

The Toronto Cornish Association (TCA) ¹

The Early Years

John Webb, March 2016

The history of the TCA stretches over 150 years; first established for a few years in the 1800's, then reformed during the first half of the 20th century and finally, re-established in the 1990's. This is the story of the Early Years.

Our story is but a small part of the story of the great migration of 250,000 people who left Cornwall and moved to every part of the world between the years of 1815 and 1915. This story is wonderfully described in the book "The Cornish Overseas", by Philip Payton, a specialist on the history of Cornish emigration from the University of Exeter. Although the book is particularly aimed at the worldwide emigration of Cornish miners, it does help to explain some of the culture and conditions in Cornwall during the 1800's.

While he found that there were multiple reasons for moving, essentially Cornwall had an *Island Mentality and a Culture of Mobility*. One specific quote from the book captures this view. A young St Just girl was asked if she had been to Land's End; the girl replied, "*Ah no, we St Just people don't travel much, only to South Africa*".

The Great Migration took place between 1815, after the end of the Napoleonic War, and 1915 at the start of WW1. 250,000 Cornish emigrated overseas, with a similar number moving to other parts of the British Isles. Indeed, from the 1860's, 20% of the male population emigrated each decade.

There were a number of key reasons why emigration was such a popular option:

- The end of the Napoleonic War led to high unemployment as the soldiers returned
- There was the potato famine in 1840's in the south west and the high price of corn caused famine
- Cornish and Devon copper and tin reserves were largely depleted by 1870
- Discovery and development of new reserves of copper, gold, tin, lead and diamonds around the world, lead to 'rushes'
- A skilled labour force was needed in these emerging new markets

¹ Although the 1873 newspaper notice identified the organization as the Toronto Cornish Society, for consistency, its latter identity as the Toronto Cornish Association (TCA) has been used throughout this Trilogy.

- The rise of the Methodist church in south west England urged ‘self-improvement’ and encouraged emigration

The book notes that with the foundation of the Australian colonies in the 1830s and the opening up of the American continent, a well-orchestrated campaign of recruitment for miners was initiated in the County. Agents were appointed initially by both the colonies and the mining companies to recruit suitable employees from the Cornish mines. Meetings and lectures were held at the principle towns proclaiming the virtues and prospects of the new ventures, and the flow of emigrants started. When combined with the failure of the potato crop in 1840 and the hardship this incurred, the flow became a veritable torrent.

In summary, the Cornish always had been aware of international job opportunities and wage differentials, and Cornwall became a clearing house for news and advice from the rapidly growing Cornish communities abroad and in other parts of Britain.

Padstow was the third most important departure port for Canada after Liverpool and London. It was a major player in the trade between Cornwall and Maritime Canada, with emigrants’ ships sailing for Quebec or Prince Edward Island and returning two or three months later laden with North American timber. Between 1831 and 1860, 6200 people sailed from Padstow to Quebec, although numbers are difficult to confirm as there were no formal passenger lists until the 1860’s

One positive fact concerned the statistics on transit mortality during that period. From Cork, Ireland, mortality averaged 18.73% while mortality from Padstow was 0.22%. One possible answer for the staggering difference in mortality rates might be a combination of the seaworthiness of the Cornish fleet, the state of health of the Cornish migrant and the fact that the Cornish, being a maritime culture, were more prepared for the journey ahead.

Sadly, for Padstow and her sailing ships, the steamships arrived in the 1850s. That, plus the difficulty of crossing the Doom Bar, was the end for Padstow and gradually the old sailing ships disappeared. In 1863, 45 per cent of the immigrants travelled in steamships from Liverpool; in 1866 this had increased to 81 per cent and in 1870 the number of immigrants using sailing vessels was practically negligible.

But why Toronto? First, a quick summary. Toronto was originally controlled by the “Family Compact”, that is, the Anglican friends of John Graves Simcoe.

They held power until the Reform movement of the 1830/40's, and the rise of the Protestant majority, particularly the Scots and Irish Presbyterian.

This Presbyterian culture was a major influence on the characteristics of Toronto. As an example, for five years in the mid 1880's, municipal politics were convulsed over the issue of whether streetcars should be allowed to operate on a Sunday. A visitor commented at the time:

“Sunday in Toronto is as melancholy and suicidal sort of day as Puritan principles can make it.”

But in the 1870's, Toronto was also known as “The Industrializing City” with 497 industries within its borders. That meant jobs, jobs and jobs. Toronto's population in 1870 was 55,000 with 95% British stock, although 50% were Canadian born. This heritage was clearly noted in the Ward designations. The earliest Toronto neighbourhoods were the five municipal wards named for the patron saints of the four nations of the British Isles; St. George, St. Andrew, St. Patrick, and St. David, along with St. Lawrence, who was a patron saint of Canada. By 1891, when the original ward system was scrapped, there were 9 wards, the original 5 plus St. John's, St. Stephen's, St. Thomas and St. James.

As a corroboration of this situation, the book “Ignored but not Forgotten: Canada's English Immigrants” by Lucille H. Campey explained why the English do not hold a high place in Canada's history. It seems that the English immigrants tended to seek others from their County, not their Country, and so, although they were the major source of immigration to Canada for 150 years, the English are rarely listed as one of the hyphenated Canadians. Support for all these new arrivals was abundantly available as Toronto had numerous associations, including St George Society, St Andrews Society, St Patrick's Society, plus, Sons of England Society, and County societies, such as Yorkshire, Devon, etc. and finally Cornwall.

There was one other organization that had a major influence on Toronto itself and the Cornish immigrants to the City; the Orange Order. One impact of this organization was to lead to the situation where Toronto at that time was known as “The Belfast of Canada”.

Although Irish in origin and perceived in the early years as an immigrant rabble associated with riot and community strife, the Orange Order attracted English, Scots and Canadians to its ranks. Those with the belief in Empire, the Queen, and the Protestant religion, that is, to “keep Canada British and Protestant”. It had

advanced its image with the Canadian Protestant majority by the 1870's and then dominated Ontario politics until the 1950's.

Its membership was an inclusive range of occupational and social classes together with a hierarchy of political leaders at local, provincial and national levels. It was a major player with decades of continuous power and influence. Virtually all Toronto mayors were Orangemen as well as Ontario premiers and Canadian Prime ministers, right up to John Diefenbaker.



A proposal to establish a Toronto Cornish Association was first announced in the Toronto Globe of 2nd September 1873. The listed objectives for the association were:

- to encourage mutual goodwill between natives of Cornwall,
- to be a benevolent institution, having special regard to Cornish emigrants arriving in Toronto,
- plus “a means for inducing many natives of that sturdy shire to leave home for Canada”

Although the announcement was buried in the “City News” column and despite the competition for world news, the meeting was well attended as was later

reported in the Royal Cornwall Gazette of Truro. Included in this report, published on 20th September 1873, and copied below, was a list of the participants along with their home towns.

Cornishmen at Toronto

We learn from the Toronto Globe that a large meeting of Cornishmen was held at Whale's Hotel Toronto, on the evening of the 2nd September 1873, for the purpose of forming a society for friendly and benevolent purposes. The following Cornishmen were present –

Messrs :

Charles MITCHELL, Bodmin.

Henry A. WILLIAMS, Bodmin.

Capt. WILLIAMS, Bodmin

TREBILCOCK, Bodmin.

Jos. HOLMAN, Camborne.

Wm. KINSMAN, Ottran. (Otterham)

Daniel KINSMAN, Ottran. (Otterham)

Dr. BERRYMAN, Penzance.

Peter ROBERTS, Penzance.

Wm. TRENWITH, Redruth.

F. FLOYD, Callington.

A. WATTS, Hayle.

J. WATTS, Hayle.

John WATTS, Hayle.

J. Russell PASCOE, Hayle.

John JOSE, Lizard

Samuel JOY, Probus.

D. WHALE, St Austell.

W. SMITH, St Austell.

BENNETT, St. Austell.

Thos. FRANCIS, St Austell.

Geo. THOMAS, Truro.

A. E. PAUL, Truro.

Dr. MAY, Truro.

Thomas HORKNIS, Truro.

W. H. HICK, Tywardreath

Daniel HICK, Tywardreath.

TAYLOR, Tywardreath

J. DARLINGTON, Tywardreath.

With this information, and using the Ancestry websites, enough material was made available to understand *who, what and when*, and perhaps a guess as to the *why*.

First, the Cornish immigrants to Toronto had many things in common:

- They had arrived over the decades from the 1840's to the 1870's. They all came as family groups, either two brothers, or parents and children. Family members often joined them later.
- Their transportation appears to be a combination of self-financing and/or assisted passage. There was no evidence that any were paupers with their transportation funded by the local parish under the Poor Law regulations.
- For anybody settling in Toronto, their background had to be a trade or a profession. The records indicate that all of the emigrant families were either from established families in Cornwall, or already had the skills needed to

prosper in Toronto. Miners or farmers settled elsewhere.² The Toronto Cornish included doctors, clerks, accountants, booksellers, shoemaker, blacksmith, carpenter, watch maker, general merchant, butcher, mining engineer and an insurance agent. One particular family, the Watts, had brought with them a variety of the skills obtained in the foundries and shipyards of Hayle.

- Their religion was predominately Wesleyan Methodist. Although Methodists were never a majority of Anglophone Canadians or even Torontonians, their political and social influence in southern Ontario generally and Toronto in particular, earned Toronto its longstanding semi-facetious sobriquet "the Methodist Rome" and the Metropolitan Methodist Church in Toronto that of "the Cathedral of Methodism." The Methodist Church at that time had many notable benefactors such as the Eaton and Massey families. The Methodists were also the sponsor of Victoria College at the University of Toronto. Another Methodist was Egerton Ryerson, after whom Ryerson University bears his name.

The founders of the TCA were all well established in the community by 1873.

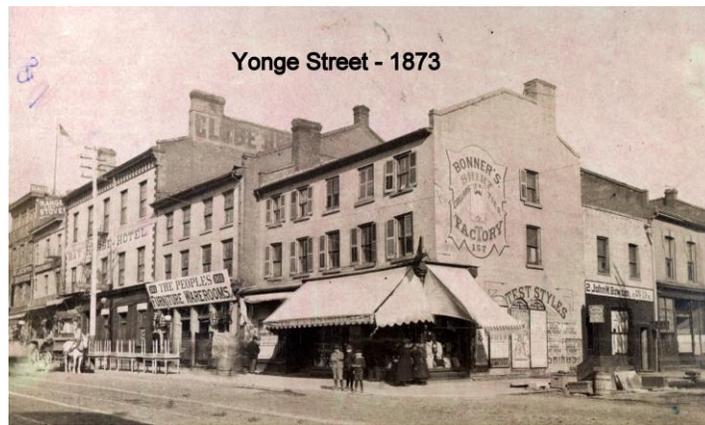
- Samuel Passmore May, age 45, an educator, who had arrived in Canada in 1853 was elected President.
- Charles Valence Berryman, age 43, a physician, who had arrived in Canada in 1852 was elected Vice-President.
- James Bennett, age 50, a civil servant, who had arrived in Canada in 1845 was elected Treasurer
- George Thomas, age 48, also a civil servant, who had arrived in Canada in 1851 was elected Secretary

Although the Berryman and Thomas families had been neighbours in Cornwall, there was no other similar links between the four families prior to their arrival in Canada. However, numerous links and connections had been established since their arrival in Toronto.

TCA activities were also reported in the Globe newspaper from 1873 to 1875. These activities included monthly meetings, a soiree and a summer picnic with the meetings held either at the Temperance Hall on Temperance Street or at a

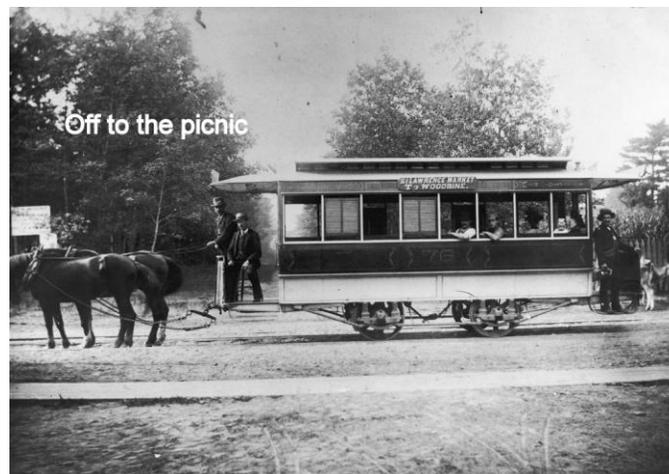
² *Padstow was also the departure port for many of the Bible Christians. However, these emigrants were mostly farmers or agricultural workers and they settled on the shores of Lake Ontario or Lake Huron, rather than in Toronto.*

Yonge Street hotel owned by fellow Cornishman Dennis Whale. It is not clear as to the position taken by the TCA regarding “temperance”.



Topics for the meetings included the election of officers, the approval of by-laws, readings and recitations and the planning of benevolent events and the summer picnic. A Soiree was held at the Temperance Hall, where “*readings, recitation in Cornish, songs, both solo and a quartet, plus a short address on Cornwall, its features, climatology, and productions, and its inhabitants with their peculiar customs. This all wound up with a dance and supper*”.

One other event of note was the Summer Picnic, held at West Lodge Gardens at Queen and Lansdowne, tickets were 25 cents. Travel to the picnic was by the horse-drawn Queen Street trolley, which took 25 minutes from the St Lawrence Hall to the picnic spot and service was every 15 minutes. West Lodge was the home of the late Col. O’Hara who had emigrated from Ireland and named his house after his estate in Ireland. He died in 1874, and the grounds were thereafter used by a number of organizations for summer picnics.



Many, if not all of the Cornish immigrants, were members of the Wesleyan Church, the St George Society and the Orange Order. Through these contacts, they were ensured of a fast track to key positions of employment, for instance, in the waterworks, the Inland Revenue, and other positions in the City administration. With such support, more than a few of the early Cornish emigrants achieved positions of distinction, as noted in the following examples:

- Charles Valence Berryman was the son of a master mason in Penzance, but from an extended family of Physicians. He emigrated in 1852, and married in Ontario in 1859. He was a graduate and lecturer at Victoria College, a physician, and a Council member of the College of Physicians and Surgeons and the Royal College of Dental Surgeons, and Dean of the Yorkville Medical College. He was active in the incorporation of Yorkville in 1853, was a Councillor and Reeve during 1862-67 period and a practicing doctor. Berryman Street in Yorkville is named after him.
- Joseph Holman was one of two families of Holman's, who along with their wives and children had emigrated from Camborne in the 1850's. Their parents joined them later and they established a thriving practice of blacksmiths.
- Almond E Paull emigrated from Truro in 1870 with his wife and children. He established an architectural practice and his activity in the Methodist movement brought him several commissions for churches in the Toronto area. His interest in the arts led to his election as an Associate in the Royal Canadian Academy in 1884 and he was one of the founding members of the Ontario Association of Architects. One of his buildings was the High Park Methodist Church in the Junction, where the Methodists also had a role in having the sale of alcohol banned in the area for nearly a century
- James Bennett was the son of a miner from St Austell and had emigrated in the mid 1840's. He married Mary Ann Sheridan, born in Ireland, probably in Lower Canada before 1863. While there are no specific records of his early life in Canada, he was very active in the Militia, the Orange Order and the Temperance League while holding the position of Deputy Collector for the Department of Inland Revenue in Toronto. In particular:
 - As Ensign James Bennett of the Queens Own Rifles, he took part in the Battle of Ridgeway in 1866. Promotion followed, and by 1873, he was known as Major James Bennett.
 - He served as the Orange Lodge District Master of Toronto in 1868, moved up to be Grand Master of the Orange Lodge of Ontario West from 1881–1884 and finally as VP of the Imperial Council of the British Empire.

- He sat on Toronto City Council in 1863 and 1864 as a councilman from St. Georges Ward.
- Samuel Passmore May was the son of a saddler from Truro with the family name of May Passmore. He had been privately educated and obtained a qualification as an MD, although in Natural History and Taxidermy. He emigrated in the mid 1850's with his wife, family and parents. During the voyage, young Samuel and his father Samuel, must have agreed upon a change in names to avoid confusion. Young Samuel became Samuel Passmore May. He went on to study at Victoria College under C.V. Berryman for his medical degree and later joined the Department of Education with Egerton Ryerson. Along with James Bennett, he took part in the Battle of Ridgeway in 1866 with the position of Assistant Surgeon, a position he held from 1866-73. He had 20 children, including one son he named "Egerton", and it will be interesting to see if any of his extended family played a role in the next stage of the TCA.



So those are the facts. The timing of the establishment announcement is a puzzle, and there was no evidence that the formation of Canada in 1867 had any influence.

But, as noted in "The Cornish Overseas", similar Cornish Associations were springing up around the Globe, starting as self-help groups and the wish to maintain a separate identity, but also to act as a pressure group to win specific advantages for the settlers. However, unlike the mining families in Australia, there

is no evidence that the members of the Toronto Cornish Association of the 1870's acted as a pressure group.

The records do not answer why this first formation of the TCA had such a short lifespan, 1873-75, after which there was no reports in the Toronto papers. Nor do they answer why the TCA went into abeyance for 30 years before its next resurrection; or how well they met their objectives, particularly the encouragement of further Cornish emigration to Toronto.