

Immigrants to Canada

Dublin to Quebec on the Mary and Bell, 1817

From *Narrative of a Voyage from Dublin to Quebec, In North America*, by James Wilson, 1822, CIHM #63247

1817. I sailed on Thursday 15th of May from Dublin, in the brig Mary and Bell, bound for Quebec, commanded by Captain Cunningham; felt my mind awfully impressed on leaving my native land; yet sensible that it is thy will, O God! Do willingly commend myself and family to thee both now and for ever.

17th -This morning the following circumstance happened. The captain seeing a small cask or barrel floating on the waves, took boat in pursuit of it, and on examining found a human body contained therein.

I and my family are now sick, especially my companion: Lord help us to be resigned! We are in thy hands, O God! Chasten us, but not in thine anger, lest thou bring us to nothing.

18th -This day the wind is fair; the vessel sails rapidly. We passed Tusker rock, situate within nine miles of Wexford town, on which is built a light house to be a guide for shipping by night; a family resides therein, paid by government for lighting the house. This evening I was requested to hold a religious meeting, which I consented to, having obtained leave from the captain of the vessel; a great number attended on the occasion, whilst I said a few words on the 3d chapter of 2d Peter. The people waited on God in a becoming manner; I trust not in vain.

19th -The people are mostly all recovering from their sickness, consequently there is more order and regularity observed.

20th -This day the wind is fair; the ship sails nearly five miles an hour. The rocking of the vessel has brought on sickness again to many of the passengers. My wife is quite unwell, and myself also; but thou art my portion, O Lord, my God!

21st -This morning is quite calm: the sky clear. About twelve o'clock; the waves swelled prodigiously, the ship making five miles an hour and through its excessive motion extreme sickness prevails. O my God! Save me from a murmuring spirit, and help me to cast my care on thee

22^d -It is now eight days since I left Dublin bay, never more, I suppose, to return. I find it a serious thing to go to America; it is attended with much pain of mind, sorrow, sickness and affliction. How few consider this, till they find themselves on the wide extended ocean then 'tis too late to wish themselves back! I think those who enjoy the comforts of life in abundance in Ireland, have no right to leave a certainty for an uncertainty. At least without a satisfactory evidence of their removal being of God, but, alas! how few consult him on any occasion.

This evening several huge fish were seen sporting on the waves; this it seems indicated an approaching storm, which lasted the whole of the night.

23^d - This day nothing particular occurred; many of the passengers continue sick: my wife and I are still unwell, and my children also; but my trust is in thee, O Lord, my God!

26th -Being much afflicted with sickness these few days past, I have been unable to write, but thanks be to God, now feel better. I never witnessed such a scene before as the storm which we had on Friday night. About eleven o'clock, the captain being just gone to bed, it began; on which he immediately got on deck and ordered all the sails down, which being done, restrained the motion of the vessel; nothing could equal the awful change that took place-the vessel rolled from side to side, and overturned all the passengers' boxes, pans, kettles, and vessels of water, in such a manner as that no tongue can express, or mind conceive the state we were in-all, I may say, expected every moment to be swallowed in the great deep. My mind was seriously impressed on the occasion, but my whole soul was stayed on God. The captain had, by his own account, three dozen of plates broken, besides several bottles of porter. This storm continued partly till Sunday evening.

27th -This day being very fine, the people are chiefly on deck, and thanks be to God recovering their health after the late tremendous storm.

28th -This day has been the most favourable for sailing of any we have had since we left Ireland. It is supposed the vessel has sailed since four o'clock yesterday until twelve this day, one hundred and fifty miles. If this continues we shall soon arrive in Quebec.

31st -Yesterday I felt so sick, with a violent pain in my head, that I was not able to leave my bed; but thanks be to God, to-day I find myself something better. Whilst on deck, I had a view of several huge fish, some of them, I think, were from eight to ten feet long, called sea hogs, they came within six yards of the vessel. How wonderful are thy works, O Lord!

June 2^d -On Saturday night we had another storm, which continued the whole of Sunday; and although it was not so violent as the one we had on the 26th, yet I may safely say, the consequences were of a more serious nature. Through the violent agitation of the waves, the vessel heaved from side to side so vehemently as to produce the utmost confusion; the people could scarcely remain secure in their beds; their chests and other articles of use were all thrown into one common heap: in short, I never witnessed such disorder before. I felt my mind deeply impressed on the occasion, and firmly stayed on the God of my salvation. The vessel sailed near ten miles an hour part of this day, till the shifting of the wind caused a decline in sailing.

5th -We are now three weeks this day at sea, and by this time, have a tolerable knowledge of what kind of provisions are most needful for a voyage to America:

And 1st Oatmeal, and cuttings are much used, molasses also; potatoes are of the greatest value, nothing more so in my judgment. Salt, or hung beef, pork, bacon or hams, are all excellent in their use; veal when salted, and afterwards watered, then boiled with beef or bacon, will produce a soup very desirable. One family here, brought a quantity of fowl in pickle, which when

watered, eat very delicious. Coffee is much preferable to tea, the water being so bad, as to render the tea rather insipid and tasteless: bottled ale is good for drink, but in my opinion, cyder when mixed through water, is a much better and cooler drink for the stomach than any other; a constant thirst being common to all on sea. As to spices, pepper, and ginger is mostly used. Flour is essentially necessary; cake bread or pan cakes being very applicable to weak constitutions. Eggs are much used, and when well grazed, or put in salt pickle for six hours, and well packed, will keep fresh a considerable time, this I found by experience. Good port wine is very reviving on sea, when used moderately; but spirits is not so very necessary here. I conceive pickled cabbage to be very useful, such kind of diet only answering whilst sickness prevails; I therefore recommend it. Biscuit is much used by seamen, and the only way for passengers to take it is, to pour boiling water on it, and when steeped a few minutes toast it before the fire, then butter it, and it will eat as pleasant as loaf bread, but not otherwise: oat bread well baked in an oven, will answer well with either tea or coffee; cheese will be very needful; split peas for soup; and lastly, vinegar, butter, and potted herrings.

To preserve new milk for a voyage, take a large or small jar or jars, and clean them remarkably well, and when done, put the milk therein, and after securing it well by corking it close, put the jar or jars into a large pot of water, and boil them over a good fire, and when done, pack them in a hamper, or some other place, and it will keep sweet the whole of the passage. This has been tried by a man of truth and credit, who went last season to Philadelphia, and used the milk there after his arrival, it retaining its natural sweetness. There is a diet much used here, vulgarly called "beggars dish," composed of peeled potatoes and either beef or bacon cut in thin slices, and mixed through them, affords a pleasant meal, the soup is much esteemed, being seasoned with pepper. Delft ware will not in any wise answer in common use, I would therefore recommend tin poringers, or small wooden noggins and trenchers, these will be found best at sea, as the constant motion of the vessel will have a tendency to break any other: a tin kettle in the form of a D will be found very useful in boiling meat or any other food, as it can hang on the bars of the grate at any time, this will be highly accommodating, especially where so many families are boiling their food at one time. The kind of apparel I would recommend to male passengers would be, short jackets or waistcoats with sleeves, a dark handkerchief for the neck, and coarse trowsers:-for women, a long bed gown, or wrappers with dark shawls or handkerchiefs, as cleanliness cannot be observed with any degree of precision. It is necessary to provide strong chests or boxes for a voyage, well secured with good locks and hinges; or otherwise it is impossible to preserve property: I am sorry to have it say, in this vessel there has been much plunder committed, for want of being duly prepared against it....

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July 9th -This morning I arose between four and five, went on deck, and felt truly thankful to the Lord for his wonderful care over us in the past night, which ought never to be forgotten by any on board this vessel. A tremendous storm took place in the evening late, continued all night, and it being extremely dark, together with the judgment that was required in steering aright, all conspired to make our state quite dangerous; the captain had to sound the depth of the water for the space of two hours constantly, and give a report of it every five minutes; the vessel sailed over part of the river not exceeding twenty-four feet of water, but through the great skill of our pilot we were safely brought clear of the rocks which were on every side. We passed by several

large vessels which lay at anchor, being fearful to get under sail till morning, the masters of whom advised us not to proceed; but depending, under God, on the experience of the pilot, we proceeded safely, all praise be to God for this and all other mercies. Having contemplated with astonishment our great deliverance, I cast my eyes around to view the country as I passed along, and never did I behold such a delightful view as I had on both sides. Here are lands improved with such exquisite taste and laid out to such great advantage, as to exceed every idea that can be formed of it by any mind not favoured with seeing it. Here are beautiful large and small houses so neatly built as to afford the greatest satisfaction to the beholder, several churches and chapels are along the sea shore; windmills, tan-yards and large buildings, are also to be seen. The houses are very near each other, and the land laid down in square lots, about two acres wide, and extend very far backward, where the people have their wood-land for firing. There are none of these houses mean in appearance; they are all executed in the neatest manner, and painted outside, some white, some yellow, and others slate colour. In short I never beheld such an improved country, nay, not in any part of Ireland that I have seen, and what causes such deserved praise to this land of liberty is, that all the improvements done are the effect of much labour and constant industry.

We arrived safe, glory be to God! About eleven o'clock this morning at Quebec, and so concluded our voyage of eight weeks. Our ship cast anchor opposite the great battery, where we have a view of the troops doing duty, and also of the shipping lying in the harbour.

We now felt the strongest desire to go on shore, and having applied to the captain, a few of us were allowed that liberty, but requested to return in a few hours, the ship not yet being examined as to the state of passengers' health, &c. We got into the boat, and in a few minutes arrived on shore, when the joy that each of us felt was inexpressible. We could scarcely walk, the earth appearing to bend under us. My first object was to find out the stationed preacher of the city; and after some enquiry was showed the house he lodged in, belonging to Messrs. Shea and Walker, partners in the boot and shoemaking trade. This family received me very kindly, and brought me to Mr. Hicks' room, to whom I was introduced as a friend and local preacher from Ireland...

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