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Emigration from Tipperary Workhouse, 1848–1858

By Chris O'Mahony

Centred on Tipperary town, the 290 square miles of Tipperary Union stretched from Golden in the East to the County Limerick Electoral Divisions (E.D.s) of Doon, Grean and Oola in the West. When its new workhouse was built in 1841, it was thought that provision for 700 inmates would be adequate for its population of 79,500. Ten years later, when the Famine had supposedly come and gone, reducing the population of the Union to 58,200, the Board of Guardians were struggling to cope with a workhouse population of over 4,000.

People who think of the Famine as peaking in 1847 tend to assume that things must have improved thereafter. The reality one sees reflected in the pages of the Minute Books of the Tipperary Poor Law Guardian is quite different. In February 1848 there were 1,000 people in the workhouse and 15,000 on outdoor relief. In February 1850, there were 3,800 people in the workhouse and 15,000 on outdoor relief.

Things continued to improve until at the end of August the workhouse population was down to 2,400 and there were only 5,200 on outdoor relief. The latter was discontinued, and all the pressure now fell on the workhouse itself. By December its population had gone back up to 3,500. By March 1851 it was 4,600. The summer brought relief as usual, and this time the improvement continued.

In 1851 and 1852 buildings leased as auxiliary workhouses were returned to their owners. In 1853 and 1854 the availability of employment was signalled not only by the reduction in the numbers entering the workhouse but by the discharge of several groups of people from it. The Guardians were able to discharge actively about 135 able-bodied young men and women in each of those Summers, as work was readily available. By 1855 one could speak with some truth of a return to normality. The only thing missing from pre-Famine normality was the potato!

Apart from a flurry of excitement in 1848 at the prospect of getting rid of a large number of young people, the Tipperary Board of Guardians took little interest in emigration as even a partial solution to their problems. They responded to requests from inmates who had their passage paid to America or had obtained a free passage to Australia, but they took no steps to avail themselves of the provisions in the Poor Law which would have enabled them to pursue a more active policy of emigration.

This is a good sign. In the early 1850s, many Unions signalled a return to normality by emigrating inmates in large numbers. The three Clare Unions of Scariff, Kilrush and Ennistymon emigrated over 400 people each in 1851. Cork Union emigrated about 800 in 1852-54. When Limerick sent 418 to Canada in 1854, it was only following the pattern set by its counterparts in the county – Croom (220 in 1852), Kilmallock (105 in 1852), Rathkeale (226 in 1852) and Newcastle West (567 in 1852). Tipperary Union's absence of trauma is typical of the situation throughout the county, with the exception of Nenagh, which emigrated 432 in 1852 alone.

This article sets out the annual statistical returns of emigration from the workhouse and tries to identify the people concerned. So indifferent were the Tipperary Guardians to their slight involvement that the minutes do not bother with ages, sometimes omit the destination and



frequently omit even to name the E.D. to which the meagre sum granted for clothing or fare to port of embarkation was to be charged.

Orphans to Australia

The scheme which caught the imagination of Board of Guardians was that initiated and run by the Colonial Land and Emigration Commission in London to emigrate female orphans to Australia. This was implemented in two phases, one group of girls being sent out in 1848-49 and another in 1849-50. The Tipperary Guardians responded enthusiastically to the invitation to participate. Their meeting of 18 March 1848 appointed a committee to investigate the eligibility and willingness of those concerned.

Typically, they heard only what they wanted to hear of the Commissioners' letter. They decided to include male orphans and young people who were not orphaned in their brief, and had to be asked to read the letter again! A missing volume prevents our being present at the final outcome. The statistical return informs us that 62 girls participated in the first phase of the scheme.

In November 1849 Lieut. Henry, R.N., selected 25 girls to go to South Australia in the second phase. In January 1850 the drapers of Tipperary town vied with one another to tender for the clothing they required: James Harcourt supplied most of the material, Theo Morrissey gloves and gowns, Edward Acheson shawls, and Miss Perse stays and bonnets. If we can assume that the boat left on time, this group of girls departed Dublin on Saturday 16 February 1850 at 1 p.m. for Plymouth. The Waterford and Limerick Railway Co. conveyed them thither at a cost of £11.11.3. It cost a further £15.12.6 to get them to Plymouth. Miss Hickey, matron of Castle Lloyd auxiliary workhouse accompanied them and was allowed £5 to feed and lodge them all overnight in Dublin!

1849-1850

Legislation for the active involvement of Poor Law Guardians in emigration from the workhouse dates from August 1849. According to the statistical return of emigrants for the period from then until May 1850, the only other emigration from Tipperary workhouse was that of a further three inmates, also to Australia. This is undoubtedly true; but the record suggests that while the Guardians had Australia on their mind, they tried to send out more than three.

Thus, when in August 1849 **Catherine Ryan** applied to be allowed to accompany her daughter (obviously one of the orphans) to South Australia, the reaction was unusually positive. The Guardians volunteered to approach the Colonial Land and Emigration Commissioners for a free passage for 'several deserving cases'. They also supported requests in September from **James Ryan** of Golden E.D. and his four children, and from **Eliza Lonergan** and her three children for a free passage to Australia. In November, **Catherine Kingelty** was allowed to accompany her mother who was being transported; the mother was being held in Grangegorman at the time. What circumstances led to so much potential emigration being reduced to three people in the official return does not appear from the record.

1850-1851

The returns for the year to 31 March 1851 tell us that emigration consisted of two children to Quebec and one adult male, two adult females, and two children to Sydney. One hesitates to call people who may be aged no more than 15 "men" and "women". The two children who went to Quebec were **Richard** and **Edmund McGrath**. Their passage had been paid, but they



had no clothes, as they had spent over a year in the workhouse and had grown out of what they were wearing when they came in. They departed in two secondhand suits.

The five people who went to Sydney must have been the **Airy** children. In March 1850, Mrs Airy of Clonbeg E.D. applied for the necessary outfit for herself and six children, claiming that her husband Joseph, who had been transported to Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) some years earlier, had obtained a passage for them. They had been three years in the workhouse.

The claim was checked out with the Colonial Land and Emigration Commissioners in London, who informed the Board that **Joseph Airy** had not requested the alleged free passage. In November 1850 the children submitted an application in their own right; perhaps mother had died. This time they were successful, and the Poor Law Commissioners issued their formal sanction on 18 February 1851. One notes, however, that whereas six children applied, only five went.

The Minute Book also records the sanction of help in February 1851 for **John** and **Susan Murphy** to emigrate, though it fails to record a destination; also for **Nancy Keating**, aged 7, of Killaldriff, bound for America, and for two **Heffernan** children who were to accompany their uncle (not an inmate) to America.

1851-1852

Canada: 3 male adults, 1 female adult

New York: 1 male adult

First to go to Canada were the three **Anster** children in April. As early as November 1849 Mr Anster had sent £12 from Quebec to bring out his wife **Mary**, of Rathliney E.D., and their three children. The Commissioners replied that it was too late in the season for Canada. When the Spring of 1850 came they were delayed by illness. Apart from the original request, the record always speaks of three Ansters. Whether the mother was taken for granted, had left the workhouse, or had died, is difficult to say; she may well have been the fourth person indicated by the return.

The lone male adult to New York was probably **Richard Wilson** of Bruis E.D., who received approval for his clothing allowance for Christmas.

1852-1853

U.S.A.: 6 male adults, 4 female adults and 5 children

Sydney: 1 child

The child who went to Sydney was **Elizabeth Burns**, aged 13, of Tipperary E.D. Her father **Denis** had emigrated in 1841 and had arranged a free passage from Liverpool for her as far back as 1848.

Of the 15 people who went to America, the following eleven were identified: **Ellen Crowe** of Oola E.D., in August; **Margaret** and **Mary Morrissey**, Union at Large in September; **Julia Meehan** of Tipperary E.D. and her two children (**John** and **David**) in October; **Anne Holway**, Templeineiry E.D., and her two children, in November; **Johanna Cummins**, Oola E.D., and **Denis Harty**, Templebraden E.D., in February 1853.

1853-1854

Boston: 1 male adult, 2 female adults, 7 children

New York: 3 female adults, 7 children

North America: 2 female adults, 1 child

U.S.A.: 2 children

Australia: 1 male adult, 2 female adults, 1 child



The record was not quite so nuanced as the return, so we are left to guess where most of the nineteen who went to 'America' really went. April saw a brisk start to the Spring sailings: **Mary Lynch**, Templeineiry, **Anne Doherty** and her two children, **Anne Sheedy** and her child, **Mary Swift** and her son. **Mary Anne O'Connor** also applied in April, but was delayed, as a slight legal problem had to be sorted out: she had just left the workhouse when her passage arrived from her brother in America, so could the Guardians 'legally assist the poor girl to emigrate?'

Dublin gave the nod, and she was on her way in May, as were **Judy Dwyer**, **Mary Condon** and her five children (a number which means she was one of those who went to New York). July saw the departure of **Catherine Gleeson**, Tipperary E.D., **Ellen Hayes**, and **William Howard**, Tipperary E.D. **Stephen Noonan** of Golden also went about May 1853 (his passage had been paid), but would not have qualified for inclusion in the return, as he had been refused help.

Of the four people who went to Australia, only two have been identified. These were **John** and **Margaret Dwyer**, whose mother was already in Australia. The mother sent home money to enable them to obtain a free passage from London. Through some misunderstanding, the children arrived in London unannounced, so to speak, and the first the Board of Guardians knew of it was a letter from the Colonial Land and Emigration Commissioners asking them to explain how they let these two young people off to London on their own to look for a free passage. Red-faced, they hastened to make both excuses and amends; they quickly sent over money to pay any costs which the Commissioners would incur. John and Margaret were put aboard the *Ellenborough* and set sail for Sydney in July. The passenger list shows that they were aged 18 and 15 respectively, were natives of Tipperary Town, and that their father (Edmund) was already dead.

1854-1855

New York: 1 male adult, 1 female adult and 9 children

Boston: 1 female adult

Australia: 1 female adult

The lone woman returned for Australia was **Johanna Hayes**, whose departure was sanctioned in May. But she was not the only one to go to Australia that year. In October, the Guardians instructed the Master of the workhouse to give **Johanna Brannick** and her two sons three old trunks, as they were going to Australia. They did not appear in the returns as they were not helped out of funds approved by the Commissioners in Dublin. The passenger list of the *Bermondsley*, which docked in Sydney on 29 April 1855, shows that Johanna was the widow of Edmund Brannicks (*sic*) of Emly, and that the sons were **James** and **Edmund**, aged 21 and 18 respectively.

Catherine Ryan, the only one destined for Boston, sailed in May. According to the returns, the remaining eleven emigrants all went to New York. Spring sailing started briskly again with **Patrick Cleary**, Tipperary E.D., and three members of the **Franklin** family – **John**, **Margaret** and **Johanna** – of Doon E.D. **Mary Cummins** followed in May. **John Dwyer**, **Michael Collins** and **Timothy Wall** went in July. **Walter** and **Catherine Mahony** left in February 1855, and the year concluded with the departure of **William Gorman** in March.

1855-1859

More people emigrated from Tipperary workhouse in 1854-55 than in the following four years put together. They are listed briefly together. **Honora Farrell** went to Australia in April 1855. **John Kirwan** (also spelled **Corrovan!**) went to America in June 1855. **Bridget Ryan** of

Golden E.D. went to America in September 1855. **Ansty Cunningham** and **Anne Johnston**, both of Tipperary E.D., went to Australia in October 1855. **Anne** and **Michael Phelan** received approval in May 1856 to go to America; the return for that year suggests that only one of them went. In May 1857 approval was given for **Malachy Lynch** to go to Boston and for **Catherine Kelly** and her child to go to Melbourne.

Young **Patrick McGrath** got away to Australia in May 1858, with difficulty, after his brother **Michael** in Liverpool arranged a free passage. The difficulty was in getting the Guardians to trust Patrick's sister to bring over the child and use the money for the purpose for which it had been requested. Only Michael's threat of going without the other two moved the Guardians to a leap of faith and full compliance. The last of the recorded emigrants were **Catherine** and **Mary Hall**, whose passage had been paid to Van Diemen's Land. They would appear to have left in July 1858.

To sum up: Tipperary Union assisted, however slightly, 167 of its workhouse inmates to emigrate in the 1848-58 decade. Of those, 87 were part of the Female Orphans to Australia scheme; the remaining 80 were divided just about 60:20 between America (incl. Canada) and Australia, respectively.

