayed in Lower Canada and a higher proportion than usual (17.9%) went to the United States, but the largest number (46.9%) still headed for Upper Canada. The figures regarding migration into the United States are important because they reveal a shift from just a few years before. Once most emigrants had gone south of the border, A. C. Buchanan claimed that about two-thirds of all emigrants had done exactly this between 1816 and 1828. By 1829 this had dropped to one-half, and, in 1831 only one in four seemed to be crossing over. In fact, Buchanan contended that "a considerable portion of those Emigrants that went last year [1831] were of the poorer descriptions to obtain labour and high wages at the Rail Roads [*sic*] and Canals, [and] they in general returned again to settle in the Canadas, when they earn a little money."<sup>45</sup> Most emigrants apparently remained in the Canadas. Few had ventured south of the border in 1832-33. The percentage for 1836 though (17.9%) was more than double that of 1831 (6.5%).

<sup>44</sup> "To Sir Francis Head, The Herald of Famine and Pestilence", *Correspondent and Advocate* (Toronto), 7 June 1836.

<sup>45</sup> *JLA, Lower Canada* (1831-32), Minutes of Evidence, 25 January 1832. Alexander Buchanan.

As for destitute emigrants, the vast majority in 1832 were sent on to Upper Canada (93.2%), the rest remaining in Lower Canada. This trend continued unabated throughout the decade before the Rebellion. On entering Upper Canada most destitute emigrants travelled the St Lawrence route to towns like Prescott and Brockville, advancing as far west as the Niagara District. The easiest and admittedly cheapest method for the Montreal Emigrant Society was to push their charges across the border into Upper Canada where they would be forwarded by government-appointed emigrant agents connected to local Emigrant Societies. In 1836, for example, 3,600 persons were sent by these societies from the Ottawa and Bathurst area to Kingston. Another three thousand left for Toronto and the Home District. Two thousand continued into the Lake Erie region. Another fifteen hundred each went to the Newcastle-Quinte area, to Hamilton, to Guelph, to the Western District, and to the Niagara District.<sup>46</sup>

Under what conditions did these destitute emigrants live? How did they affect existing communities? Already considered a burden by 1831, their presence created an ongoing crisis in the months preceding the cholera epidemic of the following year. The tragedy of the epidemic in 1832, however, merely heightened what already had transpired.<sup>47</sup> With the exception of discussing the hardships of passage and the curse of cholera, Helen Cowan in her fine study of British emigration to Canada has downplayed the emigrant's plight in the early 1830s.<sup>48</sup> Better insight is gained by studies of the cholera epidemic. Even more telling is Archdeacon Strachan's report for Colborne on the emigrant situation in the summer of 1831. Strachan put the events of the summer in an even stronger light. He began:

The Stream of emigration which has been of late years more and more directed towards this Province has become so strong during the passing season that had not Your Excellency promptly interfered to afford seasonable relief the most deplorable consequences must have followed the throwing upon our shores so many thousands of human Beings, totally destitute of every means of support.<sup>49</sup>

Continuing the report, he contended that as long as emigration had been less than twelve thousand annually, which it had been before 1829, "the portion which found their way into this Province tho' for a time exposed to many privations and entailing much expence upon the resident inhabitants especially in the towns and villages were gradually absorbed in the different Districts before the commencement of the ensuing sea-

<sup>46</sup> BR, *The Annual Report from The Agent for Emigration in Canada For 1836*; also, COWAN, *British Emigration to British North America*, p. 294.

<sup>47</sup> Geoffrey BILSON, *A Darkened House* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980); Charles A. ROSENBERG, *The Cholera Years* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), pp. 24, 62; and C. M. GODFREY, *The Cholera Epidemics in Upper Canada, 1832-1866* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968).

<sup>48</sup> COWAN, *British Emigration to British North America*, pp. 202-37.

<sup>49</sup> PAC, Colborne Papers, MG24A40, 4/604-605, Strachan to Colborne, 5 September 1831.

son.”<sup>50</sup> Everything had changed. Now, 1831 was without precedent. He explained how:

Many of whom when they arrive at Kingston and York fall sick from want — from exposure to the weather in ascending the St. Lawrence and crossing the Lakes — from the influence of a new climate, the intense heat of our summer months, and mental anxiety so that whenever they stop and the excitement of the journey is somewhat abated they become peculiarly liable to disease — Accordingly the Hospital has been for the last three months continually full. Many have died and the Town of York has been overwhelmed with Widows or Orphans and with families where Fathers in despair of bettering their situation have deserted so that in addition to the support of the Sick in Hospital the small population of York has the necessity of furnishing bread to upwards of four hundred mouths, a number nearly equal to those who are able to contribute, but severe as the pressure on the Inhabitants has been this year beyond all former precedent and great the suffering of the Emigrants themselves.<sup>51</sup>

Furthermore, wrote Strachan, had not Colborne made provisions for these emigrants by giving them plots of land, some relief, and work on the Rideau and Welland Canals, the actual experiences of 1831 would have been “trifling” compared to “the most frightful calamities” and “the most terrible evils” which would have been inevitable. “It was therefore a matter of absolute necessity”, he continued, “to provide for them or they must have perished for the means of Charitable Individuals have been taxed to the utmost & are exhausted.” Strachan entreated the Lieutenant-Governor together with the British government to prepare immediately for next season’s arrivals.<sup>52</sup>

A graphic illustration of the misery observed by Strachan in general was the arrival in June 1831 at York of a steamboat carrying two hundred and fifty “penniless” immigrants of which the Irish were in the worst condition. Among the passengers was a group “evidently of the lowest class of English paupers, with families of small helpless children who exhibited an appearance of abject misery and want, such as we have never before witnessed in the English labouring class”. What happened to them? The entire boat load was driven from York “to be cast on shore at the head of the Lake, where nothing but the charity of the people of Gore can save them from starvation.” Not one city official came out to greet them at York, though the Emigrant Society offered some interim assistance. The townsfolk were making it clear that such arrivals were unwelcome. “Their competition for employment”, they argued, “would speedily reduce the whole population of the cities to the same miserable level; even now the conditions of the resident labourers is materially disturbed thereby.”<sup>53</sup> It should be further noted that these emigrants were parish-assisted. That is, they had arrived in the Canadas with some money; namely, each had received fifty shillings at Quebec City as had been pre-arranged in England. Twenty of those shillings were immediately paid to the Canada Company agent who accompanied them. The other thirty

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> *Poor Law Report*, Report on Emigration to the Canadas by H. S. Chapman, p. 41.

shillings quickly disappeared for necessary provisions. By the time they arrived at York, most were "penniless", with little or nothing left to eat.<sup>54</sup>

The 1832 level of emigration exceeded significantly the previous year's total; the number and percentage of indigent arrivals aided by the Montreal Emigrant Society more than doubled. In his "Report on Emigration to the Canadas", H. S. Chapman, an English middle-class immigrant radical in Lower Canada who founded the *Daily Advertiser* which supported French-Canadian nationalism,<sup>55</sup> pointed out to the Poor Law Commissioners in England that "a considerable amount of distress and misery has undoubtedly existed among the emigrants." "A great number" had decided to return to Great Britain.<sup>56</sup> According to A. C. Buchanan, this was true to an extent. About 850 individuals, or 1.6 percent of all arrivals for that year had returned, most likely those who could afford to do so.<sup>57</sup>

While the ravages of cholera most certainly added to the tragedy, misery and general hardship already in evidence, there were more fundamental causes of pauperism in Upper Canada. A major structural problem was apparently the system of land granting, of which some more will be said later. The British government had urged the end of free and cheap land to settlers in 1832. Colborne continued to give some land away at low rates and on credit to poor settlers, but only to those who had their own tools and provisions.<sup>58</sup> This qualification immediately precluded the bulk of destitute emigrants from acquiring land. These were obliged to work on roads or other public projects in order to subsist.<sup>59</sup> In a subsequent effort to ease the demand for land Colborne began to issue temporary five-acre plots to indigent emigrants in 1833. Others of course had gained access to land before the restrictions of 1832 had come into effect.

There was a definite logic behind such government land policies. Easy acquisition of land had proven to have some very serious drawbacks for the poorer settler.<sup>60</sup> The *Montreal Weekly Abstract* was convinced that "while land is given away or sold for a low installment, an easy-circumstanced population cannot exist, all or nearly all are in a state of misery. They are land-owners, it is true, but without the means of putting their farms into tolerable cultivation, or of stocking them."<sup>61</sup> A similar view was voiced by the *Montreal Daily Advertiser*, which reported that "whenever we meet with isolated settlements in the midst of the forest, the people have been wretchedly poor, indeed scarcely a step from barbarism."<sup>62</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> OUELLET, *Lower Canada 1791-1840*, pp. 183-84, 210.

<sup>56</sup> *Poor Law Report*, Report on Emigration to the Canadas, p. 39.

<sup>57</sup> Montreal Emigrant Society Report, in *Poor Law Report*, Report on Emigration to the Canadas, p. 44.

<sup>58</sup> Lillian GATES, *Land Policies of Upper Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968), esp. pp. 176-85. To illustrate, at the end of the 1830s Lord Sydenham, the newest Governor-General, found that farmers did not generally hire emigrant labourers except at harvest time because of a lack of cash. Everything produced had to be eaten for, as Sydenham put it, "for devil a purchaser is found". (p. 235) Thus, public work projects rather than farmers absorbed most of the emigrant labourers.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> *Poor Law Report*, Report by Samuel Revans, p. 313.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

Samuel Revans in his report to the Poor Law Commissioners revealed how "in the Oattawa [*sic*] river Irish settlers are found living in cabins, nearly as miserable as are those in Ireland; and that a few years since, in other parts of Canada, bodies of settlers existed who had degenerated from the manners and habits common to their forefathers."<sup>63</sup> In itself land was no guarantee of a good livelihood.

A well-documented and most remarkable instance of the difficulties encountered by settlers concerned the Chelsea pensioners.<sup>64</sup> Having exchanged their pensions for small sums of money and/or land grants, these hapless British veterans arrived in the Canadas, many during the 1830-32 period. The experiment by the British government to make backwoodsmen and agriculturalists of these ex-soldiers was, all-in-all, an abject failure. By 1833 many were destitute and forlorn and had begun congregating in urban centres such as York looking for relief. Well over one hundred of the original group of eight hundred pensioners likely perished. Of the remainder, many became totally impoverished. Unable to support their families they relied on private charity for their very existence. A few clung to their homesteads. Originally, the entire group had been sent upriver by the Montreal Emigrant Society to Prescott where they had worked on opening roads or building shanties, all the time under government supervision, and "under the delusive hope [my emphasis] that a period would arrive when they would be able to provide for their own wants".<sup>65</sup> This was not to happen for many years.

Although initially encouraged by the British government to emigrate, the pensioners were left to fend for themselves once in the Canadas. Even the Colonial Office, which had kept a careful watch on their progress during the 1830s, did little to help.<sup>66</sup> Lord Durham blamed the project's failure on the Imperial government. Official sources, newspapers and emigration literature had blamed the pensioners themselves for a lack of industry and self-reliance or dissolute habits, idleness, and immorality in being unable to succeed at pioneering. Durham, however, pinpointed the futility of promoting land settlement by emigrants like the Chelsea pensioners, or by pauper emigrants at all:

The idea of forming agricultural settlers in a new country from a class of men to which these pensioners belong, could, I must suppose, have proceeded only from an entire ignorance of the state of these colonies, and of the tasks that a settler has to perform, — an ignorance of which it is not easy to discover an adequate explanation, since there were at the command of the Government so many means of acquiring all the requisite knowledge. The labour to be performed by a settler in the wilderness is of an arduous and painful char-

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 320.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> J. K. JOHNSON, "The Chelsea Pensioners in Upper Canada", *Ontario History*, LIII (December 1961): 273-89; also BR, *Copies of Despatches and Correspondence Relative to Chelsea Pensioners in Upper and Lower Canada* (n.p., 1839) (hereafter *Copies of Despatches*).

<sup>65</sup> PAC, Colborne Papers, MG24A40, 4/765-771, Hardinge to Colborne, 25 April 1832.

<sup>66</sup> What is striking on reading the Colborne papers, for example, is how carefully worded and tailored official correspondence is compared with private correspondence.

acter, and demands great physical and mental energy, combined with a facility of adaptation to new circumstances seldom found in men of mature years or settled habits. Even the most robust and enterprising individuals are generally unequal to the task, until a residence of one or two years in the country has made them acquainted with the nature of the work, and habituated them to its performance.<sup>67</sup>

### III

Critical accounts of the difficulties of settling in the Canadas began to filter back to Great Britain at least as early as 1832. "Real scenes of distress are pictured with disgusting faithfulness", wrote Chapman, without "the slightest attempt to investigate the causes and point out the remedies." His own report to the Poor Law Commissioners had been done to refute "a most erroneous impression ... that Emigration to the Canadas has failed during the last few years".<sup>68</sup> Samuel Revans also sought to counter, in his words, the "very erroneous opinions ... relative to the prospects for the agricultural labourer in the Canadas".<sup>69</sup> Both Chapman and Revans admitted that their evidence was mixed, but they were convinced that the problems of emigrating to the Canadas were only temporary and could be overcome.

A. C. Buchanan, who lauded emigration at every opportunity, also consistently downplayed the misery he well knew existed. In 1832, for example, he informed Colborne that all charities were overloaded at Quebec City and Montreal, placing the blame for this state of affairs, however, on the fact that emigrants played on the sympathy of the relief agencies. He complimented Colborne for his "calculations on settlement" which had been shown to be "so correct", bringing prosperity to the colonies. Buchanan admitted to having some concern over the negative descriptions of emigration which had been surfacing of late.<sup>70</sup> In 1837 he published a short work on Upper Canada, in which he described the province of Upper Canada as an ideal poor man's country, especially for the Irishman who had benefitted from emigration much more than either the Englishman or the Scot.<sup>71</sup> There was little hard evidence to back up this claim. There was much evidence to the contrary. Far closer to the truth

<sup>67</sup> Despatch from Earl of Durham to Lord Glenelg, 30 October 1838, in BR, *Copies of Despatches*.

<sup>68</sup> *Poor Law Report*, Report on Emigration to the Canadas, p. 39.

<sup>69</sup> *Poor Law Report*, Report by Samuel Revans, p. 303.

<sup>70</sup> PAC, Colborne Papers, MG24A40, 4/663-670, A. C. Buchanan to Colborne, 3 January 1832.

<sup>71</sup> A. C. BUCHANAN, *Outlines of a Practical Plan for The Immediate, Effective, and Economical Relief of the Starving & Destitute Poor of Ireland; But More Particularly The Unemployed Labouring Classes* (Brighton, 1837). This short work was directed at Lord Melbourne, the Prime Minister. Buchanan's credibility is seriously put to question by the Special Sanitary Committee of Montreal in 1834. It complained that "while your Committee were occupied in forwarding the greatest number of indigent emigrants ... they have never had the honour of seeing [Buchanan] at the Emigrant Office, nor have they had the advantage of knowing, or of hearing, what services he may have rendered to distressed Emigrants." In BR, *Report of the Special Sanitary Committee of Montreal Upon Cholera For the Year 1834* (Montreal, 1834), p. 11.

were the private observations of H. Hardinge, the Secretary at War. He had been following the plight of the Chelsea pensioners from England and apparently had come to Canada to evaluate their complaints for himself. Remarking on the "miserable state" in which he found them, Hardinge told Colborne in 1833 that "they [the pensioners] all think they have been taken in". To this he added, "you Tories have sadly mismanaged your offices."<sup>72</sup> Hardinge was unimpressed with the successes of emigration, in sharp contrast to Colborne and Buchanan who actively promoted it.

Later, Colborne too would acknowledge that the settlement of Upper Canada while he had been Lieutenant-Governor had not gone smoothly. Placing the blame for this on political dissension over land policy and land speculation, he stated that his government had been deprived of the means, control, and paternal authority over "the wild lands" which were essential to colonization. Admitting to the "great distress, for want of employment & means to remain in Canada" which had affected "large bodies of Emigrants" between 1831 and 1833, Colborne proclaimed that, at least at the end of this turbulent decade, "an agricultural Province created in a few years by the industry of a population thrown into dense forest, without capital, and exposed to great privations" had come into being. Colborne also claimed credit for having initiated various measures to ameliorate the condition of the emigrants. Emigration agents now guided emigrants into Upper Canada where, from Toronto, they were dispersed throughout the newly-opened townships to be employed on public works or on the farms of settlers with capital of their own. He was responsible for the string of emigrant societies established at Brockville, Kingston and York, and various private relief agencies such as the Stranger's Friend Society, the Lying-in Charity, and the Emigrant Asylums.<sup>73</sup>

The reports of these voluntary agencies provide further insight into the extent of destitution among emigrants coming into Upper Canada in the 1830s. The account book of the Society for the Relief of the Sick and Destitute for 1831, for instance, shows that between May and August, a total of 582 persons passed through the Emigrant Asylum — 143 men, 102 women and 337 children. The length of stay varied, but was usually less than two weeks, often just a matter of days before they were then sent to the townships. In December 1831, as a result of the weather and seasonal underemployment, 119 men, 169 women and 145 children were being relieved, even more than during the peak of the emigration season. What must be kept in mind was that unless the emigrant had come very recently, he or she, if able-bodied, would rarely be given relief. The "deserving" poor tended almost exclusively to be the old, the sick and "weakly", the lame or blind, poor women with small children, the insane, victims of the ague, of frostbite, and others destitute *and* unable to work, as is evidenced by these records. Months after the emigration season in the winter of 1832-33, eighty-nine families were still receiving rations from the Stranger's Friend Society at York alone. That group constituted the most

<sup>72</sup> PAC, Colborne Papers, MG24A40, 4/772-776, Hardinge to Colborne, 17 July 1833.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 26/7660-7663, Colborne to the Duke of Argyll, 8 October 1840.

deserving only of the "many families" who had landed "entirely destitute" during the year. Others had since been discharged. Many paupers found themselves to be ineligible for relief; widows "provided with situations", children "bound out", or orphans "distributed among the charitable".<sup>74</sup> A further indication of the extent of pauperism is the distribution of 16,629 rations of soup, at two pence each, issued in 1833.<sup>75</sup> This latter figure was probably less than usual because of the drop in the level of emigration that year. In addition, the Lieutenant-Governor had arranged "to remove the poorer Emigrants, able to work, to stations where they were provided with employment". As such, emigrants could be put to work on public projects, hired out to farmers, or contracted out as statute labourers.<sup>76</sup> For this purpose, Colborne offered a two-third's cost subsidy towards the construction of local buildings, bridges or roads, "on condition that Emigrants are employed on the work".<sup>77</sup> Pauper emigrants were kept occupied breaking stone for York's roads at reduced wages, a system which had been in practice at least since 1832, when Colborne ordered "the rapid removal of Emigrants from the Town or their immediate employment". This policy was still operative in 1834, when "the immediate departure of all indigent Emigrants who cannot find employment" was ordered.<sup>78</sup> Thus, those paupers relieved by the Stranger's Friend Society represented only the tip of an iceberg.

While many able-bodied poor were shipped to the townships, the number of "deserving" poor — the most desperate — left behind grew in size and remained in York well after the emigration season. In addition, a separate charity for cholera victims, the Society for the Relief of Orphans, Widows, and Fatherless Orphans, cared for 169 widows, 22 widows with large families, 535 orphans, 10 widows with infants, and 9 fatherless orphans, 745 persons in all in the two-year period beginning in August 1832.<sup>79</sup> The Lying-in Charity, exclusively for pauper pregnant mothers, helped about one hundred women in 1831 alone,<sup>80</sup> this in a city which, while undergoing rapid growth, had only reached a population of 2,860 by 1830 and 9,765 in 1835. The most destitute persons of the entire emigrant population, then, represented a sizeable minority within York itself. In 1837 the Toronto House of Industry began operation. Although emigration had fallen off

<sup>74</sup> Public Archives of Ontario, RG2105, Miscellaneous, 1831, #7.

<sup>75</sup> PAC, Colborne Papers, MG24A40, 27/8464-8466, Annual Meeting of the Stranger's Friend Society, 14 December 1833.

<sup>76</sup> For example, the York Emigrant Committee requested that it be informed of "any want that may exist for laborers, servants, or mechanics", *Canadian Freeman* (Toronto), 19 April 1832.

<sup>77</sup> BR, MS-S105, Minutes of the General Quarter Sessions for the Home District, 21 April 1832, Letter of Peter Robinson to John Gamble, 11 April 1832.

<sup>78</sup> For example, see: Toronto City Hall Archives (hereafter TCHA), Toronto City Council Papers (hereafter City Papers), Letter, Wm Rowan to the Mayor, enclosing copy of letter from A. B. Hawke to John Patan, Agent for Emigrants at Prescott, sending instructions for the care of emigrants, 23 July 1834; and "Public Meeting to Relieve Poor", *Correspondent and Advocate*, 28 December 1836.

<sup>79</sup> *Christian Guardian* (Toronto), 17 September 1834.

<sup>80</sup> PAC, Colborne Papers, MG24A40, 27/8464-8466, Annual Meeting of the Stranger's Friend Society, 14 December 1833.

considerably in that year, 857 persons were relieved by the institution — 87 widows, 638 children, 37 deserted women, and 95 others “enfeebled by sickness and want of work”.<sup>81</sup> By this time, pauperism was no longer an exclusive byproduct of the emigration season. It had become endemic. The House of Industry statistics, which, it appears, excluded the able-bodied poor, or anyone who, repelled by the workhouse stigma, refused relief, or those unwilling to work for artificially low wages as out-pensioners, nevertheless accounted for 7.9 percent of the entire population of Toronto in 1837 and 13.9 percent of all children (Table 6).

Table 6. — NUMBER OF PERSONS RELIEVED COMPARED TO THE POPULATION OF TORONTO, 1837.

	<i>Relieved in House of Industry</i>	<i>Toronto Population</i>	<i>Relieved as % of Toronto Population</i>
Children *	638	4,693	13.9
Total Relieved	857	10,871	7.9

Source: *Census of Canada, 1870-1871*, Vol. III, Statistics of Canada.

\* The Census of Upper Canada divides the population of Toronto into those persons above and below 16 years of age. However, “able-bodied” children would be ineligible for relief. This figure is therefore a conservative estimate of the percentage of pauper children in Toronto in 1837.

There were other private societies too — such as the St George’s Society, the St Andrew’s Society and the St Patrick’s Society, who aided distressed members of their ethnic communities.

Signs of the emergence of a pauper ghetto surfaced in York in 1834. Municipal officials lamented the growing shanty town, consisting of “the meanest sort of buildings”; around the Toronto waterfront. Calling them “receptacles for drunkenness and vice, and surrounded with every kind of filth” which “render it impossible for decent people to walk in front of that part of the Town”, Toronto City Council asked Attorney-General Robert Jameson on 8 May 1834 what legal recourse they might have over these “huts”, “shanties”, and “hovels”, built “without the permission of the Trustees of the ground on the Banks of the Lake, or the Commissioners of Crown Lands”.<sup>82</sup> Initially Jameson informed the Council that they had “no direct and immediate Power to remove them” without new legislation. Several weeks later Jameson gave yet another opinion as “to the proper mode of effecting the squatters, who disfigure the lake shore in front of the Town”. Since they were on Crown land, they were to be considered trespassers. A “long list of persons” for removal was drawn up,<sup>83</sup> and City Council then passed “An Act concerning Nuisances and the

<sup>81</sup> BR, City of Toronto [Broad-sides], Abstracts of Receipts and Expenditures, House of Industry, 11 July 1837.

<sup>82</sup> W. D. Powell, Strachan, and Markland to Rowan, quoted in FIRTH, ed., *The Town of York*, II: 258, “Upper Canada Sundries”.

<sup>83</sup> TCHA, City Papers, Wm Rowan to the Mayor, 8 May 1834; TCHA, Toronto City Council Minutes, Letter, Wm Rowan to the Mayor, 14 May 1834; Letter, Wm Rowan

Good Government of the City", which among its numerous clauses encompassed the removal of the shanty town.<sup>84</sup> Judging from the reports the inhabitants of the shanty town were mostly able-bodied poor. Although it forced them to relocate, this action resulted in no improvement in their situation. They simply shifted locale; many for example, moved to the area around the Don River. On the matter of housing conditions, Dr Charles Widmer informed the General Court of the Quarter Sessions in 1837 that paupers constituted a health hazard as well.

It is true that many cases of ague occur amongst the squatters in the park and neighbourhoods of the Don, but such instances must be frequent in any location where wretched huts, without floors, sadly secured from the weather, are the only protection at night, and the inmates of which have all the ills of poverty and bad habits in constant action to produce disease.<sup>85</sup>

The issue of pauperism had led Strachan and other prominent citizens of Toronto to call a public meeting late in 1836 "to devise ways & means for their [the paupers'] relief during the severity of the winter otherwise many of them must perish from cold and hunger". The subsequent meeting was attended by Dr Harris, Principal of Upper Canada College, Reverend Ephraim Evants, editor of the *Christian Guardian*, George Boulton, member of a prominent Tory family, Robert Stanton, the King's printer, James Lesslie, the Reformer, and others. They concurred that pauperism was a serious matter in the city, but differed on how to solve it.<sup>86</sup>

One who also attended, B. Turquand, an employee of Receiver-General, John Dunn, wrote a letter after the meeting, complaining of "the many indigent children with which our Streets abound and whom we daily see dragging on a miserable existence — the wretched and painful of our charity".<sup>87</sup> Such public pressure prompted a committee of the Toronto City Council to create the "House of Industry", a permanent institution to dispense relief. Far more than a charity, its chief objectives were "the total abolition of street begging, the putting down of wandering vagrants, and securing an asylum at the least possible expence for the industrious and distressed poor".<sup>88</sup>

to the Mayor, 16 May 1834; Copy of Letter, Robert Jameson to Wm Rowan, 14 May 1834; City Papers, Copy of Opinion of Robert Jameson to Wm Rowan, 27 May 1834; Copy of Letter of Wm Rowan to Commissioners of Crown Lands and the Trustees, etc., 31 May 1834; Letter, Wm Rowan to the Mayor, 31 May 1834, and Report of a Committee of James Lesslie et al., 2 June 1834.

<sup>84</sup> *Upper Canada Gazette*, "An Act concerning Nuisances and the Good Government of the City", 30 May 1834. Section five stated: "It shall be the duty of the High Bailiff to prevent the erection of any huts or Shanties on the Beach, or public grounds, adjoining within the bounds of the said City and liberties, and to cause all such Huts or Shanties to be instantly removed." Here is an early instance of slum clearance.

<sup>85</sup> BR, Minutes of the General Quarter Sessions for the Home District, Dr Widmer to John Gamble, 9 May 1837.

<sup>86</sup> TCHA, City Papers, Petition of John Strachan, D.D. et al., 22 December 1836; "Public Meeting to Relieve Poor", *Correspondent and Advocate*, 28 December 1836.

<sup>87</sup> TCHA, City Papers, Letter, B. Turquand to T. D. Morrison, Mayor, 28 December 1836.

<sup>88</sup> TCHA, City Papers, Petition of a Committee appointed by the citizens to provide for the relief of the poor and destitute; *ibid*, Report of the Select Committee, 4 May 1837.

By 1836, therefore, it came to be admitted that the able-bodied poor in urban centres like York were in dire straits through little fault of their own. How different was this attitude from the official pronouncements of but a few years before! In 1832, for example, A. C. Buchanan had bluntly asserted that "the prospects of all industrious and sober persons of the working classes in the Canadas is exceedingly favourable, and that any failure in reaching a state of comparative prosperity will be entirely at their own door."<sup>89</sup> Christopher Hagerman, the Solicitor-General, was quoted as stating that "on their arrival in Canada they are no longer from necessity paupers".<sup>90</sup> Why, then, were there apparently so many able-bodied poor in the land of promise? This is no mystery. An emigrant with some or no capital could end up being no better off and sometimes more impoverished after coming to Upper Canada. Various obstacles on the road to independence and self-sufficiency existed from the moment of departure from Great Britain. Unscrupulous ship owners falsely advertised departure dates for North America, forcing passengers to wait sometimes for weeks before leaving and causing them to use their precious resources on food and lodging before setting aboard ship. Some ship captains gouged their charges during passage. Delays marked nearly every step of the emigrant's journey. Poor emigrants were known to wait for days and often weeks at Quebec City, Montreal and other St Lawrence ports, only to be held up again on route to their final destination or kept from gaining employment at places like York. Moreover, except for actually transporting pauper emigrants, housing them in rude dwellings, and feeding them oatmeal and soup, relief agencies were limited in their assistance.<sup>91</sup>

The perpetuation of destitution was attributable to other factors too. Poorer emigrants, as has been noted, proved more susceptible to disease. References to the misery, wretchedness, and overall ill-health of the destitute emigrants abound. The wharves at Prescott, for example, "were covered and the warehouses filled with the sick and dying, without friends or acquaintances, and many in a state of nudity."<sup>92</sup> During the cholera epidemic in 1834 the New York state militia kept out hundreds of emigrants who "wandered starved and half-naked along the Canadian border".<sup>93</sup> As noted in the *Poor Law Report* of 1834 they often could not help one another, for, "friends in this country they may indeed have; but alas, how powerless, how utterly incapable of affording them assistance out of their own scanty earnings! earnings never more than sufficient,

<sup>89</sup> "A. C. Buchanan, to Rev. A. R. C. Dalls, Comparative Statements of the Number of Emigrants", in *The Annual Report from The Agent for Emigration in Canada for 1836*.

<sup>90</sup> *Canadian Emigrant*, 12 May 1832.

<sup>91</sup> Referred to throughout the following: COWAN, *British Emigration to British North America*; GUILLET, *The Great Migration*; BR, *Copies of Despatches*; JLA, *Lower Canada (1831-32)*, Minutes of Evidence, 25 January 1832; *Poor Law Report*; and BR, *Report of the Special Sanitary Committee of Montreal Upon Cholera For the Year 1834*.

<sup>92</sup> WOLFE, "Myth of the Poor Man's Country", p. 93.

<sup>93</sup> ROSENBERG, *The Cholera Years*, pp. 24, 62.

generally barely sufficient, and occasionally absolutely insufficient, to support themselves."<sup>94</sup>

Destitution was further compounded by the Upper Canadian climate, by a lack of knowledge of pioneer conditions and farming techniques, and by accidents. During his sojourn as Lieutenant-Governor in the colony, Bond Head remarked that he had "often" passed "deserted log-huts, standing in the middle of what is called 'cleared land'".<sup>95</sup> In *The Emigrant*, he recounted the background to two instances where a homestead had to be abandoned. One involved a man crushed to death by a tree just felled in the backwoods, leaving behind a wife and family with nobody to support them; another concerned a man whose foot became jammed in his plough as a result of a freak accident. The latter was forced to cut away at his foot in order to extricate himself. The alternative had been certain death. In both cases, their pioneering efforts came to an abrupt end. To Bond Head, these "deserted log-huts" represented "little monuments of the failure of human expectations — of the blight of human hopes!"<sup>96</sup>

Personal crises were greatly aggravated by larger structural conditions which made it very difficult for many emigrants to realize their dreams of prosperity, self-reliance, and independence. These larger problems consisted of the curtailment of free or cheap land, a seasonal labour glut, and the tumultuous state of the Upper Canadian economy during the 1830s. Each factor will be considered in turn.

First, why was land made less accessible to these newcomers? After having watched the experiences of the Chelsea pensioners and others, the Colonial Office, while still interested in promoting emigration to the Canadas, was forced to concede that "poor people had not the means of living during the interval necessary to raise their crops, and further, that they knew not enough of the manner of farming in the colonies to make any progress."<sup>97</sup> Moreover, the realities of sparse settlement, which made co-operation among settlers very difficult, coupled with the perceived unsuitability of many emigrants in regard to age, physique, lack of knowledge and skills, and "bad habits" — drinking — were enough to convince the Colonial Office to discontinue land grants and provisions to poor settlers. With some legitimacy, the Colonial Office concluded that "the power of acquiring land with too much facility was injurious to the interests of the settlers themselves".<sup>98</sup> The Wilmot Horton

<sup>94</sup> *Poor Law Report*, Report on Emigration to the Canadas, p. 40. Also see: Vernon C. FOWKE, "The Myth of the Self-sufficient Canadian Pioneer", *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*, LVI (June 1962): 23-37.

<sup>95</sup> Francis Bond HEAD, *The Emigrant* (London: John Murray, 1846), p. 90.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 90-94.

<sup>97</sup> "Notice published by the Commissioners of Emigration, respecting the British colonies in North America, dated 15 March 1832", in BR, *Copies of Despatches*.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, "The Regulations for the Disposal of Lands belonging to the Crown in the British North American Provinces, contained in Letter, R. W. Hay to Lord Fitzroy Somerset, 12 August 1834", n.p. For background on land policies see: GATES, *Land Policies of Upper Canada*; R. G. RIDDELL, "A Study in the Land Policy of the Colonial Office, 1763-1855", *Canadian Historical Review*, XVII (1937): 385-405; J. Howard RICHARDS,

plan of settlement had been based on the idea of making all emigrants free-holders, but it had resulted in indiscriminate land granting and the scattering of resources, population and settlement. At the beginning of the 1830s, therefore, the Imperial government moved away from the Wilmot Horton system to one which better accommodated the new realities — the Wakefield system.

Edward Gibbon Wakefield had theorized the carrying out of a three-stage plan which, in contrast to the Wilmot Horton system, restricted land ownership. This was to be accomplished by only selling land in the colony at a sufficient or "upset" price at auction to the highest bidder. As poor emigrants would not be able to afford land under this arrangement — the very intention of the plan — they had no recourse, being without capital, but to work for wages until they had saved enough to make a purchase. It was then envisaged that the profits of land sales would be used to transport other British emigrants to the colonies. Meanwhile, poor emigrants were expected "to labour for hire for a while, and so provide a supply of labourers"; this in turn would act as an incentive for "small capitalists" to come.<sup>99</sup> This appears to represent a conscious attempt on the part of the Colonial Office to transform the Upper Canadian economy from a pre-industrial to an agrarian-commercial capitalist economy by means of the creation of a free labour market.<sup>100</sup> Notwithstanding that the Wakefield plan was never wholly adopted in Upper Canada during the 1830s, the decision to restrict land affected the pauper emigrant directly.

Why was the Wakefield plan not followed to the letter? A main reason is that the plan presupposed wide possibilities for employing the pauper emigrant. Yet, as had been noted in the *Poor Law Report*, to find employment at other than subsistence wages for unskilled workers was a major problem. This was compounded by the seasonal labour glut brought on by the emigrants themselves who, during the emigration season in May and June, arrived several thousand strong at Quebec City within days of each other. Many applied to work, the *Report* stated:

Even at reduced rates, but few can procure employment; the rest subsist on the funds provided before their departure, or failing those, be compelled to ask assistance of the charitable. From the constant influx therefore of settlers, many of whom become immediate competitors for employment, the chief cities of Lower Canada severally [*sic*] present the phenomenon of so many glutted labour markets.<sup>101</sup>

"Lands and Policies: Attitudes and Control in the Alienation of Lands in Ontario during the First Century of Settlement", *Ontario History*, L (December 1958): 193-209; Leo A. JOHNSON, "Land Policy, Population Growth and Social Structure in the Home District, 1763-1851", in *Historical Essays on Upper Canada*, ed.; J. K. JOHNSON (Toronto: McLelland & Stewart, 1975), pp. 32-57; HITCHINS, *The Colonial Land and Emigration Commission*, pp. 7-36; SHEPPERDSON, *British Emigration to North America*, p. 19.

<sup>99</sup> *Poor Law Report*, Report by Samuel Revans, p. 316.

<sup>100</sup> See: H. C. PENTLAND, "The Development of a Capitalistic Labour Market in Canada", *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, XXV (November 1959): 450, 455.

<sup>101</sup> *Poor Law Report*, Report on Emigration to the Canadas, p. 40.

Furthermore, there were the vicissitudes of seasonal employment and weather so poignantly discussed by Judith Fingard.<sup>102</sup> As early as 1831, land and provisions for one year had to be given from necessity by Colborne to seven or eight hundred families, a total of over three thousand persons, in order for them to survive, a policy antithetical to the Wakefield plan. Otherwise, as Strachan argued, "hardly one could have found employment in the Colony for the other portions of the Emigrants were *more than sufficient to occupy every opening*." [my emphasis] Colborne thereby helped stave off an impending catastrophe.<sup>103</sup>

The continuing arrival of pauper emigrants, their rapid removal from the towns into the countryside, the granting of small plots of land by government, and the expansion of social welfare services — all show these problems to have been endemic in the 1830s, until the sharp decline in emigration in the post-Rebellion period. Since much land was held by speculators and its cost was beyond the means of the very poor, Colborne had little choice but to undermine the preference of the Colonial Office for the Wakefield plan. Without jobs, pauper settlers could not earn much of a livelihood, let alone save. Even those with land had different though just as serious problems to face.

In this sense, the prospects of the pauper emigrant were certainly affected by the general state of the Upper Canadian economy. Subjected to the monopoly of the local grist and sawmill, the debt-ridden farmer would more easily suffer from low grain prices.<sup>104</sup> Following a few years of economic expansion, a wheat glut befell the colony in 1834-35, which had indeed led to lower prices. Prices improved again only slowly between 1835 and 1838.<sup>105</sup> As for the towns, the *Montreal Gazette* found Toronto experiencing a depression in 1835 unlike any in its history.<sup>106</sup> This "stagnation of trade & manufactures" lasted into 1836 when Bond Head made things worse by deciding to stop supplies over his disagreement with the House of Assembly on grievances. Bond Head confessed that "the stoppage of supplies had caused a general stagnation of Business, which will notably end in the ruin of many of the inhabitants of this city Toronto."<sup>107</sup> By the end of 1836 Upper Canada was entering into the grip of a world-wide economic recession which culminated in the following year in a

<sup>102</sup> See: Judith FINGARD, "The Winter's Tale: The Seasonal Contours of Pre-industrial Poverty in British North America, 1815-1860", THE CANADIAN HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION, *Historical Papers* 1974, pp. 65-94.

<sup>103</sup> PAC, Colborne Papers, MG24A40, 4/604-605, "Memorandum".

<sup>104</sup> Leo A. JOHNSON, *History of the County of Ontario, 1615-1875* (Whitby, Ont.: Corporation of Whitby, 1973), p. 91.

<sup>105</sup> Donald CREIGHTON, "The Economic Background of the Rebellions of 1837", in *Approaches to Canadian Economic History*, eds: W. T. EASTERBROOK and M. H. WATKINS (Toronto: McLelland & Stewart, 1967), p. 229.

<sup>106</sup> *Montreal Gazette*, 23 May 1835, cited in Douglas McCALLA, *The Upper Canada Trade, 1834-1872* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), p. 26. See also: John McCALLUM, *Unequal Beginnings: Agriculture and Economic Development in Quebec and Ontario until 1870* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), pp. 13-15.

<sup>107</sup> "To Sir Francis Bond Head, The Herald of Famine and Pestilence", *Correspondent and Advocate*, 7 June 1836.

great financial panic.<sup>108</sup> As Leo Johnson has argued, "farmers who had undertaken large mortgages in the boom years of 1833-34 were now caught in a desperate squeeze as prices fell and loans dried up."<sup>109</sup> One can imagine that, with the precarious state of the Upper Canadian economy, little could have been done to ease the problem of finding work for the able-bodied poor either in the countryside or in the towns.

In spite of all this, poverty — let alone pauperism — was not ubiquitous in the colony in this decade. There were the success stories of the Buchanan merchant family who managed to circumvent these economic woes as well as Horatio Alger-like tales among some of the more fortunate pauper emigrants.<sup>110</sup> But, overall, extreme poverty was in wide enough evidence to attract the fervent attention of various agencies: the Colonial Office, investors, politicians, and Lord Durham, who was commissioned to study the state of affairs in the Canadas. Much pauperism was to be found, in particular, in the countryside where not hundreds, but literally tens of thousands of destitute settlers had been sent. In 1835, for example, the North American Colonial Association of Ireland was incorporated by a British Act of Parliament. The rationale behind the association's formation was explicitly entered in the preamble of the Act of Incorporation, namely, that:

Poor persons emigrating from various Parts of the United Kingdom to His Majesty's Possessions in North America are exposed to great Suffering and Inconvenience from Defect of adequate Arrangements for Conveyance to such Possessions, and upon their Arrival there such Persons are often reduced to a State of great Destitution and Misery from Inability to procure an immediate Settlement, and the Insufficiency of their Means for clearing and cultivating the Lands on which they may be located.<sup>111</sup>

The prominent investors who backed this association included H. Kingscote, an important London banker, Sir John Colborne, the former Lieutenant-Governor, and many others. In 1839, the Association issued a prospectus with a share capital of £300,000, with the power to raise this amount to £1,000,000. It outlined a plan for emigration in the prospectus aimed at involving paupers. Their participation, it was stated, would "unite in one hand of mutual interest — the *Landlord*, who considerably seeks to provide for his humble dependents; the *Colonist*, who is anxious to see the resources of his Country developed; and the *Capitalist*, with whose assistance these remote elements of national wealth may be beneficially and permanently combined." The obvious intimation was that such co-operation had been conspicuously absent in Upper Canada before. "Instead of encountering the frightful difficulties to which many new Settlers are exposed", the Association promised, "they will find on their arrival pre-

<sup>108</sup> CREIGHTON, "The Economic Background", pp. 227-34.

<sup>109</sup> JOHNSON, *History of the County of Ontario*, p. 116.

<sup>110</sup> For example, see: McCALLA, *The Upper Canada Trade*, and Daniel J. Brock, "The Account of Two Families Who Settled Near Simcoe, 1834-1838", *Ontario History*, LVIII (March 1966): 43-68.

<sup>111</sup> GREAT BRITAIN, *Statutes*, "An Act for incorporating and granting certain Powers to the North American Colonial Association of Ireland", 5th and 6th Wm. IV, Chap. 110.

sent labour and food, with the opportunity of acquiring future independence."<sup>112</sup> In 1840 Kingscote and Colborne both made attempts to bring the merits of their proposal to the attention of Lord Normanby and Lord John Russell at the Colonial Office.<sup>113</sup> Their statement presents further evidence that the "hard times" experienced by many settlers were well-known in the upper echelons of British society.

What about those emigrants who arrived with some capital? Were their experiences in any way parallel to those of the pauper emigrant? To a certain extent this appears to be true. Long before the dramatic increase in pauper emigration, Colborne was discouraging a friend from investing his capital in the colony. In 1829, Colborne told his friend, there was "a very erroneous opinion as to the advantages of settlement". As far as he himself had been able to ascertain, "labourers are the only class that will not meet with disappointment."<sup>114</sup> As a future supporter of emigration, Colborne was to change his position on this matter during the early 1830s, but he partly reverted to his former view by 1836. Convinced at one time "that the clearing of forest land would make an excellent return", Colborne was said to have lost his "eagerness to see the wilderness studded with respectable settlers" when he relinquished his position as Lieutenant-Governor. Those who had come with capital had been forced to expend it in the Upper Canadian backwoods. The *Canadian Emigrant* added, "it is only within the last two or three years that a contrary and more correct notion has gained ground."<sup>115</sup> Lord Durham would make virtually the same observation in 1839 when he noted that,

Most of the emigrants who have arrived within the last ten years are poorer now than at the time of their arrival in the Province ... with the exception of a few favoured spots where some approach to American prosperity is apparent, all seems waste and desolate; a widely scattered population, poor and apparently unenterprising, *though hardy and industrious* [my emphasis] ... living in mean houses, drawing little more than a rude subsistence from ill-cultivated land, and seemingly incapable of improving their condition.<sup>116</sup>

The opinions of Colborne and Durham were further supported in a document written in 1841 by one such newcomer. John Prince, a prominent magistrate and Tory, had arrived in the colony in 1834. He had been asked to answer a questionnaire "for the information of emigrants with capital intending to settle on land", and "for the information of emigrants of the Labouring Classes". When asked to comment on what a settler should do with his capital upon coming to settle in the colony, Prince replied:

If a Capitalist determines upon coming to Canada he ought to bring out all his Capital in *money* as to investing any part of it in farming stock, that course

<sup>112</sup> PAC, Colborne Papers, MG24A40, 30/8771-8772, North American Colonial Association of Ireland.

<sup>113</sup> PAC, Colborne Papers, MG24A40, 25/7531, H. Kingscote to Sir John Russell, 5 March 1840; and 26/7660-7663, Colborne to the Duke of Argyll, 8 October 1840.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, n.p., Letter, Colborne to Wilson, 21 April 1829.

<sup>115</sup> *Canadian Emigrant*, 14 January 1836.

<sup>116</sup> Sir Charles LUCAS, ed., *Report on the Affairs of British North America*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912), II: 184-85, 212-13.

would be useless, as he will meet with no encouragement whatever ... nor do I know of *any* system of farming that will pay the Capitalist in Upper Canada 1 per cent for his money — The wages, wear and tear of implements, the low prices of farming produce, the long winter months, & the Doctor's bill for curing Fever, etc. eat up *all Profits*.

This view was the product of "bought experience of 7 years and close observation of every person and they around me that a capitalist had better throw his money over Blackfriar Bridge than bring it here *and embark it in farming operations*."<sup>117</sup> Prince complained as well that "the *worst* articles are sent by the Merchants of England to Upper Canada, just as the *worst* labourers & mechanics are sent or come here."

My advice to all persons of *Capital* who wish to try other lands than England is to *shun the continent of North America*. It is fit only for *labourers* who themselves & *their families* can till the farm — and if they are not killed by fever in Summer or frozen to death in Winter they may do about as well as *good* labourers do in England. ... To succeed in this country the men must work like Horses and the women like men. ... There are fewer charities and fewer charitable persons in this country than in any part of the civilized world as far as I can judge. ... I repeat my advice to all — Exist on bread & cheese & malt beer at home rather than live in North America.<sup>118</sup>

While he may have been atypical or misinformed, Prince insisted that "all the foregoing answers and remarks apply to the Western Country where I live; but I am informed, & I believe, they apply pretty much the same to all *Country* settlements in Upper Canada."<sup>119</sup> Leo Johnson's study of Ontario County largely confirms Prince's impressions. The average wealth of various townships in this county as determined by per capita assessment showed little increase generally, and in some instances an actual decrease in value, between 1830 and 1840.<sup>120</sup> Before a final verdict can be reached, however more quantitative research is needed.

#### IV

Emigration of Great Britain's "surplus population" was encouraged in the late 1820s and early 1830s to help solve that country's social, political and economic problems. Upper Canadians, on the other hand, wanted emigrants to settle the colony, diffuse the presence of American settlers, bring in capital, and provide cheap labour. Destitute emigrants were sent by parishes and landlords for various reasons, not the least of which was to stem the tide of pauperism in Britain. Ironically, by virtue of the volume of destitute emigrants to Upper Canada in the 1830s, pauperism and its accompanying "evils" — crime, vice, disease, and disorder — ended up being exported to the colony. In attempting to help solve Great Britain's

<sup>117</sup> PAC, Emigration and Immigration Papers, RG7G14, p. 551; see also: R. Alan DOUGLASS, "John Prince", in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, ed.: F. G. HALPENNY (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), IX: 643-47.

<sup>118</sup> PAC, Emigration and Immigration Papers, RG7G14, p. 551.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> JOHNSON, *History of the County of Ontario*, p. 80.

problems, Upper Canadians inherited many of the same problems themselves.

That this conclusion is contrary to prevailing opinion, for example, that "until the famine migration of the late 1840's, only a few of the immigrants to Ontario Upper Canada were indigent", goes without saying.<sup>121</sup> It is possible that this aspect of Upper Canadian history has not been more prominent because the colony's desperate search for settlers fused with the British government's desire to use emigration to reduce social tensions at home. Had the Tories openly admitted the failures of emigration, how many potential emigrants would have seriously considered coming to the colony? In denying the existence of "paupers" in Upper Canada, that is paupers "properly speaking", Upper Canadians appear to have adopted the same qualitative distinction as the Poor Law Commissioners in England, namely, that "indigence", or pauperism, was "the state of a person unable to labour, or unable to obtain, in return for his labour, the means of subsistence". In turn, poverty was defined as "the state of one who, in order to obtain a mere subsistence, is forced to have recourse to labour."<sup>122</sup> Able-bodied persons, it was assumed, would be able to eke out an existence in Upper Canada either on the land or by working for wages. They were therefore not considered paupers. Yet, while not a majority, destitute emigrants were certainly a sizeable minority among newcomers to the Canadas, and they increased in size proportionately between 1830 and 1835.

Unfortunately for the destitute emigrant, structural conditions such as the volume of emigration, the nature of settlement, the glut of labour in summer and the shortage of employment in winter, as well as the Upper Canadian economy in general, made his task all the more difficult, if not impossible at times. Disease, desertion and death only magnified his problems. This situation, which had begun to tax the resources of Upper Canada considerably as early as 1830, led to a further development also not fully appreciated before. Early on, existing voluntary charitable societies were simply unable to meet the demands placed upon them by these destitute emigrants. Thus, *laissez-faire* and voluntary charity gave way to state intervention. The "idle", or unemployed, labourer was given food, shelter, passage, and in some instances land and provisions to prevent the stark possibility of starvation. Additionally, the great "need" for relief brought with it the proliferation of societies and legislation for lunatics, the sick, victims of the cholera who had lost a family breadwinner, deserted and widowed women, children, the old, and the infirm.

Continuing and increasingly visible urban pauperism, particularly though not exclusively in Toronto, contributed to the decision by government and prominent citizens to institute a permanent form of poor relief

<sup>121</sup> For example, see: R. Cole HARRIS and John WARKENTIN, *Canada Before Confederation: A Study in Historical Geography* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1974).

<sup>122</sup> CHECKLAND and CHECKLAND, eds., *The Poor Law Report of 1834*, p. 334. As Christopher Hagerman remarked on destitute emigrants, "on their arrival in Canada, they are no longer from necessity paupers", *Canadian Emigrant*, 12 May 1832.

in the city — the House of Industry. The fact that this move met with opposition from Reformers is worth noting as is the fact that the House of Industry Act was never fully implemented. These are properly the subject of another study. More significantly, it is abundantly clear that this multi-faceted institution did not just serve the needs of the poor. Rather, it was intended to be, and in its earliest years operated as, an instrument of social control reflecting both benevolence and domination.

Lastly, the socio-economic conditions engendered by the arrival of this pauper multitude was recognized at least privately, and often publicly, by the British government through the Colonial Office and the Secretary at War, by wealthy investors, by the two Lieutenant-Governors of these years (albeit somewhat belatedly), by Lord Durham who came to investigate Canadian affairs, and, one would think, by the destitute settlers themselves. The serious hardships of settling tens of thousands of poor persons, with little or no capital, and generally unsuited or ill-equipped for life in the backwoods, in a sparsely settled land, appears to have provided a definite impetus to discontinue selling land to destitute settlers and to attempt the implementation of the Wakefield system. Upper Canada was indeed “a poor man’s country”, but definitely not in the manner originally intended by emigration promoters.

Why has pauper emigration to Upper Canada been glossed over or regarded as historically peripheral in the literature? Undoubtedly, there are several reasons. One factor seems to have been an excessive reliance on travel accounts or sketches of the province written by persons interested in furthering emigration — hardly unbiased observers. Among these were Thomas Sockett, rector of Petworth, chairman of the Petworth Emigration Committee, and close associate of Lord Egremont; James Marr Brydone, surgeon and superintendent of the Petworth Emigration Committee; and G. J. P. Scrope, born Poulett Thomson, the brother of Lord Sydenham, whose interest in the plight of the British working classes led him to attack the “immutable economic laws” of political economy.<sup>123</sup> Their Canadian counterparts were Boulton and Buchanan. What has been unrecognized is that, in the case of Lord Egremont’s Petworth and Sussex emigrants, the Colonial Office actively intervened in order to ensure that special arrangements for their reception into Upper Canada were carried out.<sup>124</sup> As such, these arrivals were model examples of pauper emigration; they

<sup>123</sup> Thomas SOCKETT, *Emigration: A letter to a Member of Parliament* (Petworth and London, 1833); *Emigration Letters from Sussex Emigrants* (Petworth and London, 1833); James M. BRYDONE, *Narrative of a Voyage with a Party of Emigrants from Sussex, 1834* (Petworth and London, 1834); William CATTERMOLE, *Emigration: The Advantages of Emigration to Canada, being the substance of Two Lectures Delivered at The Town-Hall Colchester, and the Mechanics Institution Ipswich* (London, 1831); G. Poulett SCROPE, *Extracts of Letters from Poor Persons who Emigrated Last Year to Canada and the United States* (London, 1832); *Letters from Settlers in Upper Canada* (London, 1833).

<sup>124</sup> PAC, Colborne Papers, MG24A40, 4/925-927, Hay to Colborne, 26 March 1832; 5/1136-1137, Hay to Colborne, 7 April 1835. For background on these particular emigrants, see: Wendy CAMERON, “The Petworth Emigration Committee: Lord Egremont’s Assisted Emigrations from Sussex to Upper Canada, 1832-37”, *Ontario History*, LXV (December 1973): 231-46.

were by no means typical, and their letters home should have been suspect.

The last factor is the absence of written records from the labouring poor and the destitute emigrant, either because of illiteracy or because of the minimal value historians traditionally accorded surviving documents from such beings seen as marginal. Consequently, our knowledge of pioneer conditions tends to reflect the reports and observations of the educated middle and upper classes, whose perceptions, let alone experiences, may by no means have been representative or an accurate mirror of the rest of Upper Canadian society.

### RÉSUMÉ.

*L'émigration des pauvres au Haut-Canada dans les années 1830 était directement liée aux conditions socio-économiques en Grande-Bretagne, servant de soupape de sûreté pour «l'excédent démographique» de ce pays. Les autorités coloniales faisaient appel à des émigrants de toutes sortes dans le double but d'appuyer les intérêts du Haut-Canada et de venir en aide à la mère patrie. On a fortement sous-estimé le nombre d'émigrants sans ressources qui, de leur propre gré ou non, sont alors venus dans les Canadas. On n'a aussi que partiellement évalué l'accueil qu'ils ont reçu, les problèmes d'adaptation qu'ils ont eus, de même que l'influence qu'ils ont exercée sur la répartition des terres et les formes d'assistance publique. Nous essayons ici de reconnaître les effectifs de ces miséreux, leur origine et les conditions de leur venue; nous établissons aussi pourquoi les structures de la société ont perpétué une indigence qui, à l'origine, n'était liée qu'au type et au nombre même de ces émigrants. Nous concluons que les autorités d'alors ont délibérément sous-évalué l'ampleur des difficultés que connaissaient les nouveaux arrivants au point de déformer la réalité, cette présentation des choses devant néanmoins être reprise par les historiens.*