

## No Choice But to Look Elsewhere: Attracting Immigrants to Newfoundland, 1840-1890

Carolyn Lambert

Volume 41, numéro 2, summer/autumn 2012

URI : [https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/acad41\\_2art05](https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/acad41_2art05)

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

The Department of History at the University of New Brunswick

ISSN

0044-5851 (imprimé)

1712-7432 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Lambert, C. (2012). No Choice But to Look Elsewhere:: Attracting Immigrants to Newfoundland, 1840-1890. *Acadiensis*, 41(2), 89–108.

Résumé de l'article

*Au 19e siècle, Terre-Neuve était entraînée dans la marche de l'Amérique du Nord vers le progrès. À compter des années 1840, le désir de mettre en valeur l'intérieur du territoire était présent dans le discours de ses politiciens, selon qui la diversification économique – en particulier le développement de l'agriculture – libérerait la population de sa dépendance envers les ressources côtières. Incapables d'amener les pêcheurs à se tourner vers l'agriculture, les autorités publiques en vinrent à croire qu'elles devraient trouver ailleurs les individus qui permettraient à Terre-Neuve d'aller de l'avant. Conscients qu'une immigration à grande échelle était impossible à cause des contraintes géographiques, les contemporains fondaient leurs espoirs sur la venue d'un petit nombre d'agronomes qualifiés des îles Britanniques. Cependant, aucun gouvernement ne formula une politique officielle d'immigration, et les stratégies d'immigration proposées demeuraient prudentes.*

# No Choice But to Look Elsewhere: Attracting Immigrants to Newfoundland, 1840-1890

CAROLYN LAMBERT

*Au 19<sup>e</sup> siècle, Terre-Neuve était entraînée dans la marche de l'Amérique du Nord vers le progrès. À compter des années 1840, le désir de mettre en valeur l'intérieur du territoire était présent dans le discours de ses politiciens, selon qui la diversification économique – en particulier le développement de l'agriculture – libérerait la population de sa dépendance envers les ressources côtières. Incapables d'amener les pêcheurs à se tourner vers l'agriculture, les autorités publiques en vinrent à croire qu'elles devraient trouver ailleurs les individus qui permettraient à Terre-Neuve d'aller de l'avant. Conscients qu'une immigration à grande échelle était impossible à cause des contraintes géographiques, les contemporains fondaient leurs espoirs sur la venue d'un petit nombre d'agronomes qualifiés des îles Britanniques. Cependant, aucun gouvernement ne formula une politique officielle d'immigration, et les stratégies d'immigration proposées demeuraient prudentes.*

*Nineteenth-century Newfoundland was caught up in North America's drive towards progress. The desire for landward development was present within political discourse from the 1840s onwards, politicians arguing that economic diversification – particularly agricultural development – would free the population from coastal resource dependency. Failure to entice fishermen to farm led officials to believe that individuals to push Newfoundland forward would have to be found elsewhere. Contemporaries were aware of the geographic limitations preventing large-scale immigration, and hoped for a small number of skilled agriculturalists from the British Isles. Yet no government formulated a formal immigration policy, and proposed immigration strategies were cautious.*

THE 19TH CENTURY WAS AN ERA OF HOPE AND PROGRESS, steam and rail communication, and nation building. North Americans were consumed with the drive towards landward development, industrialization, and the move west to open up new frontiers. Between 1840 and 1890 the mass movement of peoples from northwestern Europe fueled this expansion, as emigrants were drawn by the “promise of capitalist America.”<sup>1</sup> By the 1880s there was competition to attract

1 John Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985), 65; Marcus Hansen, *The Mingling of the Canadian and American Peoples* (New York: Arno Press, 1970), 116-7, 121-5, 176, 217, 220, 235-6; Ninette Kelley and Michael Trebilcock, *The Making of the Mosaic: A History of Canadian Immigration Policy*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010).

Carolyn Lambert, “No Choice But to Look Elsewhere: Attracting Immigrants to Newfoundland, 1840-1890,” *Acadiensis* XLI, no. 2 (Summer/Autumn 2012): 89-108.

immigrant labour, particularly between Canada and the United States, as governments and business firms sought workers to fuel railroad and industrial development.<sup>2</sup> Newfoundland was part of that consuming drive towards progress, particularly after 1869 when successive ministries energetically pursued a national development policy. This course of action was in response to the poverty caused by the volatile nature of the fishery, as politicians believed that economic diversification would allow fishermen to supplement their income and be freed from dependence on coastal resources. Various legislative acts throughout the 1870s and 1880s encouraged interior settlement and promoted agricultural and mineral development, which in turn rested on the construction of a railway to facilitate the movement of goods and people.<sup>3</sup>

Unlike most of the rest of North America, Newfoundland's tale of economic expansion did not have a happy ending. The national policy failed to have any long-term effect on the country's economy, and railway debt would eventually plunge it into financial ruin. Twentieth century attempts at diversification, such as Premier Joey Smallwood's "chocolate bars and rubber boots" industrialization plan, also failed.<sup>4</sup> Significant failures in government policies, onerous debt loads, and Smallwood's unrealistic schemes are just some of the reasons why the very idea of "progress" in Newfoundland has taken on a pejorative connotation. Academics argue that such plans were misguided because they were unsuited to a colony whose economy was based on coastal resources. Sean Cadigan and David Alexander suggest that enthusiasm replaced logic and contemporaries were blind to the fact that Newfoundland's resource base was in the sea and not the land.<sup>5</sup> Patrick O'Flaherty argues that the motivation for focusing on the development of the province's interior was psychological; building a railway in a country where the majority of the population lived on the coast, he states, was a case of politicians simply aping what was occurring in the rest of North America. He believes that they were driven by a need to catch up and a "why can't Newfoundland?" line of reasoning.<sup>6</sup>

There is no doubt that Newfoundlanders from all ethno-religious groups wanted to see their country expand like the rest of North America, and that landward development was spurred by the realization that the fishery was an unreliable and increasingly profitless resource. Since the 1840s contemporaries had argued that economic diversification, specifically agricultural development, would improve the well-being of the population and lower import costs. Gerhard Bassler notes that, at

2 Philip Taylor, *The Distant Magnet: European Emigration to the USA* (New York: Harper, 1971), 44, 85-90.

3 Sean Cadigan, *Newfoundland and Labrador: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 153; David Alexander, "Newfoundland's Traditional Economy and Development to 1934," in *Newfoundland in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: Essays in Interpretation*, ed. James K. Hiller and Peter Neary (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 25-6; Patrick O'Flaherty, *Lost Country: The Rise and Fall of Newfoundland, 1843-1933* (St. John's: Long Beach Press, 2005), 111.

4 See Doug Letto, *Chocolate Bars and Rubber Boots: The Smallwood Industrialization Plan* (Paradise, NL: Blue Hill Publishing, 1998), and Gerhard Bassler, *Alfred Valdmanis and the Politics of Survival* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

5 Cadigan, *Newfoundland and Labrador*, 3-4, 153; Alexander, "Newfoundland's Traditional Economy," 25.

6 O'Flaherty, *Lost Country*, 1, 123.

the turn of the 20th century, politicians believed immigrants were the key to economic expansion, but this opinion can actually be traced back much earlier.<sup>7</sup> As early as the 1850s politicians were growing increasingly frustrated at the slow progress in agriculture, suggesting that the problem was not limited potential but rather that the island's historical development had produced a population of fishermen who knew nothing else and could be neither enticed by government nor forced by circumstance into other economic pursuits. Individuals to push Newfoundland forward, it seemed, would have to be found elsewhere.

The viability of landward development in 19th- and 20th-century Newfoundland has been vigorously debated by historians and is not the focus of this article. Rather, the emphasis is on the logic behind plans to attract immigrants in order to achieve economic diversification. Public and political discourse concerning immigration suggests that most contemporaries were not blind to the geographic limitations that might prevent large-scale immigration and agriculture. As late as 1890 politicians were hesitant to encourage mass immigration because they believed that Newfoundland's economic development was not such that it could sustain an influx of agricultural settlers. Throughout the century, in fact, politicians had sought a restricted number and type of immigrant, specifically skilled agriculturalists from the British Isles who were experienced in small-scale mixed farming and would fit within the limits of the economy. They argued that attracting farmers would aid not only in development but also lower imports, stimulate export markets, and feed the local population in times of distress.

Despite the desire and need for immigrants, no government developed a formal immigration policy. The energy and financial commitment characterizing other aspects of landward expansion, such as the railway, were absent in even the proposed immigration strategies, which politicians pursued more cautiously. This was partly due to the financial limitations within which ministries had to operate. For a struggling colony with small public revenue there was little extra money to spend on elaborate schemes, especially when railway construction began in the 1880s. It was also because the aim was to encourage a restricted number of immigrants, rather than a steady influx. Even this limited goal was problematic due to recurring downturns in the fishery, and by the 1880s mass emigration had spurred anti-immigrant sentiment in the press and made potential efforts at attracting immigrants a political tinderbox. Most notably, however, contemporaries were aware that a formal immigration policy would not have ensured success, as Canada discovered between 1867 and 1896. The problems that prevented immigration to western Canada, such as the lack of a strong economy, poor transportation networks, and farming difficulties, would no doubt stymie Newfoundland's prospects as well.<sup>8</sup> Although Canada's fortunes changed at the turn of the century due to a stronger and more diversified economy, Newfoundland's did not. Nevertheless, into the 20th century politicians continued to allege that lack of agricultural progress was due to local indifference and this conviction continued to spur enthusiastic attempts to attract immigrants.

7 Gerhard Bassler, *Sanctuary Denied* (St. John's: ISER, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1992), 44-5.

8 Kelley and Trebilcock, *Making of the Mosaic*, 65, 80.

Nineteenth-century discussions about attracting immigrant labour to stimulate economic diversification took place in an era of virtually no immigration. Newfoundland's migration pattern between 1840 and 1896 was characterized by low immigration and high emigration. The greatest influx of immigrants was the large flow of Irish Catholic migrants between 1815 and 1831, nearly all drawn from southeast Ireland, but immigration from the British Isles as a whole to Newfoundland steadily declined after the 1840s and had virtually ceased by the 1880s.<sup>9</sup> Some contemporaries blamed the loss of regular and available routes from Ireland previously tied to the provisions trade, but others were acutely aware that Newfoundland's migration pattern was determined by its economy (which since the 17th century had been based on the need for labour in the cod fishery).<sup>10</sup> Slight increases in the number of immigrant arrivals were indeed due to labour shortages caused by short-lived periods of successful fisheries, but an industry plagued by periods of low export prices and production volumes simply did not have any sustained economic pull.<sup>11</sup> By the 1880s the fishery was reaching its growth limit and was unable to sustain the existing population, causing a substantial increase in emigration between 1884 and 1901. Various ministries and merchants were increasingly aware that the fishery was leading Newfoundland from "the genesis of the colony to its exodus."<sup>12</sup> The colony was gravely disadvantaged in an era when immigrants chose to settle in a country based on its economic attractiveness. If the pillar of the economy could not meet the needs of its existing population, it certainly did not seem plausible that it could sustain large influxes of immigrants – most of whom would have little capital and would be seeking wage labour in skilled and unskilled trades.<sup>13</sup> There was little opportunity for these individuals since the trades were closely tied to the fishery and were just as hard hit by slumps.<sup>14</sup>

- 9 Great Britain, House of Commons, *Papers Relating to H.M. Colonial Possessions, 1883-85*, p. 65, 1886 [C.4842] XLV.1; Patricia Thornton, "The Problem of Out-Migration from Atlantic Canada, 1871-1921: A New Look," *Acadiensis* XV, no. 1 (Autumn 1985): 3-35; John Mannion, "Tracing the Irish: a Geographical Guide," *Newfoundland Ancestor* 9, no. 1 (May 1993): 4-19. A detailed look at Irish and other British Isles migration to Newfoundland after 1840 is given in Carolyn Lambert, "Far from the Homes of their Fathers: Irish Catholics in St. John's, Newfoundland, 1840-86" (PhD diss., Memorial University of Newfoundland, 2010), 39-46, Appendix A.
- 10 Great Britain, House of Commons, *Papers Relative to Emigration to North American Colonies*, p. 30, 1857-8 (165) XLI.59; *Journal of the House of Assembly of Newfoundland (JHA)* (1858): Appendix (A), 606, and *JHA* (1859): 441-2.
- 11 Great Britain, House of Commons, *Colonial Land and Emigration Commission, General Report* [issued yearly, 1841/2-1872]; *Report and Statistical Tables relating to Emigration and Immigration of United Kingdom, 1876*, p. 13, 1877 (5) LXXXV.621; *Patriot and Terra Nova Herald (Patriot)* (St. John's), 22 October 1860, 28 January 1861.
- 12 *JHA* (1889): 38-40; Alexander, "Newfoundland's Traditional Economy," 22-3, 25.
- 13 See Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut, *Immigrant America: A Portrait*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Taylor, *Distant Magnet*; and Marcus Hansen, *The Atlantic Migration 1607-1860: A History of the Continuing Settlement of the United States* (New York: Harper, 1961).
- 14 Sean Cadigan, "Artisans in a Merchant Town: St. John's, Newfoundland, 1775-1816," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 4, no. 1 (1993): 97, 108, 117-18; *Newfoundlander*, 18 December 1868; Thomas Talbot, *Newfoundland or a Letter Addressed to a Friend in Ireland in Relation to the Condition and Circumstances of the Island of Newfoundland with an Especial View to Emigration* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, and Rivington, 1882), 62-5.

It was the volatile nature of the fishery that underpinned all discussions of economic diversification, which began in the early 1840s within the context of a nascent Newfoundland nationalism, enthusiasm spurred by the first geological survey, and more formal support for agricultural development. The ideological basis for the idea was tied to the establishment of the Natives' Society in 1840, which emphasized progress and the economic and social advancement of the country.<sup>15</sup> Many natives and their contemporaries were encouraged by the results of a geological survey that showed some limited agricultural potential, which led to the establishment of the Agricultural Society in 1842 aimed at encouraging such pursuits. The society cut across ethno-religious and class lines, and its work was formally supported by various governors and ministries. Enthusiasm was quickly reinforced by the society's statistics, which revealed some degree of farming potential. In the 1840s, however, "Newfoundland" really only referred to the settled communities along the coastline since the interior remained an unknown until a more detailed geological survey in 1864.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, it seemed enough for some, such as Liberal native politician Robert Parsons, to suggest that potential meant that the colony could attract immigrant settlers to spur future growth. In an 1843 editorial Parsons stated that an "Emigration Society" was needed to "promote the improvement of all our local interests," including the future exploitation of mineral and timber resources.<sup>17</sup>

Others, who had reservations about the island's prospects, countered enthusiasts like Parsons. One Conservative Protestant paper argued that the current level of cultivation could not sustain a large farming class, and wondered who would employ and feed these individuals in a colony where poverty abounded amongst its own population. Recommending Newfoundland as an inviting place for immigrants, the editor warned, would be simply disastrous.<sup>18</sup> Governors were also of this opinion. John Harvey, addressing the Agricultural Society in 1843, urged its members to accept the colony's geographic limitations and not get ahead of themselves, stating that agriculture would only succeed if it were of a type suited to the colony's climate and soil conditions.<sup>19</sup> His predecessor, Henry Prescott, also emphasized the limited degree of potential, arguing that any future progress would be slow and that hard work and capital could not overcome circumstances beyond the inhabitants' control such as soil and climate.<sup>20</sup> Prescott formally expressed this opinion in 1847 when testifying before the Select Committee of the House of Lords on Colonization from Ireland concerning a colonization scheme for destitute Great Famine emigrants. He did not give the prospect any hope, noting that there was no work in the fishery and

15 For more on the Natives' Society, see Lambert, "Far from the Homes of their Fathers," ch. 6.

16 The Agricultural Society's mixed ethno-religious makeup is reflected in its officer lists between 1842 and the 1870s. See *Newfoundland Almanac*, 1855-75; *Patriot*, 4 January 1843; and Carla S. Krachun, "Murray, Alexander," *Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador (ENL)* 3:656.

17 *Patriot*, 4 January 1843.

18 *Times and General Commercial Gazette (Times)* (St. John's), 9 February 1842, 13 September 1848.

19 *JHA* (1843): A-369.

20 *Report of the Select Committee of the House of Lords on Colonisation from Ireland; Together with the Minutes of Evidence, Session 1847*, p. 262, (737) (737-II) VI.1.

that agricultural progress was limited.<sup>21</sup> It was no doubt partly due to Prescott's testimony that the committee rejected the idea of state-assisted emigration to Newfoundland. It seems clear that such a scheme would have failed in any case given that in that same year the colony was dealing with its own destitute unemployed fishermen who were flooding into St. John's to find work and food. In fact, Newfoundland was barely able to cope with even a small temporary influx of stranded passengers from shipwrecked famine vessels, and Harvey went so far as to plead colonial destitution to get the expense reimbursed from the British Treasury.<sup>22</sup>

Prescott was correct that agricultural progress would be slow and limited. In the 1850s farming continued to be small-scale and largely subsistence. In many areas only potatoes were grown, which provided fishermen with added food intake during periods of poor fisheries and lessened poor relief expenditure. Outport families, recognizing the precariousness of their situation, often tried to grow root crops and hay along with keeping a cow or sheep as a means of enhancing their diet and to help during downturns in the fisheries. In most cases, however, the families' location was chosen by the demands of the fishery, which meant setting up on the rocky shore, and so the possibilities for even this modest household production were very slim.<sup>23</sup> Settlement was also delayed on the west coast of the island due to the exclusive fishing rights granted to France in the 18th century, which prohibited British land settlement. This problem, known as the French Shore issue, was not resolved until 1904.<sup>24</sup>

After the introduction of responsible government in 1855, the Liberal government made landward progress a formal part of its political platform through emphasizing the need to open up the colony's inland resources in the hope of economic diversification.<sup>25</sup> Yet even in areas conducive to farming, such as the Southern Shore, fishermen shied away from engaging in agriculture. Government reports concerning the state of pauperism in 1855 listed the many possible reasons

21 Other colonies included British North America, the West Indian Islands, New South Wales, Port Phillip, South Australia, Van Dieman's Land, and New Zealand. See Great Britain, House of Commons, *Report of the Select Committee of the House of Lords on Colonisation from Ireland . . . , Session 1847*, pp. iii, 260-2, (737) (737-II) VI.1.

22 There was no Great Famine immigration to Newfoundland. Famine ships arrived in Newfoundland en route to North America, usually to take on provisions, and then set sail again. See Colonial Office (CO) 194/125, pp. 386-7, Library and Archives Canada (LAC); CO 194/127, p. 147, LAC; *Benevolent Irish Society (BIS) Minutes*, 7 June 1846, 1 August 1850; and *Newfoundlander*, 4 November 1847.

23 Sean Cadigan, *Hope and Deception in Conception Bay* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 26, 37; Rosemary E. Ommer, "Merchant Credit and the Informal Economy: Newfoundland, 1919-1929," *Historical Papers, 1989* (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1990), 173; Peter Crabb, "Agriculture in Newfoundland: a Study in Development," 2 vols. (PhD diss., University of Hull, 1983), 1:76.

24 Some British settlers did leak in over time, and by the 1890s the Newfoundland government was gaining further control over the region resulting in road construction and a railway terminus at Port aux Basques. All of this helped stimulate agriculture, but proper development did not begin until after the matter's political resolution in 1904. See Crabb, "Agriculture in Newfoundland," 1:66, 78.

25 Gertrude Gunn, *The Political History of Newfoundland* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966), 113; Cadigan, *Newfoundland and Labrador*, 124.

for this reluctance, ranging from lack of sufficient capital and knowledge to logistical problems. One report, for example, stated that lack of roads made the easy transport of necessary materials, such as manure, difficult. The more fundamental reason seemed to be that a successful farm required large plots of land and full-time labour, which meant fishermen would have to abandon their sole source of income for something they believed was much less certain or profitable. The reports showed that there was little prospect or desire to farm in many settlements, and so the solution to pauperism seemed to be either successful fisheries or able-bodied employment in expanding public works projects.<sup>26</sup>

That the economic fortunes of Newfoundland as well as the prospect of immigration rested solely with the fishery and not agriculture was clear two years later in 1857. It was the successful fisheries that switched political discussions from providing able-bodied poor relief to the need for immigrant labour, and led to the first and only formal government attempt to attract immigrants to Newfoundland. Although the immediate aim was to fulfill a short-term need, some Liberals like Parsons believed that increased public works and resource potential in the interior would lead to future demand for immigrants. In the spring of 1858 merchants, tradesmen, and the Agricultural Society lobbied the government for cheap labour, all complaining that an insufficient supply of manpower was causing inconvenience, financial loss, and significant wage increases. They believed that the only solution was to import immigrant labourers from the United Kingdom.<sup>27</sup> Driven by these financial considerations, the Liberals decided to afford every encouragement to potential immigrants in the way of employment and good wages.<sup>28</sup> Given the temporary nature of the situation, they devised a short-term plan to import a small number of individuals as cheaply and easily as possible. The first step was the approval of £1000 for the “encouragement of emigration,” which was one of the highest miscellaneous expenditures that year.<sup>29</sup> As they would find out, however, procuring immigrants would be a costly and difficult endeavour, primarily because Newfoundland no longer had direct or regular steam communication with Europe and due to the regulations of the Passenger Act.<sup>30</sup>

It was because there was no intent to embark on a long-term immigration plan that the Liberal scheme lacked ingenuity, and what emerged instead was an attempt to revive declining immigration from Ireland by targeting the southeast (which had sent so many people to the island in the past). It was the easiest and cheapest option given that Irish Catholic Liberal members John Kent and Ambrose Shea had familial connections in Waterford and Cork. Kent also brought his experience as one of the several successful early-19th-century Irish-born merchants in the Newfoundland-

26 *JHA* (1855): 26, 121, and A-275, A-282, A-290.

27 *Public Ledger*, 15 and 18 February 1859; *Patriot*, 23 January 1860; *JHA* (1858): A-605-7.

28 *Journal of the Legislative Council of Newfoundland (JLC)* (23 March 1859): 57.

29 This sum had to be spent before 31 December 1858. See *JHA* (20 April 1858): 145, A-132, A-180.

30 The Passenger Act, as with other similar acts, was designed to ensure passenger welfare. Regulations covered everything from the structure of the vessel itself to the individual needs of those on board. Vessels were now required to carry lifeboats, medical supplies, and a surgeon if carrying 100 passengers. After 1847 every ship had to be inspected by Customs before it was allowed to sail. See Taylor, *Distant Magnet*, 111.



Waterford mercantile and passenger trade. In a broader context, the choice made sense because Ireland was in the midst of large-scale emigration caused by the economic and social upheavals of the Great Famine. Kent took the lead by asking relatives James and Robert Kent in Waterford to secure a cheap passenger vessel and a few hundred labourers for the following spring. Despite the large sum the government set aside, however, they were not prepared to cover the cost of passage. As merchants had historically done, workers would be contracted for two summers and a winter and their passage would be deducted from their wages in Newfoundland.<sup>31</sup>

The major obstacle was not finding available men, or even a vessel, but rather the restrictions of the Passenger Act. The Liberals were concerned about their financial outlay since there would be little return on hiring and outfitting a small vessel with all the safety regulations specified under the act. At the Kents' behest, the government boldly petitioned Secretary of the Colonies Henry Labouchere for a relaxation of its provisions. The core of their argument was that it did not apply to Newfoundland's current situation for two reasons. First, the act was designed for long voyages, but the passage from Ireland to the colony took less than three weeks and, second, the plan was to transport a small number of immigrants rather than hundreds. They suggested the curtailing of required passenger comfort and safety requirements, such as ventilation, life boats, and adequate space for passengers, which the Kents deemed unnecessary for a short voyage and which would make it more profitable for smaller vessels bringing immigrants to Newfoundland.<sup>32</sup>

The danger of removing safety requirements seemed lost on the Liberals and Governor Alexander Bannerman, who were all swayed by Kent's financially driven argument; but it was not lost on Labouchere. He replied that safety regulations could not be ignored, nor would the British government assume any indirect responsibility by taking even slight action in the matter. He seemed rather bemused by the request, inquiring as to its motivation given that the number of immigrants to Newfoundland was low and that by the government's own admission the economy could not sustain them. His refusal did not prevent James Kent and John Shea from making further failed attempts in London on the colony's behalf. The emigration commissioners informed James that the act could not be altered without the sanction of Parliament.<sup>33</sup> Knowing there was no chance of this given Labouchere's reaction, the Kents had no choice but to comply with the act.

James Kent bought the *Nancy*, the largest reasonably priced passenger vessel in Waterford, and hired an unknown number of men recommended to him by priests and close acquaintances. The vessel barely passed the inspection by the emigration officer, who informed James that he would not let it sail again after this trip due to improper structural specifications. On 21 April the *Nancy* left port with 75 men, the maximum number the inspector deemed it could carry. The Kents' hassle, expense, and careful vetting were all for nothing, however, because upon arrival in St. John's

31 *JHA* (1858): A-604-5; *JHA* (1859): A-441-2.

32 *JHA* (1858): A-604-5, 608; Great Britain, House of Commons, *Papers Relative to Emigration to North American Colonies*, p. 30, 1857-8 (165) XLI.593.

33 *JHA* (1858): A-605; *JHA* (1859): A-441.

all of the labourers deserted. The Liberals were out quite an expense and could not even recover the passage money. Any further attempt would require increased financial outlay, including the purchase of a new vessel. James warned that there was no way to get around the cost and that offsetting the expense by increasing passage price would not work. He noted that Irish immigrants could leave on both cargo and passenger vessels regularly sailing from Liverpool that took any price they could get.<sup>34</sup>

The failure led to another attempt by the Board of Works in the following weeks. This time the Liberals decided to avoid the Passenger Act entirely by searching on their side of the Atlantic, Boston, for cheap Irish labour. Ironically, this was the city where large numbers of Newfoundland's Irish Catholics had been emigrating since 1840.<sup>35</sup> Perhaps they thought close proximity would encourage some to return for short-term work, and that familial connections might again lower the cost of finding an agent and men. This second attempt resulted in 19 Irishmen from Boston arrived in the summer of 1858 to repair roads and bridges in Burin, St. John's, and Topsail.<sup>36</sup> Although none of these men are known to have been Newfoundlanders, they unfortunately became known for rowdiness and were described as having been "let loose upon the country" when their short contract was finished.<sup>37</sup>

Private companies were also affected by the labour shortage. In 1859 the newly established General Water Company, which was under the presidency of Ambrose Shea and involved leading Protestant merchants and businessmen, needed workers to improve the water supply.<sup>38</sup> In addition to navvies, the company needed skilled and experienced supervisors, engineers, and surveyors and this expertise could not be found in Newfoundland. Although a much larger budget of private funds meant that the directors were not as concerned about paying for passage and wages, again choices were based largely on business and familial connections in the British Isles. Scottish-born merchant Walter Grieve relied on his elder brother, James, as their agent in Greenock to obtain materials and the skilled men, while Shea and Robert Kent obtained labourers from Waterford. Imported labour was quite expensive, and second only in cost to materials.<sup>39</sup>

The need for short-term labourers in the summer of 1858 did not stimulate a concurrent Liberal government discussion about encouraging long-term immigration. This only occurred in early 1859 during a Legislative Council session

34 *JHA* (1859): A-441-2.

35 Edward Chafe, "A New Life on Uncle Sam's Farm: Newfoundlanders in Massachusetts, 1840-59" (MA thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1982), 27, 66-7, 82, 86.

36 *Public Ledger*, 29 June 1858; *Newfoundland Express*, 3 July 1858.

37 *Public Ledger*, 15 February 1859.

38 The directors of the company were a mix of religious and political persuasions, although the majority were Protestant and most were merchants (such as Walter Grieve, Stephen Rendell, and Robert Kent). See *Newfoundland Almanac* (1860): 48; James K. Hiller, "Grieve, Walter," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* (DCB) XI, <http://www.biographi.ca/>; and Melvin Baker, "The Government of St. John's, Newfoundland, 1800-1921" (PhD diss., University of Western Ontario, 1980), 188-9.

39 Hiller, "Grieve, Walter"; *JHA* (First Session 1860): 527, 531; *JHA* (Second Session 1860): A-331, 333; *JHA* (1862): A-456; *JLC* (1861): 78-9; *JLC* (1862): A-no. 23; *Newfoundland Express*, 12 April 1860.

when Liberal John Fox inquired about the government's intent with regard to the remaining several hundred pounds left for such a purpose.<sup>40</sup> The two points of consensus that emerged from the resultant discussion were that immigration should be encouraged and that settlers were required to stimulate Newfoundland's economic progress. Politicians and merchants argued that it was fishermen's apparent disinterest in farming that was slowing the pace of agricultural development. Liberal Philip Duggan emphasized that fishermen would always be tied to the sea and would never contribute to the country's advancement. He and others concluded that "if the country is ever to be cleared and cultivated it must be by the hands of strangers, as the natives of the country naturally take to the sea, either as fishermen or seamen." Attracting immigrants, Duggan believed, was the "only means of preventing [Newfoundland] from becoming a wilderness." What was the point of the Liberal government's expensive road building projects, he asked, if there was nothing to transport?<sup>41</sup>

This broader, Liberal-based theme of progress and economic diversification was also balanced with mercantile interests and the desire for increased economic profitability. Fox, a merchant, was joined by businessmen James J. Rogerson and Edward Morris in voicing their concern about future financial losses in the fishery. Despite its precarious nature, all were optimistic about its expansion potential due to the increased demand in markets, the growth of the Labrador fishery, and the seemingly low number of fishermen listed in the census to fulfill increased future demand. They were concerned, though, with the state of the present industry and hoped that immigrants might increase the size of shore crews, which would improve the low quality of the current product that was adversely affecting prices.<sup>42</sup>

Much of the discussion, however, concerned attracting permanent agricultural settlers, and was realistic, conservative, and empirically driven with regard to the agricultural potential of Newfoundland. The proposed plan was very much like the one Canada pursued to settle the west, notably in that the Newfoundland government would seek only to attract industrious, independent agriculturalists with capital from the United Kingdom who were suited to the specific economic needs of the country.<sup>43</sup> Morris, Rogerson, and Duggan, who were all officers and supporters of the Agricultural Society, were optimistic based on the small advances that had been made across the island in terms of increased livestock and number of farms. Based on government reports, they knew that farming was not conducive in all parts of the colony and advocated two possible courses of action. First, provide the desired settlers with parcels of 200 acres in areas with good soil and established profitable farms, such as on the Southern Shore, or the outskirts of St. John's. Second, encourage pastoral farming in areas where the soil was poor.<sup>44</sup> All urged caution mostly because of the weaker and more volatile nature of the Newfoundland

40 By 1860 the remainder of the sum of £731 was carried forward from the previous two years. See *JHA* (1859): A-234, and *JLC* (1860): A-no. 4.

41 *Public Ledger*, 15 February 1859.

42 *Public Ledger*, 18 February 1859.

43 Kelley and Trebilock, *Making of the Mosaic*, 63-4, 78.

44 *JHA* (1855): 26, 121, A-275, A-282, A-290; *Public Ledger*, 15 and 18 February 1859.

economy. Fox, for instance, argued that assisted emigration schemes would result in the importation of paupers who would become a charge on the public purse, a lesson Canada learned by the end of the 1870s.<sup>45</sup> They also had the benefit of the recent failed experiences, Duggan pointedly reminding them of the unruly Irish labourers from Boston. He suggested that immigrants would be contracted for a lengthy period of time, which might increase the likelihood that they might stay once their contract was fulfilled.<sup>46</sup>

The opposition towards assisted emigration and the necessity of a contract were not the only acknowledgements that Newfoundland would have a difficult time attracting and retaining immigrants. Merchant Nicholas Stabb pointed out that steamers continually arrived in St. John's with large numbers of individuals bound for North America. Australia, Canada, and the United States, Fox noted, were the magnets for emigrants, and drawing them to the colony would require "some very powerful effort."<sup>47</sup> All agreed that success required sufficient inducements, such as a reduction of passage price, plots of free land, and the promise of high wages. Morris added, however, that this would be expensive and would necessitate emigrant agents and a direct link with the British Isles. The single source of dissension was over government expenditure on such a scheme. Stabb reminded them that based on past experience it would be money lost when the immigrants left after a contracted period of time, while Fox and Morris countered that any outlay would be offset by the savings in public works and the increase in the value of Crown land.<sup>48</sup>

Despite sketching out the broad lines of a plan and having identified potential problems, the discussion did not lead to formal action or any extra Liberal expenditure in the following years.<sup>49</sup> The immediate need for labour disappeared in the early 1860s due to successive bad years in the fishery, and the urgent financial concern was increased poor relief spending. In addition, as a political issue immigration was eclipsed by the Confederation campaign.<sup>50</sup> The one exception was in 1863 when it emerged as a way to secure the British government's support for a geological survey of the interior. Writing to the Duke of Newcastle, Governor Alexander Bannerman argued that a survey would reveal the "natural riches" that could sustain thousands of British agricultural immigrants. That same year, one of Parsons's editorials also suggested that if the land was surveyed and connected by roads Newfoundland could accommodate thousands of well-selected emigrants from the British Isles.<sup>51</sup>

45 For Canada the problem prompted legislation in 1879, prohibiting the landing of paupers. See Kelley and Trebilock, *Making of the Mosaic*, 88-90, and *Public Ledger*, 18 February 1859.

46 *Public Ledger*, 15 February 1859.

47 *Public Ledger*, 18 February 1859.

48 Robert MacKinnon, "The Agricultural Fringe of St. John's, 1750-1945," in *Four Centuries and the City: Perspectives on the Historical Geography of St. John's*, ed. Alan G. Macpherson (St. John's: Department of Geography, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 2005), 53, 63; *Public Ledger*, 15 and 18 February 1859.

49 *JHA* (Second Session 1860): A-46; *JLC* (1860): A-no. 4, A-no. 26.

50 E.C. Moulton, "Constitutional Crisis and Civil Strife in Newfoundland, February to November 1861," *Canadian Historical Review* 48, no. 3 (1967): 254-5; O'Flaherty, *Lost Country*, 111.

51 *Patriot*: 30 May 1863, 15 December 1863.

The interest and enthusiasm with which politicians discussed and supported immigration was not mirrored in public discourse, something that Duggan himself noted. Until the first detailed geological survey in 1864, much of the colony was largely unknown. For its part, the press preferred to emphasize what was known up to that point, namely poverty and distress, which seemed more than enough reason to oppose immigration. Sections of the Protestant Conservative press argued that Newfoundland was not able to sustain its current population, much less a larger one. One paper decried even the short-term importation of labourers as an absolute disgrace, since it deprived barely surviving fishermen of the opportunity to earn some extra money. This resentment was evident when the small number of Irish labourers who arrived in the late 1850s caused skirmishes and “the very worst feeling between them [and local residents].”<sup>52</sup> The press took some comfort in knowing that the government and private companies could import as many labourers as they liked, but that they would not stay because of the poor economy and better opportunities elsewhere.<sup>53</sup> The same papers also believed that the Liberal Catholic government’s encouragement of immigration was politically motivated. They argued that it was an effort to increase the declining number of Catholic voters.<sup>54</sup> There was no truth to these claims, which are a clear case of the political fear mongering typical of those papers. Politics in Newfoundland was never solely based on ethno-religious divides, and one of the Catholic politicians indirectly named, Shea, was himself returned to a Protestant district in 1874.<sup>55</sup> The editors ignored the fact that Liberal Catholics were joined by their Protestant merchant counterparts in attracting labourers, as all were bonded together over fears about their bottom line. What made the accusation even more ridiculous was that transient workers were not eligible to vote.<sup>56</sup>

Attracting immigrants to spur agricultural development only re-emerged as an issue in the late 1880s. Again it was forced by circumstance, this time the failure of the landward development plan inaugurated by Charles Bennett’s Conservative government in the early 1870s. As the previous decades had shown, fishermen were not inclined to farm and such an undertaking was even more difficult because it meant they would have to move into the uninhabited interior. Interestingly, the resulting scheme to make fishermen do just that resembled one to court immigrants from abroad as legislation attempted to make settling the interior as easy and attractive as possible. Ministries removed the previously stated obstacles to farming by building more roads, offering fishermen free grants of land, and providing them

52 *Public Ledger*, 18 February 1859, 29 June 1858; *Newfoundland Express*: 3 July 1858, 13 April 1860, 8 February 1861.

53 *Newfoundland Express*, 6 June 1857, 13 April 1860.

54 Chafe argues that the emigrant stream between 1840 and 1859 was dominated by Catholics: between 1857 and 1869 the Catholic population in St. John’s decreased by 2,530, compared to only a slight decrease in the Protestant population. See Chafe, “A New Life on Uncle Sam’s Farm,” 27, 66-7, 82, 86; *Newfoundland Census*, 1857, 1869; and *Newfoundland Express*, 3 July 1858.

55 See Gunn, *Political History of Newfoundland*, and James K. Hiller, “A History of Newfoundland, 1874-1901” (PhD diss., Cambridge University, 1971). For an alternate view, see Lambert, “Far from the Homes of their Fathers.”

56 James K. Hiller, “Shea, Sir Ambrose,” *DCB VIII*, <http://www.biographi.ca/>; Gunn, *Political History of Newfoundland*, 11.

with an adequate supply of livestock and farming implements.<sup>57</sup> During the mid-1880s Robert Thorburn's government intensified efforts to increase agricultural development by providing bonuses for settlers who cleared land for cultivation, establishing agricultural districts, and increasing the number of agricultural roads. Faced with widespread distress and a crisis in the fishery, this course of action was as much to provide fishermen with short-term, able-bodied employment as it was to offer them a means of long-term economic survival.<sup>58</sup>

Opinion was mixed as to the plan's success. Colonial secretaries Maurice Fenelon and Robert Bond remarked that based on acreage cleared, crop production, and livestock numbers the endeavor was somewhat successful.<sup>59</sup> Others, such as E.D. Shea, argued that the improvements did not signify a "great advance in agricultural development."<sup>60</sup> Lawyer and politician James Spearman Winter agreed. He pointed out that farming was still mostly confined to the outskirts of St. John's along with parts of the west coast, and that the majority of fishermen continued to engage in subsistence agriculture. He noted that the large number of farms in the Codroy Valley had been developed by Nova Scotian immigrants of Scottish descent, not the native-born population.<sup>61</sup> It must have been a case of *déjà vu* for some, as politicians argued that the explanation was that fishermen "do not like it [farming]."<sup>62</sup> They reached the same conclusion as their predecessors had 30 years before: in a colony solely reliant on one resource and whose historical development had resulted in a

57 Great Britain, House of Commons, *Emigration. Returns Showing the Names of the Colonial Land and Emigration Commissioners . . .*, p. 8, 1872 (154) XLIII.377; Great Britain, House of Commons, *Report from the Select Committee on Colonisation, Together with the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence, and Appendix*, p. 198, 1890 (354) XII.1; Alexander, "Newfoundland's Traditional Economy," 26; O'Flaherty, *Lost Country*, 111-13.

58 Great Britain, House of Commons, *Papers Relating to Her Majesty's Colonial Possessions, No. 14: Newfoundland, Report on the Blue Book for 1886*, p. 5, 1888 [C.5249-11] LXXII.583; Great Britain, House of Commons, *Colonial Reports, Annual, No. 5: Newfoundland, Annual Report for 1889*, p. 7, 1890-91 [C.6269-4] LV.385.

59 Great Britain, House of Commons, *Papers Relating to Her Majesty's Colonial Possessions, No. 46: Newfoundland, Report on the Blue Book for 1887*, p. 5, 1889 [C.5620-4] LIV.415; Great Britain, House of Commons, *Papers Relating to Her Majesty's Colonial Possessions, No. 87: Newfoundland, Report on the Blue Book for 1888*, pp. 5-6, 1890 [C.5897-17] XLVIII.667; *Colonial Reports, Annual, No. 5 . . .*, p. 7, 1890-91 [C.6269-4] LV.385; Great Britain, House of Commons, *Colonial Reports, Annual, No. 34: Newfoundland, Annual Report for 1890*, p. 11, 1892 [C.6563-18] LV.559; Great Britain, House of Commons, *Colonial Reports, Annual, No. 67: Newfoundland, Annual Report for 1891*, p. 10, 1893-4 [C.6857-17] LX.65; Great Britain, House of Commons, *Colonial Reports, Annual, No. 102: Newfoundland, Annual Report for 1892*, p. 10, 1894 [C.7319] LVI.203.

60 Great Britain, House of Commons, *Papers Relating to Her Majesty's Colonial Possession, Reports for 1879, Session 1881*, p. 5, [C.2829] LXIV.1; Great Britain, House of Commons, *Papers Relating to Her Majesty's Colonial Possessions, Reports for 1880, 1881, and 1882*, p. 74, [C.3642] XLV.1.

61 Crabb notes that Canadians emigrated to Newfoundland in the late 1860s and early 1870s to escape Confederation, but it is not clear if these are the same immigrants. See Crabb, "Agriculture in Newfoundland," 1:63; Great Britain, House of Commons, *Report from the Select Committee on Colonisation, Together . . .*, p. 196, 1890 (354) XII.1; and James K. Hiller, "Winter, Sir James Spearman," *DCB XIV*, <http://www.biographi.ca/>.

62 *Daily News*, 25 May 1899; Great Britain, House of Commons, *Report from the Select Committee on Colonisation, Together . . .*, p. 196, 1890 (354) XII.1.

lack of native knowledge and desire to change, landward development depended on immigrant labour. Winter argued that since all previous efforts to induce the local population to farm had failed, there was no choice but to look elsewhere. He was frustrated that despite every inducement to do so it was “almost impossible to get our people . . . to work upon the land.”<sup>63</sup> Governor Terence O’Brien agreed that “to make agriculturalists of fishermen was an impossibility.”<sup>64</sup> One newspaper defended fishermen by stating that it was unreasonable to think that men who had fished all their lives with no farming skills could “become farmers by magic.” It was no surprise that they preferred to live on the coast and fish, the editor noted, but perhaps experienced immigrant farmers could provide them with the proper skills to encourage them to engage in agriculture.<sup>65</sup>

The paper’s editor was accurate in contending that it should have been no great revelation that fishermen would not spur agricultural development. There was ample empirical evidence since the 1840s to bear this out, yet the economic troubles caused by the fishery and the sheer desperation to diversify seemed to have blinded politicians to this fact. In 1875 Frederick Carter’s government ignored the advice of Canadian scientist and engineer C.H. McLeod, who suggested that only a small number of fishermen would give up fishing to farm and that agricultural development depended on imported labour.<sup>66</sup> McLeod also warned that attracting immigrants to Newfoundland would be difficult due to competition from other destinations. He suggested that the government draft a formal immigration policy and post emigration agents to promote the colony in foreign ports. The main obstacle, as he saw it, was that Newfoundland was not well-known and that it had “no fair name as a back ground from which to work . . . if she would attract emigrants, offer some special inducement, some marked advantage over the attractions being held out all around her . . . then she may be hoped to be sought after.”<sup>67</sup>

It is true that little was known about the colony in the British Isles or elsewhere. Formal information available to potential immigrants was limited to an emigration pamphlet because, unlike other colonies, Newfoundland had no published detailed handbook.<sup>68</sup> Contemporary perceptions were that the island was poverty-stricken

63 Great Britain, House of Commons, *Report from the Select Committee on Colonisation, Together . . .*, p. 56, 1889 (274) X; Great Britain, House of Commons, *Report from the Select Committee on Colonisation, Together . . .*, pp. 196, 199, 1890 (354) XII.1; Great Britain, House of Commons, *Report from the Select Committee on Colonisation, Together . . .*, p. xx, 1890-1(152) XI.571; *JLC*, 1876, A-100.

64 Great Britain, House of Commons, *Colonisation. Copy of the Correspondence from Colonial Governments in Answer to the Memorandum by the Parliamentary Colonisation Committee of 1 May 1888*, p. 3, 1889 (106) (232) (314) LV.27, 43, 65.

65 *Daily News*, 25 May 1899.

66 McLeod filed a report concerning the blocking and survey of timberlands on the Humber and Gander rivers. In 1888 he became a professor at McGill University. Early in his career, after graduating from McGill in 1873, he went to Newfoundland to do work in connection with the railway. See *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Canada*, 3rd ser., 12 (May 1918), 14-15, and *JLC* (1876): A-98, 100.

67 *JLC* (1876): A-98-101.

68 Great Britain, House of Commons, *Report from the Select Committee on Colonisation, Together . . .*, p. 62, 1889 (274) X.1; Great Britain, House of Commons, *Emigration. Report on the Emigrants’ Information Office, for the year ended 31st December 1893. (In continuation of [C.*

and, as one Australian paper put it, the land of “cods, dogs and fogs.”<sup>69</sup> An article in the English periodical *Chambers’s Journal* in early 1877 noted that due to poor fisheries the inhabitants of the island were suffering from starvation and being eaten by polar bears. The author characterized Newfoundland as little more than a fishing station, where the population lived in the abject misery of “a mere hand to mouth existence.”<sup>70</sup> Such negative perceptions were well known, and letters to the St. John’s papers remarked that something should be done to combat them.<sup>71</sup> One letter to the *Telegram* on 15 March 1881 stated that it was no wonder that “when the Norfolk farmers think of emigrating, they will probably be quite willing to sail past the shores of Newfoundland.” This poor reputation probably explains why the British Emigration Office reported that of all the destinations in the British Empire enquiries concerning Newfoundland were the least frequent.<sup>72</sup> Any information that made its way to the British Isles was sent by friends and relatives in the colony who, unlike a paid emigration agent, were less inclined to embellish or bend the truth. That is not to say contemporaries made no attempt to downplay things like the severity of the winter or amount of fog, but they did nothing as extreme as the boosterish claims that Canada’s cold winter air was conducive to agriculture because frost acted like a natural fertilizer.<sup>73</sup> Newfoundlanders were candid about their state of extreme poverty since they no doubt wanted to prevent potential migrants from meeting the same fate.<sup>74</sup>

In the 1880s there were several obstacles that prevented ministries from formulating a formal immigration policy. The railway was the financial and political focus for William Whiteway and Robert Thorburn, who may also have been reticent due to a virulent anti-immigrant campaign that emerged in the press. Anti-foreigner feeling went deep among the residents of St. John’s, and even caused rifts within the Catholic Church.<sup>75</sup> The surge in antipathy towards so-called “aliens” was due to several things, including the prevention of the appointment of Newfoundland’s first native governor, frustration over lack of work in railway construction, and the mass emigration of Newfoundlanders to Canada and the United States.<sup>76</sup> In an effort to get

6887] *February 1893.*), p. 4, 1893-94 (C.7269) LX.535; Great Britain, House of Commons, *Emigration, Report on the Emigrants’ Information Office . . .*, pp. 5-6, 1907 (Cd.3407) LXVII.457; *Colonial Reports, Miscellaneous, No. 4, Canada*, p. 2, 1895 [C.7697] LXX.41.

69 *Western Mail* (Perth), 31 May 1890.

70 “Newfoundland and Labrador,” *Chambers’s Journal of Popular Literature, Science and Arts* 4, no. 161 (29 January 1887): 65-6.

71 *Daily News*, 23 December 1899.

72 *Emigration, Report on the Emigrants’ Information Office for the year ended 31st December 1900*, p. 4, 1901 (Cd.526) XLVI.79; *Emigration, Report on the Emigrants’ Information Office for the year ended 31st December 1906*, pp. 4, 7, 1907 (Cd.3342) LVI.83.

73 Kelley and Trebilock, *Making of the Mosaic*, 83.

74 Great Britain, House of Commons, *Papers Relative to Emigration to North American Colonies*, p. 30, 1857-8 (165) XLI.593.

75 See Lambert, “Far From the Homes of their Fathers,” 168-70.

76 *Evening Telegram*: 27 February, 1 March, and 22 April 1886 as well as 23 January and 31 March 1890; *Times*: 20 July 1890, 8 November 1891; William Des Voeux, *My Colonial Service in British Guiana, St. Lucia, Trinidad, Fiji, Australia, Newfoundland, and Hong Kong, with Interludes* (London: John Murray, 1903), 2:133-6, 148; Hiller, “Shea,” *DCB XIII*, <http://www.biographi.ca/>. Ambrose Shea had been selected by the British government to be the



support for native rights, the *Telegram* suggested the re-establishment of the Natives' Society and dedicated several columns to reprinting reports of an 1845 meeting. However, the discourse was much more extreme than that of the old movement, and headings in papers, for instance, read "Clear out the Foreigner."<sup>77</sup> The Natives' Society had never been anti-immigrant and had welcomed them as members.<sup>78</sup> Moreover, it was some of its founding officers, such as Duggan and Parsons, who had taken the lead in encouraging immigration in the 1840s and 1850s. It would not have been so easy for English-born Whiteway and Scottish-born Thorburn to encourage immigration in a political climate in which many natives blamed their so-called immigrant-led governments for not doing more to prevent outmigration.<sup>79</sup>

Inaction, however, was mainly due to the fact that Whiteway and other contemporaries realized that a formal policy would probably fail. They knew that many of the economic and logistical problems that prevented large-scale colonization in Canada's west also applied to Newfoundland.<sup>80</sup> They argued that the colony had not yet reached a developmental stage capable of sustaining agricultural settlement. Although they believed in future agricultural and mineral potential, many also argued that only in time, and with a completed railway, would Newfoundland be a perfect place for immigrants.<sup>81</sup>

This hesitation might have stymied the only chance at an influx of skilled farmers from the British Isles at the end of the 1880s. As in 1847, Newfoundland was one of the colonies the British government contacted about the state-assisted emigration of unemployed artisans and agricultural labourers from England and Scotland.<sup>82</sup> The responses were not encouraging, as most colonies claimed a lack of land and insufficient land laws, with only Newfoundland and Western Australia expressing interest in the plan.<sup>83</sup> Natal and Canada did not decline, but wanted certain provisos,

next governor of Newfoundland, and would have been the first native to receive this honour, but politicking on the part of other Newfoundlanders led the British to withdraw the appointment out of caution; see Lambert, "Far From the Homes of their Fathers," 379-80.

77 *Evening Telegram*: 11 December 1883, 6 and 14 October 1886, 29 January 1883.

78 See Lambert, "Far From the Homes of their Fathers," ch. 6.

79 James K. Hiller, "Thorburn, Sir Robert," and "Whiteway, Sir William Vance," *DCB VIII*, <http://www.biographi.ca/>; *Evening Telegram*, 19 September 1890.

80 Kelley and Trebilock, *Making of the Mosaic*, 64.

81 Great Britain, House of Commons, *Colonial reports, Annual, No. 34: Newfoundland, Annual Report for 1890*, p. 10, 1892 [C.6563-18] LV.559; Great Britain, House of Commons, *Report from the Select Committee on Colonisation, Together . . .*, pp. 196, 198, 1890 (354) XII.1; Great Britain, House of Commons, *Colonial Reports, Annual, No. 67: Newfoundland, Annual Report for 1891*, p. 11, 1893-4 [C.6857-17] LX.65; Talbot, *Letter to a Friend*, 62-5.

82 Great Britain, House of Commons, *Report from the Select Committee on Colonisation, Together . . .*, pp. 56-7, 62, 1889 (274) X.1.

83 The colonies contacted included Canada, Newfoundland, Cape Natal, New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia, Tasmania, and New Zealand. See Great Britain, House of Commons, *Correspondence from Colonial Governments in Answer to Parliamentary Colonisation Committee's Memorandum, May 1888*, p. 3, 1889 (106) (232) (314) LV.27, and Great Britain, House of Commons, *Report from the Select Committee on Colonisation, Together . . .*, p. xxxvii, 1890-1 (152) XI.571.

such as financial assistance and veto power over potential settlers.<sup>84</sup> With so little support, it seemed to the 17-member House of Commons Select Committee on Colonization that the plan might fail. Nevertheless, in the summer of 1888 members examined informed witnesses from the Colonial Office and the various colonies concerning their suitability for immigrants.<sup>85</sup>

Newfoundland emerged from the initial discussions at the top of the list due to a combination of Governor Terence O'Brien's overly enthusiastic response and the fact that the Colonial Office was left with so few options. O'Brien's reply certainly left no doubt as to Newfoundland's desire and need for immigrants, or the colony's ability to absorb them. He emphasized that the development of Newfoundland hinged on immigrant settlers because previous governments' attempts to encourage fishermen to engage in landward development had failed. He was fairly forthright in his letter concerning the colony's advantages and limitations. O'Brien pointed out that certain areas of the island were suited to cultivation and that there was potential for both pastoral farming and the growing of root crops and certain grains, except wheat. He also cleverly intimated that there was a possible financial advantage for the British government since England would benefit from Newfoundland's cheaper exported goods. The one thing O'Brien could not sidestep, however, was that farming and domestic markets could only be facilitated by the as-yet-unfinished railway.<sup>86</sup>

Based on O'Brien's letter, Permanent Undersecretary for the Colonies Robert Herbert testified that the colony offered "more of a practical opening in that direction than almost any other; it is worth paying attention to, I think, on account of the cheapness with which the land can be reached, and the goodness of the climate."<sup>87</sup> Herbert was aware that Newfoundland could only absorb a small number of immigrants and that settlement would be more difficult due to the inferior quality of the soil and the necessity of clearing vast amounts of land. He did not believe that these were obstacles for the right type of emigrant, such as Scottish crofters who were used to foggy, damp weather and were accustomed to mixing farming and fishing. He was reasonably certain that given their suitability the Newfoundland government would welcome them. Herbert was keenly aware that this suggestion would appeal to the committee given that the British government was already considering the state-assisted emigration of Highland crofters hit by economic distress.<sup>88</sup>

84 Great Britain, House of Commons, *Report from the Select Committee on Colonisation, Together . . .*, pp. 55-6, 1889 (274) X.1; Great Britain, House of Commons, *Colonisation. Copy of the Correspondence from Colonial Governments . . .*, p. 3, 1889 (106) (232) (314) LV. 27, 43, 65; *Report from the Select Committee on Colonisation, Together . . .*, p. xxxvii, 1890-1 (152) XI.571.

85 *Report from the Select Committee on Colonisation, Together . . .*, p. xx, 1890-1 (152) XI.571; *Colonisation. Copy of the Correspondence from Colonial Governments . . .*, pp. 2-3, 1889 (106) (232) (314) LV. 27, 43, 65.

86 *Colonisation. Copy of the Correspondence from Colonial Governments . . .*, pp. 2, 4, 1889 (106) (232) (314) LV. 27, 43, 65.

87 *Report from the Select Committee on Colonisation, Together . . .*, p. 56, 1889 (274) X.1.

88 For crofter emigration, see Eric Richards, *Britannia's Children: Emigration from England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland Since 1600* (London: Hambledon and London, 2004); Jill Wade, "The Gigantic Scheme: Crofter Immigration and Deep-Sea Fisheries Development for British Columbia (1887-1893)," *BC Studies* 3, no. 1(1982): 28-9; and *Report from the Select Committee on Colonisation, Together . . .*, pp. 60, 62-4, 67, 1889 (274) X.1.

Others were not as convinced of Newfoundland's suitability as an immigrant destination. Charles Tupper testified that the colony's agricultural potential and mineral resource-base was limited, and that it was still a poor colony dependent on the fishery. One of Herbert's contemporaries in the Colonial Office, Charles Lucas, echoed the common contemporary doubts in England about Newfoundland's claim of inexhaustible resources.<sup>89</sup> He and others wondered why the colony was so poor if the land and mineral resources were so great. If the land was arable, he stated, then surely it would have been long since settled by locals or immigrants.<sup>90</sup>

Winter sought to address these questions in his testimony. Winter was not a member of Whiteway's government and could not formally speak to the wishes of the ministry. Although he would later lead the Conservatives against Whiteway, his testimony does not appear politically driven. In fact, he was sure that the Newfoundland government would heartily welcome the right type of agriculturalists and might even consider contributing money towards a settlement scheme given that ministries had previously embarked on a similar path to encourage locals to settle the interior. More stringently than O'Brien, Winter reiterated the availability of land in Newfoundland and that the administration was anxious to obtain agricultural settlers because "our own people will not make farmers."<sup>91</sup>

Despite his enthusiasm, Winter was careful to state the limited economic opportunities the colony could offer and the type of immigrant best suited to the current stage of economic and landward development. He was very clear that the colony did not need fishermen, because the fishery had reached its limit and was spurring increased emigration. Interestingly, committee members did not press the issue of emigration with Winter. Winter did hint that emigration was ridding the colony of the deadweight that prevented Newfoundland's development and profitability. He also suggested that one of the reasons he supported immigration was because the colony needed a larger population as opposed to the current scattered one that did not generate enough revenue.<sup>92</sup> Although Winter stressed that the government wanted agriculturalists, he did warn that farming potential was limited to a small portion of the colony. He qualified this remark even further by stating that the large tracts of land suitable for cultivation totalled only a small portion of the island's land mass. He was also reticent about offering an opinion as to the possibilities in the interior since there were only rough estimates and no empirical evidence available. Winter agreed with Herbert that these limitations would not prevent success, pointing to the small number of profitable farms that already existed in Newfoundland, but he suggested that certain caveats had to be kept in mind. He agreed that Highland crofters who could live near the coast and engage in mixed farming were best suited to the island's present condition and

89 *Report from the Select Committee on Colonisation, Together . . .*, p. 104, 1890 (354) XII.1; "Newfoundland and Labrador," 65-6.

90 *Report from the Select Committee on Colonisation, Together . . .*, p. 90, 1889 (274) X.1.

91 *Report from the Select Committee on Colonisation, Together . . .*, pp. 195-6, 197, 199, 1890 (354) XII.1; Ruth Konrad and Robert H. Cuff, "Winter, James Spearman," *ENL* 5:591.

92 Gerhard Bassler points out that this quality exchange of migrants continued into the early 20th century. See Bassler, *Sanctuary Denied*, 44, and *Report from the Select Committee on Colonisation, Together . . .*, pp. 197-8, 1890 (354) XII.1.

would do very well. Winter pointed out that while the government desired to attract a solely agricultural class in the future, it could not presently encourage this because large-scale settlement in the interior depended on the completion of the railway.<sup>93</sup>

Whether or not the committee members were convinced that despite its limitations Newfoundland was indeed a perfect place for crofters remains a mystery because they decided against the entire scheme.<sup>94</sup> It was, perhaps, Newfoundland's only real chance at immigrant settlement. The belief that time and the completion of the railway would facilitate immigration proved to be a fallacy. In the summer of 1899 an agent from the Finland Emigration Society and some of his colleagues spent a week speaking with O'Brien and travelling by train to scout areas for colonization, but they did not deem Newfoundland suitable.<sup>95</sup> Nevertheless, politicians continued to argue that immigrants were needed to spur development because locals would not do it. During the early 20th century Edward Patrick Morris's government was more pro-active than its predecessors in attempts to attract farmers from the British Isles, with Morris himself acting as an unofficial emigrant agent in England. At conferences and through published articles he promoted the island's investment potential, which in a time of New Imperialism dovetailed nicely with his rhetoric emphasizing Newfoundland's essential place within the British Empire.<sup>96</sup> In 1909 his government commissioned a report outlining the possibilities of agricultural development in Newfoundland, and based on favourable findings printed a pamphlet entitled *Free Farms for Thousands in Newfoundland* (which offered free land to British farmers in an effort to draw them away from migrating to western Canada). It stated that the successive failures to stimulate farming were not because it was not possible or profitable; it was simply that Newfoundland's economy was historically based on the fishery and that "it is not easy nowadays to transform these [fishermen] or their descendants in a moment into farmers."<sup>97</sup> This perceived local indifference to interior settlement seemed to persist even after the First World War.<sup>98</sup>

Mark Twain once said that facts are stubborn things. Newfoundland's historical development had indeed produced a population of fishermen tied to the sea. For many 19th-century contemporaries, Newfoundland's historic burden was not justifying having a population at all as Alexander has suggested; rather, it was that the country was burdened with the wrong type of population.<sup>99</sup> Many believed that Newfoundlanders were out of step in the march towards progress, and felt that the colony had no choice but to look elsewhere for industrious individuals to stimulate

93 *Report from the Select Committee on Colonisation, Together . . .*, pp. 195-8, 1890 (354) XII.1.

94 Richards, *Britannia's Children*, 191-2.

95 *Irish Times*, 16 August 1899; *Daily News*, 25 May 1899.

96 "Sir Edward Morris's Visit to London," *Newfoundland Quarterly* 9, no. 2 (October 1909): 8; Sir Edward Morris, "What Newfoundland Offers to Investors," *Newfoundland Quarterly* 14, no. 1 (July 1914): 12, 21, 23.

97 Allyn H. Seymour, *Report of A.H. Seymour on the Possibilities of Agricultural Development in Newfoundland, 1909* (St. John's: Chronicle Print, 1909), 11-3, 24; *Free Farms for Thousands in Newfoundland* (St. John's: Chronicle Job Print, [1910?]), 4.

98 High Commissioner for Newfoundland, Great Britain, *Dominion of Newfoundland and Labrador: Some Information About the Resources of the Ancient Colony* (London: High Commissioner for Newfoundland, 1921), 100.

99 Alexander, "Newfoundland's Traditional Economy," 17.

economic expansion. Yet governments were in a cyclical pattern because the reason why immigrants were needed was also the reason why they would not come: continued dependence on the fishery. A colony once largely fueled by Irish labour had, in 1908, tied for last place with Holland, Portugal, and Central Africa on a worldwide list of Irish emigrant destinations.<sup>100</sup> Many contemporaries must have recognized the irony of the situation. Even as they endeavoured to attract immigrants to diversify and strengthen the country's economy, increasing numbers of Newfoundlanders were emigrating to become the nation-builders of others.

100 Great Britain, House of Commons, *Emigration Statistics of Ireland for the Year 1908*, p. 6, 1909 (Cd.4550) CIII.169.