

VOYAGE OF THE IMMIGRANT SHIP ATLAS

In the late summer of 1815 four ships, the *Atlas*, *Baltic Merchant*, *Dorothy* and *Eliza*, having sailed from Greenock, Scotland, discharged 700 immigrants at Quebec City. Arriving too late in the season to proceed to their land allotments they spent the winter of 1815-1816 in small groups at Quebec, Montreal, Cornwall, Prescott and Brockville. In the spring of 1816 about 270 of them, who had spent the winter at Brockville, were among the first settlers to reach the Perth Military Settlement.

A little more than a year later Reverend William Bell, Perth's first clergyman, noted in his diary; "*Not being along with the first Scotch settlers, when they came to this country, I was desirous of having some account of their voyage out. For this purpose I applied to one of them, who appeared to be an intelligent person, for a history of their proceedings, in writing. He sent me the following, or rather I gathered the following out of it, for it was very incorrectly written, more so than I expected*".

That "*very incorrectly written*" account was provided by Archibald Morrison of Lanarkshire, who had arrived in Canada via the ship *Atlas* and drew a Location Ticket for Elmsley Township C-6/L-23(E).

Elmsley, November 1st, 1817

Revd. and Dear Sir,

On the 24th day of June, 1815, about 200 of our settlers embarked at Glasgow, on board the steam boat, which put us on board the transports which lay at Greenock for our reception. The remainder came on the following day. On the 11th July, all being ready, the *Atlas* and the *Dorothy* weighed anchor. The former had on board about 230 emigrants, the latter 200.

The voyage was favourable until the 10th of August, when we had a terrible gale, which lasted 24 hours, but fortunately no serious accident happened. When we came to the banks of Newfoundland, the weather was remarkably cold and foggy. Most of the children became sick, attended with chincough¹, and a number of them died.

We arrived at Quebec on the 4th of September, and remained there until 12 o'clock next day, when we proceeded up the St. Lawrence 90 miles, to the town of Three Rivers, where we remained 10 days, waiting for orders. On the 17th, we were put on board the steam boat for Montreal. Here we again remained some days doing nothing, and then went to Lachine, where we were put on board of bateaux and went up the river to Cornwall, where a few of our number obtained land and left us. The remainder went on to Brockville, and there took up their abode for the winter. Early in the following spring, on the 22nd March, 1816, they began to clear the roads to the new settlement, and in another month, after many labours and difficulties, they were placed upon the lands which they now cultivate.

Archd. Morrison

¹ Whooping cough.

Reverend Bell then writes that; “*The above information not being so full and particular as I wished and expected, I made the same request to another person, who after some time sent me a great mass of written paper, from which I collected the following particulars. His work was entitled ‘A Short Account of the Scotch Settlers, From the Time of their Arrival at Glasgow, in May, 1815, up to Their Final Settlement at Perth, Upper Canada’.*

This second, more detailed, account seems to have been provided by Robert Gibson of Edinburgh who arrived in Canada via the ship *Atlas* and was issued a Location Ticket for Bathurst C-1/L-15(E)

As soon as a considerable number of the settlers had arrived at Glasgow, which was the place of rendezvous, a general meeting was called, and a petition was prepared and forwarded to Government for a supply of provisions while they were detained waiting for the transports. Their request was granted, and the agent of Government supplied them with rations till the transports arrived, and they were put on board of them at Greenock.

While they remained at Glasgow, they met regularly twice a week, and many a plan respecting their future proceedings was proposed and discussed, with more zeal than unanimity. Among other subjects that occupied their attention was, the propriety of taking a minister and a teacher along with them, Government having offered to provide in part for both. One of their number, having offered himself as their teacher², was accepted; but, about a minister, they could not agree. Being from different religious communities, every one wished to have a minister from his own, and as no one would yield to another, they had to go without any. They all, however, admitted that it was necessary to have a minister, though they took no effectual steps to obtain one. Thus they discovered more wisdom in the management of their temporal, than of their spiritual affairs; for whatever they admitted to be necessary in the former, they did without delay; sustaining the Scripture doctrine that the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light.

After some time, the arrival of two transports at Greenock was announced, the *Atlas* and the *Dorothea*, and soon afterwards two others, the *Baltic Merchant*, and the *Eliza*, appeared. All being ready, orders were issued for the embarkation of the emigrants, and their departure from their native land, a land most of them were never more to see. The thoughts and feelings of persons in these circumstances, none but themselves can know.

Many of them had been more than a month in Glasgow, and had met with much attention and kindness from the good inhabitants of that city, hundreds of whom accompanied them to the river, and saw them safe on board the steam boat, and schooner, employed to convey them to Greenock. As they were to leave Glasgow at 3 o'clock in the morning, many of them came down to the Broomilaw³ the evening before, and remained on the wharf all night.

² John Holliday of Dumfries, issued a location ticket in Burgess Township.

³ Broomielaw Quay, or simply the Broomielaw, has been the historic heart of Glasgow's harbour since the 17th century.

The air was calm and the sky serene, but few were disposed to sleep. Interesting conversation filled up the passing hours; and it is even said that the social glass went round oftener than once; for the 'tee-total' scheme had not then even been thought of.

At 2 in the morning of the 24th of June the embarkation commenced, amidst hurry, noise, and confusion. Soon after 3, the steam boat, taking the schooner in tow, passed down the river amidst the shouts of thousands, who lined the shore bidding Adieu to their departing friends. The scene, to many of the emigrants, was the most affecting they had ever witnessed. They were bidding a final farewell to their native land, which they were now leaving behind them, while before them they saw little but dangers to be encountered, difficulties to be overcome, and privations to be endured. These with, perhaps at times, brighter visions, occupied their minds during the morning.

Before noon, they reached the transports, ready at Greenock for their reception.

All those from the south of Scotland, at their own request, in order that they might be together, were put on board of the *Atlas*, commanded by Captain Joseph Turnbull, who, though a native of Scotland, had been educated in England. His temper was good, his manners agreeable, and in general very accommodating, so that he soon gained the confidence of his new friends. Before they had crossed the Atlantic, however, he had sunk considerably in their estimation. In the evening after the emigrants were in bed, he would often come among them, make sport with the girls, chat with their mothers, and play boyish tricks to those who were sleeping in hammocks. By these and similar proceedings he gave offence to many, and in some degree lost his authority with all. Indeed he soon verified the old saying, that familiarity breeds contempt.

Nor were all his passengers patterns of propriety, more than himself. At first they were under some restraint, but this soon wore off, and they speedily appeared in their true colours; some of them none of the fairest. There being 250 souls on board the *Atlas*, besides the ship's crew, they were somewhat crowded, which produced at times a little jarring among them.

But nothing discovered more of the vanity of human nature than the endeavours of some to exhibit their supposed consequence, which appeared the more ridiculous, from the variety of character and former employment of the motley multitude. Some of the men had been in His Majesty's service, a few of them in Ireland, in the late rebellion⁴. Others had been shopkeepers, manufacturers, mechanics, farmers &c. Most of them were leaving home disappointed, and of course dissatisfied. Some had contracted debts which they were unable, or unwilling to pay, and making a virtue of necessity, preferred the wilds of America to the walls of a prison. Nearly all had suffered in their feelings, from poverty and subordination to others, but now they fancied that they were not only leaving the claims of law and justice behind, but at the same time all the ills of life. They now considered themselves Gentlemen settlers, not only entitled to, but actually living upon, the bounty of Government; and each of them now proceeding to take possession of a fine estate; where he and his family would enjoy ease, affluence, and independence for the remainder of his days. No wonder if such Utopian projects ideas tended to turn their heads, and make them not only forget their former condition, but their present duties. Ambition and pride soon rose to a troublesome height. No one would yield to another. Each one was as independent as his neighbour, and what was worse, as unaccommodating.

⁴ The United Irishmen Rebellion of 1798.

Such was the nature of the cargo with which the *Atlas* sailed from Greenock, on Tuesday, 11th July, 1815, after completing her victualing, watering &c. Transports hired by the month are never in a great hurry. The progress of the voyage at first was slow, and nothing remarkable happened until they were fairly at sea; when one evening, as a party were dancing on deck, an alarm was raised, that a child was missing. This checked their mirth, and threw a damp over the whole party. The child was a fine girl, about 7 years of age. Every nook and corner of the vessel was searched for her, but in vain. She had sunk in the mighty waters, - the billows rolled over her. It was singular that amongst all the sailors and emigrants at that time on deck, not one saw her fall over board.

Near Toryisle⁵, the *Dorothea*⁶ hove in sight. She had sailed two days after the *Atlas*, and had on board 200 settlers, mostly Highlanders. She spoke the *Atlas*, but parted, and was soon out of sight.

Hitherto the sea had been calm, and sailing pleasant, but now, for the first time, they had a strong head wind, so that the vessel began to pitch, and the passengers to puke. All the fun was now laid aside, and the bright visions of happiness, in Canada, were greatly obscured. Still the wind roared, and the billows rolled their monstrous tops to the sky. A dismal scene was now presented between decks. Most were sick, and some of the females were crying. Whole families were confined to bed, some were despairing of life, and others wishing for death to relieve them of their sufferings.

The few that were able to crawl upon deck, turned their eyes to the shore, the north of Ireland, and besought the Captain to put into the bay and land them, and they would not trouble him to carry them to Quebec. Repeated messages were sent to him to the same effect by those in bed; but he paid no attention to them. Meantime he was making every exertion to get clear of the land, having but little sea room, with a head wind, and a raging sea. At length he succeeded, and got fairly out into the Western ocean.

When the gale had somewhat abated, the state of the ship between decks is not to be described. The filth which had been accumulating for eight days, the time the storm lasted, was shocking, and the stink not to be endured. The few not sick, would not go below, and some time elapsed before anything was done. At length a party of sailors, bribed by a large quantity of rum, went below and cleared away the nuisance. Half drunk when the unpleasant service began, some of them were wholly so before it was over. While the storm and the sickness lasted, each and all of the emigrants were weary of a sea faring life. But as the wind abated, the clouds were dispelled, and the sea became calm, their sickness wore off, their spirits revived, and they resumed their pleasant dreams of ease and wealth in America.

Their provisions were ample in quantity, being the same as for troops, when on board, but the quality of the bread and beef did not please them, and this led to numerous squabbles. The rum however was good, as well as the pork, pease, oat meal, &c. and made some amends for the deficiency of other articles. The supply of rum indeed was not only unnecessary, but it led to mischievous consequences. Numbers got intoxicated, almost every evening, quarrels ensued, and peace and order were banished from the ship.

⁵ Tory Isle, an island nine miles off the north-west coast of County Donegal, Ireland.

⁶ The *Dorothy*.

Amongst those who disturbed the peace of the rest, during the night season, was a band of free masons, who met in the cabin every Saturday evening, to enlighten one another, as well as the tyros⁷ whom they admitted into their honourable fraternity. The crowded state of the vessel rendered it difficult to conduct their proceedings with the requisite secrecy, but all prying curiosity was pertinaciously repelled with hard words, and not unfrequently with blows. This not only gave offence, but even led to serious disputes.

These evils were farther increased by a supposed partiality on the part of the Captain, in favour of one or two of the cabin passengers, who had ingratiated themselves with him, it was alleged, by telling stories to the disadvantage of the rest. Such characters will sooner or later appear in their true colours. One of these, who had been a great favourite with the Captain, proposed to establish a prayer meeting. The more serious part agreed, and it was commenced without delay.

One evening after the prayer meeting was over, an altercation took place between this man and one of the settlers; when, after much abusive language, he put himself in a rage and attempted to strike the other man; but being prevented by the Captain, he vented his passion in dreadful oaths and imprecations. The Captain, astonished at his conduct, reminded him of the exercise in which he had been so lately engaged. But so far from being checked by this gentle reprimand, he became worse, insulted the Captain, and threatened violence to his fellow passenger. The Captain, roused into energy by his improper conduct, in a tone of voice to which he had been unaccustomed, peremptorily ordered him to leave the cabin, which he immediately did, and was never again admitted as a companion. Indeed from this time he was treated with the contempt which his conduct deserved.

Reverend Bell then records that; *“Mr. Gibson, the person who furnished the above information, promised to continue it up to the time the settlers went upon their land, but he never found time to do so”*.

- Edited by Ron W. Shaw (2015)

⁷ Applicant or novice.