

# 1850 - Emigration in the mid 19th century

Extracts from an article printed in the *Illustrated London News* on Saturday July 6th 1850. It describes historical and statistical context for migration in 1850, and the detail of migration specifically from port of Liverpool to the New World and the Colonies.

## The Tide of Emigration to The United States And to The British Colonies.

The great tide of Emigration flows steadily westward. The principal emigrants are Irish peasants and labourers. It is calculated that at least four out of every five persons who leave the shores of the old country to try their fortunes in the new, are Irish. Since the fatal years of the potato famine and the cholera, the annual numbers of emigrants have gone on increasing, until they have become so great as to suggest the idea, and almost justify the belief, of a gradual depopulation of Ireland. The colonies of Great Britain offer powerful attractions to the great bulk of the English and Scottish emigrants who forsake their native land to make homes in the wilderness. But the Irish emigration flows with full force upon the United States. Though many of the Irish emigrants are, doubtless, persons of small means, who have been hoarding and saving for years, and living in rags and squalor, in order to amass sufficient money to carry themselves and families across the Atlantic, and to beg their way to the western states, where they may 'squat' or purchase cheap lands, the great bulk appear to be people of the most destitute class, who go to join their friends and relatives, previously established in America.

Large sums of money reach this country annually from the United States. Through Liverpool houses alone, near upon a million pounds sterling, in small drafts, varying from 2 Pounds or 3 Pounds to 10 Pounds each, are annually forwarded from America, for poor persons in Ireland, to enable them to emigrate; and the passage-money of many thousands, in addition, is paid in New York. Before the fatal year 1847, the emigration was very considerable; but, since that time, it has very rapidly increased. The following document, issued on the authority of her Majesty's Colonial Land and Emigration Commissioners, shows the progressive increase in the numbers of British subjects who have annually quitted our shores as Emigrants, from 1825 to January 1st 1850:-

Years	N.American Colonies	U. S	Aus+N.Z.	others
1825	8741	5551	485	114
1826	12818	7063	903	116
1827	12648	14526	715	114
1828	12084	12817	1056	135
1829	13307	15678	2016	197
1830	30574	24887	1242	204
1831	58067	23418	1561	114
1832	66339	32872	3733	196
1833	28808	29109	4093	517
1834	40060	33074	2800	288
1835	15573	26720	1860	325
1836	34226	37774	3124	293
1837	29884	36770	5054	326
1838	4577	14332	14021	292
1839	12658	33536	15786	227
1840	32293	40642	15850	1958
1841	38164	45017	32625	2786
1842	54123	63852	8534	1835
1843	23518	28335	3478	1881
1844	22924	43660	2229	1873
1845	31803	58538	830	2330
1846	43439	82239	2347	1826
1847	109680	142154	4949	1487
1848	31065	188233	23904	4887
1849	41367	219450	32091	6590
Total	808740	1260247	185286	30911

Average Annual Emigration from the United Kingdom for the last twenty five years- 91,407

The emigration of the present year bids fair to exceed even the unprecedentedly large emigration of 1849. This human stream flows principally through the ports of London and Liverpool; as there is but little direct emigration from Scotland or Ireland. In the year 1849, out of the total number of 299,498 emigrants, more than one-half, or 153,902 left from the port of Liverpool. We learn from a statement in a Liverpool newspaper, that in the months of January, February, March and April of the present year, the total emigration was 50,683 persons; and as these four months include two of the least busy months of the year, it is probable that the numbers during the months of May, June, July and August, the full emigrational season, will be much more considerable, and that the emigration for the year will exceed that for 1849.

Her Majesty's Colonial Land and Emigration Commissioners publish in the spring of every year a useful little pamphlet, entitled the 'Colonisation Circular', which contains the names and duties of the Emigration offices in the ports of The United Kingdom and in the colonies- the cost of passage to the various colonies-a statement of the demand for labour-the rate of wages, and the price of provisions in each colony-an explanation of the mode of disposal of Crown lands-the privileges granted to naval and military settlers-the victualling scale on board ships-an abstract of the Passengers Act, and other valuable particulars. The Government however, gives no information relative to the United States-so that its admirable little circular is of comparatively little service to at least one-half of the great crowds of emigrants.

The majority of emigrants take a steerage passage, and go out at the cheapest rate. Out of the 153,902 mentioned above as having left the port of Liverpool in 1849, the number of first and second cabin passengers was only 4639.

### **Emigration From Liverpool**

We now proceed to detail the process of emigration, beginning with the arrival of the emigrants at Liverpool, the great port of intercourse with the United States. The first care of the emigrants, if their passage have not previously been paid for them by their kind friends in New York, is to pay their passage-money, and make the best bargain they can with the passenger-brokers. The competition in this trade is very great, and fares, accordingly, vary from day to day, and even from hour to hour, being sometimes as high as 5 Pounds per passenger in the steerage, and sometimes as low as 3 Pounds 10 Shillings.

The walls of Liverpool are thoroughly placarded with the notices of the days of sailing of the various packets, for which many firms act as passenger-brokers, and set forth in large letters the excellent qualities of such well known and favourite packets as;

- the **YORKSHIRE**,
  - the **NEW WORLD**,
  - the **ISAAC WEBB**,
  - the **WEST POINT**,
  - the **CONSTITUTION**,
  - the **ISAAC WRIGHT**,
  - the **LONDON**,
  - the **STAR OF THE WEST**,
  - the **QUEEN OF THE WEST**,
- and scores of others.

The average number of steerage passengers that can be accommodated in these fine vessels (which are mostly owned in New York) is 400; but some of them, such as the **ISAAC WEBB**, can comfortably make room for double that number. After the emigrant has chosen the ship by which he will sail, and perhaps run the gauntlet through scores of designing and unscrupulous 'man-catchers'-a class of persons who get a commission from the passenger-brokers for each emigrant that they bring to the office-his next duty is to present himself at the-

### **Medical Inspector's Office**

By the terms of the New Passenger Act, 12 and 13 Vict., c.33, no passenger-ship is allowed to proceed until a medical practitioner appointed by the emigration office of the port shall have inspected the medicine-chest and passengers, and certified that the medicines etc are sufficient, and that the passengers are free from contagious disease. The master, owner, or charterer of the ship is bound to pay the medical inspector the sum of 1 Pound sterling for every

100 persons thus inspected. When the emigrant and his family have undergone this process, their passage-ticket is stamped, and they have nothing further to do, until they go on board, but to make their own private arrangements and provide themselves with outfits, or with such articles of luxury or necessity as they may desire over and above the ships allowance.

All persons who may be discovered to be affected with any infectious disease, either at the original port of embarkation or at any port in the United Kingdom into which the vessel may subsequently put, are to be re-landed, with those members of their families, if any, who may be dependent upon them, or unwilling to be separated from them, together with their clothes and effects. Passengers re-landed are entitled to receive back their passage-money, which may be recovered from the party to whom it was paid, or from the owner, charterer, or master of the ship, by summary process, before two or more justices of the peace.

### **The Embarkation**

The scene in the Waterloo dock, at Liverpool, where all the American sailing packets are stationed, is at all times a very busy one; but, on the morning of the departure of a large ship, with a full complement of emigrants, it is peculiarly exciting and interesting. The passengers have undergone inspection, and many of them have taken up their quarters on board for twenty-four hours previously, as they are entitled to do by terms of the act of Parliament. Many of them bring, in addition to the boxes and trunks containing their worldly wealth, considerable quantities of provisions, although it must be confessed that the scale fixed by the Government to be supplied to them by the ship is sufficiently liberal to keep in health and comfort all among them, who, in their ordinary course of life, were not accustomed to animal food.

The following is the scale, in addition to any provisions which the passengers may themselves bring:-

2 and 1/2 lb of Bread or biscuit (not inferior to navy biscuit)  
1 lb Wheaten Flour  
5 lb Oatmeal  
2 lb Rice  
2 oz Tea  
1/2 lb Sugar  
1/2 lb Molasses

Per week. To be issued in advance, and not less often than twice a week.

Also:- 3 quarts of Water daily.

5 lb of good Potatoes may, at the option of the master, be substituted for 1lb of oatmeal or rice; and in ships sailing from Liverpool, or from Irish or Scottish ports, oatmeal may be substituted, in equal quantities, for the whole or any part of the issues of rice.

Vessels carrying as many as 100 passengers must be provided with a seafaring person to act as passenger's cook, and also with a proper cooking apparatus. A convenient place must be set apart on deck for cooking, and a proper supply of fuel shipped for the voyage. The whole to be subject to the approval of the emigration officer.

### **Dancing Between Decks**

The scenes that occur between decks on the day before the sailing of a packet, and during the time that a ship may be unavoidably detained in dock, are not generally of a character to impress the spectator with the idea of any great or overwhelming grief on the part of the emigrants at leaving the old country. On the contrary, all is bustle, excitement, and merriment. The scene of a party of emigrants, male and female, dancing between decks-to the music of the violin-played for their amusement, by some of their fellow-passengers, is not a rare one. Sometimes a passenger is skilful upon the Irish Bagpipe, and his services are freely asked and freely given for the gratification of his countrymen and countrywomen-not simply while in dock, but, according to the reports of captains and others, during the whole voyage. Any person who can play the Violin-the Flute-the Pipe, or any other instrument, becomes of interest and importance to the passengers, and is kept in constant requisition for their amusement. The youngest child and the oldest man in the ship are alike interested; and grey headed men and women are frequently to be seen dancing with

as much delight, if not with as much vigour, as if Seventeen, not Seventy, was the number that would most nearly express their age.

But, as the hour of departure draws nigh, the music ceases. Too many fresh arrivals take place every moment, and the docks become too much encumbered with luggage to admit of the amusement. Although notice of the day and hour of departure may have been given for weeks previously, there are a large class of persons (-not confined to emigrants it may be observed 'en passant'-) who never will be punctual, and who seem to make it a point of duty and conscience to postpone everything to the last moment, and to enjoy the excitement of being within a few minutes or even moments of losing their passage. These may be seen arriving in flushed and panting detachments, driving donkey-carts laden with their worldly stores, to the gangway, at the ship's side. It often happens that the gangway has been removed before their arrival, in which case their only chance is to wait until the ship reaches the dock-gate, when their boxes, bails, barrels and bundles are actually pitched into the ship, and men, and women, and children have to scramble up among the rigging, amid a screaming, a swearing, and a shouting perfectly alarming to listen to. Not infrequently a box or barrel falls overboard, and sometimes a man or a woman suffers the same fate, but is speedily re-saved by men in a small boat, that follows in the wake of this ship for the purpose, until she have finally cleared the dock.

### **The Departure**

There are usually a large number of spectators at the dock-gates to witness the final departure of the noble ship, with its large freight of human beings. It is an interesting and impressive sight; and the most callous and indifferent can scarcely fail, at such a moment, to form cordial wishes for the pleasant voyage and safe arrival of the emigrants, and for their future prosperity in their new home.

As the ship is towed out, hats are raised, handkerchiefs are waved, and a loud and long-continued shout of farewell is raised from the shore, and cordially responded to from the ship. It is then, if at any time, that the eyes of the emigrants begin to moisten with regret at the thought that they are looking for the last time at the old country-that country which, although, in all probability, associated principally with the remembrance of sorrow and suffering, of semi-starvation, and a constant battle for the merest crust necessary to support existence is, nevertheless, the country of their fathers, the country of their childhood, and consecrated to their hearts by many a token. The last look, if known to be the last, is always sorrowful, and refuses, in most instances, to see the wrong and the suffering, the error and the misery, which may have impelled the one who takes it, to venture from the old into the new, from the tried to the untried path, and to recommence existence under new auspices, and with new and totally different prospects.

Farewell, England! Blessings on thee- Stern and niggard as thou art. Harshly, mother, thou hast used me, And my bread thou hast refused me: But 'tis agony to part:

-is doubtless the feeling uppermost in the mind of many thousands of the poorer class of English emigrants at the moment when the cheers of the spectators and of their friends on shore proclaim the instant of departure from the land of their birth. Even in the case of the Irish emigrants, a similar feeling-though possibly less intense-can scarcely fail to be excited. Little time, however, is left to them to indulge in these reflections. The ship is generally towed by a steam-tug five or ten miles down the Mersey; and during the time occupied in traversing these ten miles, two very important ceremonies have to be gone through: the first is 'the Search for Stowaways;' and the second is the ' Roll-call of the Passengers'.

### **The Search for Stowaways**

The practice of 'stowing away', or hiding about a vessel until after the passage tickets have been collected, in order to procure, by this fraudulent means, a free passage across the Atlantic, is stated to be very common to ships leaving London and Liverpool for the United States. The 'Stowaways' are sometimes brought onboard concealed in trunks or chests, with air-holes to prevent suffocation. Sometimes they are brought in barrels, packed up to their chins in salt, or biscuits, or other provisions, to the imminent hazard of their lives. At other times they take the chance of hiding about the ship, under the bedding, amid the confused luggage of other passengers, and in all sorts of dark nooks and corners between decks. Hence, it becoming expedient to make a thorough search of the vessel before the steam-tug has left her, in order that, if any of these unhappy intruders be discovered, they may be taken back to port and brought before the Magistrate, to be punished for the fraud which they have attempted.

As many as a dozen stowaways have sometimes been discovered in one ship; and cases have occurred, though not frequently, of men, women, and young boys, having been taken dead out of the barrels or chests in which they had concealed themselves, to avoid payment of 3 Pounds or 4 Pounds passage money. When the ship is fairly out, the search for stowaways is ordered. All the passengers are summoned upon the Quarter-Deck, and there detained until the search has been completed in every part of the ship. The Captain, Mate, or other Officer, attended by the clerk of the passenger broker, and as many of the crew as may be necessary for the purpose, then proceed below, bearing masked lanterns or candles, and armed with long poles, hammers, chisels, etc, that they may break open suspicious looking chests and barrels. Occasionally, the pole is said to be tipped with a sharp nail, to aid the process of discovery in dark nooks; and sometimes the man armed with the hammer hammers the bed-clothes, in order that if there be a concealed head underneath, the owner may make the fact known, and thus avoid a repetition of the blows. If a stowaway be concealed in a barrel, it is to be presumed that he has been placed with his head uppermost, and the searchers, upon this hint, whenever they have a suspicion, deliberately proceed to turn the barrel bottom upwards,- a process which never fails, after a short time, if the suspicion be well founded, to elicit an unmistakable cry for release.

Although this search is invariably made with the utmost care, it is not always effectual in discovering the delinquent; and instances have occurred in which no less than eight, ten, or even a larger number, including both men and women, have made their appearance after the vessel has been two or three days at sea. Some captains used to make it a rule to behave with great severity, if not cruelty, to these unfortunates; and instances are related of their having caused them to be tarred and feathered, or to walk the decks through the cold nights with nothing on but their shirts: but this inhumanity does not now appear to be practised. As there is a great deal of dirty work that must be done on ship-board, the stowaways are pressed into that service, and compelled to make themselves useful, if not agreeable. They are forced, in fact, to work their passage out, and the most unpleasant jobs are imposed upon them. After the search for them in every corner of the ship, the next ceremony is commenced.

### **Roll-Call**

This is one that occupies a considerable space of time, especially in a large ship, containing seven or eight hundred emigrants. The passengers-those in the state cabin excepted-being all assembled upon the Quarter-Deck, the clerk of the passenger-broker, accompanied by the ship's surgeon, and aided in the preservation of order by the crew, proceeds to call for the tickets. The clerk, or man in authority, usually stands upon the rail, or other convenient elevation on the Quarter-Deck, so that he may be enabled to see over the heads of the whole assemblage-usually a very motley one-comprising people of all ages, from seven weeks to seventy years. A double purpose is answered by the roll-call-the verification of the passenger-list, and the medical inspection of the emigrants, on behalf of the captain and owners. The previous inspection on the part of the governor was to prevent the risk of contagious disease on board. The inspection on the part of the owners is for a different object.

The ship has to pay a poll-tax of one dollar and a half per passenger to the State of New York; and if any of the poor emigrants are helpless and deformed persons, the owners are fined in the sum of seventy five dollars for bringing them, and are compelled to enter in a bond to the city of New York that they will not become a burden on the public. To obviate this risk, the medical officer of the ship passes them under inspection; and if there be a pauper cripple among the number who cannot give security that he has friends in America to take charge of him of arrival, and provide for him afterwards, the captain may refuse to take him.

The business of verification and inspection generally occupies from two to four hours, according to the number of emigrants on board; and, during its progress, some noteworthy incidents occasionally arise. Sometimes an Irishman, with a wife and eight or ten children, who may have only paid a deposit of his passage-money, attempts to evade the payment of the balance, by pleading that he has not a farthing left in the world; and trusting that the ship will rather take him out to New York for the sum already paid, than incur the trouble of putting him on shore again with his family. Sometimes a woman may have included in her passage-ticket an infant at the breast, and may be seen, when her name is called, panting under the weight of a boy of eight or nine years of age, whom she is holding to her bosom as if he were really a suckling. Sometimes a youth of nineteen, strong and big as a man, has been entered as under twelve, in order to get across to America for half the fare of an adult; and sometimes a whole family are without any tickets, and have come on board in the hope that, amid the confusion which they imagine will be attendant upon the congregation of so many hundred people on a ship, they may manage to evade notice, and slip down unperceived amid those whose documents are found 'en regle'.

These cases, as they occur, are placed on one side; and those who have duly paid their passage money, and produced their tickets, are allowed to pass down and take possession of their berths. Those who have not paid, either in whole

or in part, and are either unable or unwilling to satisfy the claim against them, are then transferred on board the tug, with bag and baggage, to be reconveyed to port. Those who have money, and have attempted a fraud, generally contrive, after many lamentations about their extreme poverty, to produce the necessary funds, which, in the shape of golden sovereigns are not unfrequently found to be safely stitched amid the rags of petticoats, coats, and unmentionable garments. Those who have really no money, and who cannot manage to appeal to the sympathy of the crowd for a small subscription to help them to the New World, must resign themselves to their fate, and remain in the poverty from which they seek to free themselves, until they are able to raise the small sum necessary for their emancipation. The stowaways, if any, are ordered to be taken before the magistrates; and all strangers and interlopers being safely placed in the tug, the emigrant ship is left to herself. May all prosperity attend her living freight!

'Far away-oh far away-  
We seek a world o'er the ocean spray!  
We seek a land across the sea,  
Where bread is plenty and men are free,  
The sails are set, the breezes swell-  
England, our country, farewell! farewell!