

## **ASSISTED EMIGRATION TO CANADA from the Banbury region**

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This account of assisted emigration to the British North American colonies begins in the island of Grosse Isle in the St Lawrence Seaway, a few miles north of Quebec. For three million emigrants to Canada in the nineteenth century, this was their first point of call on landing, and for a few it was their last. A quarantine station and disinfection point was set up there in 1832, through which all would-be immigrants had to pass before being allowed into Quebec and inland. Some who had made it across the Atlantic from Great Britain, Ireland or the continent of Europe on overcrowded ships brought disease with them and died before setting foot on the promised land, to be buried in the cemetery on the small island. The more fortunate satisfied the British authorities there that they were fit to step onto the mainland and so carried on to Quebec.

The transatlantic flow began after the end of the Napoleonic wars in the 1820s. Although the main destination in the New World became the United States, especially for the Irish, the numbers of emigrants travelling to Canada were higher until about 1835. For instance in 1825 8,741 adults and children went to Canada, compared with 5,551 to the US; and in 1832 66,339 went to Canada and 32,872 to the US. But in 1849 the number to Canada was 41,367 (having peaked at 109,680 in 1847) compared with 219,450 to the US, and as will become apparent some went to Canada only with the intention of moving on to the US. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the extent to which assisted emigrants came from North Oxfordshire and South Northamptonshire.

The condition of the English poor had been a source of concern to politicians and property owners for many centuries, because the property owners had to pay to support them through the poor rates. But in the 1820s this concern took a new turn: would it be cheaper to remove the poor altogether by helping them to emigrate than to pay for them to stay at home? This was the question addressed by a Select Committee of the House of Commons on Emigration from the UK in 1827, provoked by (among other things) the plight of the hand-loom cotton weavers in Lancashire who were put out of work by mechanisation in the mills.