
Canada and the British World

*Edited by Phillip Buckner
and R. Douglas Francis*

Canada and the British World:
Culture, Migration, and Identity



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Canada and the British World

Introduction

Phillip Buckner and R. Douglas Francis

Since the Second World War a revolution has taken place in Canadian historiography. In the late nineteenth and well into the twentieth century, the majority of English Canadian historians believed that Canada was essentially a “British” nation and that its legal and political institutions and its culture and society could be understood only within the context of its long history as a British colony. Mainly amateurs who wrote history as a hobby, the earliest Canadian historians were proud of their British origins and deeply committed to Canada’s participation in the British Empire. They belonged to what J.M.S. Careless once described, ironically but not inaccurately, as the “blood is thicker than water” school.¹ The first generation of professional historians, men such as George Wrong, W.P.M. Kennedy, and Chester Martin, were very similar both in background and in their attitude toward the Empire, even though by the early decades of the twentieth century one can see a growing desire among Canada’s small historical community to emphasize that, while Canada was a “British” nation, it was a distinctive British nation with institutions and a cultural identity of its own.²

The First World War shook but did not destroy this Britannic vision of Canada. It is a myth that Canadians emerged from the war alienated from, and disillusioned with, the imperial connection. Most Canadians undoubtedly felt that Canada had earned the right to have its own foreign policy and in the interwar period there was a vigorous debate among English Canadian intellectuals about the extent to which Canadians should follow British leadership in international affairs. But few English Canadians wanted to break the imperial tie. They continued to believe that Canada was, and should continue to be, a “British” nation and that it should cooperate with the other members of the British family in the British Commonwealth of Nations. As Wesley Gustavson points out in his chapter in this collection (Chapter 9), even though there were disputes over how Canada’s part in the First World War should be interpreted within the British imperial context,

these disputes did not imply any fundamental reassessment of Canada's relationship with Britain. In general, most English Canadian historians shared this perspective.

In the interwar years, English Canadian historians began to place greater emphasis on the role of North American environmental factors in the creation of the Canadian identity. But even those historians, such as Frank H. Underhill and A.R.M. Lower, who were increasingly critical of Britain's leadership and who wanted Canada to pursue an independent foreign policy or to become more closely allied to the United States, were, as Douglas Francis argues in his chapter in this collection (Chapter 18), committed to the notion that Canada was essentially a British nation. The Second World War reinforced English Canada's sense of belonging to a family of British nations. In the First World War nearly half the Canadian forces had been British-born but migration from the British Isles dropped dramatically in the interwar years and in the Second World War the Canadian forces were overwhelmingly composed of native-born Canadians. But a majority of those Canadians who served overseas during the Second World War could trace their ancestry to the British Isles. During the war the Canadian forces served alongside the British and other Commonwealth forces, first in defending Britain and then in the invasion of Europe. Both in Britain and in Canada the war was promoted as a "people's" war, and great stress was laid upon the unity of the "British peoples" around the globe in defence of British liberty and British parliamentary institutions against Nazi tyranny and oppression. Even the British monarchy emerged from the war more popular both in Britain and in Canada than ever before. During the war half a million Canadians lived in Britain, and many of them married British women. The war brides, with their children, formed the beginning of a new wave of British immigrants who flooded into Canada in the years after the Second World War.

The Second World War is usually seen as the critical turning point in the creation of Canadian nationalism, and it was. Canadians, whether they had served overseas or on the home front, were proud of the role Canada had played in the war and this pride was reflected in a strong determination in the postwar period that Canada would play an independent role in international relations. In 1947 the Canadian Parliament passed the first Canadian Citizenship Act, and in 1949 it made the Supreme Court of Canada the final court of appeal, ending appeals to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. But Canadians were not engaged in a headlong rush to cut their remaining links with Britain. The Canadian Citizenship Act specifically declared that Canadians remained British subjects. When Princess Elizabeth toured Canada in 1951, she received the same warm welcome that her father had received in 1939. In 1949 India became independent and the British Commonwealth of Nations was renamed the Commonwealth of Nations, but

most Canadians continued to view the Commonwealth as primarily an association of British nations and as an important instrument of Canadian foreign policy because it promoted solidarity among the British family of nations. The Suez Crisis of 1956 weakened that sentiment but it did not weaken the belief among English Canadians that Canada ought to be a British nation. Indeed, John Diefenbaker's election victory in 1957 was at least partly due to a desire by many English Canadians to reaffirm the importance of the British connection.

In the 1960s, however, Canada underwent two quiet revolutions. The first – and less quiet – took place in Quebec. The Quiet Revolution in Quebec not only modernized and transformed Quebec society but also led to the rise of a viable separatist movement. Of course, French Canadians had never shared English Canadians' enthusiasm for maintaining the imperial connection, particularly when it led to Canadian participation in Britain's wars in South Africa at the end of the nineteenth century and in Europe in the twentieth. But the attitude of the conservative French Canadian elite, from which French Canada's historians were also drawn, had never been entirely negative toward the imperial connection. They saw the connection as a necessary bulwark against American expansionism and even as providing a degree of protection against the English Canadian majority within the Canadian federal system. In the postwar environment, with Canada increasingly integrated into a North American economy and with the removal of appeals to the Judicial Committee of Privy Council (which had often upheld provincial autonomy), these arguments lost their force among Québécois nationalists who had little sympathy for the relics of the imperial past, forgetting (as Serge Courville points out in his chapter in this collection, Chapter 8) how much Quebec's culture had also been shaped and influenced by the imperial connection.

The second quiet revolution took place in English Canada, which also began to redefine its national identity in the 1960s.³ After a heated debate within English Canada over whether the symbols of empire and Britishness should be retained, Canada adopted its own flag with a new design that did not include the Union Jack. It also made "O Canada" its national anthem. Much of the pressure for these changes came from within English Canada, from those who believed that it was time to abandon the relics of Canada's imperial past. In part, this revolution in English Canada was motivated by a growing fear that Quebec might try to leave the federation. But it was also a response to the heavy postwar migration that came from a much wider range of sources than in the past and that changed the composition of Canada from a predominantly British into a multicultural nation. It was also a response to the increased Americanization of Canada, as Canada was integrated into the American economy and influenced by American popular culture. Younger native-born English-speaking Canadians – even those

of British ancestry – no longer felt the strong attachment that previous generations had felt to British institutions and the imperial connection. English Canadian historiography reflected these trends. In the 1950s and even into the 1960s, historians such as Donald Creighton and W.L. Morton continued to insist on the importance of Canada's British and imperial past. But in the 1970s Canadian historians became more interested in the limited identities that Canadians shared – of class, region, ethnicity, and gender. Of course, all of these themes in the past had an imperial dimension, as a number of the essays in this book show, but this dimension was largely ignored in the new Canadian historiography. Even those who disliked the focus on regional identities and called for a return to what they thought of as national history downplayed the importance of imperial history in the shaping of modern Canada. As Doug Owsam – a critic of the limited identities approach – notes in the recent *Oxford History of the British Empire*, by the 1960s the study of Canada's place within the Empire had become a specialized field of little interest to most Canadian historians. This, he argues, is as it should be, since the true concern of Canadian historians should be not with imperial history but with "the origin of Canada."⁴ British imperial history was now seen as a field that should be left to the British historians – that is to say, to those who focused on the history of the United Kingdom, a subject of less interest to Canadian historians. What had once been a central field in Canadian history was now seen as essentially part of an alien subject: British history.⁵ In the other former dominions the same pattern emerged, although more slowly in Australia and New Zealand, where a far greater proportion of the population was of British origin than was the case in Canada.

There were a few voices in the wilderness who protested against this attempt to de-emphasize the British connection in the history of the dominions. The most influential was J.G.A. Pocock, the New Zealand-born historian, whose area of specialization was seventeenth- and eighteenth-century British history. In as early as 1974 Pocock pleaded for a new British history that would include the old dominions (or what he called the neo-Britains overseas) and that would recognize that the history of the dominions was an integral part of imperial history.⁶ But the call met with a very limited response from most national historians, who continued to believe that one could be either an Australian, a Canadian, a New Zealander, or a South African or one could be British but one could not hold two national identities at once. In the 1990s, however, historians began to question this simplistic notion, pointing out that in the past, particularly in composite monarchies like the United Kingdom, most people had held multiple national identities.⁷ And if it was possible to be Scottish – or even Irish – and British at the same time, why could one not be Australian and British, or Canadian and British, at the same time? Not everyone accepted this conclu-

sion, but the issue of Britishness was slowly put back on the agenda in the writing of the history of the former dominions.

There were other factors at work. A growing number (though undoubtedly a minority) of historians in the older dominions were increasingly disturbed by the marginalization of the dominions within the new imperial historiography that emerged in the period after the Second World War. In the older histories, the creation of a series of self-governing colonies with institutions modelled on that of the mother country had been seen as one of the most significant and lasting contributions of the British Empire and was viewed in wholly positive terms. But in an era of decolonization, British imperial historians could see little that was lasting and less that was positive in the history of the British Empire. They were more concerned with writing a history of British imperialism than with writing a history of the British Empire. The new historiography was metropolitan-centred, focusing on how Britain had managed to acquire and control a vast overseas empire and how this empire had contributed to Britain's wealth and to its status in the world. From this perspective, the division between the parts of the world that were formally part of the Empire and those that simply contributed to the creation of British wealth through trade was not significant. The focus of the new historiography was also on those parts of the world that Britain had exploited most ruthlessly, particularly the impact of imperialism on the African and Asian peoples who had been brought under imperial rule against their wishes. Canadian (and Australian and New Zealand) history was no longer at the front of the new agenda. In fact, it was barely on the agenda of the new imperial history at all. Most historians of the older dominions by and large did not strenuously object to the changes in the way in which imperial history was being written. This was partly because most were nationalists who no longer wished to see their countries as products of the age of imperial expansion. But there were many younger historians, less nationalistic than the previous generation, who felt that the dominions must confront the reality of their own imperial past and the legacies of that past – particularly the exploitation of Native peoples – that remained imbedded within Canada and the other colonies of British settlement.

Gradually, then, there has emerged a renewed interest in Canada's place in what we have called the "British World." The concept of a British World is not a new one. The phrase was frequently used from the late nineteenth century until the 1950s, but its popularity was always overshadowed by the term "Greater Britain," which was coined by Sir Charles Dilke in the late 1860s and quickly became the preferred term for collectively describing the British colonies of settlement overseas. Like the boundaries of Greater Britain, the boundaries of the British World were and are open to interpretation. Dilke originally included the United States as part of his Greater Britain. Obviously, the Thirteen Colonies were at the centre of the first British

Empire. Indeed, although the first British Empire was destroyed when the United States achieved independence in 1783, it could be argued that, during the first half of the nineteenth century, the newly created United States was still to some degree part of a British-dominated cultural and intellectual world. But in the nineteenth century the Americans also created an empire of their own as they expanded across the continent and, in the early twentieth century, even acquired overseas colonies. In the twentieth century British politicians such as Joseph Chamberlain and Winston Churchill talked of the unity of “the English-speaking peoples,” but this unity was more imagined than real. Dilke recognized this in as early as 1899 when he declared in his study of *The British Empire* that the pressure to restrict the use of the term to territories that were part of the formal empire was “too strong to resist.”⁸

Canada, as the largest and most prominent of the self-governing colonies (or dominions as they came to be called officially in 1907), was clearly part of this British World, a world held together more by a sense of belonging to a shared British culture than by ties of commerce and trade. It was the mass migration of British immigrants to Canada in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that ensured that Canada would remain part of a British World until well into the twentieth century. Indeed, most of the chapters in this collection deal – some directly and some indirectly – with the impact of migration from the British Isles on Canada. From the 1960s to the 1990s, there was extensive research on the Scots and the Irish in Canada (particularly in the pre-Confederation era), although only recently have scholars begun to study the impact of Canada’s largest immigrant group – the English – on the history of Canada. A variety of factors explain the comparative lack of interest in English immigration to Canada. But clearly one reason is that the descendants of the Irish and Scottish immigrants to Canada have succeeded in disassociating themselves from their British imperial past and in presenting themselves as part of the colonized rather than as the colonizers, thus laying the blame for imperial exploitation on the English and their descendants. This, of course, is a serious distortion of the reality. What existed in Canada was a shared British culture to which all of the various immigrant communities from the British Isles, including the Scots and the Irish, contributed. There are historians who would question whether one can talk about a British diaspora, but this is a question of semantics.⁹ What is clear is that the migration of waves of Britons overseas was fundamental in creating a series of new nation-states, which have survived and remain one of the most important and lasting legacies of the British Empire. These new nation-states are no longer as predominantly British as they once were, and Canada and the other former dominions have begun to redefine themselves as multicultural communities with their own distinct national identities, rather than as neo-Britains.

Nonetheless, the legacy of their imperial past cannot easily be wiped away and consigned to the dustbin of history.

Of course, it is important to keep in mind that the dominions never were simple replicas of the “mother country.” It is well known that the populations of the dominions were more Scottish and Irish than that of the United Kingdom, although this emphasis on the Scots and the Irish is frequently exaggerated. During the first half of the nineteenth century, Scottish and Irish immigrants did outnumber English immigrants in Canada, but during the even heavier waves of migrations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the English overwhelmingly predominated, though the Scots remained significantly overrepresented.¹⁰ Certainly, it is a myth that the Scots created Canada. Canada drew upon all parts of the British Isles for its immigrants, its institutions, its laws, and its culture. And Canadians frequently rejected aspects of the law or culture of the mother country that they felt were incapable of being transplanted in a new environment or that they felt were undesirable to transplant. Canadians wished to be “British” but on their own terms and in their own way. It was a “Better Britain” – not simply a neo-Britain – that they sought to create. But clearly there remained strong linkages between the British at home and the British immigrants and their descendants in Canada. Hundreds of thousands of Britons in Britain saw relatives, friends, and neighbours migrate to Canada. Some of those who left became return migrants, either because they failed to create a better life for themselves overseas or because they were so successful that they could afford to return in style. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as the costs of transport fell and the safety and comfort of travelling by sea improved dramatically, a growing number of British migrants repeatedly moved back and forth between Britain and the colonies. They were joined by many second- or third-generation colonials who were lured to Britain as tourists or for a variety of business, professional, or political reasons. Some of these Canadian migrants never returned to the colony they continued to call home. Indeed, the word “home” had an ambiguous meaning for many English Canadians, who had a sense of having two homes: an ancestral home in Britain and a new home overseas. Over time, loyalty to the new home – to Canada – clearly came to count for more than loyalty to the old. But English Canadians did not perceive any conflict in being loyal both to the Empire and to Canada. In the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, this loyalty was strengthened by an increasingly complex web of family, cultural, commercial, and professional networks that linked the British in Britain with the British overseas.¹¹ In the past, Canadian historians have too readily accepted some version of the colony-to-nation thesis. It is as if the Empire existed essentially to create a series of independent nations and that the process of making the transition was simple, uncomplicated, and linear. This teleological approach glosses

over the fact that while there was a continual process of renegotiating the status of Canada within the Empire, Canadians were committed to continued participation in the Empire and the preservation of British culture in Canada. Even after the Second World War, the belief in the existence of a British World remained strong for another two decades.

An attempt to explore and interpret the value of the British World as a concept and its meaning to those who were part of it began as an initiative of a small group of historians – John Darwin at Oxford University, Rob Holland at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies at the University of London, and Carl Bridge at the Menzies Centre for Australian Studies at the University of London – who were determined to break the mould in which imperial history was being written and to bring the dominions back into the picture. They recruited Phillip Buckner from Canada (at that time teaching at the University of New Brunswick, although he too would shortly become a senior research fellow at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies), James Belich from New Zealand (shortly to move to the University of Auckland), and Bill Nasson from the University of Cape Town in South Africa. This group formed an informal committee that was responsible for organizing the first British World Conference at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies in June 1998. So successful was the conference that it was decided to hold a series of conferences in the dominions, the first in South Africa, at the University of Cape Town, in 2002.¹²

The third conference was held at the University of Calgary in 2003.¹³ Selecting the papers to include in this book on Canada and the British World was a difficult task because of the number of excellent papers from which we could choose. The purpose of resurrecting the concept of a British World is not an exercise in imperial nostalgia, a lament for a world we have lost. Our goal is to re-examine a complex phenomenon and to understand how it shaped the world in which Canadians lived and to some extent still live, and we hope that the chapters that follow give some indication of the quality and complexity of the debate that has been taking place on the issue of the relationships that bound Canada to the wider British World.

Notes

- 1 See J.M.S. Careless, "Frontierism, Metropolitanism and Canadian History," *Canadian Historical Review* 31 (1950): 105-14.
- 2 The best overview of English Canadian historiography in the twentieth century remains Carl Berger, *The Writing of Canadian History: Aspects of English-Canadian Historical Writing Since 1900*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986).
- 3 We have taken the notion of a second quiet revolution from José Igartua. See his "'Ready, Aye, Ready' No more? Canada, Britain, and the Suez Crisis in the Canadian Press," in *Canada and the End of Empire*, ed. Phillip Buckner (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), 47-65.
- 4 D.R. Owsram, "Canada and the Empire," in *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. 5, *Historiography*, ed. Robin W. Winks (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 161. For a critique from a British World perspective of the whole Oxford History project, see Phillip

- Buckner, "Was There a 'British' Empire? *The Oxford History of the British Empire* from a Canadian Perspective," *Acadiensis* 32 (2002): 110-28.
- 5 See Paul T. Phillips, *Britain's Past in Canada: The Teaching and Writing of British History* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1989).
 - 6 J.G.A. Pocock, "British History: A Plea for a New Subject," *New Zealand Journal of History* 8 (1974): 3-21. See also his "The Limits and Divisions of British History: In Search of the Unknown Subject," *American Historical Review* 87 (1982): 311-36; "History and Sovereignty," *Journal of British Studies* 31 (1992): 358-89; and "The New British History in Atlantic Perspective: An Antipodean Commentary," *American Historical Review* 104 (1999): 490-500. For a Canadian perspective, see Phillip Buckner, "Whatever Happened to the British Empire?" *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 3 (1993): 3-32. It was another New Zealander, James Belich, who most consistently sought to examine the extent to which the term "NeoBritain" is a useful description of the dominions. See his "Neo-Britains" (paper presented at the first British World Conference at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, London, June 1998), and his two-volume history of New Zealand, *Making Peoples: A History of the New Zealanders from Polynesian Settlement to the End of the Nineteenth Century* (Auckland, NZ: Penguin Press, 1996) and *Paradise Reforged: A History of the New Zealanders from the 1880s to the Year 2000* (Auckland, NZ: Penguin Press, 2001).
 - 7 This notion can be found in a host of books written in the 1990s, but the one that had the greatest influence on British scholars was Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992).
 - 8 Sir Charles W. Dilke, *The British Empire* (London: Macmillan, 1899), 9.
 - 9 For a recent discussion of the usefulness of the concept of a diaspora, see Rosalind McClean, "'How We Prepare Them in India': British Diasporic Imaginings and Migration to New Zealand," *New Zealand Journal of History* 37, 2 (2003): 131-51.
 - 10 For a discussion of why the migration from England has been comparatively neglected, see Phillip Buckner, "Introduction," *British Journal of Canadian Studies* 16, 1 (2003): 1-6. This issue of the journal was devoted to the theme of English migration to Canada.
 - 11 These networks have yet to be properly examined. For a useful start, see Alan Lester, *Imperial Networks: Creating Identities in Nineteenth-Century South Africa and Britain* (London: Routledge, 2001), and Simon J. Potter, *News and the British World: The Emergence of an Imperial Press System* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003).
 - 12 More than fifty papers were given to an audience of at least twice that size and a selection of the papers has subsequently been published in a special issue of the *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, issued simultaneously as a book under the title *The British World: Diaspora, Culture, and Identity*. See Phillip Buckner and Carl Bridge, "Reinventing the British World," *Round Table* 368 (2003): 77-88, and Carl Bridge and Kent Fedorowich, "Mapping the British World," in *The British World: Diaspora, Culture and Identity*, ed. Carl Bridge and Kent Fedorowich (London: Frank Cass, 2003), 1-15.
 - 13 The Calgary British World Conference attracted more than 120 papers and about twice as many participants. It was decided to publish two collections of papers drawn from those given at the conference – one collection that would focus on the wider British World and a second volume that would examine in greater depth the place of Canada with that world. The first collection has appeared as *Rediscovering the British World*, ed. Phillip Buckner and R. Douglas Francis (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2005).

1

“Information Wanted”: Women Emigrants in a Transatlantic World

Elizabeth Jane Errington

In June 1827, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* published one of Mrs. Heman's new poems, “Songs of Emigration”:

There was heard a song on the chiming sea;
A mingled breathing of grief and glee;
Man's voice, unbroken by sighs, was there,
Filling with triumph the sunny air.

The song told “of fresh green lands, and of pastures new,” and of “plains whose verdure no foot hath press'd / and whose wealth is all for the first brave guest.” There, in the New World, the emigrants sang, “we will rear new homes, under trees that glow / As if gems were their fruitages of every bough ... And watch our herds, as they range at will / Through the green savannas, all bright and still.” The exultant strains of this song reflect a good deal of nineteenth-century Britons' rather romantic vision of the New World across the Atlantic and the abundance it promised to all who settled there. Yet even Mrs. Heman, a firm advocate of emigration, recognized that not all shared the vision. While men sang eagerly of new farms in the wilderness, she presented a discordant chorus of women who cried for “the shelter'd garden bower, ... the grey church tower, / And the sound of the Sabbath bell” of home. “But alas!” they sang, “that we should go, / From the homesteads warm and low.” Even the soaring triumph of the last verse could not completely drown out the women's lament:

We will give the names of our fearless race
To each bright river whose course we trace;
We will leave our memory with mounds and floods,
And the path of our daring in boundless woods;
And our works unto many a lake's green shore,
Where the Indians grave lay alone before!

But who shall teach the flowers,
Which our children loved, to dwell
In a soil that is not ours?
Home, home, and friends, farewell!¹

"Songs" was but one small part of the discourse of empire and emigration that echoed throughout the British Isles and Ireland and the British American colonies in the first half of the nineteenth century. Drawn by the seemingly limitless possibilities of land and "independence," songs, poems, pamphlets, and emigrant literature celebrated the determination of stalwart young Britons, the very "sinews of the nation," who eagerly went into the wilderness and made it bloom as a rose. Under the hand of British farmers and labourers, the "useless and silent forest" was being "replaced by fields and meadows interspersed with towns and villages, bounding and sparkling with life and enjoyment."²

When told in the nineteenth century, the story of the "extraordinary" migration of Britons was of farmers and mechanics, of missionaries and merchants, and of labourers and adventurers who, alone or with their families, made a new life for themselves in the colonies. The heroes of these tales were men. Although it was recognized that to succeed an emigrant needed a wife, and even children could be a real asset, the project of emigration and colonization was decidedly masculine. Like the choruses of Mrs. Heman's song, the thousands of women who went to America, if they were considered at all, were assumed to be only reluctant participants in what many characterized as a great crusade. Recent scholarship has begun to tickle out the complex and diverse roles British women played in creating and defining the British imperial world.³ There is a growing body of literature that chronicles female migration to the settler colonies, particularly to the Antipodes.⁴ With few exceptions, emigration to British America in the first half of the nineteenth century continues to be characterized as the migration of nuclear families and adventurous men. Women's voices and their participation in the process is at best muted or, by implication, of no consequence.

What then, do we make of the notice that appeared in the local Kingston, Upper Canada, newspaper in September 1821: "If JOHN DONEVAN, who left Cork about three years ago, and was last heard of at Mr. Sniders near Point Fortune, about twelve months since, be alive, and will enquire at Mr. Barnhams, Inn Keeper, at Point Fortune, he will find his wife who has come out to this country in search of him."⁵ Or the card to the public in York, Upper Canada, printed in the *Colonial Advocate* in 1834 that began, "Where is FRANKY MACHOGAN?" To ensure that there was no doubt to whom the notice was addressed, Mary Jane MacHogan explained that "Franky MacHogan was a native of Ireland, emigrated to Canada from County Armagh between Newtown Hamilton and Keady – by profession a hacker of

flax." "His disconsolate companion" had followed him to the colony. Mary Jane, who had recently "delivered a son ... and remains in a very destitute state," asked that editors of newspapers "do an act of humanity" and help her find her husband.⁶ And then there was the dilemma that Jane Mayarity found herself in, in early February 1830. She had arrived in York the previous fall to join her brother, Christopher Flinn. Her note to the public explained that although three years before (when she had last heard from him) he had been in Prince Edward Island, he had intended to move "to the upper province." To date, he was not to be found, and Jane was frustrated and did not intend to wait much longer. If she did not hear from Christopher by the end of the winter, she declared that she would return home to Ireland.⁷

Between 1815 and 1845, local newspapers in Upper Canada (and indeed, throughout North America) printed hundreds of similar notices of newly arrived wives looking for husbands, sisters or brothers looking for siblings, and mothers and fathers looking for their children.⁸ Newspapers also included cards from "ladies" "lately arrived from England" or Scotland or Ireland, who, either alone or with their sisters, mothers, or husbands, proposed to open a "Seminary of Respectability" for young girls or a hat or dress shop. Some notices were very brief, like that which appeared in the *Kingston Chronicle and Gazette* in March 1834: "If Patrick Brady, from Claremont County, Mayo Ireland be in Kingston, he will confer a favour by making it known to this office."⁹ A few told a poignant story. An "Information Wanted" in the *Cobourg Star* in August 1832 addressed to "ALEXANDER CAMERON, late of Glasgow, who came out in March last, by the ship *Nailer*, from Greenock," recounted how his brother, Hugh, and his family had followed Alexander to Upper Canada. "Unfortunately," Hugh had been "seized with the cholera, while coming up the Lake" and had died. His widow and child, who were "totally unprovided for," were "anxiously desirous of hearing from the said ALEXANDER – who is supposed to have settled somewhere in the Township of *Cavan*." Mrs. Cameron's notice concluded: "Any information respecting him, addressed to this *Office*, will be gratefully acknowledged. He has a wife and eight children."¹⁰

Unfortunately, even the most detailed of these cards offer only a tantalizing glimpse of the lives and expectations of these emigrants and their families. One is left wondering if John Donevan was alive. Were widow Cameron and her child reunited with her brother-in-law, Alexander? Did the growing numbers of "ladies" and craftswomen who established businesses in the colony find economic success? These notices do, nonetheless, offer fleeting details of who these women (and men) were and why they were in Kingston or York or other colonial communities. They also include hints of emigrants' expectations of the New World and suggest that although absent in the imperial discourse, women were actively engaged in the colonial project.

And when these fragmentary stories are read within the context of emigrant correspondence, one can begin to tickle out how at least some Britons regarded the British World in the thirty years after the Napoleonic Wars.

The women and men who placed notices in colonial newspapers and, in most cases, those whom they sought were recent emigrants and all were engaged in what scholars now call the project of empire and colonization.¹¹ Between 1815 and 1845, hundreds of thousands of Britons left their homes and the British Isles for America, for Australia, for South Africa, and for other colonies around the globe.¹² Contemporaries remarked on the "extraordinary emigration from all quarters of the Old World" and British papers often commented on the "tides" of migrants or "the fever" of emigration that seemed to be infecting the nation.¹³ The destiny of choice between 1815 and 1845 was North America, and particularly that "land of promise," the United States.¹⁴ After 1815, however, the new colonies of British North America and particularly Upper Canada began to attract a growing number of English, Irish, and Scottish migrants.¹⁵ By mid-century, many politicians, pamphleteers, colonial promoters, and many of Britain's growing middle classes were extolling the efforts of those "true Britons" who, "by the result of the white man's hard and honest labour,"¹⁶ were creating a new "wondrous Empire" in North America and promoting the spread of the Anglo-Saxon race and "English laws, language," and civilization.¹⁷

There was nonetheless considerable debate in Britain in the first half of the nineteenth century about the efficacy of emigration. Questions were raised in the British press and in Parliament about whether the population should be "guarded" or if the government should actively promote various emigration schemes to "relieve distress at home." Others proposed that Parliament actively encourage Britons who intended to emigrate anyway to make for the settlement colonies of the Empire.¹⁸ There were also sharp differences as to who should be encouraged to leave the British Isles and what class of people made the best settlers on the imperial frontiers.

There was little debate, however, that emigration and empire were "manly" undertakings. Abandoning one's home for the uncertainties of a new world required individuals with resolve and determination. The imperial frontier and settler colonies needed strong, "true British men" to subdue the wilderness and lay the seeds of civilization. As other scholars have persuasively argued, the project of colonization was a gendered undertaking. And in the first half of the nineteenth century, emigration was certainly a gendered experience.¹⁹ Common sense told Britons that the "emigrant" was male. The growing attention and often heated debates in the British press and in government about the waves of Britons who were packing up and boarding ships bound for America revolved around the need for hardy farmers, questions about whether impoverished peasant labourers would survive, and how to attract "men of capital." The growing body of promotional literature

was directed almost exclusively to men of the soil, gentlemen of some means, and craftsmen and mechanics.²⁰

Not all men were equally suited for such an enterprise. Certainly, British newspapers and travellers' accounts told stories of young single men who by their ingenuity, determination, and hard work had made their fortune in the colonies.²¹ But settlement required families and the discourse privileged married men. "The irregularity of a bachelor's life" should be avoided on the frontier,²² it was firmly declared. A wife "helped secure [an emigrant's] comfort."²³ An industrious and willing wife could also be a decided economic asset. "Married persons are always more comfortable and succeed sooner in Canada than single men," traveller John Howison advised in 1821. Indeed, "a wife and family, so far from being a burden there always prove sources of wealth."²⁴ Young men were encouraged to "bring out wives with them ... as generally speaking, a man will find a woman of his own country more congenial to his habits and taste ... than any other."²⁵

Some emigrant guides and settlers' accounts did acknowledge that specifically women were "wanted" in British North America.²⁶ One settler stated, somewhat derisively, that he could readily find husbands for single or young widowed women who had "a snug jointure or disposable fortune."²⁷ Emigrant guides also pointed out that young, healthy girls would quickly find employment in the colonies as domestic servants, teachers, or farm girls. "And if steady, industrious and deserving," these girls "may probably soon (if they choose) become the mistress of a house of their own."²⁸ Such encouragement was muted, however. It was "known" that women, by their very nature, were not really suited to such independent action. Indeed, emigrants were periodically warned to expect that their wives would be reluctant to leave home. It was pointed out that women feared the dangerous ocean voyage and that they had a greater attachment to the land of their birth than did their husbands. Emigrants would have to persuade their wives to join them. Most women portrayed in the discourse were, like children, dependants who needed to be directed to acquiesce to their husbands' decision to emigrate.²⁹

Those who actually packed up their goods and boarded ships at Greenock, Southampton, and numerous smaller ports to make their way to "America" were certainly not indifferent to the public's growing preoccupation with emigration and empire. Few of those who made their way to Upper Canada between 1815 and 1845 would have recognized themselves in the public discourse, however. The tales of emigration and their implicit assumptions about reluctant women do not seem to have influenced Mrs. Donevan or Mary Jack MacHogan as they negotiated the often difficult world of the transatlantic crossing. And Jane Mayarity was certainly not the only young woman who, either alone or in the company of friends or family, arrived in the colonies in search of kin and economic opportunity.³⁰

At the same time, information-wanted notices do illustrate that for many, and perhaps most, women, emigration was a family affair. Most of those who sought the public's help were looking for kin and identified themselves within family relationships. The majority of wives looking for their husbands identified themselves solely by his name, like Mrs. John Donevan or Mrs. Hugh Cameron. As they searched and waited in that liminal space between emigrant and colonist, being a wife, a mother, a sister, or a cousin offered these women at least some sense of certainty and identity. And by characterizing themselves as a wife, mother, or sister of an emigrant, these women may also have been unconsciously asserting their respectability. For in a world that was increasingly concerned about the symbolic role of the "good woman" and the supposed naturalness of women's dependence, this was one way they could gain the public's sympathy and claim the right to support from kin and the wider community.

It is unlikely that Upper Canadians were particularly surprised to read notices of wives and mothers who were looking for their husbands. Although a significant proportion of Britons emigrated to Upper Canada between 1815 and 1845 as part of a nuclear family, the limited shipping lists of the period indicate that adult men outnumbered women by a factor of at least two to one.³¹ Some of these men were undoubtedly young, single labourers and artisans who were drawn by the promise of work and land and an opportunity to assert their independence from parental households. But many other apparently unattached men were actually husbands and fathers. Certainly, Mrs. Donevan was not the only woman whose husband had gone ahead, expecting that the rest of the family would follow some time after.³² Mrs. Comerford, for example, left "the Parish of Guildmore, County of Cavan, Ireland" in 1825, some months after her husband, William, emigrated to Upper Canada. Her notice informed William "that his wife is at York, UC. Information will be obtained of Mr. Ketchum, of that Town, at what place she can be found."³³ Indeed, there were dozens of notices of British wives, often accompanied by children, who were looking for husbands who had gone on ahead.

The practice of heads of households going ahead "to spy out the land" was not unusual. Some men went to the colony to assess the situation for themselves before making a final decision to emigrate. Others, as recommended by a number of emigrant guides and settlers' accounts, went ahead to find work or land and then sent for their families.³⁴ The decision that the family would be divided, perhaps for an extended period, was not taken lightly. The journey was notoriously dangerous; the colonies were "foreign." And those left behind still had to support themselves until the family could be reunited. The undertaking required careful planning. It must also have prompted lengthy discussions about where "Father" might go and when, how long the family would be divided, and, ideally, how it would be reunited.

The debates in John Gemmill's household may well have been protracted. In 1820-21, John Gemmill, a forty-five-year-old stonemason living just outside Glasgow, had the opportunity to join a local emigration scheme. The proposal included a land grant in Lanark County, Upper Canada, and subsidized passage to the colony. It appears that financial circumstances precluded the family from travelling as a unit. It may also have been that John and his wife, Ann, decided that he should go ahead and begin to make a home for their nine children. Given the local economic situation, John and Ann felt that the opportunity was too good to miss and John boarded the *David of London* at Greenock in May 1821.³⁵ After he left, Ann and the children, who ranged in age from eighteen to two, went to reside with John's brother, Andrew. In one of his first letters home, John told his wife "to get [herself] entered into some society" and, if need be, have their son Andrew, "entered as head of the family."³⁶ He also sent detailed instructions on what goods the family should bring and what should be sold, how to pack, and what tools he wanted. John's letter did not arrive, however, until after Ann had set out.³⁷ We know that, among other things, it was Ann who organized the sale of household items, packed boxes and supplementary food for the voyage, and negotiated the family's passage. And in the end, Ann was obliged to travel alone with the six younger children. To her and John's great disappointment, the three eldest children, daughters Jean and Margaret and son Andrew, decided to remain in Scotland. John and Ann were reunited in 1823, apparently without incident. And all extant records indicate that Ann had shared her husband's commitment to emigrating to the colonies and took an active part in the process.

This was not always the case. In 1832, William Hutton found himself increasingly unable to make a respectable living managing a farm in Ireland. In the spring of 1833, he asked to be released from his lease and, at the same time, wrote his mother that he and his wife, Fanny, and his brother had "been considering the propriety of going out to Canada next month."³⁸ It seems clear from William's subsequent letters that Fanny was not enamoured by the prospect. Hutton told his mother that "Fanny says she would rather have a situation of £150 per annum than go to Canada; to her the idea of such a trip is odious in the extreme. No wonder, when there are five such helpless little ones about her, but she thinks of two evils 'Canada or idleness' the former is the better."³⁹ Fanny Hutton's obvious reluctance must have prompted some heated discussions. It was probably not just concerns about the health and welfare of her young children, although this would have been significant. She was also a gentlewoman for whom the colonies offered little but hardship, loneliness, and estrangement from family and friends.

William Hutton travelled to Canada a year later on his own to assess the situation. In June 1834 he wrote to Fanny that he had purchased 165 acres

of land within a mile and a quarter of the small village of Belleville in eastern Upper Canada. After describing how he intended to finance the purchase (loans from his father), William then explained: "I have done my very best both in doing and in refraining from doing, and I feel very confident that if my dearest Fanny should think otherwise, she will not reproach me." William was obviously aware that Fanny was still not reconciled to emigrating: "If you feel you cannot be happy at such a distance from home, I would say certainly remain until you can train your mind to it, and send the children forward." But he hoped that her love for him would prevail and, echoing the tropes of the day, he also hoped that "you will endeavour to sooth sorrows which a separation from a beloved country and beloved friends naturally produces in a warm heart. Enough of this, I merely wish to encourage you to hold the mastery over your spirit, to root and ground your love. I know well how grievous, how intensively grievous, your separation from all that you hold dear in Ireland must be."⁴⁰ Fanny did have some choice in the matter. She had family members in England willing and financially able to support her and the children. And William would, reluctantly, have accepted her decision. Leaving an ill mother and moving permanently to a new country and a new home that William described as "bare," difficult at best to reach, and surrounded by strangers was almost impossible to conceive. But Fanny too was a gentlewoman of her time. Being separated from her husband and possibly children and refusing to accept those responsibilities of women of her class was, for her, apparently unthinkable. Fanny and the children joined William in Upper Canada in the fall of 1834.⁴¹

It is perhaps not surprising that Fanny, and a number of other women of her status, did not emigrate until they had a home to go to. Most British families did not have such choices. And even fewer could afford, as the Huttons could, to ship almost all their household goods to Upper Canada. Financial circumstances often forced members of a family to emigrate at different times. And many wives were only too eager to join their husbands. But maintaining contact across the Atlantic was difficult. Not all British emigrants had the ability or could afford to write letters home, and they relied on friends or neighbours to pass on information or to make the necessary arrangements for the family to follow.⁴² Even then, letters could take months to reach their intended recipients and they frequently went astray. Although many women, like Fanny Hutton, waited for news and instructions, others, like Ann Gemmill, chose not to wait. Fanny was also fortunate in that William met her and the children at the wharf in New York and took them, together with untold numbers of boxes and furniture, to their new home. For her part, Ann Gemmill had detailed directions to John's location, and she and the children seem to have made their own way there. Many families were probably reunited without significant difficulty. But as

notices to the public illustrate, sometimes the family's arrangements went awry; at other times, wives and children, prompted perhaps by desperation or impatience, set out to make the long passage to America to find husbands they had not seen or heard from, sometimes, in years.

John McQueen wrote for his family from a "location near Gananoque," Upper Canada, a year after he left Glasgow. When Mrs. McQueen, with their six children, arrived six months later, she was dismayed that she could not find John. The family was "now in distressed circumstances," she informed the public, and any information of her husband would "receive her grateful thanks."⁴³ Neil Horkan, "from the neighbourhood of Castleban, Ireland," sent for his family in 1836-37. Upon arrival in Kingston, Mrs. Horkan turned to the local emigrant agent for help to find him.⁴⁴ Most information-wanted notices did not include details about what, if any, arrangements the family had made to be reunited. Some, like Irishwoman Mrs. Thomas Wilson and her four children, were "expected" and she seems to have been dismayed that Thomas was not waiting for them.⁴⁵ The tenor of other notices only suggests that the family had had news from their husbands before they left home.⁴⁶ Some clearly had not. Hannah Cradel from County Clare placed a notice in the *Niagara Herald* in January 1830 that she had come to the colony in search of Michael Power, her husband, "for he never wrote."⁴⁷ Fanny Connor was disconsolate when she arrived in Montreal in August 1833 "in search" of her husband, Thomas, who had left home more than two years earlier.⁴⁸ Sometimes it was years before the family left at home could make its way to Upper Canada. Mrs. William Banks and her four children had not seen William in more than four years when they arrived in the colony.⁴⁹

Many women and their children appear to have used what limited resources they had just to make the journey and arrived in the colony in dire straits. In 1829, Mary Duffy "arrived at York, UC with five children" and, she informed the public, was "in a distressed situation" and most "anxious to hear from" her husband, John, who had emigrated from County Kerry to Quebec two years before.⁵⁰ Mrs. Furgeson Bell announced that she and her three children were now "at the corner of Oak and James Street, New York, destitute of the comfort of life."⁵¹ Mrs. Bell's dilemma was complicated because she did not know where her husband was. Neither did a "dejected" Mrs. William Flia Cooper, who asked that her notice be published "by all the Canadian newspapers" as well as those in the United States as her "last resource."⁵² Julia Kain only knew that her husband, Thomas, was "supposed to be living in Upper Canada" when she arrived in York in 1830.⁵³ When she left home, Julia may have been quite confident that she would be able to find Thomas. One wonders what she thought as she began to realize how large the colony was and, even in 1830, how difficult communications and transportation could be. This was certainly not just another part

of Britain, as some at home were claiming.⁵⁴ And what, in the end, had prompted her to leave the familiarity of home? Perhaps she did not have family and neighbours, as Ann Gemmill did, to rely on. Or perhaps the promise of a new world and the hope of being reunited with Thomas had greater influence than any regrets about leaving "the sound of the Sabbath bell."

We know next to nothing about how those who were left behind managed while they waited for word from across the Atlantic. Many probably moved in with a close relative – parents or a sibling – and relied on what they and their children could earn and perhaps save for their future departure. A few were delighted when they received remittances from their husbands. Not only did this help defray the cost of the voyage but it was also tangible evidence that he was still alive and waiting for them. A number undoubtedly turned to local charities or depended on the parish poor rates to keep themselves and to pay at least part of their passage to the New World. And when no news arrived, either directly or included in letters sent to neighbours or friends, at least some wives must have wondered if their husbands did not want to be found.

What is startling is these women's determination to join their husbands and reunite their families. As they settled into the steerage of one of the many emigrant ships or, for those fortunate few, took cabin accommodation on a packet, some may, as Mrs. Heman suggested, have sighed with regret, "Home, home and friends farewell." But most would have been too preoccupied with looking after their children, wondering whether they had packed enough or too much, and looking forward to reconstituting their family. Theirs was not an act of particular heroism or of self-effacing dependency. They arrived in the colony as independent and determined women, most of them quite capable of negotiating leaving home and of remaking home and family.

When Jane Grey arrived in Upper Canada in 1831, she had not left home to look for her husband. Rather, she sought news of her sister, Esther Brown, who had left Ireland a year earlier as a member of her employer's household. Jane's notice did not display the urgency that characterized those placed by desperate wives. Although "newly arrived in the colony," Jane and her husband were already "residing in York" when she sought the public's help. Nonetheless, she stated, she "would be happy to hear" from her sister, who was somewhere "in the upper or lower province."⁵⁵ Jane may not have needed to find her sister, but having family already in the colony probably had some influence on her destination as an emigrant. And finding her sister would also have provided an element of stability in this new world.

Most information-wanted notices were placed by recently arrived emigrants looking for their siblings.⁵⁶ The majority of these were men looking for their brothers or sisters; a significant proportion, however, about 25

percent, were of apparently unattached young women, like Jane Mayarity. Most cards in this category were placed by recently arrived Irish migrants. They included Sarah McCulloch, who put a notice in the *Cobourg Star* in August 1833: "Information is wanting, where Esther McCulloch is to be found." Esther had left the parish of Treshaskin, County Antrim, Ireland, three years earlier. The family must have maintained some contact with Esther, because Sarah knew that when she had first arrived Esther had lived in Belleville and had then moved "on to the Trent." Sarah now thought that Esther had been "seeking service in this village lately." But she could not be found. And Sarah, alone and "in distress," was "most anxious to find her."⁵⁷

An emigrant's choice of destination was, in part at least, often dictated by the whereabouts of other family members or friends. And for many, the pull of kin stretched not just across the Atlantic but over many years. Isabella Stevens must have had a good deal of optimism when she arrived in Upper Canada from Ireland in 1835. She had a brother already living and presumably well settled in the colony and Isabella undoubtedly expected that he and his family would provide her with a home for at least the time it would take her to find employment. Her hopes were dashed, however, when, as she announced to the public, she could not find her brother, whom she had not seen in fifteen years or directly heard of in ten.⁵⁸ One wonders what Jane O'Neil had expected when she arrived in York in 1829. Although she found work at Mrs. Methan's, she could not find her brother, Matthew, who had come to the colony only two years before.⁵⁹

Many young women and men arrived to join a sister who was already settled in the colony. Finding a sister could be more difficult than finding a brother. In 1836, for example, a notice in a York paper asked for information of Leticia Ingham. She had emigrated in 1824 and was thought to be "living in or near Montreal." To complicate matters, Leticia had married after she had left home, and her sister, who was looking for her, did not know her married name.⁶⁰ Moreover, the family did not seem to have heard from her for a number of years. Many siblings did manage, however, to stay in touch with brothers and sisters on the other side of the Atlantic. When Jane Nelson began to look for her sister, Mary, "the last account" she had had was that Mary was in New York.⁶¹ Before Bridget Drury left home, she had received a letter from her sister Catherine, then in Montreal.⁶²

Unlike wives who were going to join their husbands, most siblings did not seem to expect to reconstitute the family of their youth. Rather, they were just trying to establish contact or perhaps to rekindle a relationship. A notice in the *Bytown Gazette* in 1840 was quite typical: "Information wanted of David Chambers, a native of the North of Ireland who came to this country from Liverpool by the ship George Wilkinson in May last. Should this meet his eye, his sister Eliza Chambers who resides in Bytown will be happy

to hear from him."⁶³ A few were rather more urgent. Sarah Palmer wondered if her "brother and sister, Robert and James Palmer," who had left home "some years since," were even alive.⁶⁴ For Louise Godfry, it was imperative that she find her brother, William, as she was "in the most heart-rending condition, without money and among strangers."⁶⁵ For all newly arrived emigrants, knowing that kin was close at hand must have helped ameliorate the strangeness of the foreign land. Reforging familial relationships helped provide a sense of emotional and, perhaps, financial security.

Many young women were quite capable of coping on their own in the colonies, however. Like four young sisters, aged sixteen, eighteen, nineteen, and twenty-three, who "alone" and having "recently arrived from the neighbourhood of York England"⁶⁶ placed advertisements in local newspapers or went door to door looking for work as maids, cooks, governesses, and other domestic help. Some wanted to be taken on as apprentices by a milliner; others offered to become land girls. By the mid-1820s, girls could also register at one of the employment agencies that had been set up by enterprising local shopkeepers and newspaper editors.⁶⁷ In communities where servants and "girls" were at a premium, newly arrived emigrant women had little difficulty finding waged work. In this regard, the discourse was right; women were wanted in Upper Canada, not just as wives but as girls of all work and domestic labourers. Many of those usually young women who took on waged work in the colony had probably left home in the company of parents or other siblings. And, as they would have done at home, they entered the labour market when their labour was not needed at home and as a way to supplement their family's income before they married and set up their own households. But the information-wanted notices indicate that, like their brothers, some, at least, left home alone or in the company of siblings, cousins, or friends expecting to join kin already settled in the colonies. And if, on arrival, they could not find their brother or sister, a few, like Jane Mayarity, decided to return home.

Most emigrating women did not have this option. They had used all their resources just to get to the New World. And for some, there was little reason to return. Perhaps the most poignant notices were from widowed women and elderly parents and fathers looking for their sons or daughters. In July 1840, Lucy Chambers, who had "lately arrived in Upper Canada," was "feeling anxious to hear from her sons, Alexander Hughes and Henry Elam."⁶⁸ Ten years earlier, Ann Dunlop had been particularly "anxious to hear from" her son, Thomas Wright. She had just arrived from Aghnacky, Ireland, her card stated, and had missed meeting him in Montreal.⁶⁹ Ann Crone was in "distressed circumstances" in 1832 when she began to look "desperately" for her sons, Cormick and James.⁷⁰ Not all, or likely even most, parents were in such difficulties. Richard Parson's mother was "very anxious that he would join" her and her new husband, William Lane, at their new home in

Ottotabee Township. They were well settled; what Richard's mother wanted was to be reunited with her son.⁷¹ Edward and Mary Moran had followed their daughter Sarah to the colonies. Now that they were settled in York, they were eager to find her. They wrote, "[they will] be thankful to any person giving any account of her and should this meet her eye, they are willing to pay her expenses to York."⁷² For the Morans, emigration was an opportunity to reconstitute the family. For Ann Crone and Ann Dunlop, leaving home may have been an act of desperation. They were searching not just for their children but for the financial security that was no longer available to them at home.

The importance of kin in the process of emigration cannot be overstated. As Marjory Harper and others have concluded, "private encouragement and practical assistance from family, friends and community ... were of inestimable and enduring importance in stimulating secondary migration and directing patterns of settlement."⁷³ This was as true of emigrating women as of emigrating men. Moreover, when British women (and men) left home, they did so, in part at least, within the context of their identities as wives, sisters, and mothers. In many households, the decision to emigrate was cause for considerable family debate and discussion. And once the decision was made and they had arrived in the colony, emigrants consciously asserted kin relationships to gain the public's attention and assistance and to find emotional and often financial support.

A small but significant portion of unattached women emigrants were in quite different circumstances. After 1820, Upper Canadian newspapers included notices from a few women who had "recently arrived from the old country," who announced their intention of setting up a shop in one of the female trades – dressmaking, bonnet making and mantuumaking – or opening a girl's school.⁷⁴ Staymaker Jane McBradney was one of a growing number of craftswomen who, having "served a regular apprenticeship" or having been trained in Britain, tried to parlay their status as recent emigrants to gain custom in the colony.⁷⁵ Jane Arnold of Brockville, newly arrived from England, made a point of informing the public and potential customers that she was already an "experienced" seamstress.⁷⁶ Other women-merchants claimed to have owned or worked in a shop before they emigrated to the colony. Many of those who opened millinery, hat, and bonnet shops, or offered to make ladies' gowns and children's clothes, were widows, often accompanied by their daughters. Others were apparently younger women who, like the Misses Rubergall of Brockville in the early 1830s or the Misses S. & J. Ross of York,⁷⁷ hoped to find in the colony greater economic opportunities than existed at home. These women must have had some financial resources to buy supplies and, at the very least, rent a room. They also possessed the confidence that their skills were valuable assets even in this far-flung part of the British World.

After 1815, notices began to appear in colonial newspapers, of that group of women Martha Vicinus has identified as British gentlewomen in distress.⁷⁸ Certainly, most of those looking for a situation as a governess in a good home were "local" women who had recently fallen on hard times. But, if their cards to the public are to be believed, a few were "gentlewomen" who had just arrived in the colony and intended to try to take advantage of the growing demand for formal education for both girls and boys. Like their sisters who emigrated to Australia, a number of these self-proclaimed "ladies" stated that they had particular expertise in a specific subject or had themselves had the benefit of a "complete" education at home. Some may have feared "the loss of caste and humiliation which would accompany a wage earning career at home" and thought they could "safely pursue the same career anonymously in the colonies."⁷⁹ The "lady," who had "lately arrived from England" and proposed to establish a seminary of respectability in Kingston in the early 1820s,⁸⁰ obviously anticipated that she would be able to attain some degree of economic security and personal independence in the colony. Others, with an introduction to a local family and perhaps a little capital, may have relished the move. Mrs. Twigg stated that she had been "induced" to emigrate to Upper Canada. She had "conducted a boarding and day school in the north of Ireland" for many years and brought with her her good name and her "long experience and credentials."⁸¹ Mrs. Twigg and, by the 1830s, dozens of other "independent" women were offering formal instruction to the colony's daughters in reading and writing as well as those "accomplishments" – drawing, languages, dancing, and fancy needlework – so necessary for middle-class wives and mothers. Many of these "seminaries of respectability" were short-lived and most seemed to have only a few students. But a few teacher proprietors were very successful. By the mid-1830s, Mrs. Cockburn of York had forty day and boarding students and a full-time staff of three teacher assistants.⁸²

A number of these craftswomen and teachers were consciously claiming a place for themselves in the British World. Their skills, their womanhood, and even their "condition" as unattached women filled a need in the burgeoning colonial society. Many newly arrived milliners, bonnet makers, and others who sold their womanly skills found ready markets for their work. Gentlewomen teachers not only met the growing demand for an educated citizenry; in their schools they also actively promoted and embraced the gendered constructions of true womanhood that many in the colony considered essential for civilized society. By emigrating, at least some British "spinster" women who at home were increasingly considered "superfluous" gained status and a new respectability.⁸³

Leaving home clearly promised hundreds of thousands of Britons new economic and personal opportunities in the first half of the nineteenth century. But emigration was only one of the options available to those looking for

work, for security for themselves and their families, or for a way to escape an untenable situation. The decision to leave home and make the always difficult and often treacherous journey across the Atlantic was not taken lightly. The brief notices of women and men looking for work or asking for the public's assistance to find relatives or friends illustrate some of the complexities of these decisions. They also indicate how integral familial relationships were in who went and where.

It would appear that, in the short term at least, emigration may also have accentuated ethnic and local identities.⁸⁴ Information-wanted notices almost always identified the parties by their origin – Scots, Irish, Welsh, or English – and often included details about the particular town, village, or community in which the individual being looked for had lived. This was undoubtedly an attempt to make it easier for the public to help identify and find the husband, sister, or other party sought. And yet, the advertisements of those new arrivals looking for work also frequently included whether they were Scottish or English. And those who placed help-wanted ads often explicitly stated their requirement for an English or a Scottish girl. Although Upper Canada may have been part of a British World, those who arrived to join husbands and reconstitute their families or to find other family members seem to have seen it as an extension of the more immediate and personal world of family and kin relationships, perhaps overlaid by ethnic identity.⁸⁵ And in their determination to reforge these connections, women created their own stories of emigration.

Acknowledgments

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Notes

- 1 Originally in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 22 (July 1827): 32. This was then picked up in the *Brockville Gazette*, 23 July 1830, and *Farmers Journal* (St. Catharines), 26 September 1827.
- 2 *Thoughts on Emigration as the Means of Surmounting Our Present Difficulties* (London, 1831), 45.
- 3 The literature on this has grown exponentially in the last twenty years, and most attention to women and empire was in the latter half of the century. For a recent overview, see the discussion in Lisa Chilton, "A New Class of Women for the Colonies: *The Imperial Colonist and the Construction of Empire*," in *The British World: Diaspora, Culture and Identity*, ed. Carl Bridge and Kent Fedorowich (London: Frank Cass, 2003), 36-56, and R. Kranidis, *Imperial Objects: Essays on Victorian Women's Emigration and the Unauthorized Imperial Experience* (New York: Twayne, 1998).
- 4 In addition to James Hammerton's classic study, *Emigrant Gentlewomen: Genteel Poverty and Female Emigration, 1830-1914* (London: Croom Helm, 1979), see also Janice Gothard, *Blue China: Single Female Migration to Colonial Australia* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2001), and Charlotte MacDonald, *A Woman of Good Character: Single Women as Immigrant Settlers in Nineteenth Century New Zealand* (Wellington, NZ: Bridget Williams, 1990).
- 5 *Kingston Chronicle*, 21 September 1821.
- 6 *Colonial Advocate* (York), 31 May 1834.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 4 February 1830.

- 8 This preliminary study rests on about 360 notices that appeared in Upper Canadian newspapers between 1815 and 1845. This is only a fraction of the information-wanted notices that were printed in these years. Most were placed by "settlers" who appear to have been quite well established, looking for children who had left home or for other relatives or friends who had "disappeared" while looking for work or on a business trip. The notices used here were those that can be clearly identified as having been placed by recently arrived emigrants, or those looking for new arrivals.
- 9 *Chronicle and Gazette* (Kingston), 22 March 1834.
- 10 *Cobourg Star*, 8 August 1832.
- 11 For a discussion of this see, among others, Catherine Hall, ed., *Cultures of Empire: Colonizers in Britain and the Empire in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: A Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2000), and Adele Perry, *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race and the Making of British Columbia, 1840-1871* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001).
- 12 It is still unclear how many actually emigrated from Britain in this period. P. Cain, "Economics and Empire: The Metropolitan Context," in *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. 3, *The Nineteenth Century*, ed. Andrew Porter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 31-52, estimates 600,000 between 1815 and 1859. For a discussion of the problems in determining the volume of emigration and its ethnic composition, see D.H. Akenson, *The Irish in Ontario* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1984).
- 13 This language was particularly evident in the early 1830s. See, among others, articles in *Scots Times*, 26 June 1832; *Chronicle and Gazette* (Kingston), 3 June 1840, taken from *Herald* (London); *Manchester Guardian*, 17 April 1830; *Cobourg Star*, 17 May 1832, taken from *Fife Herald* and *Bell's Messenger*; *Canadian Emigrant* (London), 6 July 1833; *Christian Guardian* (York), 3 July 1830; *Kingston Chronicle*, 26 June 1830.
- 14 As many have illustrated, British colonies in America had been attractive to migrants throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This persisted after the American Revolution and in the nineteenth century was a growing concern for many in Great Britain. See, among others, David Cressy, *Coming Over: Migration and Communication between England and New England in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Bernard Bailyn, *Voyagers to the West: A Passage of the Peopling of America on the Eve of the Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988); Marilyn C. Baseler, "Asylum for Mankind" *America 1607-1800* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998); Ronald Hyam, *Britain's Imperial Century, 1815-1914: A Study of Empire and Expansion* (Lanham, MD: Barnes and Noble, 1993).
- 15 Marjory Harper, "British Migration and the Peopling of the Empire," in *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. 3, *The Nineteenth Century*, 75-87.
- 16 "Hochelega," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 61 (October 1846): 464.
- 17 "A Letter of Emigration and Colonization," *Bytown Gazette*, 9 February 1843, in a letter taken from a London paper. See also *Chronicle and Gazette* (Kingston), 27 December 1834, in an article taken from *Agricultural and Industrial*. This evolving discourse of emigration and empire presages many of the images and themes that would preoccupy travellers and the British public in the second half of the nineteenth century. Although rooted in traditional visions of the New World, the early-nineteenth-century discourse of emigration reinvented British America as an integral part of the global British Empire, and a colony that shared a uniquely Anglo-Saxon vision of the world, whose "children will present at no great distant period, the most glorious family compact man has ever seen [and] they will govern the earth by their influence and example." Robert MacDougall, *The Emigrant's Guide to North America*, ed. Elizabeth Thompson (1841; reprinted Toronto: Natural Heritage Books, 1998), 7. See Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 1992), and Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492-1979* (London: Methuen, 1986).
- 18 See Michael Vance, "The Politics of Emigration: Scotland and Assisted Emigration to Upper Canada, 1815-26," in *Scottish Emigration and Scottish Society*, ed. T.M. Devine (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1992), 37-60; Harper, "British Migration."
- 19 See the discussion in Perry, *On the Edge of Empire*, and Hall, introduction to *Cultures of Empire*.

- 20 One notable exception, of course, is the work of Catherine Parr Traill, *The Backwoods of Canada* (London, 1836) and her sister Susanna Moodie, *Roughing It in the Bush* (London, 1852). For a good survey of promotional and settler literature about Upper Canada, see Daniel Keon, "The New World Idea of British North America" (PhD thesis, Queen's University, 1984).
- 21 See for example G.W. Warr, *Canada As It Is* (London, 1847), 99; *Thoughts on Emigration*, 43; *A Few Plain Directions* (London, 1820), 48; John MacGregor, *Observations* (London, 1830), 41; John MacGregor, *British America* (London, 1833), 1, 473.
- 22 Thomas Radcliffe, *Authentic Letters from Upper Canada* (Dublin, 1833). William Blane, *An Excursion Through the United States and Canada ... 1822-23* (1864; reprinted New York: Negro University Press, 1964) judged that "a Bachelor has no business in the Backwoods," 163.
- 23 Martin Doyle, *Hints on Emigration* (London, 1832), 66.
- 24 John Howison, *Sketches of Upper Canada* (Edinburgh, 1821), 239. An article in the *Aberdeen Herald* noted that men who "have sons and daughters old enough to lend them efficient assistance ... let them emigrate by all means and we will answer for their success." Quoted in *Sequel to Counsel to Emigrants* (Edinburgh, 1833), 7. See also *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 27 (August 1832), where it was noted that the more numerous a man's children, the better he would succeed. *View of Canada* (Edinburgh, 1844), 40-41; Doyle, *Hints on Emigration*; MacGregor, *British America*.
- 25 *Sequel to Counsel to Emigrants*, 7.
- 26 Andrew Picken, *The Canadas as They at Present Commend Themselves to the Enterprise of Emigrants, Colonists, and Capitalists ...* (London, 1832), 36.
- 27 Radcliffe, *Authentic Letters*, 26. See also MacDougall, *The Emigrant's Guide*, 5.
- 28 Picken, *The Canadas*, 36.
- 29 Adele Perry also discovered this attitude on the BC frontier; see *On the Edge of Empire*, chap. 6. Joanna de Groot, in "'Sex' and 'Race': The Construction of Language and Image in the Nineteenth Century," in *Cultures of Empire*, 37-60, 38, notes how the cultural dependence of women in the colonial/imperial context and their portrayal as "children in need of protection and care" intersected and reinforced understandings of race.
- 30 See Hasia Diner, *Erin's Daughters in America: Irish Immigrant Women in the Nineteenth Century* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983).
- 31 See Charlotte Erickson, "Emigration from the British Isles to the United States of America in 1831," in *Leaving Home: Essays on British Emigration in the Nineteenth Century* (Ithaca, NY, and New York: Cornell University Press, 1994), 126-66.
- 32 *Ibid.*
- 33 *Niagara Gleaner*, 3 September 1825.
- 34 See John Matheson, *Counsel for Emigrants* (Aberdeen, 1834), 36-37. The correspondence of those who had been in the colony for some time often remarked on meeting new arrivals who were on a farm-hunting expedition.
- 35 See John McDonald, *Emigration to Canada* (Edinburgh, 1823).
- 36 Scottish National Library, John Gemmill Family Papers, MU7424, 2 March 1822.
- 37 The letter arrived, according to the annotation made on receipt, about six weeks after Ann left. The Gemmill correspondence is quite unusual, as all the letters include the date written and the date received.
- 38 Gerald E. Boyce, ed., *Hutton of Hastings: The Life and Letters of William Hutton, 1801-1861* (Belleville, ON: Hastings County Council, 1972), 19 April 1833, 32.
- 39 *Ibid.*
- 40 *Ibid.*, 32-33.
- 41 See Amanda Vickery, *The Gentlemen's Daughter* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998); Jack Little, ed., *Love Strong as Death: Lucy Peel's Canadian Journal 1833-1836* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2001); and discussion in Elizabeth Jane Errington, *Emigrants' Worlds* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, forthcoming).
- 42 The letters included in Wendy Cameron, Sheila Haines, and Mary McDougall Maude, eds., *English Immigrant Voices: Labourers, Letters from Upper Canada in the 1830s* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000) illustrate this most eloquently.

- 43 *Kingston Chronicle*, 14 January 1832. A number of women explicitly mentioned that "they had been sent for." *Chronicle and Gazette* (Kingston), 23 August 1837; *Bytown Gazette*, 14 December 1843.
- 44 *Chronicle and Gazette* (Kingston), 23 August 1837. So too did Mrs. Barker, accompanied by four children. *Ibid.*, 13 June 1840.
- 45 *Bytown Gazette*, 14 December 1843.
- 46 Many were like the notice of Mrs. Spright and her children, which stated simply that they were looking for Thomas Spright. "They have just arrived from England," Mrs. Spright informed the public. *Colonial Advocate* (York), 9 July 1829.
- 47 *Niagara Herald*, 21 January 1830. This also seems to have been the situation of the Donevan family, mentioned earlier. Mrs. Donevan's notice concluded that she "[had] come out to this country in search of him." *Kingston Chronicle*, 21 September 1820. See also notice of Mary White who, with her three children, was looking for Joseph. *Chronicle and Gazette* (Kingston), 19 April 1834.
- 48 *Chronicle and Gazette* (Kingston), 17 August 1833.
- 49 *Kingston Chronicle*, 21 September 1821.
- 50 *Farmers Journal* (St. Catharines), 4 March 1829.
- 51 *Ibid.*, 9 April 1828.
- 52 *Chronicle and Gazette* (Kingston), 2 September 1843.
- 53 *Niagara Herald*, 21 January 1830. She had not seen him in three years. Robert Morris' wife and three children and Mary White of Scotland were two others in this situation. See *Toronto Patriot*, 28 November 1837; *Kingston Chronicle*, 19 July 1834; *Chronicle and Gazette* (Kingston), 1 October 1831, notice of Mrs. William McIndoe.
- 54 See, among others, accounts in "MacGregor's British America," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 27 (June 1832): 927.
- 55 *Colonial Advocate* (York), 17 November 1831.
- 56 This category made up almost 60 percent of those placed by emigrants.
- 57 *Cobourg Star*, 28 August 1833. See also notice of Margaret Graham, looking for her brother Robert, *Canadian Freeman* (York), 3 May 1832; Ann Coyle, looking for her brother and sister-in-law, *Colonial Advocate* (York), 11 June 1834. Most of the information-wanted notices of emigrants were placed by people who identified themselves as Irish. This is not surprising, as long before the famine migrations of 1846-48, Irish immigrants to Upper Canada outnumbered all others.
- 58 *St. Catharines Journal*, 26 November 1835. See also that of Margaret Young, looking for her brother Thomas, who had left County Derry seventeen years earlier. *Chronicle and Gazette* (Kingston), 28 June 1834.
- 59 *Colonial Advocate* (York), 24 September 1829.
- 60 *Christian Guardian* (York), 8 June 1836. See also *Hallowell Free Press*, 24 July 1832, Ann Bleakney looking for Margaret, whom she thought had married a farmer.
- 61 *Christian Guardian* (York), 15 February 1832. Jane was in York.
- 62 *Canadian Freeman* (York), 24 May 1832.
- 63 *Bytown Gazette*, 17 September 1840.
- 64 *Christian Guardian* (York), 19 February 1834. See also *Chronicle and Gazette* (Kingston), 29 May 1839: Mrs. Phillips of Cobourg looking for Catharine O'Brien, who had not been heard of since her arrival.
- 65 See notice in *Christian Guardian* (York), 8 March 1837. See also Margaret Scott, looking for brother George, a blacksmith who was a native of Scotland; she had "arrived in this country last summer and [was] anxious to hear from him." *Cobourg Star*, 10 December 1834. A number of notices were from brothers and sisters looking for siblings who had arrived with another family. Mary Hamill was looking for her cousin, Sally, who had come from Ireland in the company of William and James Brown eight years before. *Chronicle and Gazette* (Kingston), 7 April 1832; Ann Sherlock, now Ann Maine, had arrived in Kingston with three women from Ireland in October 1836; "Where is she?" her sister now asked. *Ibid.*, 16 May 1838. In 1837, sisters Eliza, Isabela, and Margaret were looking for their brother, John Taylor, who had left County Donega for York in May 1835, *Christian Guardian* (York), 15 November 1837.

- 66 *Patriot* (York), 30 June 1831.
- 67 For a little more detail on this and opportunities for employment generally in the colony, see Elizabeth Jane Errington, *Wives and Mothers, School Mistresses and Scullery Maids* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995), particularly 144 and accompanying notes.
- 68 *Upper Canada Gazette* (York), 8 July 1840.
- 69 *Niagara Gleaner*, 14 August 1830. In 1833, Elizabeth Hetherington, who had emigrated from County Fermanagh, Ireland, some months after her son, Adam, had left home, could not find out her son's new place of residence. Her call for assistance stated: "Any person acquainted with him would serve the cause of humanity by letting him know that his mother is at the house of Mr James Botfield, Matilda, UC and wishes him to write or come to her immediately." *Christian Guardian* (York), 31 July 1833. See also Ann Dundoon and her daughter, who were looking for Patrick Dundoon, *Niagara Herald*, 21 January 1830.
- 70 *Canadian Freeman* (York), 22 November 1832. Widow Fox turned to the emigrant agent for assistance in finding daughters Nancy and Betty. *Christian Guardian* (York), 13 October 1847. See also notice looking for Francis Duffy; his mother and sisters were anxious to find him. *Patriot* (York), 25 September 1840; Michael Carey's "distressed parents" were looking for him. *Chronicle and Gazette* (Kingston), 20 January 1841.
- 71 *Cobourg Star*, 10 April 1833.
- 72 *Canadian Freeman* (London), 24 November 1833.
- 73 Harper, "British Migration," 83.
- 74 See discussion in Errington, *Wives and Mothers*, chap. 8.
- 75 *Brockville Recorder*, 21 July 1831. Miss Wilson, recently arrived in Kingston, became an independent dressmaker and milliner only after, she stated, she had had five years' training under Mrs. Kennedy. *Kingston Chronicle*, 22 November 1834. See Sally Alexander, "Women's Work in Nineteenth Century London: A Study of the Years 1820-60s," in *Becoming a Woman and Other Essays in 19th and 20th Century Feminist History*, ed. Sally Alexander (London: Virago Press, 1994).
- 76 Mrs. Jones and Miss Rose Anne Osborne, *United Empire Loyalist* (York), 24 May 1828; Jane Arnold, *Brockville Recorder*, 6 August 1830; Misses S. and J. Ross, *Brockville Recorder*, 28 July 1831; Mrs. Steward, *Colonial Advocate* (York), 6 June 1834.
- 77 See *Brockville Recorder*, 28 July 1831; *Colonial Advocate* (York), 21 January 1830.
- 78 Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women, 1850-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).
- 79 Hammerton, *Emigrant Gentlewomen*, 46.
- 80 *Kingston Chronicle*, 4 January 1822.
- 81 *Ibid.*, 4 January 1825.
- 82 See discussion in Errington, *Wives and Mothers*, chap. 9.
- 83 See Rita Kranidis, *The Victorian Spinster and Colonial Emigration: Contested Subjects* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999).
- 84 Charlotte Erickson notes that European migrations "were not so much national in scope" as "constituted by particular streams from one village or region to a particular county or city elsewhere"; *Leaving Home*, 7.
- 85 See discussion in Bridge and Fedorowich, "Mapping the British World" and Phillip Buckner and Carl Bridge, "Reinventing the British World," *Round Table* 368 (2003): 77-88 for a discussion of emigrant and colonial "identities."