

SCOTTISH EMIGRATION to VICTORIA in the 19TH CENTURY

In the 19th Century, Scotsmen and women emigrated from Scotland to Australia mainly because of economic necessity. The social and economic conditions in Scotland and the necessity for settlers and a workforce in Australia encouraged this.

Conditions in Scotland.

From the 1760s the introduction of large scale sheep farming and the change of communal clan lands to one of ownership by clan chiefs displaced the clansfolk and began movement of entire communities. Crofters went to the coasts to become fishermen or to industrial towns for work or joined the armed forces. Subsistence agriculture was swamped by land clearances for sheep grazing. Highland families were dependent on herring fishing, kelp collecting and their staple crops of potatoes, but when in 1836 and again in 1846 the potato blight struck, the kelp industry collapsed and the herring fishing declined most Highlanders were faced with starvation and poverty. Emigration seemed the only answer to survival.

Labour Shortages in Australia.

In the early 19th century New South Wales and Tasmania were promoted as colonies for free settlers, for whom land would be provided at nominal rates. This attracted mainly middle class Scots, officials and army officers, many of the Lowlanders from the Lothians and Fife, those who had some capital to spend. By the 1830s and 1840s the colonial government in Australia offered assisted passages to would be emigrants because of a shortage of workers, especially: domestic servants, mechanics or artisans and agricultural labourers. The first two jobs didn't attract Scots but the third did and many agricultural labourers and shepherds migrated to Australia, thus changing the character of Scottish emigration after 1830. Now the poorer Scots migrated and they came from all over Scotland, to embark from Glasgow, Greenock and Liverpool.

The assisted passages were organized through the colonial government, through charitable societies, through relatives, merchants and by private schemes. The latter was particularly important in the early Bounty Schemes of 1837 to 1842. Between the 1820s and 1850s competition between the colonies and New Zealand was vigorous to attract a labour force which was necessary for expansion. Many were assisted by the Highland and Island Emigration society 1852 to 1858. This scheme encouraged families to emigrate together, especially from the Isle of Skye and its surrounds ie. Lockalsh and Matheson territory. So many Mathesons immigrated at this time especially to Victoria. During the 1850s 80% of Scottish Immigrants went to

Victoria, and of those 80%, 50% were from the highlands. The bias for Victoria at this time partly reflected the Gold Rush, but most Scots came in family groups and filled agricultural and trade positions vacated by those who had gone to the gold rushes. Also Highlanders were attracted to Victoria because it already had a significant Scottish population which had come from Tasmania in the 1830s and 1840s. The expansion of settlement in Tasmania had reached from Hobart to Launceston, so by the mid 1830s settlements in Portland and the Port Philip District had begun. These earlier immigrants from Tasmania were mostly free settlers looking for more agricultural or grazing land than the small island could supply. Once these earlier settlers were established the need for agricultural labourers increased. In the period 1860 to 1914 Scottish emigrants continued to arrive in all the colonies and again the Highlanders were mainly in family groups and were agricultural labourers and shepherds.

My Matheson immigrants - Great Great grandparents:

My (Margaret Fleming's) Great Great Grandparents, Alexander and Margaret Matheson and their four children were perfect candidates for emigration in the 1850s. They sailed from Liverpool on the 'Blanche' on 4th August 1852 and arrived in Geelong on 20 November 1852. On the shipping list Alexander's 'calling' was a shepherd. They came from Lockalsh, Ross Shire, were Presbyterian, both could read and write, and were engaged to a Patrick Hart of Indented Head (Bellarine Peninsula) for 12 months for 60 pound a year with rations. They were 43 and 41 years old and were to raise six children in Victoria, all of whom married and produced grandchildren. Margaret died in 1886 at Donald, Victoria, at the age of 76 but Alexander lived until he was 100 years old, still speaking only Scottish Gaelic, passing away in 1910 in Lygon Street, East Brunswick.

Written by Margaret Fleming. 2015.