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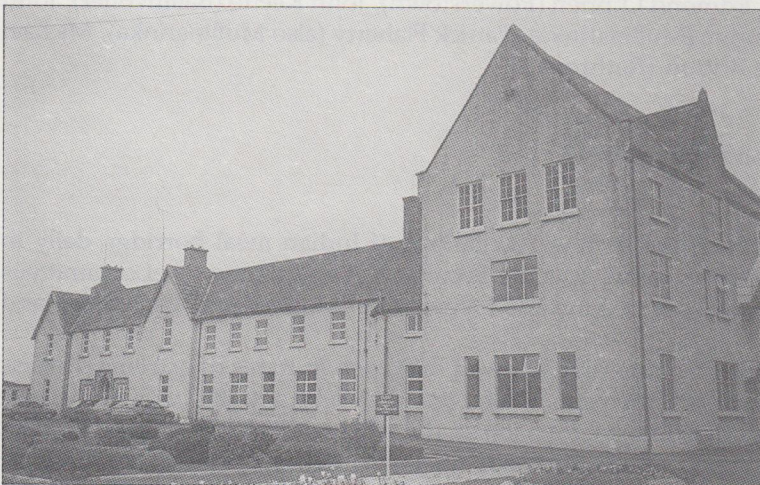
# Emigration from Thurles Workhouse: 1848-1858

By Chris O'Mahony

Thurles Union's awakening to the potential in emigration for relief of the ratepayer dated from 1848 and the scheme to send 4,000 female orphans from Irish workhouses to Australia as part of a larger scheme for the redress of the balance between the sexes there. The scheme was carried out over two years, participating Unions being invited to send one group in 1848-49 and another in 1849-50.

In the first year, Thurles contributed 30 girls. However, the experience would not seem to have been a happy one. Thurles did not participate in the second phase and, despite enabling legislation to borrow money for emigration purposes, sent no one anywhere again until 1852.

In the early 1850s many Unions chose to initiate a big clear-out of inmates in an effort to get back to normal after the overcrowding of the famine years. Thus Ennistymon and Kilrush Unions each emigrated over 300 inmates to Quebec in 1851. Nenagh followed their example with almost 400 in 1852, and Limerick sent some 400 in 1854.



*The Hospital of the Assumption, which housed Thurles Workhouse in the 19th century.*

Not so Thurles, whose workhouse population declined steadily from 1850. It had no clear-out, no big decision to indulge in emigration to solve its problems. It just quietly started to respond to the requests of individuals for help to emigrate, as other Unions had been doing for some time.

In this paper I shall set down the emigration statistics which the Board of Guardians returned to the Commissioners in Dublin every year; the year ran from April to March. I shall then try to identify the people behind the figures, and a few more who do not appear in them, using the Minute Books of the Board of Guardians, the complete set of which is held at the County Library, Thurles. The terms "adult male" and "adult female" are retained, as it is difficult to call 15-year-olds men or women.

Frequently it will be found that the number mentioned in the Minute Book does not tally with the statistical return. This does not mean that the returns were wrong. There were various reasons



(which I shall explain) why a person emigrating might not have qualified for inclusion in those returns, and some of those approved to go were known to have changed their minds at the last minute.

## 1852-1853

**New South Wales** 1 adult male, 2 adult females and 1 child  
**New York** 5 adult males, 3 adult females and 2 children

### Australia

**Miss Margaret Creagh** had been helping in the wards of the workhouse for 11 months when on 31 August 1852 she informed the guardians that she had an opportunity to go to New South Wales. She was given £3 "for her services" and left. Margaret's emigration was not included in the official returns; she was not an inmate who was helped from the rates, but rather a worker paid off and allowed to take up an opportunity.

Those referred to in the above statistics were the Ryan family. John Ryan had been transported to Australia at some previous date, a fact which resulted in his wife and three children being forced into the workhouse. A surviving fragment of the Indoor Register, covering admissions from November 1849 to February 1850, shows that **Mary Ryan** (48) and her three children — **Michael** (14), **Anne** (12), and **Bridget** (10), all from Gurtena (now Gurteeny) in Borrisoleigh District Electoral Division (DED), were admitted to Thurles workhouse in February 1850.

Two-and-a-half years later all the children had aged four years. Michael and Anne thus became "adults" for the purposes of the statistical returns. A free passage to Australia was secured for this family as dependents of a convict. The Guardians were informed of this towards the end of September 1852. They voted £1 to help get them to Dublin, and took care of the clothing requirements for the three-month voyage.

The females were fitted out with 2 female suits, 12 shifts, 4 flannel petticoats, 12 pairs of stockings, 4 pairs of shoes, 4 gowns, 2 pairs of sheets and 3 towels. The male got 6 shirts, 6 pairs of stockings, 2 pairs of shoes, 2 suits, 1 pair of sheets and 3 towels.

Records of assisted passages to Sydney show that the Ryan family travelled on the *Blundell*, which arrived in Sydney on 5 May, 1853. They also show that the mother was now 58 and had taken along daughter May (aged 23) as well as the three children mentioned above. The latter three retained the same ages they gave when applying, a usual feature of assisted emigration even when the time-lag between application and emigration is longer than it was in this instance.

### New York

One of the first emigrants to America noted in the Minutes was not an inmate either. She was **Johanna Farrell**, the assistant school mistress, who gave a month's notice in May 1852 that she was going to America. In May too clothes were ordered for **Patrick** and **Mary Dunne**, Union at Large, as friends in America had paid their passage thither.

At the end of August **William** (20) and **Judy** (16) **Dwyer** of Templemore Electoral District (ED) were helped to go to New York for the same reason. So were the two **Davern** children — **Mary Anne** (6) and **James** (4) of Thurles. In January 1853 five members of the Byrne family from Thurles ED — Margaret (20), James (19), Michael (18), Laurence (17), and Bridget (15) — received their passages to the promised land.





Last to go was **James Healy** (15) of Moyaliff ED in February 1853. Apparently, therefore, 12 inmates went to America rather than the 10 suggested by the statistical return.

#### 1853-1854

**New York**     4 children  
**Australia**     1 adult female

##### **Australia**

The young woman who went to Australia was **Ellen Ardagh** (21) of Thurles ED. In January 1853 Ellen asked for clothes to go to Australia. She was refused as there was no evidence that she had received her passage to that country. However, in October she finally produced the evidence and the Guardians sanctioned £1.50 for her in November.

Two other girls went to Australia too, but were not included in the statistics as they had not been helped from Union funds. **Mary** (18) and **Anne** (16) **Darmody** had spent five years in the workhouse when in February 1854 they received their passage to Australia from an uncle there.

The Guardians voted a sum not to exceed £7 to fit them out; the money was to be charged to Glenkeen ED. The guardians representing Glenkeen objected to this. The commissioners in Dublin duly investigated the case, but the two girls had meanwhile left the workhouse and gone on their way, and so did not qualify to be mentioned in the statistics.

##### **New York**

All four children in this case can be identified. The statistics are sometimes the only evidence that they were under 15 years of age. First to go was **Honora Maher** of Moyne ED; approval was granted in May 1853.

The benevolent Joshua Lyster of Thurles was responsible for helping two Kavanagh children. In May he paid the passage of **Michael** (14); in September he presented **Margaret Kavanagh** (9) with "a suit of clothes and ticken to make a bed", and sent her to her father in America.

Her mother was dead and she had spent five years in the workhouse. The record does not say whether or not these two Kavanaghs were related to one another. The fourth child was **Mary Ryan**; in her case her grandmother had paid the fare.

##### **England**

England never appears in the statistical returns; it was forbidden to use money from the emigration account to send anyone to England. That did not prevent people going to England, of course; nor did it prevent the Guardians from helping them to do so! It merely meant that they had to be helped, if at all, from the normal clothing account used for people leaving the workhouse on securing employment locally. Where they went once they had left was their own business! It was in this way that, on 14 March 1854, Mary Moloughney (12) was enabled to join her mother in England. She had been five years in the workhouse.

#### 1854-1855

**Quebec**     28 adult females, 4 children  
**New York**     1 child

##### **New York**

The child who went to New York was **Mary Anne Shaw** of Thurles ED. In April 1854 she received





£4 to help her emigrate to America. The Guardians clothed her and made up what she lacked for the passage. It took them until September to do so.

### Quebec

Quebec was a fairly common destination for emigrants from many Unions. For Thurles, however, this was a first, so the event was planned with great care and recorded in detail.

The subject of emigration to Canada was first brought up at a meeting in March 1854, apparently on the initiative of the Poor Law Inspector, Mr. Lynch. He had arranged that the Poor Law Commissioners would pay a grant of £196.16.00 to emigrate a group of 32 people. Any costs over and above that would have to be shared by the DEDs from which the emigrants came. A committee of seven Guardians was appointed to oversee all the arrangements with the help of Mr. Fogarty, the Clerk, and Thomas Ryan, Master of the Workhouse.

Messrs. Spaight of Limerick were chosen as the carriers. Their terms were reasonable, and their record of care for the paupers on previous occasions (on the recommendation of Nenagh Union) was good. Francis Spaight's terms were to carry 28 adults and 4 children on the *Energy* (leaving Limerick on 18 April) at £4.10.00 per adult and £2.15.00 per child.

In addition, extra rations would be provided — 2 lbs of oat meal, 4 oz of butter, 4 oz of sugar weekly per person, as well as bedding and cooking utensils. To this the guardians added 6 lbs of bacon per person. The budget also allowed for £30 "landing money", to be sent to the emigration agent in Quebec to provide transport on the other side to their eventual destinations in Canada.

The Thurles Guardians showed an unusual amount of care for the health and well-being of their charges on this occasion. They even sent the workhouse medical officer, Dr George Bradshaw, to inspect the ship on 17 April. He reported that the ship, though small, and capable of taking only 105 people in all (including the crew), had an excellent record, had lately been completely overhauled and was free of cholera or any other contagious diseases.

The thirty-two people who made up this group were:

Sisters **Anne** (20) and **Ellen** (16) **Hickey**; **Biddy Kelly** (45), with her children **Johanna** (15), **Edmond** (12) and **Philip** (10); **Betty Hayden** (40), with her two daughters **Mary** (20) and **Margaret** (12); **Judy Cormack** (17); **Nancy Ryan** (15); **Mary Fogarty** (22); **Anne Cull** (19); **Ellen Skid** (16); **Catherine Mihan** (18); the **Holland** sisters **Mary** (17) and **Winny** (15); **Mary Quinn** (18); **Eliza Purcell** (17); **Sally Ryan** (15); **Judy Ryan** (20); **Margaret Quirke** (36) with her daughters **Eliza** (15) and **Ellen** (12); the **Higgins** sisters **Judy** (18) and **Mary** (16); **Mary Anne Ryan** (15); **Mary Mockler** (20); **Ellen Collins** (21); **Anne Bourke** (16); and the **Hayes** sisters **Margaret** (18) and **Bridget** (16).

The Union Minute Book does not specify which District Electoral Divisions each of these people came from. However, from the way the Union's share of the cost was apportioned between the three DEDs in question, it is clear that most of the girls were from Thurles DED; it was charged with £27 of the £35 total. Moyalliffe paid £4.10.0 and Glenkeen £3.10.0.

The emigrants took the train to Limerick. The *Energy* left on schedule, arriving in Quebec on 25 May with all its passengers both healthy and happy with the treatment they had received. In a letter dated 3 June the agent, Mr. Buchanan, reported on how he had disposed of the group. He had forwarded 23 of the girls to Boyston in Betty Hayden's care. Servants were very much in demand there and a local committee would ensure they were all placed in employment. Each of the girls had received a ticket and 16/3 landing money.

Judy Cormack had stayed in Quebec. Five girls had moved on to friends in the U.S.A., and three had gone to Upper Canada.





## 1855-1856

**New York**     3 adult females, 4 children  
**Australia**     1 adult female

### Australia

The lone person bound for Australia was **Nanno Fogarty** (17) of Thurles ED. She would appear to have left about the middle of September 1855.

### New York

**Winnie Hayes** of Thurles ED was sent for by her husband in New York. He sent £4 and the guardians supplied 15/- worth of clothes in July 1855. Help for **Margaret Doherty** of Templemore ED and her child (unnamed) was approved in August. The fact that she received only £1.10.0 suggests that her fare had been taken care of, although this is not stated in the record.

**Margaret Long** of Inch ED, on the other hand, would not appear to have received help from relatives in America. She assured the guardians that she had friends in New York who were willing to receive herself and her child, and in October received the unusually large sum of £8.10.0 to enable her to emigrate.

The record does not account for the remaining two children mentioned in the returns. It does, however, give us the name of one more emigrant, that of **Henry Guest** of Church St., Templemore, who emigrated this year and was recorded in a list of irrecoverable rates!

## 1856-18857

**New York**     2 children

Only one of these two children could be identified. Help for **Patrick Moloney** (12), of Borrisoleigh ED was approved in June 1856.

## 1857-1858

**New York**     1 adult female, 2 children  
**Australia**     1 adult female, 3 children

### Australia

The people in question here were **Anastatia Cormack** and her three children. In January 1857, Anastatia, who came from Templemore, had no intention of going to Australia. She applied to go to Canada, and the Guardians sanctioned the expenditure of £25 to enable herself and her three children to get there.

The Commissioners refused her request, accusing her and her husband of colluding to emigrate at the expense of the Union. That led to a dispute with the local Guardians, in the course of which the following story emerged, as the Guardians explained the facts in a letter to the Commissioners:

*Anastatia Cormack and her children entered the Workhouse in 1855, and in consequence of her bad health in the House, left it for three weeks early in September 1856, and entered again on the 22nd*



*of the same month. Her husband had a public house (but was never a shopkeeper) in Templemore, but owing to intemperance and other misfortunes he became insolvent and was sent to prison for one year. On coming out of gaol, he being destitute and his family in the Workhouse, he stole three sheep from his brother, for which he was prosecuted, convicted and sentenced to six months imprisonment. At the expiration of his sentence, his friends, in order to get rid of him, assisted him to emigrate, leaving his wife and three children a burthen on the Electoral Division of Templemore.*

The Commissioners consulted the local Poor Law inspector, Mr. Lucas, who said Mrs. Cormack had no desire to join her husband in Canada and that anyway she was ill. So the Commissioners repeated their refusal.

In August the Guardians tried a modified version of the previous petition. Mrs. Cormack was not a chronically ill person; she was well now and would go to Canada with just one of the children. Her brother-in-law had taken two of the children and offered to pay £5 towards the cost of the outfit. The answer was still "no".

On 10 November the Board of Guardians was informed that **Thomas Cormack** had moved on to Australia and had paid the passage for Anastatia and her three children. The Commissioners were requested to sanction £10 for outfit and cost of getting the family to Plymouth. This time they consented. Melbourne shipping records show that Anastatia Cormack, aged 35, and her three children — William 11, Mary 9, and Johanna 7 — sailed from Liverpool on 27 January 1858 and arrived in Melbourne on 29 April of that year.

### **New York**

The woman and two children are easy enough to identify. **Mrs. Maria Gooding** of Templemore received the passage to New York for herself and her two children from friends there. All she needed was £2 to get them to Liverpool.

It transpired, however, that her husband was Sergeant Gooding of the 55th Regiment. The Commissioners had to be assured that he was indeed the father of the two children in question and had no objection to their going to America. Sergeant Gooding had no objection; in October he wrote from Parkhurst to say so, and there were no further complications.

### **Other emigrants**

Perusal of the Minute Book shows that more people emigrated from the workhouse this year than are contained in the statistical return. One was **Patrick Cullagh** of Ballycahill ED. Friends in America had paid the fare to New York, and he left the workhouse at the end of April 1857. Even though it is unlikely that **Edmond Holland** and his wife went to Canada, the record at least shows they had a daughter there, as they were discharged in April when they received £5 from her.

One who did emigrate was **Mr Comerford**, a master shoemaker in the employ of the Workhouse. The Master reported that he left for America on 24.8.1857. In October, **Catherine Maher's** passage to America was paid by her father there. She had been in the Workhouse since 1850 and had to be given a new suit of clothes. **James Breen** of Inch ED was also supplied with new clothes that month to enable him to emigrate; his destination was not mentioned.

By 1859 emigration from Irish workhouses had declined to a trickle, and the Commissioners ceased to record it. Apart from some special cases, such as participation in the scheme to send female orphans to Australia and the Quebec initiative of 1854, what has been recorded here for the most part is the follow-up to Famine emigration — people who had been left behind and forced into the workhouse in that exodus being sent for by those who could afford to do so. The chain of emigration would continue; but the workhouse ceased to be a link in it.

