Marion Emigration - Conditions for Acceptance

Research has shown that the majority of emigrants to Australia for the years 1831 to 1860 were agricultural labourers and single female domestic servants. While the latter did not apply to the Marion, certainly there was a preponderance of single agricultural labourers (ag labs) and ag lab families. Most emigrants who had government assistance came from the south of England, but we know that the Marion brought people from many counties of England, Ireland and Scotland.

An historian from the Flinders University in Adelaide, Dr. Robin Haines (see Editorial), has produced an abundance of published works on the assisted emigration from the United Kingdom to Australia in that era and the conclusions reached from that research will form the basis of this article and others to be presented in later issues.

The United Kingdom authority for assisted emigration was the Colonial Land and Emigration Commission (CLEC). The requirements to satisfy this authority were considerable in terms of money and personal qualities. The potential emigrant had to raise between 2 and 5 pounds per adult for the mandatory passage deposit and an approved outfit of clothing for each person. In addition he had to finance the travelling costs of the individual or family to the port of embarkation. Virtually all rural people attracted to Australian emigration, especially in the south of England, were in poor financial circumstance in this era, barely subsisting in the rural economy where wages were low, unemployment was rife and assistance very limited. For most these costs were impossible to meet without assistance. Applicants also had to convince officers of the CLEC that they met the

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stringent personal attributes required.

So what were the conditions that had to be met? The emigrants on the Marion comprised mainly single men and families varying from young married couples without children to those with up to 5 children. Dr Haines has provided details of the requirements.

The mandatory payment for "bed money" (new bedding and mess utensils) varied over the years according to the status of the applicant(s) and the destination. It is not known the precise requirements for the Marion emigrants, but for the family with 5 children this may well have been 15. Where the weekly wage for an "ag lab" in the south of England was as low as 6/-, this amounted to almost a year's wages.

All members of the family were required to produce a compulsory outfit of clothing suitable for the extremes of hot and cold weather to be encountered on the voyage. For the father this comprised six shirts, six pairs stockings, two pairs shoes and two complete suits of exterior clothing. For the mother it was six shifts, two flannel petticoats, six pairs stockings, two pairs shoes and two gowns. Commensurate sets were required for the children. Strongly recommended were two or three serge suits for the father and flannel for the mother and similar for the children. The set of clothing need not be new, but in very good condition, capable of seeing the emigrant through very hot and very cold climates during a three or four month's voyage. A new kit for an adult would have cost about 3.

Other items required to meet the conditions of acceptance were a strong sea chest, sheets, towels and soap. The chest and clothing were inspected by emigration officials before departure, and inadequate supplies, or worn clothing, were not tolerated. So many emigrants were forced to buy new kits.

During the application phase, candidates were required to submit a long and complicated application form which included their name, trade or calling, whether or not they had received parish relief, place of residence, their marital status, the name and address of an employer and the name and address of their minister. They were also required to state the names, ages, birth-date and smallpox vaccination status of each member of the family. The application form was required to be witnessed by two respectable householders, a physician or surgeon, and a magistrate, clergyman or priest, minimising the potential for misleading information by the applicant.

So the applicants, particularly families with children, were required to raise significant funds and show considerable resourcefulness in meeting the terms of the CLEC. With limited resources and education (ag labs in Wiltshire rarely attended school beyond the age of nine years) the requirements must have appeared most daunting. It is gratifying to descendants that after years of meticulous research, Dr Haines concluded that government-assisted emigrants from the United Kingdom to Australia between 1831 and 1860 "...although poor, were rarely the most impoverished members of rural society. They were enterprising, literate, self-selecting individuals who took advantage of a scheme which allowed them to improve their employment prospects abroad. When facing seasonal unemployment and potential destitution, they financed their mandatory deposit, compulsory outfit, and travel to the port of embarkation by a combination of private, public and charitable agencies...."

How emigrants accomplished this is discussed in a later issue.

Baker Family from Wiltshire

Our record of Marion emigrants shows that Sylvanus Baker (21 years old) of Shalbourne, Wiltshire and his wife Elizabeth (22 years old) were amongst the emigrants. Sylvanus was classified as a farm labourer.

Ron Stephenson of Maryborough, Queensland is a direct descendant of Sylvanus and Elizabeth and has forwarded an article on this family. A mildly edited version is presented here.

"When Sylvanus Baker married Elizabeth Manchester on 8th December 1850, little did he realise the hardships that they would encounter in their first year of married life.

They had grown up in Wiltshire where Sylvanus had been employed as a farm labourer, but things were bad on the land after the "Swing Riots", when farm hands broke up threshing machines. In fact about 600 farm workers were charged and many of them were sent to Australia, to serve out life sentences. Two of the Baker family suffered this fate and were transported on the sailing ship "Proteus" in 1831. They were James and Robert Baker who were sent to Port Arthur and Port Jackson respectively. Elijah Baker who was the father of Sylvanus, who is the main character in this story, was also convicted and given 12 months hard labour at Reading in England.

[So the pair emigrated on the Marion. Ron repeats the details of the ship's grounding described in previous articles].

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Wiltshire Ag Labs c1850 - Part 2

Mark Baker’s published article continues:

The employment situation varied greatly between summer and winter. In the summer, specially during the haymaking and the corn harvest, labourers were in demand, for the work all had to be done by hand. The casual labourer then came into his own, and nearly everyone worked overtime, to earn the extra money that would help to keep them going in the winter. Somewhere in or near the Pewsey Vale it was said that hayrakes six feet wide were made, so that men strong enough to wield them could make exceptional earnings when the mowing was done on a piece-work basis. Up till 1850, by which time their numbers were reduced to vanishing point by famine and emigration, Irish reapers came over for the haymaking and harvesting and camped out in tents and barns - a sign of plentiful employment. In the winter it was very different. The fields emptied and the workhouses filled up; even those tragic outcasts, the ‘surplus children’ - illegitimate orphans boarded out by their parishes and employed in picking stones for the road menders - were sent to the workhouses. Some farmers tried to keep men employed by threshing with the hand-flail rather than support them in enforced idleness on the rates. For in spite of George Brown’s claim in October 1849 that ‘we have plenty for them to do’, inevitably there was less work on a farm in winter, and except in the cheese-making areas of North Wiltshire very little of it brought an immediate financial return. Earl Bruce, son and heir of the Marquess of Ailesbury, was worried by the number of men who called at his house in Savernake Forest in autumn and winter, asking for work which they said the farmers wouldn’t give them, and refused to accept George Brown’s explanation that it was all the result of the repeal of the Corn Law. Bruce was not the only landowner concerned about this situation. During the winter of 1844-45 some landowners and farmers in the Lacock area had pledged themselves to provide work for

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Elizabeth was 7 months pregnant when the ship sunk, and had been taken into a life-boat to the distant shore at Rapid Bay where the lifeboat was capsized in the surf and the women and children tossed into the sea. Thankfully the sailors were quick to act and plucked the survivors from the stricken lifeboat and got them to the desolate shore.

[A study of newspaper reports which listed the names of the survivors of the Rapid Bay incident as well as those that were taken by longboat to Cape Jervis indicates that Elizabeth was taken to Cape Jervis and not Rapid Bay - Ed.]

My g-g-grandmother said that she did not know for about 3 weeks if Sylvanus had been rescued as he had apparently been landed on Yorke Peninsula near where Edithburgh is now situated.

The Bakers’ first child Henry was born at Adelaide on the 28th September 1851 and their second child Mary on 1st July 1854 in South Australia.

I believe that they travelled overland to Victoria during 1855 to mine for gold at Campbells Creek, and then moved to Castlemaine in 1861 again in search of gold. A large mine had been established at Daylesford and had been called Cornish Hill as most of the deep lead miners came from Cornwall. As there was work available at this mine, Sylvanus decided to move the family to Daylesford in 1863. The family remained in this area until 1879 when young Henry, who had now married Elizabeth Anne Andrew, thought that there were better opportunities of employment in Tasmania for miners, so they sailed for Georgetown during 1879. The Baker family by this time had produced many offspring and were now able to acquire a house at Lefroy where another 5 children were born.

Then in the year 1890 they returned to the mainland and settled at Brunswicke where they remained until Sylvanus died on 9th October 1897, aged 68 years. Elizabeth died on the 22nd October 1923 at the grand old age of 96 years. She had been living at 3 Benny St Brunswicke with her daughter-in-law Mary Ann (nee Andrew), her grand-daughter Elizabeth Johnston (nee Andrew) and g-grandchildren William Sylvanus and Alma Johnston.

The descendants of Sylvanus Baker are now scattered across this vast land, with a large group still in Tasmania around Georgetown and Launceston. Another large family group settled in Bendigo, Victoria, with another family still at Daylesford, and a small family in Maryborough, Queensland.

The graves of our forebears are at the Bell St. Cemetery, Coburg, Victoria, Methodist section A138, another at Methodist P825.

How fortunate we all are, that those two young 21-year-olds decided to get out of England during the tough times of the 1850s.”

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the labourers in winters by a scheme which was partly financed by that wealthy and generous man, T.H.S. Sotheron Estcourt. The scheme seems to have failed in the end because some of the farmers would not co-operate; at any rate it was not repeated after 1845. Perhaps it was too altruistic to have any chance of success. Could that have been the reason why the lord of the manor of Lacock seems to have completely ignored it? This curious fact remains unexplained, and is not without interest because the lord of the manor of Lacock was William Henry Fox Talbot, the father of modern photography, a man of genius. Absorbed though he was at the time in his calotype experiments and other scientific matters, he must have known what was going on in the parish of Lacock. Or didn't he? There was no Jacob Baker in Lacock to make it absolutely clear to him what the labourer's lot was like.

There is no doubt at all about the undernourishment. Jacob Baker's complaints are confirmed by the comments of investigators and by other indications. For instance, James Caird, writing for The Times in 1850 on the state of English agriculture, enquired into the labourer's diet on Salisbury Plain and found that it did not amount to much. For breakfast he had flour with a little butter and water from the tea-kettle poured over it; for his lunch-break in the fields a piece of bread and, if he could afford it, some cheese; for his tea (as we should now call it) a few potatoes and possibly a little bacon; and for supper at bedtime bread and water. Caird was not surprised to find in the men who lived on such a diet 'a want of that vigour and activity which mark the well-fed ploughman of the northern and midland counties'. Lord Bruce, whose father had estates in Yorkshire as well as in Wiltshire, had noticed the same difference. A Poor Law Assistant Commissioner, enquiring into the work of women and children in agriculture in 1842, was told by two mothers in Calne that their children never really had enough to eat. One of them made the point clear by adding: "... at the end of the meal the children are always asking for more at every meal; I then say, "You don't want your father to go to prison, do you?"" Many of course did go to prison. The magistrates, who included most of the landowners and some of the parsons, knew only too well the numerous cases of sheep-stealing, corn-stealing and other kinds of stealing to get food, quite apart from poaching. The more enlightened landowners looked round anxiously for remedies; the most obvious seemed to be emigration. Continued in Part 3 in a later issue.