



# *The Bromley Sheaf*

*Bromley Historical Society Newsletter*

Issue 2, 2024

## **President's Remarks**

Just like a lot of other people, I live with chronic health conditions ... in my case, asthma and hypertension. Filling my pill caddy is a regular, weekly event and, some days, when I look at the medication I take, it's kind of depressing. But then I stop and I remember. I remember trips to hospital emergency rooms with very high blood pressure. I remember how, soon after I was diagnosed with asthma, I almost died in the ambulance during an acute attack.

Things got better. My chronic health conditions are now well controlled. They are manageable. Livable. Filling my pill caddy is still a regular, weekly event and, at times, it's still kind of depressing but I try to be grateful. I think about how, in my grandparents' day and certainly in my great-grandparents' day, I probably wouldn't be alive. So, I take a slow, deep breath and I remember.

During the recent global pandemic, I listened to a number of people who spoke about feeling vulnerable. Their feelings made sense to me. In Canada, we have grown accustomed to a better level of personal health than many of our grandparents enjoyed. I think about Indigenous peoples and the devastating results after their first exposure to diseases brought from Europe. And about the immigrants who came seeking a better life only to die from typhus and cholera enroute or upon landing. Today, there are many more possibilities for life-saving medical interventions. And, for those of us who need them, we have greater access to medications that make many chronic conditions better. Manageable. Livable.

It wasn't always so and it's good for us to stop for a bit and reflect on that. To realize how much we take for granted. To remember how it was.

***Patricia Van  
Gelder***

## *Coming From Far: The Irish in Canada*

The earliest documented arrival of the Irish in Canada was in Newfoundland with its rich cod fishing grounds in the late 17th century. This was as a result of the shipping routes that connected Irish ports and Newfoundland. These mostly men worked in the fishery industry but some also worked as artisans, shopkeepers, traders, farmers, carpenters, bakers, general labourers, and in other occupations. The Irish even gave a name to the island — “Talamh an Éisc”, meaning the “Land of Fish”.

The first identified Irish man to come to the new world in 1661 was Tadhg Cornelius Ó'Braonáin, known in English as Tadhg O'Brennan. It is believed that Tadhg was one of the many Irish soldiers who left for France following the Cromwellian invasion of Ireland in March 1649. It is assumed that he learned French, which is why he came to New France at age 45. He married Jeanne Chartier on October 9, 1670 in Notre Dame Cathedral in Quebec City and they had 10 children. Tadhg died aged 55 in 1687 and is buried at Pointe-aux-Trembles (now part of Montreal). By 1700, Quebec parish records show that 100 families, of the 2,500 families living in the colony, were natives of Ireland. An additional 30 families had one of the spouses being Irish-born.

Most of the Irish at that time who chose to emigrate paid for the sea crossings themselves or had help from family and friends. They were knowledgeable about the economic advantages which Canada could offer them. The possibility of work in the timber trade and farming drew them to Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island in Atlantic Canada as well as to Upper Canada.

Between 1817 and 1824, the Irish began arriving in large numbers. These were mostly Irish Protestant farmers and landless tenants from Cork, Tipperary, Wicklow, Tyrone, Cavan and Fermanagh. The British government provided grants that included the transatlantic fare, land, shelter, tools and food for the first several months to help them settle. This made the trip overseas more appealing. There were three important colonization leaders who helped the Irish to come to British North America – Richard Talbot led a smaller group of Tipperary settlers to the Ottawa Valley and Middlesex County in 1818; James Buchanan helped Irish in New York relocate to Durham and Peel counties in 1816-1817; and, Peter Robinson moved hundreds of County Cork settlers to the Ottawa Valley and the Peterborough region in 1821 and 1823.

Initially, the Irish came to the Ottawa Valley area in the hopes of securing work building the Rideau Canal. Under the direction of Colonel John By, the work began in 1826 and lasted until 1832. Certainly, opportunities in agriculture and lumbering were other options. It is estimated that approximately 450,000 Irish came to British North America before 1845. They created a settlement pattern of kinship networks and

migration chains that would assist the Irish who came during the time of the Great Famine.

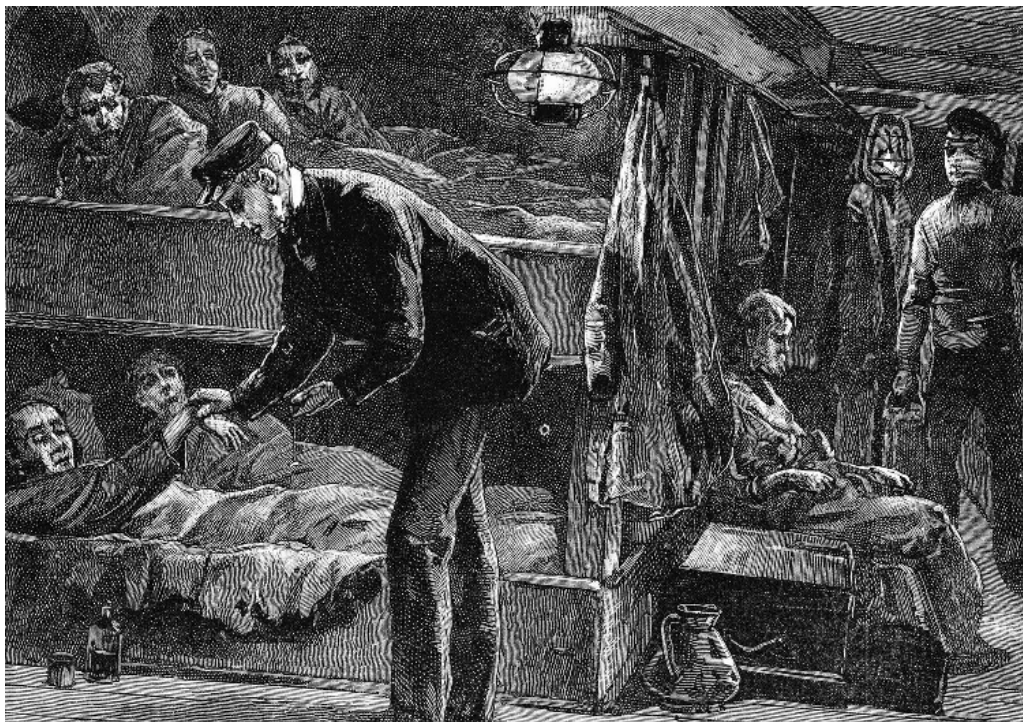


By the mid-19th century, more than half of the settlers on the Ontario side of the Ottawa Valley were of Irish origin. Waves of immigration continued to bring mostly Catholic Irish into Carleton County in Ontario, and into Pontiac County on the Quebec side. It is estimated that 75% of the residents of the Valley were of Irish origin. These people shaped the history of communities such as Carp, Fitzroy Harbour and Renfrew on the Ontario side, and Shawville, Bristol and Quyon on the Quebec shore.

The turning point in immigration certainly was the year 1847 – An Gorta Mór or the Great Hunger as it is known in Ireland or the Great Famine as we call it. The Famine resulted in 1.5 to 2 million destitute Irish leaving their homeland. Malnourished and some suffering from typhus, they embarked on the journey to North America from a variety of ports: Dublin, Belfast, Londonderry, Cork, Sligo, and Liverpool. It is estimated that 340,000 came to British North America at this time. They arrived in large numbers on boats that came to be called “coffin ships”. These ships were built to contain lumber from Canada. The owners would make slight changes so they could carry people back to Canada, but they were cramped, provided little creature comfort, and became a breeding ground for disease.

The crossing lasted between six and eight weeks, although sometimes it took 10 to 12 weeks. Arriving in poor physical health, the sick overwhelmed the quarantine facilities at Grosse Île, which had been established to prevent the spread of disease. The quarantine station operated by trial and error, ill-equipped and, at the time, there was little understanding as to the causes, spread and treatment of infectious diseases. As a result, the lack of space on Grosse Île meant that only the sick were taken ashore while the apparently healthy passengers remained on board the ships for up to 15 days to ensure quarantine. Despite this, infection spread on board the ships. In midsummer 1847, there were 2,500 invalids quarantined on Grosse Île, and it was reported that the waiting ships stretched several miles.

More than 400 ships came from Great Britain during that year and approximately 90,000 people passed through the quarantine station. It is estimated that over 5,000 victims were buried at sea and an equal number succumbed to their illness and were buried on at Grosse Île.



Those in good health continued on their journey to Montreal and many came up the Ottawa River. Others continued on to Kingston and travelled up the Rideau Canal. However, even the Canal was closed for a period due to the outbreak of the disease. In Bytown, the influx of 3,000 Irish immigrants in June 1847 triggered a typhus outbreak in the nascent shack town. The Grey Sisters, under the direction of Mother Élisabeth

Bruyère, tended to the ill in fever sheds put up near to the Canal entrance, but 200 people died while in quarantine. The sisters also had a hospital built where they could care for those who they felt had a chance of recovery.

The wave of Irish immigration to Canada dwindled as the 20th century approached. However, Irish culture took hold and laid down roots in the Ottawa Valley, with its lumber industry and good farmland. The Irish immigrants dominated 53 townships in a line of settlements straddling 8 counties. This concentration created a distinctive Ottawa Valley style in the pastimes they took pleasure from – step-dancing, fiddling and song. It also led to a distinctive Ottawa Valley dialect.

Sources:

<https://www.ottawariver.org/pdf/08-ch2-6.pdf>

<https://www.tfcg.ca/1847-typhus-epidemic-canada>

<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/irish>

<https://www.irishtocanada.com/canada-s-irish-immigrants/>



### ***So what is Typhus?***

As we learned in 2020, an epidemic occurs when an infectious disease spreads rapidly throughout a community. Several epidemics have occurred over the course of Canada's history.

Typhus first reached our shores in 1659. But an outbreak in 1746 came about because France had sent a large flotilla of warships to New France to expel the English, retake Port-Royal in Acadia and then go on to lay siege to Boston and New England. Of the 3,150 soldiers aboard the ships, however, 1,270 died at sea and another 1,130 in Bedford Basin. Tragically, the disease also spread to the Mi'kmaq in the region with devastating results; it killed more than one-third of the population. This also happened to other Indigenous peoples when the Europeans first arrived on our shores, exposing them to diseases against which they had no natural immunity.

The year 1747 became synonymous with typhus due to the overwhelming impact it had on Irish immigrants coming to British North America in search of a better life. It is estimated that over 5,000 immigrants died during the Atlantic crossing that year. Another 5,000 or more died at Grosse Île, the quarantine station in the St Lawrence River below Quebec City, with a further 10,000 people dying in the fever sheds of Québec, Montreal, Saint John, Kingston, Toronto and Bytown, which were set up to assist the sick.

So what is typhus? *Epidemic typhus*, also called louse-borne typhus, is an uncommon disease caused by bacteria named *Rickettsia prowazekii*. It is spread from person to person through infected body lice. Its symptoms include fever, headache, rash, and

confusion. The symptoms manifest themselves within two weeks after exposure. Body lice thrive in conditions that are overcrowded and where people are unable to bathe or change clothes regularly. This was certainly the case for the Irish on what were called “coffin ships”, which brought them to British North America.

Robert Whyte, a pseudonym for the author of the *Famine Ship Diary: The Journey of a Coffin Ship*, describes the neglect of his fellow passengers, who although 'within reach of help' were waiting 'enveloped in reeking pestilence', no access to medicine or treatment, nourishing food, or 'so much as a drop of pure water'. He noted how conditions on other Irish emigrant ships were even worse. His story told of two Canadian priests who visited the holds of the vessels and saw people 'up to their ankles in filth. The wretched emigrants crowded together like cattle and corpses remain[ed] long unburied'.

Fever sheds were hastily set up to house the sick but they were filthy and crowded. Patients were placed in double tiers of bunks with dirt from the top bunk falling onto the sick below. Meagre meals consisted of tea, gruel or broth, which were served three times a day. Drinking water was scarce and there was not enough for the patients. One Catholic priest reported that the sheds had no ventilation and no privies.



At Grosse Île the medical personnel to tend to the sick were few. Dr. George Douglas, the chief medical officer, tried to encourage healthy female passengers on the ships to act as nurses. He promised high wages. But they would be required to sleep among the sick and share their food. Fear of the disease meant none accepted. With good reason; the nurses who cared for the sick more often than not caught the fever and were not offered any assistance.

While ships were not obliged to carry medical personnel, some of the arriving ships had doctors among the passengers. One, Dr. A. Benson from Dublin, volunteered as he had worked in fever hospitals in Ireland. Sadly he became infected and died a few days later. Even the 40 religious who ministered to the sick and dying became ill.

At the time the causes of the typhus were not known. That, however, did not stop the suggestion of preventative cures. Among these were not sitting in draughts, giving children cold water sponge baths, avoiding hanging washing to dry in the rooms where you live in, never living on poor food to save money for drink, walk and exercise in the open air; of course, consuming alcohol was blamed.

One positive result of the epidemic is that boards of health were created and the public was encouraged to read the reports and comply with their recommendations. There was a strong emphasis on cleanliness. The epidemic was declared officially over in April of 1848. However, it was not until 1916 that the cause of typhus and how it was transmitted was found.

Sources :

<https://www.tfcg.ca/1847-typhus-epidemic-canada>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1847\\_North\\_American\\_typhus\\_epidemic#:~:text=In%201847%2C%20with%20a%20large,Island%20and%20in%20Saint%20John.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1847_North_American_typhus_epidemic#:~:text=In%201847%2C%20with%20a%20large,Island%20and%20in%20Saint%20John.)

McGill University / ILN / DRBSC, 1850

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### ***Tending to Those in Need***

Born Élisabeth Bruguier in L'Assomption in Lower Canada, on March 19, 1818, she was the daughter of Jean Baptiste Charles Bruguier and Sophie Mercier. Her father died when she was six years old. The Bruguier name was changed to Bruyère in 1824 when the family moved after the death of her father.

She spent her childhood in Montréal where her mother earned a living by working as a servant. Élisabeth cared for her two brothers while attending school. From the age of

12, she lived with her mother's cousin in St. Esprit, Québec, and the cousin became her surrogate mother, teacher and mentor, preparing Élisabeth to become a teacher.

In 1839, however, Élisabeth Bruyère chose to join the Sisters of Charity (also known as the Grey Nuns) in Montreal. In 1845, she was asked to set up a community of the Sisters of Charity at Bytown. Barely three months after her and three other Sisters' arrival, they had begun to establish a school, a general hospital (the predecessor of the current Ottawa General Hospital and the Bruyère Centre), a home for the aged, an orphanage As well as a home for abandoned children. Mother Bruyère and her group also provided services to the poor in their homes.



In 1847, Irish immigrants arrived in Bytown, leaving their famine and plague-stricken homeland and seeking better lives. Only two short years after the opening of the hospital, the Congregation took on the challenge of tending to the typhus epidemic brought to the town.

Over the course of her life, Élisabeth Bruyère and her Sisters contributed greatly to providing social assistance to the citizens of Bytown. She died on April 5, 1876, aged 58.

Sources:

<https://www.bruyere.org/en/mother-Élisabeth-Bruyère>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Élisabeth\\_Bruyère](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Élisabeth_Bruyère)



## Right on Our Doorsteps

Stretching 1271 kilometres from the wilderness of Abitibi-Témiscamingue to the St. Lawrence River west of Montreal, the Ottawa River and its extensive watershed have



a natural beauty and over the centuries have become the cultural centre for most of eastern Ontario and western Quebec.

The Indigenous peoples have paddled the River and its secondary sources for an estimated 10,000 years. It provided a route for Europeans who traded in furs, timber, and brought people who fled wars, hunger and poverty to build a new life for themselves and for future generations. In many ways over the centuries, the River was the original trans-Canada highway.



The Ottawa River is synonymous with the names of people who were key players in Canada's history – Algonquin chief Tessoüat, Étienne Brûlé, Samuel de Champlain, and Pierre Radisson, as well as a host of others who followed in their wake. Through the centuries, the River has served people well. It was the route chosen to bring furs and timber to the nations of the old countries. It brought settlers from different countries and speaking different languages. All sought work, places to farm, establish businesses and set down permanent roots. Irish, French Canadian, Scottish, Dutch, German and Polish, as well as the original Indigenous people, have shaped the Ottawa Valley and given it its unique and distinctive culture and dialect. Through the years and even today, the River's resources have brought economic and social development along and close to its shores.

One thing remains constant, the Ottawa River continually evolves. The retreat of the Champlain Sea, which was created when the last ice sheet melted 10,000 to 7,000 years, allowed the Atlantic Ocean to flow in and fill up the depressed land that formed the Ottawa Valley. Between 10,000 and 8,000 years ago, much more water flowed through the River, due to the large glacial lakes in northern Ontario and the Prairie Provinces as well as the upper Great Lakes. All drained through the Ottawa River. Several times during this period the Ottawa River shifted into new channels. About

8,000 years ago, the present modern drainage of the River's watershed had become established.



Photo Courtesy of Fred Blackstein

One thing that has remained, despite the passage of time, is the richness of its natural geophysical heritage. The Ottawa River has many physical features that continue to draw people to experience them firsthand. It is the only Canadian River that crosses four major geological subdivisions. Its sheer size and high discharge volume make it the largest tributary to the St. Lawrence and Canada's 12th-longest river. It is home to many different ecosystems, each one playing a critical role in sustaining Canada's biodiversity. Unique wetlands and floodplain habitats along the river support species considered to be rare or at risk. The region hosts the most biologically diverse ecosystems in Quebec. More than 300 species of birds have been sighted along the River, and it is one of the continent's most important migratory stopovers. It is home to the threatened Least Bittern and the Eastern Spiny Softshell Turtle, one of the rarest turtles in Canada. As well, 33 species of reptiles and amphibians, 53 species of mammals, and 85 species of fish can be found in habitat along the River. Within the watershed, there are at least 50 animal and plant species at risk.

Travelling along the waters of the Ottawa River today allows people to escape from the modern frenetic world. A trip on its waves gives paddlers and boaters glimpses of the past 3 billion years of the Earth's evolution. The process of erosion continues to expose

diverse features that can be viewed both from the River or the shore as it reveals its rich geo-heritage. All this right on our doorsteps.

Source: <https://ottawariver.org/pdf/0-ORHDC.pdf>

## UPCOMING 2024 TALKS

- |                              |  |
|------------------------------|--|
| Thursday, July 18<br>7pm     | <i>The Great Famine &amp; Irish settlement in the Ottawa Valley</i><br>Michael McBane.<br>Old Town Hall<br>498 Micksburg Road<br>Osceola |
| Saturday, August 17          | <i>The Ottawa's History - A Paddler's Journey</i> 2pm<br>Fred Blackstein<br>Old Town Hall<br>498 Micksburg Road<br>Osceola               |
| Sunday, September 15<br>2pm  | <i>Sudden Impact: The Almonte Train Wreck of 1942</i><br>Jamie Bramburger<br>Old Town Hall<br>498 Micksburg Road<br>Osceola              |
| Sunday, October 6<br>2pm     | <i>How the Feckin Ottawa Valley Irish Speak English</i><br>Barry Conway<br>Old Town Hall<br>498 Micksburg Road<br>Osceola                |
| Saturday, November 16<br>2pm | <i>Yesterday &amp; Today: The Tradition Continues</i><br>Wendy Jocko<br>Barr Line Community Centre<br>1766 Barr Line<br>Douglas          |



# JOIN US!

Become a member of the BROMLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

- Renew your annual membership – Individual \$10.00 or Family \$15.00.
- Send your cheque along with your name, street address and e-mail coordinates to: Bromley Historical Society, c/o Box 1, Douglas, ON, K0J 1S0.
- Charitable donations receive a tax receipt.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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I wish to join as: Individual \$10.00 \_\_\_\_\_ Family \$15.00 \_\_\_\_\_

I wish to donate: \$\_\_\_\_\_.

Yes, I would like to volunteer. My interests are:



## And join us on Facebook!

Our Society can now be found our Facebook. We post old photographs and stories about our township's history. Please look at the page or join the page and feel free to add your own photos and memories of days gone by.