

The Canadian Press and the Great Irish Famine: The Famine as an Irish, Canadian & Imperial, Global Issue

Introduction

1The Famine was not just a purely Irish or Anglo-Irish issue. As Britain was at the head of a growing and expanding Empire, in which Ireland played the double role of colony and colonizer, the Famine may also be regarded as an Imperial and even global issue.

2British colonies experienced the Famine or felt its repercussions in various ways. First, they were amongst the destinations chosen by the Famine-stricken Irish who opted to leave Ireland. Even though it is now recognized that significant emigration had taken place before 1845, the Famine may be viewed as a “catalyst”, which transformed Irish emigration to a great extent and turned it into a mass phenomenon.¹ K. Miller indicates that 2.1 million adults and children left Ireland between 1845 and 1855, including 1.2 million before 1851². The primary destination was the United States of America, followed by British North America (Canada), Britain, and Australasia. Between 1845 and 1855, 1.5 million Irish people travelled to the United States, 340,000 migrated to British North America³, between 200,000 and 300,000 settled in Great Britain and a few thousand sailed to the Antipodes⁴.

3Secondly, colonies received news of the Famine through Irish and British newspaper reports, letters and witness accounts, which reached the colonies by boat and were reproduced in the colonial press. As distress increased in Ireland after the extensive crop failure experienced in the summer and autumn of 1846, places and communities outside Ireland and Britain became involved in relief initiatives. The first donation for Irish relief was actually collected in India in late 1845 but soon the rest of the British empire followed, with donations coming from places as varied as British Guiana, Barbados, Jamaica, the British West Indies, Australia, South Africa, and of course British North America⁵.

4This paper will study how the British Empire reacted to the Great Famine by focusing on Canada. Canadian reactions to the Irish Famine will be assessed by studying a selection of Canadian newspapers and periodicals, both in French and English. The documents quoted in the paper — editorials, meeting reports, accounts by local correspondents and letters to editors, mostly dating from 1847 — voice a strictly Canadian point of view (as opposed to reprints of European/Irish/British news and views). They will be relied upon to present and discuss the amount of financial and moral support shown by Canada towards the starving Irish. They will also serve to illustrate how Famine emigration became a significant domestic concern in Canada, notably during the notorious “Black ‘47”.

1 351,000 people emigrated to North America between 1838 and 1844. Ch. Kinealy, *This Great Calamity*: (...)

2 K. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Exodus to North America*, Oxford: Oxford University (...)

3 Emigration to British North America even experienced a peak at 45% of the total Irish emigration in (...)

4 South Africa was not among the favoured destinations of Irish emigrants (see D. P. MacCracken, “The (...)

5 Ch. Kinealy, *The Great Irish Famine: Impact, Ideology and Rebellion*, London: Palgrave, 2002, pp. 75 (...)

Finally they will be used to examine whether or not the Famine helped reinforce the idea that Canada and Ireland shared parallel destinies within the Empire.	
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From Canada to Ireland: moral and financial support

<p><u style="color: #e91e63;">Charity from Canada</u></p> <p>5It has proven difficult so far to estimate precisely how much private aid was sent from Canada for the benefit of the starving Irish. In May 1847 the Governor General for the Province of Canada Lord Elgin told the Secretary for the Colonies Lord Grey that he estimated the collected amount at £20,000. Historians have established that significant donations as well as far smaller sums were collected in all parts of Canada and sent to various bodies providing relief in Ireland: the Society of Friends, the Roman Catholic Church, the British Relief Association and the Irish Relief Association. In an article dated 1947, John B. O'Reilly lists contributions from Montreal, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Quebec, Toronto and a few other places, which indeed amounted to a total close to £20,000⁶:</p>	<p>⁶ J. B. O'Reilly, "The Irish Famine and the Atlantic Migration to Canada", <i>The Irish Ecclesiastical R</i> (...)</p>
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Contributor	Beneficiary	Collected sum
Catholics of the city of Montreal	?	\$8,676
Dr. William Dollard, 1st Bishop of the diocese of New Brunswick	?	£80
Nova Scotia	?	£665
House of Assembly, Nova Scotia	?	£2,250
Quebec	Irish Relief Association	£1,165
Other(s)	Irish Relief Association	£1,656
Montreal	General Central Committee for all Ireland	£5,873
Quebec	General Central Committee for all Ireland	£1,571
Toronto	General Central Committee for all Ireland	£3,472
Other(s)	General Central Committee for all Ireland	£1,547
TOTAL		£18,279 + \$8,676

Contributions to Irish relief from Canada during the Famine according to John B. O'Reilly

<p>6In her more recent and very detailed work <i>Charity and the Great Hunger in Ireland</i>, Christine Kinealy was able to trace significant contributions from Toronto, Quebec, Halifax in Nova Scotia, Kingston in Ontario⁷. Smaller sums were collected in Newfoundland, Bayton near the Ottawa River, Chatham near Miramichi in New Brunswick and Niagara. Food and clothing were also collected and shipped over. Kinealy gives the example of the cargo ship the Georgian, which was used by the relief committees of Toronto, London (Ontario) and Montreal to send flour to the Society of Friends for distribution in Ireland⁸.</p>	<p>7 Over £2,000 were collected by April 1847 in Toronto. In Quebec, the local Relief Committee set up i (...)</p> <p>8 Ch. Kinealy, <i>Charity and the Great Hunger in Ireland: the Kindness of Strangers</i>, London : Bloomsbur (...)</p>
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<p><u>Reactions</u></p> <p>7The newspapers and periodicals that were browsed through in order to write this paper confirm that support came from various provinces in Canada and that public meetings led by local political and religious elites were organised to collect donations as early as February 1847. The <i>British Whig</i> (Ontario) dated 5 February reported a “public meeting in Kingston City Hall, chaired by the Mayor T. Kirkpatrick,” set up to determine how a relief committee should be formed and where donations should go:</p> <p>(...) That with the best-felt thanks to Almighty God for the mercies bestowed on us, the starving conditions of our fellow subjects on Ireland calls for our warmest sympathy and compassion; and that we endeavor with our humble tribute to alleviate their sufferings under the present calamity.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. That the clergymen of all denominations in the City, S. D. Kirkpatrick, Esq, Doctor McLoan, Dr. Meagher, and Thomas Baker, be a Committee to receive subscriptions and to forward them to the Central Relief Committee in Dublin. 3. That the Aldermen and Councillors of the City of Kingston be requested to act as Collectors in their respective Wards. 4. That W. G. Hinds, Esq., Cashier of the Bank of Upper Canada, be requested to act as Treasurer. 5. That a copy of the foregoing resolutions be forwarded to the District Council now in Session and that the members of that honorable body be solicited to procure subscriptions in the Townships which they represented⁹. <p>8Similarly <i>The Newfoundlander</i> dated 11 February noted that “some of our most influential fellow citizens were actively engaged in the getting up of a public</p>	<p>9 <i>The British Whig</i>, 5 February 1847.</p> <p>10 <i>The Newfoundlander</i>, 11</p>
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meeting to raise subscriptions for the relief of Irish suffering¹⁰." Another meeting was held in Quebec on 12 February "in aid of the famishing poor of Ireland and the Highlands of Scotland" and chaired by Andrew W. Cochran. Among the resolutions passed during the meeting, it was agreed "to set up an appointed Committee of seven persons in order to name collectors in the responsible wards of the city and neighbourhood" and to give this Committee the power to forward any amount of money that was collected¹¹.

9Initiatives were varied and included for example a concert by the Philharmonic Society of Kingston (11 March 1847)¹². Indians were also praised for contributing to Irish relief by the Governor General, in a speech opening the third session of the second Parliament of the Province of Canada (June 1847)¹³.

10More importantly these initiatives involved all denominations. This is highlighted by an account of a district meeting held on 4 March 1847 in St Catharine's (Niagara region). One resolution presented relief as "a duty imperative upon us as men and christians"¹⁴, while another specified that "the clergymen of the various denominations in the district [should] be ex-officio members of the District Committee." At the 12 February 1847 Quebec meeting, the chairman A. W. Cochran had not only appealed to the "feelings of a common humanity" but had also rejoiced that the "requisition for the meeting proceeded from persons of all sects and classes and parties." The newspaper *Le Canadien* actually praised the meeting for its oecumenical and universal character:

Il était beau de voir des prélats, des ministres de différents cultes faire et seconder les mêmes propositions ; des hommes de toutes les origines et de toutes les nuances politiques, oubliant leurs distinctions (...) se donner la main et rivaliser de zèle pour une œuvre de philanthropie et de charité¹⁵.

(It was beautiful to see the prelates , ministers of different religions and to assist the same proposals ; men of all origins and of all political shades , forgetting their distinctions (...) join hands and compete with zeal for a work of philanthropy and charity)

11The Roman Catholic clergy of Canada was certainly at the forefront of the relief efforts, especially in the province of Quebec. The *Quebec Mercury* indicated on 13 February that the Archbishop of Montreal had sent a circular to the clergy of his diocese, urging local priests to "raise subscriptions among their parishioners in aid of the starving population of the British Isles." The *Gazette des Trois Rivières* includes a similar circular letter from the Archbishop of Quebec dated from 12 February 1847, which suggested organising door-to-door collections or collections at church¹⁶. The involvement of the Canadian Roman Catholic clergy was undoubtedly inspired by the appeal made by Pope Pius IX at the beginning of 1847 asking Catholics to assist Ireland and its poor. The involvement of the Canadian Protestants may be explained by the fact that Queen Victoria had also urged the Anglican clergy in England and Ireland to read prayers for the famine-

February 1847. This meeting was only to take place a few days later, as anot (...)

¹¹ *Quebec Mercury*, 13 February 1847 & *Le Canadien*, 16 February 1847.

¹² *The British Whig*, 12 March 1847.

¹³ *Canada Gazette*, 2 June 1847: "I cannot refrain from adverting to the fact that among those whose ge (...)

¹⁴ *The Niagara Mail*, 10 March 1847.

¹⁵ *Le Canadien*, 16 February 1847.

¹⁶ *Quebec Mercury*, 13 February 1847 & *Gazette des Trois Rivières*, 18 & 25 February 1847.

¹⁷ Ch. Kinealy, *Charity and the Great Hunger in Ireland*, 2623-32 &

<p>stricken Irish in October 1846 and had provided the largest donation (£2,000) to the British Relief Association¹⁷.</p> <p>12 Substantial sums of money appear to have been collected fairly quickly. The <i>Quebec Mercury</i> dated 20 February 1847 indicated that donations were “upwards of £3,000” and predicted that “the whole collection in Quebec, once finished, [would] exceed £3,500, and perhaps, approach £4,000.” As was shown previously, collectors had been appointed in various localities, wards and suburbs of Quebec City and the <i>Quebec Mercury</i> shows that this local network of collectors was fairly successful in raising money (March 1847)¹⁸.</p> <p>13 Canadian relief committees collected money but were also open to receiving alternative forms of relief such as foodstuffs. During the 4 March meeting at St Catherines (Niagara region), it was decided:</p> <p>That in order to afford the greatest possible facilities for increasing the amount of donations, and also to meet the views of those to whom it could be more convenient to make contributions in produce than in money, the several Millers of the District be requested to open their Mills respectively as depots of any kinds of produce that may be deposited for this purpose, to be by them ground gratuitously, and also that the Flour-warders be requested to carry the same to the shipping ports free of charge¹⁹.</p> <p>14 The Canadian press illustrates that the solidarity of the Canadians can be attributed to various forms of sympathy felt for the Irish: they were pitied as fellow human beings, fellow Christians, fellow Catholics (in the case of the French Canadians), and sometimes as fellow Irishmen & women and fellow countrymen or “brethren” within the British Empire. In February 1847, <i>The Newfoundlander</i> justified the organising of a meeting at St John’s by highlighting that many Newfoundlanders had Irish roots: “we think it must be obvious, that no claims upon Newfoundland can be deemed of superior justice to those of that country to which so large a portion of this population owe their birth, which must be ever endeared to them by a thousand associations (...)”²⁰. In the circular letter sent to the clergy of his diocese, the Archbishop of Quebec invited his priests to emphasise the links binding their parishioners to the Irish:</p> <p><i>Vous leur représenterez que ceux qui souffrent de la sorte sont nos frères, qu’ils sont sujets comme nous de l’Empire Britannique, et qu’ils ont d’autant plus droit à nos sympathies que dans les désastres qui, il y a deux ans bientôt, ont si cruellement affligé la ville de Québec, ils sont venus à notre secours avec une libéralité au dessus de tout éloge</i>²¹.</p> <p><i>(You will represent them than those who suffer in this way are our brothers, they are subject as we of the British Empire, and they have even more right to our sympathy in the disasters , there are two years soon have so cruelly afflicted Quebec city , they came to our rescue with a liberality above all praise)</i></p> <p>15 Reciprocity was seen as a duty particularly in locations that had benefited from Irish generosity in the past. The contributors from Quebec expressed their gratitude for the help they had received from Ireland in 1832 and 1834, when</p>	<p>3113-3131 (Kindle version).</p> <p>¹⁸ <i>Quebec Mercury</i>, 20 February 1847; see also 25 February as well as 18 & 20 March 1847 to see example (...)</p> <p>¹⁹ <i>Niagara Mail</i>, 10 March 1847.</p> <p>²⁰ <i>The Newfoundlander</i>, 11 February 1847.</p> <p>²¹ <i>Gazette des Trois Rivières</i>, 18 February 1847.</p> <p>²² <i>Quebec Mercury</i>, 13 February 1847.</p> <p>²³ <i>The Newfoundlander</i>, 11 & 18 February 1847.</p>
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cholera plagued Quebec City, and also in 1845, after a fire had destroyed part of the city²². Similarly the inhabitants of Newfoundland were asked to contribute to Irish relief because they themselves had benefited from Irish donations after a "devastating fire" and a "destructive gale". In an account of a meeting organised by the Benevolent Irish Society and held in St John's on 7 February 1847, The Newfoundlander reminded its readers that:

We have, undeniabl[y], been large recipients of the bounties of others, and amongst the many contributions for the support of our population, impoverished, famine-stricken Ireland extended her willing hand. The total amount that she could bear to wring from her own destitution was trifling indeed; but it was her all, and it was proffered with an alacrity that bespoke the good will to give more²³.

¹⁶Despite the overall impression of general sympathy, there are a number of texts expression doubt about the relevance and benefit of sending relief to the starving Irish. The Newfoundlander acknowledged that "a question [had] been raised by some, as to the propriety of originating a subscription here" since Newfoundland "[had] been so recently soliciting assistance herself²⁴." A letter sent to the British Whig in March 1847 echoed British anti-Irish prejudice: it interpreted the Famine in providentialist and moralist terms, and defended the idea that the Irish were too dependent on the potato, and that the fiscal and moral responsibility for the famine ought to be transferred back to the Irish countryside:

The subscriptions in England for the relief of the Distressed Irish have not attained that height which they were expected to reach. – The principle of subscription for the relief of a nation has been vehemently opposed in the London papers, (...) and with success. The chief plea is, that it devolves upon the Irish Landlords who have fattened upon the poor of that country for centuries, now to step forward to the relief of their tenantry, even to the high taxing of their estates, or the partial sale thereof. (...)

In the midst of the darkness which now overwhelms this unhappy land, we can see two bright lights, both fraught with hope to its hard-working peasantry. The one, the abandonment of the Potatoe, as a chief means of support; and the second, the establishment of a proper and permanent Poor Law, that shall compel the Land and Landlords to support the people²⁵.

²⁴ *The Newfoundlander*, 11 February 1847.

²⁵ *The British Whig*, 30 March 1847.

From Ireland to Canada: the issue of emigration

¹⁷While Canada contributed significantly to Irish relief, it also received a significant number of Irish emigrants. Emigration to Canada rose to 32,750 persons in 1846, and peaked during the notorious 'Black 47', when well over 100,000 Irish people (106,000 or 110,000 at the minimum depending on the estimation) left Irish and British ports to reach Canada. Thereafter, heavier head taxes on immigrants in North American ports and stricter rules of navigation were

²⁶ M. G. McGowan, "Black '47 and Toronto, Canada", in J. Crowley, W. J.

introduced thanks to the vote of 3 new navigation laws (the Passengers to North America Act in 1848 and the Navigation Act et Passengers Act in 1849). These new measures led to a drop in figures from 1848 onwards: 31,065 Irish emigrants entered British North America in 1848 and 41,367 in 1849. According to Mark G. McGowan, “this marked the beginning of a decline of Irish migrants to Canada and Britain’s neighbouring Atlantic colonies²⁶.”

¹⁸The main route into Canada was through Quebec. Prior to their arrival in Quebec city, immigrants had to go through a quarantine station situated at Grosse Ile, 48 km northeast of Quebec. From Quebec, many immigrants would continue their journey to Montreal, Toronto as well as the small lake ports of Cobourg, Port Hope and Port Windsor (Whitby) on the shores of Lake Ontario. There some would go further inland in Canada or the United States. Once they had left Quebec, immigrants who fell ill could be quarantined at further fever sheds and quarantine stations — Point St Charles along the St Lawrence River or Kingston. A smaller number of immigrants also landed in other British North American ports: St John in New Brunswick, Halifax in Nova Scotia and St John’s in Newfoundland²⁷.

¹⁹Estimates vary but clearly show the importance of the Quebec route. J. B. O’Reilly uses passenger lists to establish that “by way of the St Lawrence River route 90,409 immigrants from Great Britain and Ireland entered Lower and Upper Canada”, and that “of these no less than 75,000 were Irish.”

Origin	Number of boats	Number of passengers
Irish ports	211	54,329
English ports	140	32,328
Scottish ports	42	3,752
TOTALS	373	90,409

Numbers of passengers entering Canada by way of the St Lawrence River route according to John B. O’Reilly²⁸

²⁰Mark McGowan puts forward slightly different estimates for 1847 but they also reveal the same preference for the Quebec/St Lawrence route:

By the end of the sailing season, in Black ‘47, ships landed at Quebec carrying over 80,000 passengers; the largest number of these ships had come from Liverpool (72) and Glasgow (30), where Irish refugees had sojourned and waited for transatlantic passage. Limerick and Cork dominated the direct Irish routes to Quebec, sending 50 and 33 ships respectively. Over 20 ships came from each of Dublin (27), Sligo (26), and Belfast (21).

²¹McGowan adds that “such a variety of ports of departure meant that the Irish who ventured in Canada came from nearly every county and both English and Irish speakers could be counted among their numbers²⁹.”

Smyth & M. Murphy (eds.), *Atla* (...)

²⁷ Ibid., p. 525.

²⁸ J. B. O’Reilly, “The Irish Famine and the Atlantic Migration to Canada”, available on the Irish Emi (...)

²⁹ M. G. McGowan, “Black ‘47 and

	Toronto, Canada", p. 526.
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<p><u>What type of emigration?</u></p> <p>22The Great Famine raised an intense debate on the question of state intervention, landlord responsibility and also the relevance of emigration as a possible relief policy. Two state-sponsored schemes in favour of emigration towards British North America were envisaged (the first at the end of 1846 and the second in 1848). But they were heavily criticised and therefore both abandoned despite the backing of Prime Minister Lord John Russell. Landlord-assisted emigration was very limited in scope: it likely affected fewer than 50,000 Irish emigrants and represented only about 5% of the total emigration³⁰. In the case of Canada, Mark G. McGowan estimates that, out of the 80, 000 passengers who landed at Quebec by the end of the sailing season in 1847, "6,000 (...) or roughly 7.5%, had been subsidized by their landlords³¹." In other words, the vast majority of emigrants relied on their own income if they had any, on charity, or for the poorer migrants, on the system of remittances — pre-paid tickets paid for by family members already settled overseas. Since Canada was the cheapest destination and the quickest way to reach North America, it was attractive to potential Irish migrants. Emigration from Ireland to Canada was made all the easier as Irish people were British citizens and as such, could not be refused entry into Canada.</p>	<p>³⁰ Ch. Kinealy, <i>This Great Calamity</i>, 6781 & 6975-7003 (Kindle version) & O. McDonagh, "Irish emigratio (...)"</p> <p>³¹ M. G. McGowan, "Black '47 and Toronto, Canada", p. 526.</p>
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<p><u>The notorious travelling conditions and their impact</u></p> <p>23Limerick landlord and philanthropist Stephen de Vere depicted the notoriously harsh conditions, that the Irish emigrants experienced crossing the Atlantic. He journeyed to Canada in the spring of 1847 and bemoaned the fate of the Irish migrants in the report of his voyage to the Colonial Secretary Earl Grey:</p> <p>Before the emigrant is a week at sea, he is an altered man. (...) How can it be otherwise? Hundreds of poor people, men, women, and children, of all ages, from the drivelling idiot of ninety to the babe just born; huddled together without light, without air, wallowing in filth and breathing a fetid atmosphere, sick in body, dispirited in heart (...); the fevered patients lying between the sound (...); by their agonised ravings disturbing those around them and predisposing them, though the effects of the imagination, to imbibe the contagion; living without food or medicine except as administered by the hand of casual charity; dying without the voice of spiritual consolation, and buried in the deep without the rites of the church³².</p>	<p>³² Quoted in B. Ó Cathaoir</p>
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<p>241847 was a particularly dark year, during which “mortality and sickness (...) were unprecedented and unparalleled”: it is estimated that 17,445 Irish emigrants (out of roughly 106,000 bound for British North America in that year) died during the journey or shortly after. The mortality rate of the Irish migrants in 1847 amounted to 16%. Death tolls aboard ships were as high as one passenger in fourteen on vessels departing from Liverpool and Sligo and one in nine on ships leaving from Cork.³³</p> <p>25Irish migrants also experienced dreadful conditions while they were quarantined at and around Grosse-Ile near Quebec. On 31 May 1847, 36 ships accommodating 12,500 emigrants were waiting to disembark on the St Lawrence River; on 5 June, the number of emigrants had increased to 21,000 and was still as high as 14,000 in early September. Overcrowding led to the rapid spread of disease, which could not be controlled due to poor care facilities: the quarantine hospital on the island could house only 200 patients and the temporary sheds and tents erected did not have enough beds to solve the problem of overcrowding; on 20 July, there were over 2,500 fever patients in the island hospitals. In these circumstances, the mortality rate soared, from 50 deaths a day on 23 May to 150 a day by 5 June. The Chief Emigration agent at Quebec estimated that 3,000 emigrants died on the coffin ships at sea and over 2,000 on Grosse-Ile. In total over 5,000 people were buried on the island but estimates suggest that as many as 20,000 people died on the island or aboard ships quarantined around it.</p> <p>26Grosse Ile was not an isolated case. According to J. B. O’Reilly, on the transit route used by emigrants to Canada, there were 1,137 deaths in Quebec City; 200 deaths out of the 1,000 sick people in Baytown/Ottawa. In addition 4,326 people were admitted to the hospitals and fever sheds in Kingston and 1,400 died; 863 others died in Toronto. O’Reilly defines Montreal as a “second Grosse Ile”, explaining that “at Point St Charles, 11,000 lay sick with fever”; and Partridge Island, at the entrance to the harbour of St John in New Brunswick is described as a “third Grosse Ile” with a total 1,195 deaths on the island or in the city’s fever sheds out of a total of 17,074 arrivals³⁴.</p>	<p>(ed.), <i>Famine Diary</i>, Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1999, p. 120.</p> <p>³³ O. McDonagh, “Irish emigration to the United States of America”, in R. D. Edwards & T. D. Williams (...)</p> <p>³⁴ J. B. O’Reilly, “The Irish Famine and the Atlantic Migration to Canada”, available on the Irish Emi (...)</p>
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<p><u>Reactions</u></p> <p>27Following the massive crop failures of 1846, people in British North America clearly expected the number of Irish immigrants to rise significantly. The problem was clearly anticipated in the press, as is shown by the <i>Quebec Mercury</i> dated 20 March 1847:</p> <p>We have the best authority for believing that our wharfs will not be overcrowded with emigrants sent out at the government expense, but the lessons taught us in former years of the misery resulting from an over influx of the self-expatriated</p>	<p>³⁵ <i>Quebec Mercury</i>, 20 March 1847</p>
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inhabitants of the old country ought to induce some preservative action of the part of the provincial government and the civic authorities of Quebec. The wretchedness and personal evils of 1832 are not forgotten; and a repetition of them may be anticipated as consequent upon the arrival of the many immigrants who will, undoubtedly, seek these shores to escape the horrors of famine and the uncertainty of future prosperity in their native land.

We are not of those who look forward to the certainty of the introduction among us of an important virulent epidemic, but we should be wanting in our duty did we not urge upon the proper authorities the necessity of early and active preparation to meet a threatened evil.

The Quarantine Station at Grosse Ile will prove of much efficacy in diminishing the preconceive danger, but it is beyond dispute that of itself, in a season fruitful of disease, it is insufficient (...)**35**.

28The *British Colonist* gave a similar warning on 11 May 1847, as the sailing season was starting:

[The emigrants we may expect from Limerick, Sligo, and Londonderry] are represented to be possessed of moderate means; but we must look forward, in addition to these, to a large influx of pauper emigration, and it behoves the authorities to be prepared for the occasion, as great misery and disease are likely to accompany these unfortunate sufferers, in their progress. At Quebec proper steps have been taken for the establishment of a Board of Health, and a similar precaution ought to be observed in all our frontier towns and cities to which the emigrants are likely to resort in considerable numbers**36**.

29However emigration to Canada was not necessarily seen as a problem by all. On the contrary some welcomed it. Like the British, they saw emigration as a possible form of relief because it offered employment and possible prosperity for the starving Irish, relieved Ireland and Britain and helped provide "*advantage, strength and consolidation to colonies and Empire.*" To quote A. W. Cochran, chairman of the Quebec relief meeting of 12 February 1847, emigration could work as a "*safety valve — one mode of relief for Ireland which must suggest itself to any statesman effecting that which no expenditure could.*" The last resolution voted during the meeting actually urged the British government to consider state-aided emigration for a railway project to Halifax**37**.

30As more and more ships landed in British North American ports and as great numbers of passengers proved to be ill, fell ill and died, new relief initiatives were put into place to deal with the flow of immigrants, especially with those suffering from fever and disease. The *British Whig* dated 22 June 1847 reports on "*a Public Meeting (...) called by the Mayor*" organized with the following aim:

To contrive (...) to relieve (...) the indigent and suffering Emigrants [and to appoint] a Committee of 21 persons (...), exclusive of the Clergymen and all the Medical men (...) to whom should be left the details of all measures to be conducted for the relief of the sufferers, and to whom should be deputed the task of corresponding with the Government, on all matters concerned with the Emigration**38**.

36 *British Colonist*,
11 May 1847.

37 *Quebec Mercury*,
13 February 1847.

38 *The British Whig*,
22 June 1847.

39 *British Colonist*,
11 May 1847.

31An Emigration Settlement Society devoted to assisting new migrants (especially in their quest for work) had also been formed by the Toronto Relief Committee in early May³⁹.

32As time went by, concern grew significantly but was clearly variable depending on the type of publication. Between 25 May and 1 June 1847, as the number of emigrants arriving at Grosse Ile was sharply increasing, the tone of the *Quebec Mercury* — an Anglophone, conservative, pro-British and anti-Lower Canada newspaper — remained relatively confident in the capacity of emigration authorities to cope with the influx of emigrants and the spread of disease. The newspaper kept dismissing any kind of alarm among the Quebec City population:

To deny that an unexpected extent of disease prevails at the Quarantine Station would be not only impolitic but untrue. The passenger ships arrived up to this time have been visited with a heavy mortality, but not altogether arising from a malady which should create in the people of Quebec that alarm which would appear to have seized them. (...) Typhus has also declared itself: but even that malignant affliction of the human race need be no source of terror to us if the officers at the Quarantine ground faithfully discharge their duty, and we are but active in preserving cleanliness among ourselves, and energetic in those measures which common prudence suggests as the duty of one and all.

We have had access to the latest and most authentic information from Grosse Ile, and can assure our readers that the alarming stories current in town pervert the actual state of things.

The state of affairs at the Quarantine Station imperatively demand[s] some prompt action on the part of the Government, if we would spare human life and at the same time preserve the Province (...) from the spread of disease in the coming warm season, which may extend its ravages to a degree not to be anticipated.

(...) It will be proper here to state that no cause for alarm at present exists. We have been afforded every facility in obtaining the correct matters of things at Grosse Ile (...)⁴⁰.

33Other publications were more vocally critical. *Le Canadien*, a Francophone working class newspaper competing with the *Quebec Mercury*, urged for a change in the existing navigation regulations on 28 May 1847:

*Ne serait-il pas urgent aussi d'insister strictement sur l'exécution de la loi qui règle le nombre de passagers dont chaque bâtiment peut se charger. C'est principalement à la non-observation des règlements que l'on doit attribuer le fâcheux état de choses auquel il est aujourd'hui presque impossible de remédier, autrement qu'en rendant les capitaines de navires responsables des infractions de la loi. Si la loi même telle qu'elle est se trouvait inefficace il appartiendrait à la législature qui va siéger bientôt d'en passer une nouvelle et de limiter le nombre de personnes que l'on peut agglomérer dans un espace aussi malsain et aussi étroit que l'est ordinairement l'entrepont d'un navire de commerce*⁴¹.

(Would it not also urgent to insist on strict enforcement of the law that regulates the number of passengers that each building can handle. This is mainly to non-compliance with the regulations that we must attribute the unfortunate state of affairs which it is now almost impossible to remedy, other than making the captains of ships responsible for violations of the law. If the law even as was ineffective it is for the legislature that will sit soon to pass a

⁴⁰ *Quebec Mercury*, 25 May & 1 June 1847.

⁴¹ *Le Canadien*, 28 May 1847.

⁴² *The Newfoundlander*, "The Quarantine Burlesque", 27 May

<p><i>new and limit the number of people that can agglomerate in such an unhealthy and space as narrow as is usually the steerage of a merchant ship)</i></p> <p>34Other newspapers, such as <i>The Newfoundlander</i>, vigorously criticised the Canadian authorities for failing to implement Quarantine legislation properly and for failing to manage efficiently health and quarantine facilities⁴². These critical views persisted throughout the summer. Concern about health and safety was all the greater as a number of local male and female volunteers involved in the care of the sick (doctors, nurses, nuns and priests) fell ill themselves and sometimes died⁴³.</p> <p>35The sanitary crisis experienced by British North America was blamed on external factors — the lack of adequate quarantine measures in the ports of departure, ship-owners and landlords. While the latter had “sent out [their tenants], without the slightest provision for their sustenance on arrival”⁴⁴, the quarantine at Liverpool was denounced as a body that was “not only worse than useless as regards this country, but absolutely murder[ed] the emigrants intending to embark hitherward⁴⁵.”</p> <p>36In total £150,000 was spent by the Canadian government for the care of the emigrants during the 1847 shipping season. This sum was reimbursed by the British (Imperial) Government, but it was also stipulated that the Canadian government could no longer expect such grants. The inflow of sick emigrants experienced in 1847 led local and national newspapers to express a wide range of feelings and reactions — worry, anxiety, suspicion, but also sheer pity and sympathy at the fate of the emigrants. These expressions of empathy suggest that there existed a form of deep moral and emotional connection between Ireland and Canada, which could be further examined.</p>	<p>1847: “In these days of <i>nil admirari</i> philoso (...)</p> <p>43 Ibid., 12 & 26 August 1847 ; <i>Gazette des Trois Rivières</i>, 17 July & 21 August 1847.</p> <p>44 <i>The Niagara Mail</i>, 2 June 1847.</p> <p>45 <i>Quebec Gazette</i> quoted by the <i>Niagara Mail</i>, 2 June 1847 & <i>The Cork Examiner</i>, 18 August 1847.</p>
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Parallel destinies within the Empire?

<p><u>Irish crop failures/Canadian crop failures</u></p> <p>37Blight reached Ireland in 1845 but had been responsible for potato crop failures in the St Lawrence Valley and North-East America from 1842 to 1845. There was even a reported famine in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia in 1845⁴⁶.</p> <p>38After 1845, blight seems to have struck again, as can be inferred by a number of articles and reports found in the local press. Potato crop losses were reported with growing alarm both by the <i>Niagara Mail</i> and <i>The Newfoundlander</i> in September and October 1847:</p>	<p>46 M. G. McGowan, “Black ‘47 and Toronto, Canada”, p. 525.</p>
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Mr James Hiscott, a practical farmer resident in this neighbourhood, informed us last week that his potato crop is principally destroyed by the blight. The attack was sudden and unexpected, and occurred within a week or ten days past.

The existence of the Potato disease in St John's, and its vicinity, has unhappily ceased to be subject of question – we very much regret to learn there are now indications abroad which with but too much certainty determine the fate of a considerable portion of the crop.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ *The Niagara Mail*, 22 September 1847 & *The Newfoundlander*, 23 September & 14 October 1847.

The Famine a turning point in relations between the Irish and the French Canadians?

³⁹Canada and Ireland both suffered from blight, which may have helped reinforce reactions of empathy and solidarity between the Irish and the Canadians. It has been argued however that the Famine marked the beginning of a turning point in the political relations between the Irish and the Canadians, notably the French Canadians. Papers by Mary Haslam, David Wilson and Jason King confirm that connections and alliances existed between Irish settlers in Quebec and French Canadians long before the Irish Famine⁴⁸. The Canadian Irish were instrumental in providing support to the Patriot movement led by Louis-Joseph Papineau. At the same time, some in Ireland — such as Young Irelanders Thomas Davis, John Mitchel and Charles Gavan Duffy — regarded the French Canadian Patriot movement as providing Irish nationalists with lessons to follow. On the contrary the post-Famine period witnessed, until at least the end of the 19th century, increasing political and ethno-religious tensions between the Irish and the French Canadians. The Canadian Irish acquired a more distinct Catholic identity within Canada. At the same time, Canada remained a political model only for the moderate Irish Home Rulers but ceased to inspire republican nationalists in Ireland. In between, the period of the Great Famine and its immediate aftermath are seen as a moment of both climax and transition. J. King notably asserts:

L'arrivée des immigrants de la Grande Famine irlandaise (1845-1849) marque non seulement un point tournant démographique, mais, politiquement, elle met fin à l'alliance irlandaise et canadienne-française.

(...) On pourrait dire que les alliances irlandaise et canadienne française atteignirent un sommet en même temps qu'elles amorcèrent un déclin durant la même année 1848⁴⁹.

(The arrival of immigrants of the Great Irish Famine (1845-1849) marks not only a demographic turning point but, politically, it terminates the Irish and French-Canadian alliance.

⁴⁸ J. King, "Their Colonial Condition': Connections Between French-Canadians and Irish Catholics in t (...)

⁴⁹ J. King, «L'historiographie irlando-québécoise», consulté sur le site en ligne du *Bulletin d'Histoi (...)*

(...) One could say that the Irish and French Canadian alliances reached a peak at the same time they amorcèrent decline during the same 1848)

40King supports his view by examining the deeds and words of Bernard O'Reilly, an Irish priest based in Sherbrooke, who looked after the sick at Grosse Ile in July 1847. Upon his return to Sherbrooke, O'Reilly promoted the idea of setting up an association promoting the interests of the French Canadians in the eastern townships, a majority of whose inhabitants were English-speaking. O'Reilly wrote several letters to various newspapers to support his project and these letters do illustrate King's theory about the Famine. O'Reilly urged the Irish and French Canadians to unite:

(...) en dépit des jalousies ou des haines des autres races, (...) le peuple canadien restera là debout, comme l'élément principal de notre société autour duquel dans le bonheur comme dans le malheur, se ralliera un autre élément, l'élément irlandais. (...) Ce ne sera que sur les débris de leur union et de leur mutuelle affection que la tyrannie assoira son trône.

(...) Despite the jealousy or hatred of other races, (...) the Canadian people will remain standing there, as the main element around which our society in happiness as in misfortune, would join another element, the Irish element. (...) It will be only the remains of their union and their mutual affection that tyranny sit down his throne)

41However his letters also reveal the economic gap that was starting to emerge between the two communities:

*[Mes fidèles Canadiens-français] viennent, pour la plupart, travailler à la journée, ou s'employer aux manufactures de Sherbrooke et autres lieux. Ils sont bien pauvres. Quelques-uns ont acquis, par leur persévérance et leur industrie, une assez jolie indépendance. Malheureusement, ceux-ci font exception à la pauvreté qui domine chez leurs frères. Les Irlandais, de leur côté, au bout de quelques années après leur arrivée dans les townships, réalisent un bien-être qui contraste avec leur premier dénuement*⁵⁰.

([My loyal French Canadians] are, for the most part work by the day, or use the manufactures of Sherbrooke and other places. They are poor. Some have acquired, through perseverance and industry, a pretty independent. Unfortunately, these are exceptions to the poverty that prevails among their brethren. The Irish, on their side, after a few years of their arrival in the townships, achieve wellness which contrasts with their first deprivation)

50 *Le Canadien*, 22 October 1847 & 11 February 1848.

Conclusion

42Reactions in Canada were not unique. Studies of what took place in Australia show that relief measures were also taken in the Antipodes from the second half of 1846: a Relief Fund for the famine-stricken Irish and Scots was established in Sydney in August, while meetings gathering all denominations took place to help

the Irish as early as November in large cities (Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide) as well as smaller towns (Berrima, Bathurst and Goulburn in New South Wales, Port Philip in Victoria, Hobart on Van Diemen's Island). Ch. Kinealy emphasises the generosity of the Australian settlers who, like the Canadians, believed in a "shared imperial responsibility". Money was soon collected to encourage emigration to Australia: over 2,000 Irish orphans were sent there thanks to a Government scheme financed essentially by the colonial authorities, and a few other thousands came thanks to other forms of assistance (1847-8). As in the case of Canada, emigration was seen by a number of Australians as a way to increase the available labour force and boost the Australian economy. But anti-Irish prejudice acted as a brake on further Government-assisted emigration schemes⁵¹.

43What is shown by our study of Canadian reactions to the Great Irish Famine and by previous assessment of solidarities in Canada, Australia and other parts of the British Empire is that the Famine was truly a global phenomenon. British colonies sent donations to Ireland and welcomed Irish immigrants, so that they formed new bonds with the Irish and their native country. The networks of trade and communication available by the mid-19th century contributed to the flow of news and information from Ireland to the colonies and back: as a result, the colonial press also turned the Famine into a cross-imperial and international issue.

⁵¹ Ch.
Kinealy, *Charity and the Great Hunger in Ireland, 1160-1279* (Kindle version) & O. McDonagh, "As (...)

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<http://mimmoc.revues.org/1787?lang=en#authors>