

Paupers and Poorhouses

The Development of Poor Relief in Early New Brunswick

by Brereton GREENHOUS. *

The well-known enthusiasm of John Graves Simcoe for "a perfect Image and Transcript of the British Government and Constitution" in Upper Canada was significantly limited in one direction. Although the first statute adopted by his Legislature in its first session was an act to introduce the main body of English civil law into the province, it carefully stipulated "that nothing in this Act ... shall ... introduce any of the laws of England respecting the maintenance of the poor ..."¹ Richard Splane, in his *Social Welfare in Ontario*, speculates that the omission may have been due either to Simcoe's inherent distrust of decentralization or a realization that the system of English Poor Law was not suited to the condition of his province,² but it seems much more likely that the latter was the case, since Upper Canada also rejected the English Bankruptcy Law which could not conceivably have been concerned in decentralization. Moreover, Upper Canada had before it, in the evolving situation of New Brunswick, an excellent example of the complications which arose when a highly mobile, thinly settled and financially insecure community, very similar to itself, tried to adapt to its use a Poor Law designed for a comparatively static, socially immobile, wealthy and well settled environment. There were good and obvious reasons, on the basis of New Brunswick's five years' experience, for leaving poor relief in private hands as much as possible, so that it might be offered in kind rather than demanded in cash,³ and then supplying any needed balance upon a provincial rather than a parish level. Private charity could often supply goods and services but in a frontier society there were often very limited amounts of money in circulation. What there were could be better and more easily distributed on an equitable basis by the provincial authorities,

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¹ Upper Canada *Statutes*, 32 Geo. III, cap. 1.

² Richard B. SPLANE, *Social Welfare in Ontario*, Toronto, 1965, p. 66.

³ For its first three years even New Brunswick had to realise the truth of this and permit taxes to be paid in services. 26 Geo. III, cap. 42, allowed justices to assess and levy taxes for building gaols and courthouses, but anyone who could not meet his assessment in cash might work it off at the rate of 2/6d per ten-hour working day, working on the actual construction. However, this clause of the Act was repealed by 29 Geo. III, cap. 3.

and, in fact, New Brunswick proved to be the last British colony in North America to attempt a system of poor relief copied almost exactly from that of the mother country, just as Upper Canada was the first to strike out in a new, far more centralized, manner.

The pattern of New Brunswick's poor relief was established at the first session of the province's first Legislature, with the passage of "An Act for preventing Idleness and Disorders and for punishing Rogues, Vagabonds and other Idle and Disorderly Persons", very similar in its essential aspects to the great Elizabethan Poor Law statute.⁴ The poor law unit was clearly going to be the town or parish and the basic instrument the justice of the peace.

All persons who not having any visible means of supporting themselves, live idle and refuse to work for the usual wages, and all persons going about to beg alms ... and all persons who return to such Town or Parish or Place from whence they have been legally removed by order of two Justices of the Peace, without bringing a certificate from the Town or Parish where they belong, shall be deemed idle and disorderly persons.⁵

The justices were empowered to have suspects apprehended by the constable, examined by themselves and, if found guilty of being idle and disorderly, committed "to Prison or to the House of Correction, there to be kept to hard labour for any time not exceeding one month". The widespread lack of prisons at that time⁶ and the total absence of houses of correction in the province for some time to come, were apparently not considered too important a handicap by the Legislature. The possibility that the Act was one to cover contingencies rather than to meet an immediate need is supported by an observation in the *Royal Gazette* eighteen months later that "notwithstanding the extensiveness of the county and city of Saint John and the number of inhabitants that live in it, there is not at this time a single person confined in the Gaol ... either for debt or any other trespass or misdemeanor whatsoever".⁷

Sick and infirm poor were another matter. The next Act of the same session confirmed that the poor law unit was going to be the town or parish and the basic instrument the justices of the peace, ordering the

⁴ 39 Eliz., cap. 4.

⁵ 26 Geo. III, cap. 27. Statutes quoted are New Brunswick *Statutes* except where otherwise stated or chronologically impossible.

⁶ See footnote 3. Authorization for building gaols had not yet been granted and as late as May 27, 1787, the *Royal Gazette* was proclaiming that "unless those persons who have not paid their assessment for building a Gaol in Saint John do so by the 20th inst., warrants will be issued against them".

⁷ *Royal Gazette*, Oct. 16, 1787.

justices to appoint "out of every Town or Parish in the said County, three fit persons to be Overseers of the Poor". The possibility of these unfortunate appointees declining the office was also considered by the Legislature.

And upon their or any or either of their refusal to accept, or being guilty of any neglect, or misbehaviour, in the execution of the duty of their respective offices, they shall forfeit and pay, for the use of the Poor of the said Town or Parish, the sum of Forty Shillings, for every such refusal, neglect or misbehaviour.

Overseers having been authorized, the question of the resident poor of the parish — able-bodied or infirm — was taken up. Financing procedures were considered first and it was decided that the Overseers of the poor "shall at the first General Sessions of the Peace, annually ... lay before the Justices ... the state and condition of the Poor in their several districts, which statement the said Justices ... are ... required to supervise, examine and allow; and thereupon shall issue their Warrants to the Assessors ... for the assessing and levying of the several sums". Once raised, the money was to be "paid into the hands of the Overseers of the Town or Parish where such rates are assessed".⁸

This Act firmly established in New Brunswick the ancient English principle that a parish must support its own poor through a compulsory levy upon the inhabitants of that parish, along the general lines of 43 Eliz., cap. 2. It went even further than the English law, in that the New Brunswick version omitted an equivalent of the "rate in aid" clause which, although rarely utilized, proclaimed that if an English parish could not raise sufficient funds, then the hundred and, if necessary, the county, should be assessed as well. The emergent Poor Law of New Brunswick lacked, even from the beginning, that flexibility provided by "rate in aid", and stipulated that the poor rate could be paid only "into the hands of the Overseers of the Town or Parish where such rates are assessed".

The same Act went on to lay down procedures for dealing with the poor once funds for maintenance had been realised and particularly concerned itself with the able-bodied paupers, the "idle and disorderly" with "no visible means of support", who irrevocably belonged to the parish. If they were considered "likely to become chargeable to the Town or Parish where they reside" the overseers could "oblige" them to take employment, and bind out any children as apprentices, apparently

⁸ 26 Geo. III, cap. 28.

irrespective of parental consent, males to the age of twenty-one and females to eighteen. Then, for "such Poor who are not able to earn a living", the overseers might hire or buy a house for them to live in and purchase materials so that they could be kept employed to whatever extent they might be capable. But there was an alternative solution offered as well.

The said Overseers ... are hereby empowered ... to agree with some person residing in the same Town or Parish to take into their house, at a yearly allowance, and employ such Poor, in any labour they are able to do, and to give credit for the same to the Overseers, from the sum allowed them for the said yearly maintenance of the Poor; and that Public charities may not be abused, the said Overseers are hereby directed to act with impartiality, and to put the said Poor in the hands of the person who shall offer to keep them at the least expense, having at the same time a regard to the character of the person who offers, so that the Poor may not be inhumanly treated, nor the Public abused.

Nothing like this last clause was to be found in the body of English Poor Law on which the remainder of the statute was so obviously based. And from it, since the overseers were unpaid and generally busy men who were naturally reluctant to spend much of their time inquiring about their parishes for respectable people willing to take in paupers, or dickering over price with those who were, arose the notorious pauper auctions of New Brunswick.⁹

Why was such a clause inserted? It would seem because otherwise the overseers would have had to "hire or purchase" a house in order to fulfill the provisions of the Act and there were good reasons, in the New Brunswick of the 1780's, why such a course of action was impractical. There could have been barely enough houses in the province in 1786 to afford shelter for all the able, hard working and more prosperous settlers — more than 12,000 Loyalists had poured in since 1783¹⁰ — and the possibility of finding anyone with a house to rent at a reasonable price must have been remote. Nor was there much hope that such sparsely and recently settled parishes as existed at that time would be able to buy or build without imposing a disastrously heavy assessment.

The alternative expressed in the "auction" clause offered certain practical advantages to both overseers and citizens in an essentially frontier

⁹ Still occurring as late as the 1880's. See Grace AITKEN, "The Selling of Paupers by Public Auction in Sussex Parish", in *Collections of The New Brunswick Historical Society*, No. 16.

¹⁰ James HANNAY, *History of New Brunswick*, St. John, N.B., 1909, p. 142.

community where even agriculture was not yet firmly established. A settler who planned to spend the summer clearing and cultivating his land and to winter in the woods, trapping or lumbering, might find it both convenient and profitable to have some old pauper in residence to cut firewood and attend to the farm chores, especially if, as was not uncommon, his wife had a large brood of young children to look after.

Unfortunately, such a system was also open to substantial abuses despite the promulgations of the Legislature. Paupers so old or infirm as to be virtually invalids, who were incapable of any productive labour and who might well be disagreeable in their personal habits, were not in demand amongst the more prosperous categories of society. Often the only people who were prepared to put them up and suffer their idiosyncrasies were those whose own economic situation was marginal and who badly needed any small profit they could make from the deal. Although "inhumanity" is a matter of comparison and almost any standard of living is humane compared with starving to death, the position of a pauper in such a home might be very unpleasant.

In the present mode of providing for paupers it cannot be expected that they should at all times be comfortable. — The writer of the above has seen an aged person shivering in bed in an open house where there was a stove but where the family who kept her could not at all times procure fuel.¹¹

A deplorably speculative element also entered into these pauper auctions. Bidding was on an annual basis "for the said yearly maintenance" and the money paid over in advance, so that the unscrupulous might bid on a pauper "with one foot in the grave and the other on a banana skin", to use a twentieth-century expression, at a ridiculously low price. If the pauper died shortly afterwards, his temporary guardian made a good profit on the transaction, but there was little incentive in such a case to try very hard to keep the pauper alive, for that would mean a loss on the year. Abuses such as these, of course, took time to grow up and, in the earliest days of the province, the system was probably as humane as could be devised short of making pauperism and poor relief a provincial responsibility.

In any case, the provisions of this Act, supplemented by the ominous decision of 1793 that permitted justices to make a second assessment during the year "by reason of many persons becoming Poor and charge-

¹¹ Letter to the *Royal Gazette*, Jan. 28, 1817.

able long before any provision can be made for their relief”¹² sufficed to carry New Brunswick into the next century.

As for private charity, we have little record of any prior to 1819. The age of *laissez-faire* had arrived and while, no doubt, there were still many individual acts of kindness, organized private charity had many utilitarian objections to overcome in the business of assisting the indigent. People were often liberal in their donations when it was a question of relieving the relatively prosperous from misfortunes clearly brought about by “acts of God”, and quite large sums were quickly and frequently raised to aid sufferers from fire, flood or shipwreck. But the inherently poor, the incapable and the incompetent, seem to have been looked upon in a different light and there was a deep-seated suspicion that charity to them encouraged idleness. People on all levels of society were puzzled by the problem of deciding where charity ended and unwarranted largesse began.

Lilian Maxwell, in her *History of Central New Brunswick*, reports the first New Brunswick charitable society to have been “The Emigrant Society” of Fredericton, which was founded on December 2, 1819.¹³ But the *Royal Gazette* of October 27, 1787, carried an advertisement signed by “P. Lugin, Secretary” to the effect that a quarterly meeting of the “Humane and Charitable Society” would be held on the following Saturday evening in McPherson’s Coffee House at seven o’clock, for the purpose of electing officers.

The above Society beg leave to acquaint the public that they have, since their first institution, been enabled to relieve weekly from 15 to 40 distressed persons, but from the increase of objects and the great probability of the funds being inadequate to the relief of the number who will probably apply during the ensuing winter, they earnestly recommend it to the humane and charitable of their fellow citizens to contribute to so laudable a purpose.¹⁴

The establishment of a regular quarterly meeting implies that the Society had been in existence for some time previously, and the quite broad range of “from 15 to 40 persons” helped weekly also suggests that the Society may have been well established, but there is only this one isolated instance of the work of the Society recorded in the pages of the *Gazette*. In fact, this is the only reference to any private charity during

¹² 33 Geo. III, cap. 6.

¹³ L. H. B. MAXWELL, *The History of Central New Brunswick to The Time of Confederation*, Sackville, N.B., 1937, p. 151.

¹⁴ The King’s Printer and editor and publisher of the *Royal Gazette* was George K. Lugin.

the first twenty-four years of the province's existence, for there is not even any indication of the churches working in this field before 1810 when "a Sermon was preached by the Rev. Mr. Pidgeon at Fredericton concerning Sunday Schools for Poor Children. After the Sermon a collection was made for poor children amounting to £ 18. 4. 3d."¹⁵ Between 1821 and 1832, if not earlier, it had become customary for the Christmas Day collection at most churches and chapels to be devoted to poor relief.¹⁶ In 1829 the *Saint John Courier* was referring to "the formation of such female benevolent societies as are now in operation in connexion with almost every Church or Chapel in this City"¹⁷ but the clerics of the province never seem to have become involved in charitable activities in the way that John Strachan and George Okill Stuart did in Upper Canada.

Meanwhile, in the realm of public charity, Saint John had shown considerable inventiveness in raising funds. It seems likely that, as usual, the problems of poverty were more severe in urban areas than they were in rural ones. In any case, Saint John, as the premier seaport of the province, had to deal with many near-destitute emigrants who arrived in New Brunswick. Consequently "An Act for the further and better support of the Poor in the City of Saint John"¹⁸ which was passed during the 1801 legislative session established a tax on dogs which was not to amount to more than five shillings for any one dog. The money thus raised was to be "Appropriated and applied for the support of the Poor and to no other purpose".

Three years later the poor rate in many parts of the province was also being supplemented by fines on those found guilty of a rather specialised form of trespass, a practise which drew the following letter to the *Gazette* from a somewhat disgruntled gentleman who signed himself "A Customer", but who may well have been a magistrate as well.

In some of the Counties they have exercised that power to prevent horses and hogs running at large on the Commons. As the law now stands the penalty for a breach of this law goes to the Overseers of the Poor, and nothing to the informer, consequently no one will inform . . . Now, Sir, as I think it degrading to the character of a Magistrate (although I contend it is his duty) to take up horses and hogs and drive them to the public pound, and as the present law does not authorise him to order any other

¹⁵ *Royal Gazette*, March 5, 1810.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Jan. 2, 1821, Jan. 4, 1832, *et al.*

¹⁷ Quoted by the *Royal Gazette*, Jan. 20, 1829.

¹⁸ 41 Geo. III, cap. 8.

person to do it, I propose ... that some person should be appointed, who shall be obliged to take up all horses and hogs running contrary to law.¹⁹

Whoever the author may have been, he seems to have had some influence, for a year later Samuel Smiler came on the payroll of the Saint John's Common Council and earned £ 4 for "catching hogs" between April 1805 and March 1806.²⁰ Smiler was already employed by the overseers of the Poor as collector of the dog tax.²¹ He could hardly have been a popular man about town, despite his name.

Not every parish was as progressive, and as late as 1820 the *Gazette* — now published at Fredericton — was rather plaintively inquiring "how long might the poor of Fredericton be fed by such means?", after reporting that in Halifax the sum of £ 14 had recently been distributed to the poor, "being the net proceeds of sundry hogs which were caught at large in the streets of that town and sold according to law".²² Saint John continued to be particularly adept at raising poor relief revenues by indirect methods, probably because of its unusual pauper problem. In 1806 a by-law "to secure Fisheries within the City Limits of Saint John" provided that offenders against it should be fined and half the money go to the informer, half to the overseers of the Poor.²³ A similar penalty was enacted in a by-law regulating the size of fish barrels, although this latter one was almost immediately repealed,²⁴ no doubt to the dismay of the overseers, who had been experiencing difficulty in obtaining their requirements by direct taxation as early as 1799. In that year the Common Council had passed a by-law "to facilitate the recovery of assessments made for the support of the poor in Saint John". Miscreants were to be given five days from demand in which to pay up or be hauled into court.²⁵

In such curious and varied fashions New Brunswick met and vainly endeavoured to overcome the problems posed by the thoughtless imposition of a system of poor relief evolved to meet the needs of a very different society. A correspondent of the *Gazette* analysed the problem as early as 1817 well enough to deserve quoting at length, even though he had no constructive alternative to offer in detail.

¹⁹ *Royal Gazette*, Sept. 26, 1804.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, March 3, 1807.

²¹ *Ibid.*, April 20, 1803, March 18, 1804, *et al.*

²² *Ibid.*, March 7, 1820.

²³ *Ibid.*, May 28, 1806.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, April 20, 1807.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, Aug. 13, 1799.

In looking over the List of Poor's Rates we find the sum assessed for the last year in the Parish of Fredericton amounts to £352 and, allowing this to be one half of the Rates of the County, it will make £704 for Poor's Rate in the County of York. Now, allowing the other Counties to average £600, it gives £4,200, making in all a total of £4,900 at a moderate calculation for the province, which perhaps falls short of the real amount. This sum in a Country so thinly peopled ... where land is plenty [*sic*] is certainly enormous. We may also notice their rapid increase, having nearly tripled in the short space of three years, and their insufficiency still to relieve all that in want ... high rates, among other evils, have a tendency to destroy the finer feelings of our nature, for where people are highly rated, they grow hardhearted and often refuse aid to a deserving object, because they think that they have already been compelled to contribute more than their share...

Many are ever ready to blame the Assessors, some the Collectors, and others the Overseers, not considering that it is not the mode of raising, but the magnitude of the sum wanted, that occasions the evil, and that the Overseers (particularly of this Parish) instead of censure, deserve the thanks of the Public, as they generally advance the most of the money, and wait nearly a year for their pay.

In short, the devising of some plan to check this growing evil deeply concerns the public; *and it may not be long a Parish or a County but a Provincial concern*; and it is much to be desired that some way may be provided to relieve more effectually real objects [*sic*] and to prevent any imposter from preying on the public and eating the bread of charity.²⁶

Fredericton, as the provincial capital, may not have been typical of the parishes, but its poor rate had tripled between 1814 and 1817 according to this correspondent. One cause of that could have been disabled and demoralised soldiers returning from the war, but a larger one was probably brought about by the demobilisation of able-bodied men from the regular service and the militia. Soldiering is not an occupation conducive to good work habits at the best of times and many formerly sturdy workers may have become addicted to idleness in the service and subsequently found the receipt of charity a more attractive way of life than regular employment. There was an almshouse — probably rented — in Fredericton by December 1814,²⁷ and a gaol, but no workhouse or house of industry until after 1822,²⁸ so that the able-bodied poor still had to be auctioned off or kept in comparative idleness at the almshouse, despite the best efforts of the overseers.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, January 28, 1817. My emphasis.

²⁷ A Mrs. Susannah Tomlinson died there at the beginning of the month, aged 78 (*Royal Gazette*, Dec. 5, 1814).

²⁸ 3 Geo. IV, cap. 25. Building tenders were called for in the *Royal Gazette*, Sept. 17, 1822.

Overseers of the Poor — Simple employment such as sawing wood is solicited for several shiftless persons who are in distress. As the prices of sawing are usually *stated*, the employer can loose [*sic*] nothing by the slowness of the operator. — Enquire of the Overseers of the Parish.²⁹

In neither case was there any provision for applying compulsion or punishment to any pauper who resolutely declined to work, unless he was a resident of another parish,³⁰ so that parishes found the cost of keeping even their own poor rising steeply.

Yet with the turn of the century had come the first whisperings of a new and far greater problem in the field of poor relief. It was easy enough to ship the able-bodied poor of a neighbouring parish back where they belonged after getting a month's hard labour out of them; and the infirm poor, rarely transient, were each parish's own admitted problem. But what was to be done with penniless emigrants, fit or unfit, who arrived on New Brunswick shores?

The full tide of emigration did not begin to flow until after the War of 1812 — 7,000 came to New Brunswick in 1819³¹ — but by 1806 the Common Council of Saint John had already been forced to act on its own against shipowners and shipmasters.

Whereas a practice has prevailed of bringing into the City of Saint John from divers parts of the United States of America and other places without the Province in vessels owned and navigated by Citizens of the said City and others, poor, decrepit, blind or infirm persons not belonging to or entitled to a residence in the said City, incapable of earning a livelihood and destitute of all manner of support, whereby the Citizens of the said City have been most wrongfully burthened with taxes for the purposes of maintaining and supporting such poor, decrepit and infirm persons...³²

Shipmasters were ordered to report on the status of every passenger they brought to Saint John and, in the case of those the authorities found unsatisfactory in any way, they had to "give a Bond or Obligation with two good and sufficient sureties ... in the penalties of £ 100 for each such passenger". If the passenger either left the province or had not become a public charge, within one month of landing, the bond would be cancelled.

This by-law must have been repealed or allowed to lapse, either during or just after the war, however, for in 1816 the province was hopefully encouraging unlimited emigration from Britain, with the

²⁹ *Royal Gazette*, Jan. 1, 1821.

³⁰ 26 Geo. III, cap. 27. See *supra*, p. 104.

³¹ MAXWELL, *The History of Central New Brunswick...*, p. 151.

³² *Royal Gazette*, April 2, 1806.

Legislature voting £ 1,000 to publicize New Brunswick and subsidize vessels bringing immigrants across. ³³

Emigrants brought out "free of expense" were not likely to have much capital when they arrived, but that did not necessarily mean that they would become a burden on the poor rate. If they were mechanics or artisans — and we may charitably hope that the government had enough common sense to recruit such people! — there were plenty of opportunities to practise their trades. The real problems arose over the privately organized emigration to this "Promised Land" of peasant smallholders and agricultural labourers who inevitably found great difficulty in adapting themselves to an environment like that of New Brunswick, lacking as they were in the vital frontier skills of axe-work and stump-pulling, the construction of log cabins and the handling of canoes.

Once the ordinary emigrant set foot in the province neither government nor shipper nor speculator made any move to help him during these early years. But, the government did help one particularly group with provincially financed relief. During the amphibious operations conducted by British forces along the western and southern seaboard of the United States in the War of 1812, numbers of slaves fled from their American masters to the protection of British ships and lines. Some of them eventually arrived in New Brunswick and, in 1817, "Mr. Peters presented [to the Assembly] the petition of William Flood, in behalf of himself and forty other black people brought into this province . . . in the year 1815, praying aid to assist them in forming a settlement at Loch Lomond". ³⁴ This little group formed the basis of a community which received legislative grants almost annually until 1838, when the Assembly voted them £ 97. 7. 11d. and decided "that as employment can easily be obtained in the Agricultural and Lumbering districts of the Province, no further grant be hereafter made, except to such as are disabled by age or infirmity". ³⁵ On the other hand, immigrants from the United Kingdom could expect no provincial assistance once they were landed, and had to rely largely upon private charity, which began to play an organized and

³³ House of Assembly, *Journal*, March 8, 1816.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, Feb. 14, 1817.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, Feb. 17, 1838.

recorded part in the history of the province in 1819, with the raising by private subscription of £ 76. 10. 0d. to help some destitute Welshmen.

At a meeting of the Inhabitants of Fredericton held at the Jerusalem Coffee House on Saturday evening last, it was proposed and concluded upon to form a Society for the purpose of assisting the Welch families who are about forming a settlement between the Madam Keswick [*sic*] and the Nashwack; and that Samuel Grovenor and Peter Fisher be nominated a Committee to take charge of any articles of husbandry, clothing, provisions, tools, etc. that may be contributed.³⁶

The formation of such an organization was not universally approved of, however, and the following week the *Gazette* carried an explanatory appeal couched largely in utilitarian terms and clearly designed to attract the Benthamites of the town.

For the information of persons who have or may become Subscribers to assist the Welch families ... these statements are to show that it was the intention of the meeting to put the families in a way to become useful Settlers, by furnishing those means without which, however small, they could by no means move on their lands. That it was not their intention to make them idle or to damp their exertions by giving too much, for they were well aware that on the industry of the Settlers the prosperity of the Settlement must ultimately depend. It was their design to assist and stimulate industry; not to destroy it. And it is evident, without some effort to assist them the Settlement could not have been formed, as the families had already began [*sic*] to disperse for want of encouragement.

There have also been objections to confining the purposes of the society to the Welch, and not to emigrants in general. The Welch families were the particular objects of the meeting because they had been some time in town.... Their families were straggling through the Streets or crowded in Barns. ... the Committee are this particular because they are concerned it is the want of understanding the design of the meeting that has prevented several Gentlemen from giving it their support.³⁷

Subscriptions promised had meanwhile risen to "£ 135 and a large quantity of clothing", but it was still not enough. Six weeks later the Welsh emphasis had been entirely abandoned and the appeal was a little more emotional, although the last five words might be construed as anti-climatic.

It must be evident to every reflecting person that it is of the utmost consequence to get as many of the destitute families at present among us as possible on their land before winter, for if they remain in town there will not be employment for them; and as they would not be left to perish outright, a subsistence, however miserable, must be afforded them by individual charity or at the expense of the parish. The Overseers of the Poor have their hands full already, the present rates are paid with reluctance, and no friend to the country can wish to have the number

³⁶ *Royal Gazette*, Aug. 10, 1819.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, Aug. 17, 1819.

of unproductive persons augmented. House room, too, would be difficult to procure — few persons, however willing to assist the distressed, would like to admit families whose habits are so different from their own, into their houses ... and ... by remaining in town their habits and morals may be affected; the want of a steady occupation and encouragement might destroy industry, give them a distaste for the steady life of a husbandman and lead them into idleness and knavery, or what is worse, drunkenness.³⁸

But by this time it was already too late in the year simply to give new immigrants supplies and set them out in the bush to “farm” their way through a New Brunswick winter. Two weeks later the Mayor of Fredericton took the chair at a meeting which decided to open a registry office where “all Emigrants may make known their circumstances, situations and objects”. It was also agreed that “the most eligible method of assisting needy Emigrants ... will be to take measures without delay to have them hutted on some of the uncultivated lands in the neighbourhood of the City where they may be enabled to provide their own fuel and, if necessary, may be occasionally assisted with provisions”.³⁹

By mid-November the subscription list had reached £170, although it was mostly in the form of goods, only £15. 14. 1½d. having been received in cash.⁴⁰ There were still people who disagreed with the whole idea, and the *Gazette* observed that “many look upon wandering Emigrants with total indifference, while others appear to be hardened against them”.

Yet the advantages of being able to subscribe in goods instead of paying an increased tax in cash must have been obvious and the idea of organized private charity spread rapidly. A meeting on November 26th appointed a committee to consider “how the Emigrants might be helped on a long-term basis” and on the 29th a further meeting approved the committee’s report that while the ordinary problems of pauper emigrants should be extended relief within the parish organisation by the overseers of the poor, emergencies and extraordinary cases might well be handled better privately.⁴¹ The Fredericton Emigrant Society was formed, whose terms of membership were defined as \$4 annually or £10 for life — this was the age of mixed currencies — and the Lieutenant-Governor was invited to accept an appointment as patron of the Society.

A week later the Governor accepted and Sir Robert le Poer Trench was elected president of the Society. By December 21st Sir Robert was

³⁸ *Ibid.*, Sept. 28, 1819.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, Oct. 12, 1819.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, Nov. 16, 1819.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, Nov. 30, 1819.

able to report that "Already the good effects of this institution are apparent Fuel, food and clothing have been supplied and the medicinal gentlemen of the Town have, by their humane zeal, rendered the Society an essential aid".⁴² On January 4, 1820, the *Gazette* reported that "sixteen Emigrants had been found work, twenty-six had received medical assistance, fourteen supplied with fuel, food and clothing, and two still needed work".

The utilitarian opponents of such charity changed their tactics and this principle of disinterested help for destitute emigrants was soon adulterated by an upsurge of agriculturally oriented charity which was really no more than semi-charitable in intent. On January 18, 1820, the *Gazette* reported a meeting of the inhabitants of St. Andrews under the headline "Agricultural and Emigrant Society", at which it was resolved unanimously that "an Agricultural Society shall be formed" which might also "aid Emigrants in the settlement and improvement of lands within the County, and also in collecting and giving such information as may assist them in procuring a livelihood". Despite the meeting being chaired by the Rev. J. Alley and the clergy providing two of the five committee members appointed to formulate the rules and regulations of the new Society,⁴³ the primary emphasis seemed to be upon agricultural affairs and there is a strong impression already that, as far as emigrants were concerned, the Society's intention was to help those who were already helping themselves, rather than those who could or would not. Such a spirit was shortly to pervade the province and overwhelm the less utilitarian ideas of those who had formed the Fredericton Emigrant Society.

Nevertheless, the Emigrant Society — it was sometimes called the Cardigan Society now, after the name of the Welch settlement — prospered for a while. It soon raised "upwards of £ 200, most of which has been expended . . . 27 families, consisting of nearly 150 souls, have been enabled by its existence to commence a settlement about 17½ miles from Fredericton".⁴⁴ At the end of February "fourteen persons have been aided with food and fuel; seven furnished with employment . . . the present dependents of the Society are seven women, six children, three

⁴² *Ibid.*, Dec. 21, 1819.

⁴³ The one occasion when the *Gazette* reports clerics taking a prominent part in "charitable" activities.

⁴⁴ *Royal Gazette*, Feb. 15, 1820.

men . . .", but an increasing agricultural and business influence is apparent in the Society's report.

The Petitions before the Legislature on the subject of an Asylum for the Poor will doubtless meet the attentions they deserve; in which case a renewal of the Bounty on a limited scale . . . would induce someone to raise Hemp and Flax for so certain a Market. Fifteen acres of tolerable soil under good tillage would produce a sufficient quantity of these articles to give employment during winter to all the transient poor that might here assemble By such means a House of Industry may be furnished with profitable labour.⁴⁵

Only three months before, the same Society had agreed that "the ordinary problems of pauper Emigrants should be extended relief within the parish organisation by the Overseers of the Poor". Yet despite this changing emphasis, "Georgian" could still begin a letter to the *Gazette* in favour of the new agricultural societies with the bald and unadorned statement that "Though an Emigrant myself, I like not your Emigrant Society . . ." ⁴⁶

More people were probably influenced by the report, early in April, that "in various instances the applications of idle persons were easily dismissed by offering them labour", accompanied by the admission that "the Society has unavoidably encouraged idleness in other cases from the little employ that could be found and the absolute necessity of providing sustenance".⁴⁷ Certainly combined agricultural and emigrant societies began to flourish while the purely emigrant society withered on the vine. There was a steady evolution of the former into associated parish and county societies which combined the interests implicit in their titles, but with a very definite emphasis on the agricultural side which enabled them to obtain government grants to further their activities.

The process culminated in the formation of a provincial network under the auspices of the New Brunswick Agricultural and Emigrant Society in 1825, whose only recorded charitable effort not also directly concerned with agriculture seems to have been the provision of a hospital in Fredericton in 1827.

Through the indefatigable zeal of the Committee to ameliorate and improve the condition of the Emigrants who may be sick upon their arrival here, a commodious house on the Marsh Road . . . has been taken for a hospital. It has now fourteen inmates [patients] . . . this measure has arisen out of the crowded state of the Alms House which could not admit these

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, Feb. 29, 1820.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, March 28, 1820.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, April 4, 1820.

suffering Emigrants, and being now a separate establishment will prevent the perplexity in accounts that might arise from having the transient poor, which are always to be considered a public burthen upon the Province, blended with the poor belonging to the Parish, and will also greatly lessen the labour of the Overseers of the Poor.⁴⁸

This quotation is interesting in that it suggests a general acceptance of the theory that the province as a whole was responsible for the transient poor who originated outside the province. It was certainly a responsibility that had never been formally spelled out, and before the War of 1812, seems to have been accepted by the town or parish, judging by the Saint John by-law of 1806. In 1812 the Legislative Council had demurred at the idea, but, while no one accepted the responsibility directly and the parishes actually supported the poor transients, the province had begun to recompense them in due course by means of special legislative grants made as a result of petitions.⁴⁹ Now, apparently, they were expected to do so as a matter of course although, in 1824, there was at least one unlucky fellow rejected by everybody.

Mr. Smith, by leave, presented a petition from Joshua Cook, a Pauper, removed backwards and forwards between the Township of Amherst in the Province of Nova Scotia and the Township of Westmorland in this Province, not being able to get relief from the Overseers of the Poor at either of the Townships, praying for Legislative provision to meet his case.

His petition was tabled and never taken up again.

As a result of the rise of these agricultural and emigrant societies, the old Fredericton Emigrant Society finally called a meeting "to take into consideration the propriety of dissolving the Society and transferring the Funds thereof to the Agricultural and Emigrant Society of York".⁵⁰ The *Gazette* failed to report the decision of the meeting but, although the Society seems to have become moribund for some years, apparently it was not dissolved. In 1832 a Fredericton Emigrant Society decided to build a cholera hospital "which building, when erected, to be held for the use of this Society as a receptacle for distressed Emigrants except when wanted for a Cholera Hospital or any other infectious distemper

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, July 31, 1837. A decade later, on October 12, 1836, the *Gazette* was "glad to find that the New Brunswick Agricultural and Emigrant Society, of whose doings we have lately heard nothing, is not altogether defunct, but is continuing to improve the breeds of stock in the Province." My emphasis.

⁴⁹ House of Assembly *Journal*, Jan. 28, 1814, *et al.*

⁵⁰ *Royal Gazette*, April 8, 1825.

that might be brought among us by Emigrants".⁵¹ £150 of a £200 balance was appropriated for the purpose and application was to be made for a portion of the Alms House lot on which to build. The annual subscription to the Society was then set at "five shillings until further orders". The hospital was built but there is no further reference to the Society in the columns of the *Gazette* prior to 1840.

Thus the elementary forms of organized private charity in New Brunswick languished at the expense of specialized agricultural and fishing "self-help" societies, with their emphasis on food supplies, stock and seeds,⁵² so that in 1820 an inquest on "Ann Davis, a Welch girl", whose body was found on the road between Fredericton and the Cardigan settlement, found that she had died from "excessive fatigue, want of nourishment and the inclemency of the weather".⁵³

Many English, Irish and Scottish local patriotic societies were formed in the province in the early 1820's, most of which proclaimed their intention, at one time or another, of raising "funds for the relief of indigence" among their newly-arrived fellow-countrymen.⁵⁴ No specific details of their good works are recorded in later issues of the *Gazette*, which regularly lists the numerous toasts drunk at their respective festivities, but neither does the *Gazette* record the deaths of any English, Irish or Scottish girls frozen to death on the roads, so perhaps it is reasonable to assume that these societies did engage in some unpublicized charitable work and met with more success than the Cardigan Society.

Direct governmental assistance in the cases of these emigrant "transient poor", some of whom, as we have seen, had been induced into the country by the expenditure of provincial funds in the United Kingdom, never seems to have been considered. When legislative grants were made, they came through parish channels, grudgingly, after the

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, July 4, 1832. The cholera epidemic of this year also brought the New Brunswick clergy to the fore in a quasi-charitable role. "The clergymen of the several congregations in this City, together with a number of inhabitants, met ... for the purpose ... of raising Funds by subscription to assist the poor in cleansing and fumigating their houses", reported the *Saint John Courier*, quoted by the *Gazette*, Aug. 1, 1832. But a cynic might construe this more as self-preservation than charity.

⁵² The pages of the *Gazette* in the 1820's abound with advertisements of the various agricultural and emigrant societies offering prizes for the best samples of stock, crops and seeds, or the services of some fine imported bull or stallion. A "Poor Man's Friendly Fishing Society" was organized in Saint John in 1826 "to give employment to the industrious poor" but also to "secure a good supply of Fish to this City at a reasonable rate and at all times".

⁵³ *Ibid.*, Dec. 19, 1820.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, April 6, 1824, Dec. 6, 1825, *et al.*

fact, as a result of petitions submitted through the Assembly, and always in such small amounts that they inhibited any constructive measures. Portland, applying for £ 191. 14. 6d. in respect of money used for emigrant purposes in 1822, was told that "the charges appear to be high and extravagant", while a claim for £ 68. 8. 11d. from St. Andrews was found "correct and reasonable with the exception of forty shillings charged for two coffins and burial of two strangers".⁵⁵ Yet they were both luckier than Dr. James Woodd, for the Assembly resolved that his petition "praying for compensation for attending poor and indigent persons, be not complied with".⁵⁶

These were the peak years of immigration, and clearly the system of parish relief, supplemented by meagre provincial grants made as much as a year after the money had been expended by the parishes, must have put an abnormal strain on local finances. In fact, during the early 1820's even provincial resources must have been strained, which may explain why it was not until 1827 that the Assembly abandoned its time-consuming practice of haggling over each individual grant and resolved "that there be granted to his Excellency the Lieutenant-Governor the sum of £600 ... to defray expenses which have been incurred in various parts of the Province during the last year in the relief and support of sick and indigent Emigrants; who are not properly chargeable on any of the Parochial funds in this Province".⁵⁷ At last the Legislature had formally accepted some responsibility for the transient poor.

The next year the Governor required £750 to reimburse the local authorities,⁵⁸ but the Legislature was not now quite so enthusiastically in favour of unlimited and assisted immigration as it had been in the years immediately after 1812. By 1832 — perhaps under the stimulus of the cholera epidemic — it was decided that the cost of maintaining so many immigrants was definitely excessive and legislation was introduced to tax all new arrivals in order to help support that proportion of them which was, or would become, indigent. The tax was imposed directly on the shipmaster who brought them to New Brunswick shores. If he was licensed by the British Government as a carrier of emigrants, he

⁵⁵ House of Assembly *Journal*, March 18, 1823.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, March 3, 1824.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, March 16, 1827.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, March 28, 1828.

had to pay five shillings per immigrant to the Provincial Treasurer before he could land his passengers; if he was not a licensed carrier, then the tax was ten shillings per passenger, with two children under 14, or three under seven, or one under twelve months, to be counted in with their mother as one person. Money thus raised was to be put into an "Emigrant Fund" and applied towards "relieving destitute and diseased passengers and emigrants".⁵⁹ Such provision was certainly needed, for another immigration boom was in the making and, by 1837, "whereas immediate pecuniary aid is required for the support and relief of great numbers of poor and distressed Emigrants who have lately arrived", the justices of the peace in Saint John alone were granted £1,000 from the Emigrant Fund,⁶⁰ while another £300 went to St. Andrews.⁶¹

But during the years when much of their income was sunk into the support of the "transient poor" as soon as they received it, the parishes still had their own resident paupers to maintain and the system of pauper auctions was proving an expensive way of doing so. They were also bedevilled by the reluctance or inability of their parishioners to pay their assessments. Peter Fisher, one of the overseers for Fredericton, had something to say on the matter in March, 1820, and he probably spoke for overseers throughout the province.

There are, at present, a number of such Paupers looking to the Overseers for daily support. It is well known that food cannot be obtained at this season without prompt payment. There are also several bills brought against them for the care of the sick which they cannot discharge — no means having yet been placed at their disposal. From the present wretched mode of providing for the sick they must, of necessity, suffer; but if the Parish can afford but one poor meal a day, that should be made sure to them. I do not wish a Pauper to call on me the second time for what the Parish allows and places at my disposal. I am willing to do my part in improving the condition of the sick but I do not wish to have them looking to me when I have not the means of relieving them. I have assisted in providing for them during the winter — I have visited them frequently and expended a considerable sum for their relief, but have not yet received a shilling, neither can I learn when I am to have anything. Complaints will probably be made; but as I attach blame to no one, so neither do I wish to be blamed.

If I had seen any prospect of an alteration in this system I should not have made this statement; but having been placed in the gap, I do not wish the cries, much less the curses, of the Poor to follow me.⁶²

⁵⁹ 2 Gul. IV, cap. 36.

⁶⁰ 8 Gul. IV, cap. 17.

⁶¹ 8 Gul. IV, cap. 18.

⁶² *Royal Gazette*, March 28, 1820.

Most overseers probably had to be "placed in the gap" and it is not surprising that two years later the Legislature found it necessary to pass a bill setting out the procedure to be followed in cases where citizens appointed to serve in parish offices declined the appointment despite the fine imposed by 26 Geo. III, cap. 3. In such cases, they proclaimed, "it shall and may be lawful for any two of His Majesty's Justices . . . to appoint a fit person or persons . . . [who] shall be subject to the like penalties for refusal or neglect to accept..."⁶³ If the second set of appointees also refused to serve, then the justices might appoint others, "as often as similar cases may arise".

Almshouses were already in use in the more central parishes — one burnt down in Saint John in January, 1819⁶⁴ — but it would appear that they were merely almshouses, not workhouses, where only the sick and infirm poor were housed and fed. They may also have been rented, since the capital cost of building would probably require a special assessment on the parish, which in turn required the permission of the Legislature, and there is no record of such permission having been granted before 1822.⁶⁵

In January of that year the overseers of the poor in Fredericton brought the question of workhouses to public attention through the advertisement columns of the *Gazette*.

...being desirous of building a Poor House upon the hill in the rear of the Town, and not knowing whether one of Stone, Brick or Wood could be erected at the least expense, request proposals to be sent to them . . . The building proposed to be two stories high and contain at least ten rooms, including the ground storey, and that built strong to answer the purposes of a Work House.⁶⁶

On March 21, 1822, the Assembly passed "An Act to provide for the erection of an Alms House and Work House within the County of York, and for making rules and regulations for the management of the same". In the preamble they rather plaintively voiced their reasons for doing so.

Whereas by the modes generally pursued for the support of the Poor in this Province, many persons who might, under proper regulations, contribute to their own maintenance, have nevertheless become chargeable

⁶³ 3 Geo. IV, cap. 29.

⁶⁴ *Royal Gazette*, Jan. 19, 1819.

⁶⁵ One exception was St. Andrews, where a poorhouse was built in 1822 at the personal expense of two private benefactors, John Dunn and Christopher Scott (*Royal Gazette*, May 7, 1822).

⁶⁶ *Royal Gazette*, Jan. 29, 1822.

to, and are entirely maintained by, the Inhabitants of the Parishes in which such persons reside, to the very great Burthen of such Inhabitants: And whereas the establishment of suitable Alms Houses and Work Houses ... would not only enable many poor persons who are now chargeable to the Parishes in which they reside, to contribute materially to their own support, but would also afford the means of checking the disorderly behaviour of divers persons, who by drunkenness and idleness disqualify themselves from earning a proper support; Be it therefore enacted...⁶⁷

They went on to enact the appointment of commissioners to administer the poorhouse, who could compel people seeking relief to live there and bind out their children as apprentices,⁶⁸ as well as "inflict such correction and punishment, by solitary confinement or otherwise ... on any person ... who shall be so set to work and shall not conform..." This Act also authorised the justices to assess the parishes of Fredericton, St. Mary's, Kingsclear, Prince William and Queensbury for the cost of construction and decided that the annual expenses should be paid by the parishes in proportion to their numbers of poor in residence in the house, a move which might be construed as the first step in a process of centralisation which New Brunswick is still fighting to this day.

Despite its obvious advantages not everybody concerned approved of such an attempt even then. It was not made clear whether the question of annual expenses involved merely the costs of maintaining the paupers, or whether those expenses were to be combined with the expenses involved in building maintenance and, in 1826, the parish of Queensbury which had no paupers in residence at that time, petitioned the Assembly for "a repeal of the Act to provide for the erection of an Alms House and Work House in the said City, so far as it relates to the said Parish of Queensbury".⁶⁹ The petition was tabled and the parish promptly took its case to the Supreme Court of the province, where Messrs. Justices Bliss, Botsford and Chipman quashed the assessment made against the parish for as long as it should have no paupers residing there.⁷⁰

Nevertheless, in more practical respects the experiment was a complete success and much of New Brunswick was only too eager to emulate the

⁶⁷ 3 Geo. IV, cap. 25.

⁶⁸ "Public Notice is hereby given, by the Commissioners of the Alms House, that they will bind out as apprentices to any respectable Person who may be willing to take them, two boys, children of Mrs. Roulston, now in the Alms House" (*Royal Gazette*, Jan. 13, 1824).

⁶⁹ House of Assembly *Journal*, Feb. 7, 1826.

⁷⁰ New Brunswick Law Reports, *Reports of Cases Determined in the Supreme Court of New Brunswick*, 1825-1835, p. 108-110.

example of York. The Acadians were probably unhappy about it, since they not unreasonably objected in principle to participating in the support of destitute Celts and Anglo-Saxons when they themselves supported their own poor.⁷¹ But the inhabitants of Northumberland actually petitioned the Legislature that they might be assessed the costs of a workhouse,⁷² and in 1824 acts were passed authorising a workhouse in Northumberland County⁷³ and the re-organization of the St. Andrews almshouses along the lines of the new Fredericton system.⁷⁴ The financial advantages of having the poor employed within their capabilities were indisputable, as a *Gazette* correspondent in Fredericton was quick to point out.

Having observed a notice in a late Montreal paper that mendicity is increasing in that city ... I beg leave to recommend to the Guardians of the City the establishment of an Alms House and Work House. The effect of such establishments in this town has been the removal of every beggar from the streets, and of the reduction of the Poor Rate within four years from £1,000 to £350 per annum, an example worthy of imitation.⁷⁵

The income from the poor rate in the parish of Fredericton actually decreased to £250 in 1836, and the other parishes of the county showed similar reductions.⁷⁶ Since the population of the county and rateable values were increasing all the time, and as Fredericton also adopted, in 1828, the Saint John expedient of taxing dogs for the benefit of the poor,⁷⁷ the poor rate must have dropped as drastically during these years as it had risen during the second decade of the century.

Saint John, of course, as the major port of entry, still had its special problems in trying to maintain a disproportionate number of pauper immigrants, despite the genial optimism expressed in an 1829 editorial of the *Saint John Observer*.

The general subject of Pauperism has often occurred to our minds as a topic of great interest and importance. It has proved so to the political economists of Great Britain. But in this country the system is far from being so complex, and happily, notwithstanding the vast influx of the poor by Emigration, the burden of supporting them is not felt to be so grievous a load as might have been expected. The assessment, no doubt, falls heavily

⁷¹ In 1837 an Act was passed permitting justices of the peace in Westmorland, Kent, Northumberland and Gloucester to exempt Acadian French from poor relief assessment, because they were "in the habit of supporting their own poor" (7 Gul. IV, cap. 22).

⁷² House of Assembly *Journal*, Feb. 5, 1824.

⁷³ 5 Geo. IV, cap. 23 and 6 Geo. IV, cap. 1.

⁷⁴ 5 Geo. IV, cap. 10.

⁷⁵ *Royal Gazette*, Oct. 24, 1826.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, Feb. 1, 1837.

⁷⁷ 9 Geo. IV, cap. 23.

upon some individuals ... we are disposed, however, by all means, to encourage voluntary efforts for the relief of indigence...⁷⁸

Only three years later the situation was sufficiently out of hand for the *Saint John City Gazette* to record that, "by a unanimous decision of the Board of Magistrates the system of supporting out-door paupers has been entirely prohibited; and no person will be allowed, in future, to receive support from the Parish unless willing to go to the Poor House".⁷⁹ How long this prohibition endured — if, indeed, it was ever put into effect! — is not clear, but by 1837 it had certainly been abandoned and the *Courier* was very worried.

We understand that besides upwards of 200 individuals in the different Parish Houses of this City, at present there are no less than 150 sick and distressed families, comprising more than 500 souls, assisted in private houses in various quarters of the City, weekly, by the Parish Officers So large an amount of paupers at this early period of the winter is truly alarming and calls for the adoption of some measures that will, if possible, prevent its increase during the coming inclement season.⁸⁰

One measure that had just been adopted, and was no doubt being put into effect at the time, was "the erection of an Alms House and Work House [...] in and for the City and County of Saint John", along the lines of the now well-established institutions at Fredericton and St. Andrews. A workhouse was to be constructed and the inmates of the present city almshouse moved to new quarters. The old almshouse, which was evidently unsuitable for productive employment, was to become "a Public Infirmary ... for the reception of such of the poor persons of the said City and Parishes as may be sick or diseased, and from time to time may become so".⁸¹ The absence of subsequent correspondence about the poor rate testifies to the success of the workhouse system there, also, for the next three years of the *Royal Gazette* contain neither complaints from irate taxpayers nor suggestions from enthusiastic philanthropists regarding the administration of poor relief.

Outlying parishes continued to auction off their paupers for half a century to come, and to provide out-door relief for many, if not all of their poor. But with the construction of the Saint John workhouse the three centres of the province were adequately equipped to provide that relief which they could not carry out successfully when the legislation

⁷⁸ Quoted by the *Royal Gazette*, Jan. 20, 1829.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, April 4, 1832.

⁸⁰ Quoted *ibid.*, Dec. 13, 1837.

⁸¹ I Vic., cap. 17.

which required it was first introduced. By 1840 poor relief in New Brunswick may be considered to have reached a standard essentially equal to that of Great Britain, a standard which had taken this vastly different, pioneer-style society four decades of suffering to reach. Nor was that suffering confined merely to those seeking relief: under the fundamentally unsuitable parish system, places such as Saint John and Fredericton, which were the points of entry and concentration of the province, had to bear a crippling heavy tax burden at times. It is, perhaps, surprising that the system never collapsed completely, and that during the peak years of early immigration to the province there were so few who died, like Ann Davis, "from excessive fatigue, want of nourishment and the inclemency of the weather".