

Journeys of the Cornish & History of Settlement in North America

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INTRODUCTION

This presentation will look at some journeys of the Cornish and a little of the history of the Cornish settlement in America, especially in Ontario. Much of the material comes from surveys that Toronto Cornish Association members filled in for me in 2007 and from other CAHS members earlier - Americans who came to Ontario first. This will not be a formal history but an impression in photographs, poetry, and words from your ancestors, to evoke the painful and exciting story of a people moving from one continent to another, from one culture to FOUND another, in a very different world.

Your ancestors who left Cornwall were mainly farmers. It is sure you know more of the history of Ontario than I do, and it goes without saying that you have more intense tales from your ancestors than I have. Perhaps I can hope to do justice to both from a Cornish perspective; almost two hundred years after those brave souls risked all to find a better life in the New World.

Even growing up in Cornwall in the mid-20th century, from a very early age I was aware of America. My mother sang "John Brown's Body" and "God Bless America" as she pinned the clothes on the line in a windy Cornish garden, in memory of those, still treasured, who had left. Now we have come full circle and in your return on holidays in Cornwall, in your genealogical excavations of your people, you give to the Cornish a sense of pride just when it is needed, just when the speed of change threatens so much. You probably know more antiquated ways and words than they remember in Cornwall. Your past too resonates with an authenticity, which can contrast with the hanging baskets of flowers on cottage walls and the delightful, but strange palm trees from Australia.

CORNWALL

So let's go back to the starting place of it all - to Cornwall. Charles Causley in a poem entitled "Cornwall" predicts:

"One day, friend and stranger
The granite beast will rise,
Rubbing the salt sea from his hundred eyes
Sleeping no longer"

and Joyce Grenfell in her poem "Cornish Estuary" hears:

"The curlew cry in lonely places
Up the river where dark trees frown
To the water's edge and little fields
Fall steeply down."

How many Cornish farms trace this pattern?

Others left too, besides the farmers: At Port Gaveme, John Caddy a CAHS member from Minnesota sees

"One small boat lies askew on the naked beach,
When this chain was dropped
The huers stood on the bluffs above town
And cried the dance of arriving pilchard shoals
To racing seine boats while women on the shore
Would ready barrows and casks to receive the fish.
Their children's children are gone, the pilchard done."

This one small boat, painted by Alfred Wallis (1935), a Cornish primitive painter had been engaged in the great fishing adventures on the Grand Banks of Newfoundland and Labrador. Have you ever been to N&L and heard Cornish phrases, inflections, customs in Newfie ways?

Also, John Caddy reflects on his mining ancestors' experiences:

"They came to grass at the end of the day
They climbed from the Dark to grass
And carried the Dark up with them."

A considerable percentage of all these people - farmers, fishers, miners, - came here, here to America.

THE GREAT MIGRATION

WHY? For many, but not all, it was poverty, which drove them from their ancestral lands. A.C. Todd who has long informed us in his book "The Cornish Miner in America", and enchanted us with his company, bluntly states:

"For the miner life was nasty, brutish and short with endless physical toil and often marginal poverty, eight hours a day being spent underground except mercifully on Sundays".

Closer to your people in North Cornwall, Parson Hawker of Morwenstowe, 1803-1875, cleric and mystic, agonized:

"They are crushed down my poor people, ground down with a wretched wage."

He wrote "The Song of the Western Men", which we know as "Trelawney", and he sang "The Cornish Emigrants' Song", seeing the emigrants' journeys as a flight from oppression to the freedom of America.

"Oh the eastern winds are blowing
The breezes seem to say
We are going, we are going
To North Americay.
There the merry bees are humming
Around the poor man's hive
Parson Kingdon is not coming
To take away their tithe.
There the yellow com is growing
Free as the King's highway
So we're going' we are going
To North Americay."

Todd, probably a little less under the influence of exotic Victorian thought patterns, carries us a little further on their journey, quietly stating, "politically and socially they were already to some extent Americans even before their ships left Falmouth".

Thomas Tamblyn in a letter to Charles Tamblyn, copied for me by Teudar Tamblyn says, "You will probably be surprised to hear that I have for a considerable time past been thinking that I could do better for my family in Canada than I can in England" He had nine children. He has fifty incisive questions in his letter about conditions in Canada. This gives me a window on how serious conditions were in Cornwall in 1835 for even an educated person, a Customs Officer. Later, in 1902, in a poem called "The Miner in Foreign Parts: California", Mark Guy Pearse, a Methodist minister from Camborne celebrates the miner's arrival, then his miner gazes at California's beauties and thinks of the lost landscapes of Cornwall, his missing lover, and the value exchange between her affection, on the one hand and on the other, wealth.

"The glory of your scenery
Sinks all into the shade
Beside the thought of her I love
My awn sweet maid
How poor a thing it seems to me

To be a millionaire
Beside a kiss from those dear lips
My little maid so fair"

These were people who maybe had never before moved from their, village, like the ancestors of Fern Tinney who bore the same name as the village. Daniel Petherick from Little Petherick left his ancestral lands in 1843 to come and farm in Darlington Township, Durham County. Especially in the farming communities of North Cornwall, there was little of the alternative economy of mining or fishing to disturb settled lives. In the early 19th century when so many of your folk came, the wrench must have been particularly bitter. People like James Passmore who came as a child in 1841 and was proud to be Cornish. Quote: "Don't call me an Englishman, I'm a Cornishman."

ECONOMIC DECLINE

So, while the economy of Cornwall grew in all fields - mining, fanning, fishing - in the 19th century, the population grew too, but so did the poverty. The Napoleonic Wars seriously depleted English resources. The Enclosure Acts injured the poor, and while the land was improved, small farmers and tenant holders were seriously impoverished losing grazing rights, gleaning privileges, firewood sources, to name a few.

Yeoman farmers too left their land, sometimes bringing their stock and farm equipment with them to America. Taxes, tithes, the Corn Laws and then their Repeal, confused a market which had hitherto provided for the needs of the local population. Gradually the vast lands and varied climates of the expanding British Empire impinged on these local markets out-competing what could be produced from the thin and acid soils of North Cornwall. The Hungry Forties affected all.

Where did the pilchards go? These days one is tempted to think of pollution. All that arsenic pouring down the cliffs at Botallack. But go they did and as the fishery declined the fishermen left and others too like Thomas Tamblyn of St. Ives, a customs Inspector, who in 1835 came to Zion, north of Port Hope to farm. There was little in Cornwall whether you were educated or not. Mining endured tenable fluctuations in the 19th century, even as it grew prodigiously. Am I allowed to say, "tin and copper, the minerals from hell"? The names of your mining ancestors are redolent of Cornwall: the Balls, the Tinneys, the Lords came at various times in the 19th and 20th centuries.

These are the people - farmers, miners, fishers - who scraped the money for

the fare, who crowded the quays in Padstow or Falmouth and then endured the voyage of 3000 miles by sea, and sometimes worse, the 1000 miles by river, lake and land up the St. Lawrence and Ottawa rivers, down the Rideau Canal, into Ontario, and some went further on into the heart of the continent.

The places your Cornish ancestors left from were where the wives, mothers, children, and old folks stayed, and they ranged across every parish in Cornwall. In North Cornwall- Little Petherick, St Eval, Lansallos, Pelynt, St. Wenn, Kilkhampton, Lanivet, Morwenstowe, Egloshayle are some of the names which evoke your history.

THE CROSSING - Outward Bound.

An old Padstow sea shanty sings:
"And now my boys we're outward bound
Young girls go a weeping
We're outward bound for Quebec Town
Across the Western Ocean."

Once clear of the Doom Bar at the entrance to Padstow harbour, where the river Camel meets the Western Ocean, the journey becomes really dangerous. The local saying goes:

"From Hartland Point to Padstow Light
Is a watery grave by day or by night"

In 1867 one thousand ships sought refuge in Padstow harbour. Why am I talking about Padstow so much? From 1829 - 1857, a time when many of your ancestors came, of those who sailed from Cornish ports, one third of them sailed from Padstow, one fifth from Falmouth. In particular those leaving North Cornwall obviously made for Padstow.

Writing in 1960 Claude Berry, the Padstow writer, in "Portrait of Cornwall" states with compassion,

"Now there is no more emigration from Padstow, and for this we may be thankful. There were times in the 19th century when our streets were thronged with people from the stricken mining districts of the county, waiting for ships to return to port with timber and then take them to a new life on the prairies or in the mining camps of Canada."

Toronto Cornish members had relatively little knowledge of the sailing of their families in the early 19th century, but some I could attempt to discern from

Shipping Lists of sailings from Padstow matching them to the year of your ancestors' emigration.

We have a good picture of one group who went on to the farmlands of Wisconsin on the 'Voluna'. 'Voluna' was a ship from Padstow which when she sailed in 1846 carried families whom we know because they were Bible Christians. Brother Paul Robins wrote to the Missionary Society with an excellent journal of the voyage. The Humbly, Elvis, Hopers, Heals and Abbots were among those who accompanied him. It is sure that we owe this information to Elizabeth Abbott, CAHS member, unfortunately now deceased. An article about their voyage in the CFHS journal tells of the bushels of flour and potatoes they took; the pounds of ham, beef and suet; 433 eggs from Devon although unfortunately most broke on the way as the barrel was carried on its side. You can pack your eggs upright in salt or bran but lime is preferable. The treacle got upset on the sea voyage.

These were the years when the Irish were sailing in fever ships and dying on arrival in the lazaret houses on Grosse Ile, the Quebec inspection station in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. The Cornish ships had a very different history from those that brought the Irish. They were less prone to ship's fever and other diseases.

In 1847, the worst fever year of about a dozen Cornish boats I found listed at Grosse Ile only one had had anyone die or be quarantined with ship's fever, that was the 'Clio' which had two die on the passage. The ships were often Cornish owned and crewed, and the emigrants might feel better among their own people despite the stringent conditions of a steerage passage.

Another family which went to Wisconsin was the Lean family. The Lean family, farmers from Blisland left in 1847 and 1848 on the 'Clio' from Padstow. Blisland today is a tiny village in a cleft in the hills of Bodmin Moor. Yet the family must have had some resources. John Lean left in 1847 and he obviously sent for his family, Mary and children John, William and Edward who sailed on 18th August 1848 for the farming lands of Wisconsin. My informant is Edward too, Edward Hasselkus, who still lives in Wisconsin.

I found their sailing in a shipping list with the extra information that the captain of the 'Clio' was R. Easthope and she was sailing a week later than anticipated. I find magic in this combination of history and the genealogy of some of the travelers.

The ships too live again-wooden sailing ships. Quote:

"The nine hundred tons 'Clio held the blue riband of the fleet The passage money was not heavy. Including 'head money' payable at Quebec the fare from Padstow was 30 shillings for an adult. .. Passengers had to bring their own provisions..”.

The "Western Times" reported on April 28th, 1832 that the 'Economist' sailed from Padstow last week with 184 emigrants, chiefly respectable farmers and tradesmen for Quebec. The Jose's had two families leave in that year - farmers, probably respectable! The same paper reports the week ending May 22nd, 1841, "The English emigrants from Padstow and Hull are a small and healthy body of settlers, nearly all going to settle in the Home and Newcastle districts".

Particular notice was taken in the papers of the day as to how well financed those leaving were, and to comment on those who were aided to emigrate by the Parish These are YOUR people going from Padstow to Newcastle and Home - who else? In 1841 the Passmores, Williams, Landers, Henwoods sailed, very likely from Padstow.

In 1843 quote: “on the Clio from Padstow were agricultural labourers who were proceeding to join their friends in the Newcastle and Home districts.” The Warne's ancestors left St. Eval for Cobourg on the Clio in 1843, so they must have been on this sailing too.

William Vyvyan, Ray Vyvyan's relation came in 1844 from Little Petherick, near Padstow, to Wisconsin. He was a farmer and butcher. Why did he not come to Ontario? In 1834, ten years earlier, John Vivian, a miller had come from Little Petherick to Oakland, Ontario, both the Vivians and Joses tell me. They have got to be related all these people!

In an Emigration Guide to Ontario, 1880, I found John Blake Sweet of St.Mabyn who went to Elgin in 1854. He was just married, had no "means but his two hands, a good stock of energy”. He laboured for three years which only provided subsistence. Then he rented farms for 18 years and accumulated \$10000. He bought 100 acres in Malahide for \$6400 and is now worth \$12000".

The Quebec ocean passage was shorter and cheaper than the New York one, but thereafter came long river and lake journeys to Ontario. From about 1809 steamers could be taken from Montreal up into the Great Lakes. The journey up the Ottawa River and down the Rideau Canal for fear of American attacks across the St. Lawrence seems a huge diversion to me but it was the route at one time.

Decisions on which way to travel were made in economic terms but also in terms of suggestions by the family. I was really struck by the frequency of the movements of people to where they knew someone who had preceded them: a Cousin Jack, a sweetheart, a husband, a father, a brother.

Unknown to me, also, was the tight nature of Cornish society here in America as Cornish married Cornish. A strong thread which runs through your family records.

After 1858 no emigration ships left Padstow. Steam was taking over from sail. Then, you or your ancestors came by steamers, which were soon providing a faster crossing than the handsome sailing clippers. Few steamers left from Cornish ports, so the emigration journey started with a long (and costly) train ride to Liverpool, Cardiff, Southampton or London. But I hazard a guess, a safer passage.

Yet something walked over my grave when I read in Rex Barratt's small book "The Hey-Day of the Great Atlantic Liners" that an American steamer the 'City of Boston' left Halifax for Liverpool on the 28th January 1870 with 177 on board. Nothing more was ever heard of her.

I am sure some of your folk came on the 'Philadelphia' around the turn of the century. My aunt and uncle did. She had been the 'Paris' which was wrecked on the Manacles, The Lizard, salvaged and rebuilt in Belfast to become the 'Philadelphia'. Marconi traveled on her several times, so the masts were heightened for his transmissions. It was calm weather when the 'Paris' had been wrecked, like the 'Mohegan' six months earlier, on the Lizard, leading to speculation that magnetism of the Cornish rocks had affected their compasses.

It was fun to note that by the mid - twentieth century air travel was taking over from the steamers. In the 1950's and 1960's the Julians, Pellows, Bolithos, Crichton-Harris and Radcliffes came by steamer, while in 1951 Duinker had come by air as did the Gichards and Eastlake in 1975 and the Burkes in 1990.

Perhaps like yours, my mid-20th century Cornwall was pretty much a disintegrating society with so many having left, so few opportunities available and then World War 2, which strengthened our integration into England. Only after WW2 has the Cornish Movement sought to reclaim our history and our true self-identity for us in terms and in ways with which ordinary people can identify such as with music, drama, art, literature and language.

WOMEN

From the information which you have given me it seems that the farmers were more likely to be accompanied by their wives and families than mining families. Perhaps they had more resources than the miners had, where often a young man went alone first. Also no one mentions an 'occupation' for the farming wives. They were well occupied, of course, with family, housekeeping and all the farm chores which have always added to every farm wife's role. Frequently the miners' wives in Michigan were nurses or chose to seek a position as housekeeper. I have few of the women's stories from anyone as in the 19th century the economic clout lay strongly with the men, especially in such a male dominated world as Cornish farming or mining. I did find one bal maiden.

Some women waited to be called overseas from Cornwall and for some the waiting never ended. Some followed overseas only to be faced with accidents, disease, death, or desertion and then remained in America to bring up families on their own. There was little to return to in Cornwall. These were your grandmothers and great grandmothers. And some lived happily ever after. John Crase married his 15-year-old sweetheart in Linden, Wisconsin, and left for California. He returned and they eventually had sixteen children.

Tommi (Toms) O'Hagan's great grandmother had struggles in her life. Jane Knight married Joseph Toms in Cornwall who, quote, "Did a bunk" to south west Wisconsin. Jane found him in Galena Illinois. Another child was born but Joseph took off again to the UP. By the time Jane got to the UP Joseph was gone again. Growing up in Cornwall we occasionally heard of the families abandoned by the father. And on more than one occasion the - now ancient miner returned home to die, nursed by the deserted wife of decades earlier. It happened in the family of my sister-in-law.

More of the wives lived to "Shake the Rag", summoning all for lunch, as in Shake Rag Street in Mineral Point and to raise amazing families. Opportunities never available in Cornwall soon saw families out of the mines, or on land which offered better opportunities than Cornwall, but somewhat less fortunately, out of the tight rural communities that were the mining or farming villages.

John Vivian had come in 1834. His father died in 1839 so his mother followed him in 1840 with six children, his siblings. Coming to Canada must have represented a great opportunity to her. Away from Cornwall, across the Western Ocean land to farm was available. So they came, your ancestors: the Landers,

Jewells, Daveys, the Tamblins, the Iveys, the Pascoes, and others from all over Cornwall to many parts of America but very predominately our sample came to Ontario to clear the bush, build a log shelter but then hopefully to be able to farm land which was richer, with warmer summers to ripen crops than the harsh granite and shales of North Cornwall.

Social conditions were sometimes easier too. The tithes of the Church, the taxes, the rents, were often less demanding than in England. The old social order could be escaped from too. I have skated over some of the more dramatic events of Cornish lives and said nothing about the real, meaningful parts of our existence. Cornish food - pasties to forever. The music, dance, poetry, literature, and art are now alive and flourishing .Cornish culture has been dragged back from the edge of a slide into complete assimilation into the broader English, Anglo-Saxon culture -a battle which Celtic Cornwall has been fighting for over a thousand years.

For the future we still have, both in Cornwall and here in America, yet to save ourselves from predatory 21st century capitalism, which seeks to homogenize everything.

RELIGION

Religion to the Cornish was more fun. With Charles Wesley's lead they switched allegiance to the Methodist Church from the tight Anglicanism of the Church of England, the church of the landowners, the bosses and the emerging elites. Melodic hymns, stirring preachers, tight fellowship gave much to a people needing much. Cornish faithfulness to Methodism is no better illustrated than in the Keweenaw Central Church, erected by Cornish copper miners within a few short years of the opening of Central Mine and township in 1868, still stands only because it has been so cared for by the descendants of those who built the chapel, the town, the mine and the economy. Worshipped in for only 34 years, for 100 years more it has stood and rung with the peels of " Crown Him, Crown Him" once a year ever since. Most of your families were Methodists too.

Some ancestors became Methodist ministers. Charles Henwood a farmer from St. Neot and his wife in the 1840's both became Bible Christian lay preachers. Almost one hundred years later Alfred Jenkin's father arrived as an apprentice wheelwright to become a Methodist minister. Len Snell's father came in 1912 as an Anglican missionary. Much social support came from the Church, and from kith and kin.

Medical help particularly at the times of horrendous mine accidents and the

contagious diseases of the 19th century like cholera and typhoid came from a fund which miners paid in to. I do not know what provisions the farmers made. Generally the Cornish did not embrace Unions believing that they had their own way out of problems. And starting fairly high on the socioeconomic scale here in America, they often could survive quite well. With the advantages of language(English) and a marketable skill (hard rock mining), many soon made it to an even better social position. The Cornish farming population followed a similar pattern of self-reliance, with help from family, friends and Church.

To conclude I have two short stories which came my way and impressed me. When we were in Ely for the Gathering in 1997, we heard of Elisha Morcom who in 1884 had led 350 miners and their families, most of whom were Cornish, 400 miles across the wilds of northern Minnesota to start a mine. By horse and sleigh and on foot they finally reached Sudan, near Tower, Minnesota where they opened iron mines. 400 miles through the snow hardly seems possible, from Duluth to Ely, even today that area is not much populated.

Farboden Towan Blystra, the bardic baritone, also known as Peter Julian, from Newquay had his family adventure in America too. His grandfather, Adolphus Julian left, probably from Liverpool, in 1907 and was never heard of again till his gold watch and a notice of his death arrived at the family home in Cornwall some years later. He had taken the family finances with him, 300 pounds sterling. Quote from Peter, "Nothing has ever turned up to indicate his demise". Peter's father was eight years old when his father left for Canada, leaving the mother with him and ten other siblings to raise. She died of T.B. four years later in 1911. At the time I was recounting this in Calumet was when Peter succumbed to the injuries from his motorcycle accident.

The Cornish were by all accounts skilled, determined, not to say bloody-minded. They threw life's energy into surviving in a new land that they helped to mold as they worked and strived, more particularly to see that their children and grandchildren need not go down the mine. Here on the good soils of Southern Ontario, as well as those of Wisconsin, they joined Germans, Ukrainians and Italians to produce 'the rich crops we grow' in Ontario". They participated in building a new society even while they remembered they were Cornish, a legacy which we, their descendants, carry into the future.