Maith
FOUNDATION

15th day of September in the year of our Lord 1848

Dearest Sister Ellen:

It has been too long since I have written, dear sister. Indeed, months have passed and so much has happened. William and I are settled enough now that I can give you a faithful account of our passage from Ireland to British North America, hereby put down this September 1848.

Before I do, I make bold this address that yourself, James and the rest of our family have the blessings of good health. Be assured that Denis and Mary are well, as are William's parents, the Barkers, whom we have not yet seen. Our plans to join them in Hamilton have not transpired due to unfortunate circumstances of which I will now relate to you.

When we said goodbye to you on April 18 at the port of New Ross and boarded the Bridgetown, bound for Grosse Île, Québec, William and I were filled with the hope of a new life. We sailed past the Hook Peninsula on our starboard side, catching our final view of Ireland and her ancient landscapes of golden beaches, patchwork of fields, and remnants of old grey abbeys and castles.

Though we will likely never see our green isle again, I was overcome with relief to be leaving the famine, pestilence, and full poorhouses of Ireland behind. We considered ourselves lucky to be so well assisted by the Earl Fitzwilliam of Coollattin, who granted us passage and gave to us a sea chest for our belongings, along with provisions and a clothing allowance.

Many of our fellow travellers were likewise assisted but they travel penniless. Unlike the Fitzwilliams, they were given nothing but empty promises by their landlords, which they discovered only after making the harrowing trip across the Atlantic. The land agents who were supposed to be waiting in Québec with an allotment of land never existed. The whole scheme devised to rid the estate owners of their poverty-stricken farmers to free up their smallholdings for cattle. At least we traveled with our possessions and some capital to set ourselves up in the New World.

We can also bless the Fitzwilliams for securing us a place on board the Bridgetown, a ship with a far superior standard of hygiene than the "coffin ships" that have crossed, which we were soon to learn about. While the deck was a chaos of ropes, chains, and goods that the sailors moved below, the hold was neat and tidy on embarkment. About twenty-five feet wide, it contained rows of double tiers of wooden containers or makeshift cabins. Each was built to hold six persons, but since two or three children counted as one adult, the seven of us occupied one ten-foot long by five-foot wide space. In some instances, because infants weren't counted at all, twelve were squeezed into a single space.

The Bridgetown was required to carry enough hard bread to give each of us a pound a day. And since we had to arrange for our own food, the passageway was soon jammed with hunks of meat, sides of bacon, pots and pans, and other personal effects. The only ventilation was through the hatchways, and these were battened down in rough weather.

We spent two days traveling to Liverpool to pick up more passengers before we set sail on the open seas. Though we rounded the coast of England like a seagull, dear sister, a fierce wind chased us. Captain Wilson warned of a coming storm and we were shut below in darkness while the devil spent his rage on us. We tumbled out of our berths, the hold was two feet full of water, and our topsails were almost carried away in a violent wind. Most of the male passengers, William included, spent the night in turns at the pump, working against the rising water levels.

We could only sit and listen to the shouting of orders above, the tramp and rush of the sailors, the groaning of the ship's timbers and masts, and the constant splash of water across the deck. With no light and the hatches nailed down, some passengers prayed while others cried, cursed, or sang. Everything was topsy-turvy, with barrels, boxes, cans, and our beloved children, Anne, Abraham, and Charles, rolling about with the swaying vessel. Many moaned in the throes of seasickness and for some, fever took hold.

The storm filled me with melancholy and such forebodings that I was afraid some evil had darkened my soul. We had four dreadful nights and slept only in snatches. None of us were sick, thankfully, though the children were well afraid and unable to sleep. William had brought good Irish whiskey along as a preventative, which we took in shots and it seemed to help some. How I prayed for calm waters! When at last the dawn of the seventh day came, the wind lessened its force. The hatches were opened, and we took some fresh air on deck.

I am sorry to write that we had been at sea about a fortnight when a young woman who took sick during the storm died. The Captain had the woman sewn up in a sheet with some rocks placed at her feet. She was thus thrown overboard and buried at sea. All the Irish passengers knelt down and prayed in earnest for her. The sight bore heavily on my feelings, especially as it was done with too little concern and scarcely any notice. Afterwards, a committee was appointed to see that the passengers kept themselves clean, under penalty of being deprived of our water allowance.

The belief was that the crew was already doing its part. Indeed, half a day's pay would be docked if they failed to bring up, open out, and air our bedding. And a full day's pay would be lost for not being cleaned, shaven, and washed on Sundays. Despite the crew's almost puritanical commitment to this regime, many travellers succumbed to typhus, or what we called "ship fever." In the end, thirty passengers and two sailors were committed to the deep on our voyage.

We arrived in British North America on first of June, almost seven weeks after setting sail. By the grace of God and our own steadfast devotion to cleanliness, however we could find it, none the children, nor William, myself, Denis, nor Mary had caught the deadly fever.

As we hove in sight of the shores of the St. Lawrence River, our prospects lifted to a high degree. All nature was in bloom, with quaint white cottages dotting the shores. The fields were flushed with green and some of the tree-tops thickened with bud and bursting leaf. The farms ran from the river to the head of the slope, which was crowned with woods.

Though it was early June, the ice on the river was still thick in places. A boy hauled up a pailful of water to douse his head, and when he got a taste of it, discovered it was fresh. The tide was out, and we had reached the inland freshwater! Pailful after pailful was hauled on board and the sick were supplied without stint, with sweet, clean water.

As we neared Grosse Île, I could see the “fever sheds” and tents that made up the quarantine station, set up by the government of Lower Canada to deal with migrants who sailed over from Ireland and Europe, many of whom had contracted typhus during their voyages. Before any passengers could disembark, they had to be examined, and those showing any signs of illness were taken to hospital. The rest, who appeared healthy, would be taken ashore and put in tents. In truth, this was not how it worked, sister, because the island was overrun.

We set anchor at some distance from the island and waited for our inspection. The rows of white tents resembled the encampment of an army. Somewhat nearer was a little fort and the residence of the superintendent physician, and nearer still, the chapel, seaman's hospital, and a little village with its wharf and a few sail boats. On the adjacent rugged rocks, beautiful fir trees grew. But this beauty was sadly contaminated by the display of human suffering that it presented.

Ships arrived with every tide. Two came from Bremen, Germany, in the morning and were discharged at once with no sickness on board. Other ships sailed in with the tide, after which, we heard, there were more than forty in quarantine. Rowboats plied all day long between several vessels and the island. The tide being high at times would drench the miserable patients being brought in as they clambered over the rocks or were carried up by sailors. An even more awful sight was a continuous line of boats carrying its freight of dead to the burial-ground. They formed an endless funeral procession.

Six more fell ill on our ship before the doctor came. The accounts from shore were dreadful. Helpless children without parents or relatives, the father buried in the deep last week, and the mother the week before. It was miserable change from the joyous hopes with which they had left our unfortunate country, expecting to be able to earn the livelihood denied to them at home.

Finally, after two long days on the river, the doctor came to inspect us. Those of us who were able to come up were called onto deck. The doctor made us walk past, one by one, to judge our overall health. Those he suspected of being feverish, he made show their tongues. This lasted a quarter of an hour, and then the doctor went to examine those below. He remained in the hold for half an hour, and when he returned, the doctor complimented the captain on the overall cleanliness of the vessel.

He wrote out the order to admit the six patients to hospital and to our great relief, promised to send a steamer to take the remainder of us to Québec City, Montreal, Kingston, and on to Hamilton. He stayed a short time and gave us an account of the frightful conditions of those who came before us.

Vessels arrived at Grosse Île each day, sometimes lining up for miles down the St. Lawrence River. Of these coffin ships, those traveling from Liverpool and Cork had the highest death rates. One ship had over one hundred sick, including nine of the crew, and had lost over 150 on the passage over. “The few that came onto the deck,” the doctor said, “were ghastly yellow looking specters, unshaven and hollow-cheeked, and without exception, the worst looking passengers I have ever seen.”

I dare not describe in detail the disgusting condition in which hundreds of men, women and children were confined. Enough to say that on these ships, decency was a luxury and cleanliness, neglected. Many captains were ignorant of handling passenger vessels, making it little wonder that the holds became hotbeds of disease. The foul air in the steerage was an efficient conductor of germs. Before a ship was a day at sea, the dread typhus was raging in many. Even the rugged and healthy fell victims to

the unsanitary conditions. And those whose constitutions were weakened by the famine in Ireland caught the fever almost instantly.

According to the doctor, the quarantine station didn't fare much better than the ships. Hastily built, the hospitals lacked proper sanitation, supplies, and space to accommodate the sick. Many of the doctors had no experience dealing with the effects of typhus and were overworked. Doctors and nurses alike fell ill. Kitchens had been hastily set up to feed all the emigrants. The rocky terrain made it impossible to pitch tents for healthy passengers, so many had to remain on board as we did, with the sick and dying.

Early that same evening, the captain's nephew came to take us to shore to replenish our supplies. Denis accompanied us while children stayed on board with Mary. After a long pull through a heavy swell, we landed on what many called the "Isle of Pestilence." I found I could hardly walk on land, my legs shook so. The swaying sensation of being at sea for so long stayed with me for a while.

With William's help, I climbed over the rocks and we passed through the little town, walking by the hospitals and fever sheds, behind which were piles of unsightly coffins. The fever sheds were flimsy affairs, providing pitiful shelter from the sun and rain, with shrunken boards and leaky roofs. William commented on the constant tap, tap, tap of the workmen's hammers, as they banged their nails into roughly made coffins. The poor bodies hurried off to what was called the cholera burying ground where previous numbers, just a year prior, caused people to be buried five and six deep with layers of lime in between—all in a single grave.

Every place was crowded with sick, even the two churches were full. I could see worry etched in William's face, him wanting to leave this forsaken place behind to join the Barkers in Hamilton as quickly as possible. He confirmed our passage on a steamer and we called at the store licensed to sell provisions. It was well stocked with carrion beef, mutton, bread, flour, and cheese. A vast crowd of mates, stewards, and seaman were there, buying articles for stowing on their ships. The demand for bread was great and several batches were yielded from a large oven, while we waited.

We walked for the last time past the hospital yard and saw burning there the fever-tainted velvet and silk gowns, bonnets and shawls, children's clothing, the rags of the poor, uniforms, and boots—in a pile as tall as a house. We watched the flames creep upward, shocking proof of the ravages of typhus. We made a small prayer for the souls of the dead who had once worn those garments.

It was with gratefulness to the Almighty for having preserved us that we were approved for further travel and left Grosse Île for Québec City the next day. We joined thousands in one of the three steamships used to carry immigrants upriver, packed on their lower decks like herrings in a fish-box.

Québec itself was a plague-stricken city, where sick men, women, and children were dropping in the streets. Some 36 hours into our passage, we passed Point St. Charles, Montreal. We saw people walking in port with short sticks between their teeth, the end smoking tar, which we learned was to ward off the cholera.

Dearest sister, it is with a most heavy heart that I write about what happened next. The crowded steamshup was hot during the day and cold at night, causing us to lay close to ward off the chill. We found ourselves on slow passage to Kingston for two days through the canals, confined with many who were sick. The boats did not stop for cleaning and death was all around us. It was here that our dear Anne, Abraham and Charles, vulnerable and weak after our long journey across the Altantic, caught the

fever. Please know that it pains me to cause you sorrow, but it was not one week into our arrival when all three of our blessed children passed from this life. Anne on June 8, Abraham on June 11, and little Charles on June 13 of this year 1848. They died wharf side, with no time to admit them to the nearby Hotel Dieu Sisters for the nuns to adminster to them. They were but four, two and poor Charles was not yet one years old. May the Lord have mercy upon their sweet souls.

Overcome with grief we found we could travel no further by steamship and abandonned our plans to travel to Hamilton to join the Barkers. It was such a cruel blow to lose all of our babes, especially after overcoming such obstacles at home—a marriage despite family objections and deep religious differences, and starvation and poverty in Ireland. And then, to endure such strife at sea. And for what? It was our belief that once we landed, we had survived the worst.

The children were laid to rest in Kingston and the priest said to me that the Lord works in mysterious ways. William, though despondant, remained true to our dream to start fresh. We must endure, he said to me, and believe that our love will conquer all hardship.

As if in answer to our determination, we received word from an old Wicklow neighbour who had settled up north in Camden East. He relayed to us that other Collattin immigrants had settled thereabouts in Addington County and we would be welcome. After farming a plot of land for three years, he had just filed for a grant to own the land. The government was willing to offer free land farther north if the land was cleared and a house built. Wanting to leave the mortification of Kingston behind us and seek out the comfort of old friends, we set out to walk the lonely 27 miles north with Denis and Mary, now a childless family of four.

We passed through several small towns, with William and Denis unable to secure temporary work in any of them. I found the landscape to be rugged though beautiful with some parts swampy and bush-covered and others, dominated by rock formations. For the most part, it was thickly forested with pines, maples, and hemlocks and water was abundant. On the warmer days, the blackflies and mosquitoes were unbearable, and we had to rub mud on our arms and necks to drive them off.

Finally arriving in Camden East, we found there a sawmill, a post office, a general store, and a chapel. William approved, saying that the nearby Napanee River would attract more millers and the settlement would grow. It's as good a place as any to carve out our life, though it is much smaller than the townland of Laragh. With the money we have left, we purchased corn for one shilling per bushel, bacon for two and a half pence per pound, flour for one penny per pound, potatoes for one shilling per bushel, and will procure a good cow and her calf for eight shillings in the future.

We set to clearing a plot of land directly with help from our neighbours, who have kindly put us up. We start building our house in ten days, having drawn every log for it from the land. Our plot is flat and appears fertile, so I hope to have a good garden outside our door. William plans to grow crops of wheat, oats, barley, and rye, and perhaps sell some of the timber to be burned for potash. Seeds will have to be sown by hand with the scant selection of farming machinery available here.

Are the potatoes still tainted in the ground back home? We fear there still may be famine in Ireland if the good Lord does not do something for the people. So much poverty in your hearts and no room to bury the dead in the churchyards brings tears to my eyes.

To ease your suffering, dear sister, please find enclosed one pound. With our hopes of making money and assisting you frustrated at present, it is all we can spare. I promise to send more when we can.

Worn out with hunger and fatigue, I cannot help but feel that the government failed the Irish, being so ill-prepared for our arrival here, though the people have been exceedingly kind. Food, clothing, and supplies have been given us, and entire families have been taken in by some.

I hope that once we are settled, you will join us here, as we discussed quayside at New Ross. There will be room and William, so wonderful as he is, has assured me so.

I trust in God that we shall meet again. Your loving sister, Anne Loughlin.

EMIGRATION

FROM

NEW ROSS

TO

QUEBEC.

THE following Superior First-Class, Copper-Fastened, New Packet Ships, are intended to be despatched from

New Ross

TO

QUEBEC:

The Fast and Powerful Coppered Ship

"Lord Ashburton,"

1800 TONS BURTHEN,

On the 8th of MAY, 1852,

The well-known, fine and Fast-Sailing Ship

"GLENLYON,"

JAMES JEMMISON, Commander,

1700 TONS BURTHEN,

On the 18th of MAY, 1852.

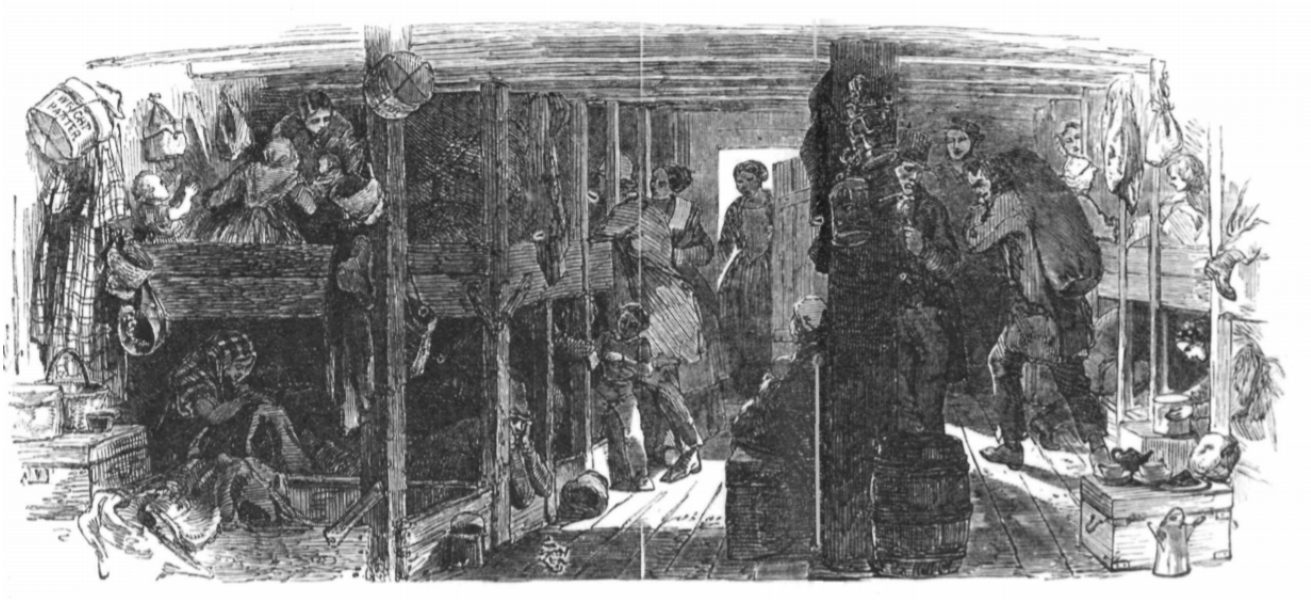
The above large and superior Ships will be fitted up in the most approved manner for Cabin, Second Cabin, and Steerage Passengers; these Ships are well ventilated and lofty between Decks, having a height of about Nine Feet; they are to carry experienced Surgeons; and Passengers by them will be supplied with Water, Fuel, Bread Stuffs, Groceries, &c., according to the new Government scale. They are to be followed by other equally fine Passenger Ships during the season.

P.S.—The increase of Travelling facilities which the new Railways and Canals afford for going into the States, and interior of America, from Quebec, now render it a most desirable landing port for Emigrants.

For Freight or Passage, as well as for fuller information, apply to

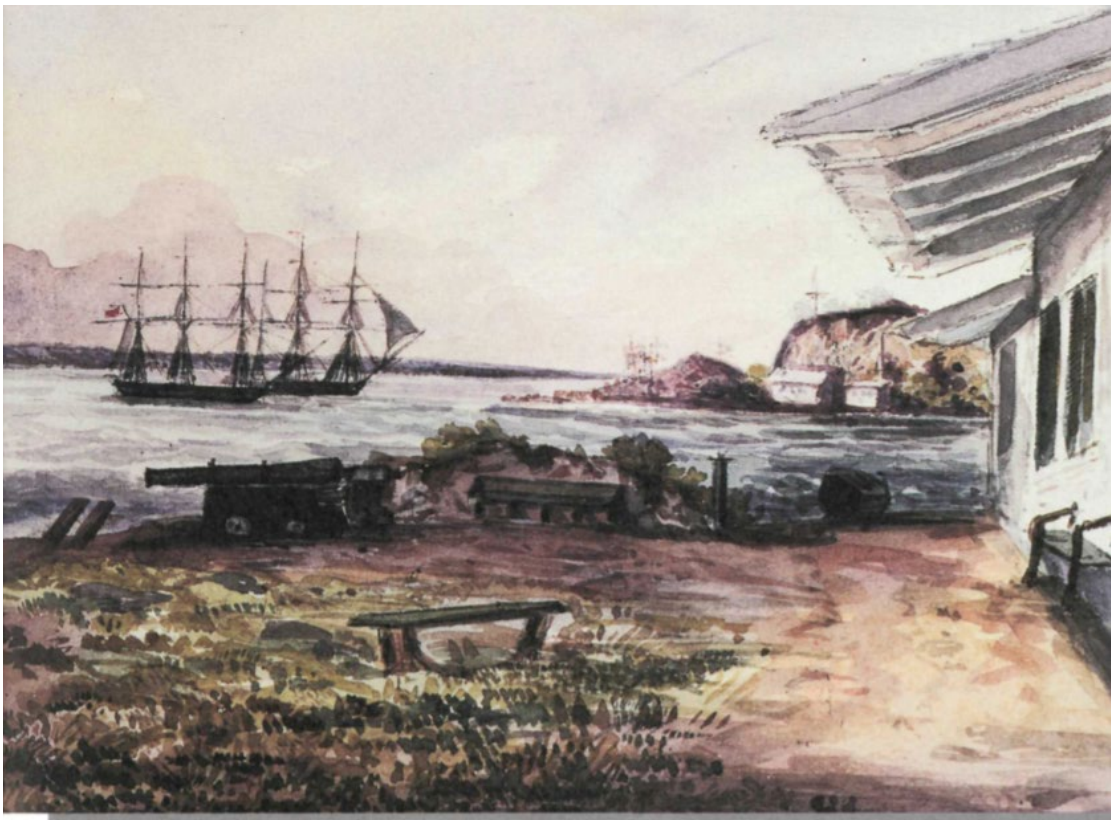
WILLIAM GRAVES & SON.

New Ross, April 10, 1852.



ON SHIP, EMIGRANTS WERE PACKED INTO OVERCROWDED STEERAGE QUARTERS. IN 1847, THE APPLICABLE LEGISLATION WAS THE *PASSENGERS ACT* OF 1842, WHICH PROVIDED THAT EACH STEERAGE PASSENGER MUST HAVE AN AREA OF 10 SQUARE FEET AND THAT THE HEIGHT BETWEEN DECKS MUST BE NOT LESS THAN 6 FEET. (*ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS*, MAY 10, 1851, MCGILL UNIVERSITY, MCLELLAN LIBRARY.)

(http://parkscanadahistory.com/series/saah/1847-grosse-ile.pdf)



A VIEW OF THE QUARANTINE STATION FROM THE GUN BATTERY IN THE CENTRAL SECTOR. ON JUNE 4, 1847, THE GOVERNOR GENERAL OF CANADA PROMULGATED ADDITIONAL QUARANTINE REGULATIONS WHICH, IN PARTICULAR, AUTHORIZED THE MILITARY ON GROSSE ÎLE TO USE ANY MEANS NECESSARY, INCLUDING FORCE, TO ENSURE THAT SHIPS COMPLIED WITH QUARANTINE MEASURES. (WATERCOLOUR BY H. PERCY, BEFORE 1850. NAC, C-13656).

(http://parkscanadahistory.com/series/saah/1847-grosse-ile.pdf)

BARRACKS IN THE CENTRAL PART OF THE ISLAND. THE ARMY WAS CALLED UPON THAT SUMMER TO SUPPLY TENTS FOR THE EMIGRANTS ON GROSSE ÎLE, TO ERECT THESE CANVAS SHELTERS, TO MAINTAIN ORDER AT THE STATION AND TO ENFORCE THE QUARANTINE REGULATIONS. (HENRI DELATTRE, 1850. NAC, C-120285).

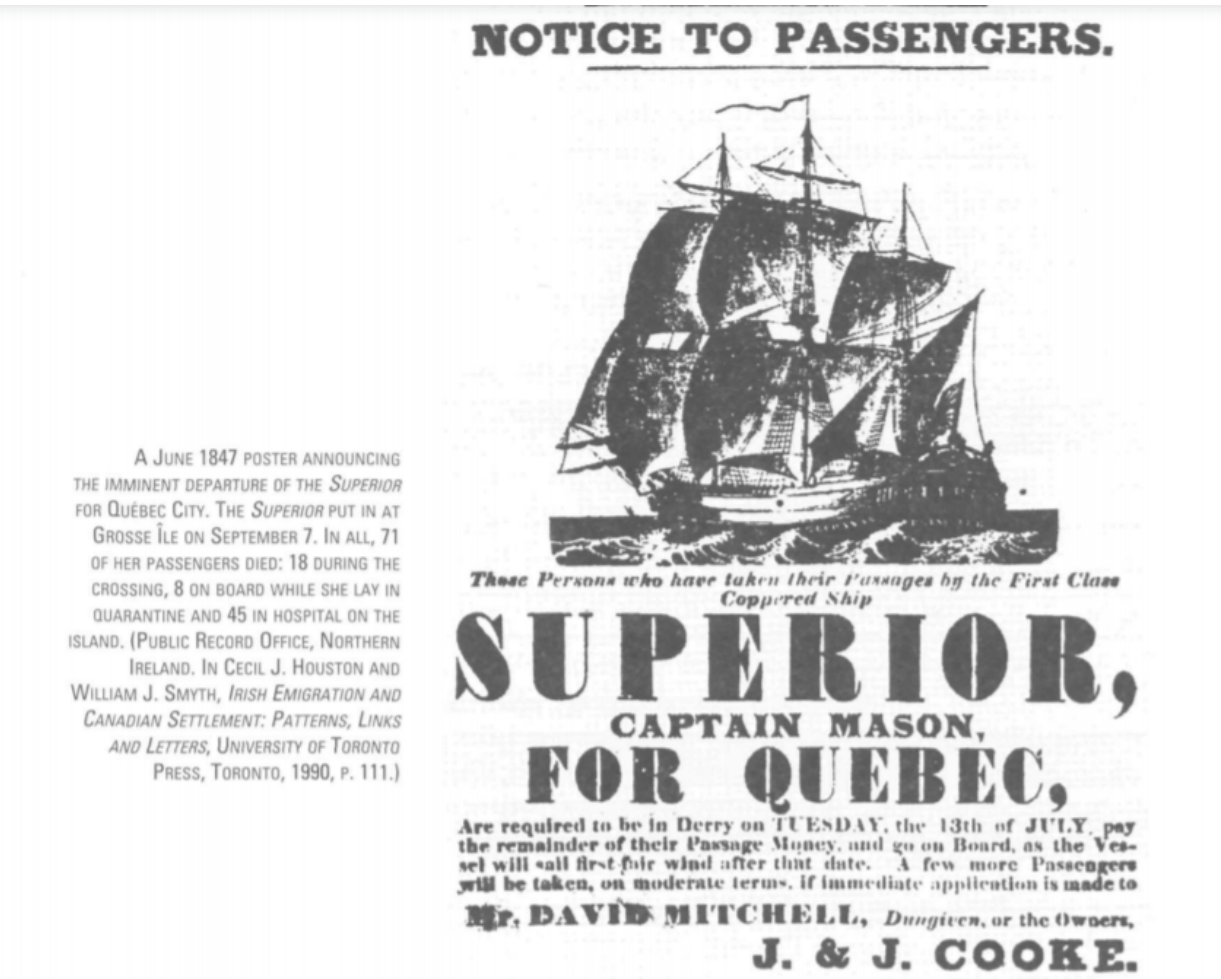
SHIPS ARRIVING AT GROSSE ÎLE

Name of ship	Captain	Port of departure	Crossing time (in days)	Passengers		No. of sick on arrival	No. of deaths during crossing
				Steerage	Cabin		
Bridgetown	J. Wilson	Liverpool (England)	52	471	9	128	74
Champion	J. Cochrane	Liverpool (England)	42	422	0	60	29
Colonist	J. Sinott	New Ross (Ireland)	43	453	0	30	12
*Maria Somes**	H. Taylor	Cork (Ireland)	42	329	0	30	17
TOTAL				1675	9	248	

* This ship was transporting retired military personnel and their families.

(1847; not direct but from Liverpool).

(http://parkscanadahistory.com/series/saah/1847-grosse-ile.pdf)



A JUNE 1847 POSTER ANNOUNCING THE IMMINENT DEPARTURE OF THE *SUPERIOR* FOR QUÉBEC CITY. THE *SUPERIOR* PUT IN AT GROSSE ÎLE ON SEPTEMBER 7. IN ALL, 71 OF HER PASSENGERS DIED: 18 DURING THE CROSSING, 8 ON BOARD WHILE SHE LAY IN QUARANTINE AND 45 IN HOSPITAL ON THE ISLAND. (PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE, NORTHERN IRELAND. IN CECIL J. HOUSTON AND WILLIAM J. SMYTH, *IRISH EMIGRATION AND CANADIAN SETTLEMENT: PATTERNS, LINKS AND LETTERS*, UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO PRESS, TORONTO, 1990, P. 111.)

(http://parkscanadahistory.com/series/saah/1847-grosse-ile.pdf)

Background

Anne Loughlin's letter to her sister Ellen, based on the premise that Ellen's name was scratched from the registry and changed her mind at the last minute, withdrawing her name from the passage/ship's registry. Mary and Denis travelled with the Walls, though Mary was married to John, there is no proof of his travel across to Quebec, so his name was dropped (perhaps he died due to the famine).

Sources

Inspiring emigrant letters home to Ireland from America in the Famine era: https://www.irishcentral.com/roots/history/inspiring-emigrant-letters-home-to-ireland-from-america-in-the-famine-era.

The Journal of Gerald Keegan: The Entries from Grosse Isle: https://gail25.tripod.com/journal3.htm.

Letters to and from Irish Immigrants to America, 1830s – 1880s: http://risdyeswecan.blogspot.com/2010/02/letters-to-and-from-irish-immigrants-to.html.

Kilkelly Ireland Song, Orluar July 6th 1872: https://www.mayo-ireland.ie/en/towns-villages/kilkelly/history/kilkelly-ireland-song-july-1872.html.

Letter from Hannah Curtis to John Curtis, April 2, 1847: https://hsp.org/sites/default/files/attachments/curtis_letter_april_2_1847_page_1.jpg.

Meghan Balogh, Couple helps Ontarians connect with their Irish roots, Whig Standard, Oct 18, 2019: https://www.thewhig.com/news/local-news/couple-helps-ontarians-connect-with-their-irish-roots.

Max Braithwaithe, The Nightmare Stories of the Irish Flight to Canada, McLean's Magazine, September 1, 1953: https://archive.macleans.ca/article/1953/9/1/the-nightmare-story-of-the-irish-flight-to-canada.

Cummings, Don and Serge Occhietti, "Grosse Île and the Irish Memorial National Historic Site," The Canadian Encyclopedia, June 6, 2018: https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/la-grosse-ile.

Gallagher, John A., C.SS.R., (St. Alphonsus Seminary, Woodstock, ON), "The Irish Emigration of 1847 and Its Canadian Consequences," CCHA Report: https://www.umanitoba.ca/colleges/st_pauls/ccha/Back%20Issues/CCHA1935-36/Gallagher.html.

Lyne, Daniel Colman, "The Irish in the Province of Canada in the Decade Leading to Confederation, McGill University, August 1960: https://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/obj/thesescanada/vol2/QMM/TC-QMM-112864.pdf.

Walsh, Mary McLean, "Mary McLean Walsh writing about her 1832 arrival in Ottawa," Re-imagining Migration: https://reimaginingmigration.org/mary-mclean-walsh/.

Whalen, Jim, "Almost as Bad as Ireland: St. John, 1847." https://archivaria.ca/index.php/archivaria/article/download/10812/11714/.

Whyte, Robert, “Robert Whyte's 'The Journey Of An Irish Coffin Ship, 1847', Chapter 10,” The Irish Archives: http://www.theirisharchives.com/articles/view/73/Robert-Whytes-The-Journey-Of-An-Irish-Coffin-Ship-1847-Chapter-10.