

For all emigrants there were also the rigours of arrival in Canada to be overcome, and for this the month of the sailings was all-important. The season ran from March to October, and the later the sailing the higher the risks because of the severity of Canadian winters. Emigrants had to find somewhere to live in a strange country before the freezing weather started. In a report from the Governor General of Canada to the British Government in 1852, Mr Buchanan, the chief agent at the Emigration Department in Quebec, said

“in all cases ‘indigent settlers’ who are assisted to emigrate by the unions or their landlords, should be sent out early in the season, so as to reach here before or during the harvest, when work is plenty. They should also be decently clothed, and furnished with funds to enable them to proceed from Quebec to such parts of Upper Canada as they wish to settle in. Instead of this being the case, large numbers have reached Quebec penniless, and almost destitute of clothing and bedding, after the weather has become cold and rainy, and in this condition obliged to undertake a journey of many hundred miles entirely dependent upon casual charity, or such limited assistance as the Emigration Department is authorised to afford. The consequence is suffering to all, and sickness to many, especially amongst the women and children. If those who fall sick recover, a long time must elapse before they gain sufficient strength to work, and, as their wants must be supplied, they become a burden to the communities amongst whom they reside.”

He went on with a happier side to the story:

“Such emigrants as possessed a little capital, as well as those who were fit for domestic and farm servants, found no difficulty in settling themselves advantageously. Out of nearly 700 girls sent out by the Irish Unions, who landed at this port [Quebec] not a dozen remained unemployed a fortnight after their arrival.”<sup>24</sup>

There was also the danger of disease as indicated in a letter from the medical superintendent at the quarantine station on Grosse Isle, Dr Douglas, dated December 15, 1851. “The general health and condition of emigrants have improved yearly since 1846-47 [when several thousand Irish passengers died in a typhus epidemic], those dreadful years of famine and its attendant pestilence... The diseases admitted to hospital the past season have been smallpox, measles and scarlatina... There were few or no cases of typhus fever among the Irish, those admitted being English passengers from the barque “Secret” from Bideford and Highlanders from the brig “Vesper” from Thurso. In the

---

<sup>24</sup> Papers relative to Emigration to the North American colonies, Parliamentary Papers xxxiii, 1852 pp 20-21.