

# Assisted and Bounty Immigration to Australia

The Australian colonies needed skilled tradesmen, farm labourers and female domestics to come out as immigrants, but it was much quicker and cheaper for someone to go from the UK to North America or to Canada. Therefore the colonies had to provide free or subsidised passages in order to attract immigrants.

## Wives and children of convicts

From 1817 a decision was made to provide free passage for the wives and children of convicts. To be eligible, a convict had to have received a Ticket of Leave, Certificate of Freedom, or a Pardon. They then had to apply for their family to come out, and the government would assess their application. If approved, their wives and children were carried out on female convict ships. The scheme stopped in 1843, and restarted in 1847. From 1851 convicts had to pay part of the cost of the passage. The scheme was abandoned in the early 1870s.

[For more information on this scheme see *Free Passage*, by Perry McIntyre]

## One special shipload

In July 1831 the *Palembam* arrived carrying 50 girls from the Cork Foundling Hospital. The Governors of the Hospital provided outfits for the girls, and all other costs were paid by the government.

## The first plan

The principals of first official government scheme to bring out immigrants was developed by the Secretary of State (Viscount Goderich) in 1831, with the fine details being established by the Commissioners of Emigration. This plan involved two separate schemes: one for unmarried female emigrants, and one for skilled mechanics (tradesmen). The initial suggestion was to fund it through a tax on assigned convicts, but the colonies realised that this would not work, and instead used money from the sale of crown land in the colonies to fund the scheme.

## Female Scheme

In order to satisfy the demand for female domestic staff and female farm labourers, the government provided a bounty of £8 towards the cost of a passage to NSW or Van Diemen's Land. This represented about half the cost, and the women were expected to pay the rest. As many of them couldn't afford to do so, promissory notes were issued to some women, with the expectation that the money would be repaid out of salaries once they reached the colonies. From 1834-5 the women were charged a flat £5, but with problems reclaiming the balance loaned to the women it was eventually increased to cover the whole cost.

The first ships arrived in 1832 carrying women from Ireland to Sydney in the *Red Rover*, and from England to Hobart in the *Princess Royal*. Because of the rush to fill these ships, girls were mostly recruited from the Female Penitentiary, workhouses and other charitable organisations. The women were often destitute and the colonists, particularly in Van Diemen's Land, claimed that many of them were not of good morals.

From 1833 to 1836 the scheme was managed by the London & Cork Emigration Committees. Initially the women continued to be selected mainly from institutions, and later were chosen by shipowners. The government required the immigrants to have good character, but many didn't. The colonists claimed many were prostitutes, many had no ability as domestics or farm servants, and that many had disabilities or diseases. Some were unsuitable because they were "over qualified", since the colony had little need for governesses, ladies maids, milliners and so forth.

[For further information see *Fair Game* by Elizabeth Rushen & Perry McIntyre, and *Single & Free* by Elizabeth Rushen]

### **The scheme for men & families**

This was known as the £20 advance scheme. A loan of £20 was made towards the passage of skilled tradesmen and their families. From 1834 the scheme included farm labourers and their families. Immigrants were chosen by government agents in London, Liverpool, Bristol, Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Belfast and Greenock. The system was not a success. Very low numbers came out under this scheme, and many people didn't repay the loan, so that by 1835 it had to be converted to a free grant. Governor Arthur ordered that all assisted immigration to Van Diemen's Land be suspended from 1837.

### **Governor Bourke's plan**

In 1835 Governor Bourke proposed a new scheme, comprising two different plans. Potential immigrants were to be selected by former surgeon-superintendents from convict ships who would have knowledge of the colony and its needs, and who would accompany the immigrants on board ship. At the same time colonists would have the opportunity to use their own agent to find mechanics or farm labourers. The colonist would be given a bounty equal, or nearly equal, to the expense of the person's passage if they met age & other criteria and were accepted by a member of the Immigration Board who examined them on arrival.

The system went into practice in 1836, with the London Emigration Committee being replaced by an Agent-General for Emigration. The Agent-General appointed agents at various places to supervise shipping and provisioning arrangements, to provide information to parishes, institutions and individuals, and to prevent frauds. Now there were two schemes: The Government System and the Bounty scheme.

Settlers would receive a bounty for married couples under 30 (with their accompanying small family), unmarried women aged 15-30 who came under the protection of a married couple, and single men aged 18-25, provided they did not outnumber the single women. The amount of the bounty varied over time, but at the start of the scheme it was £30 for a couple, £5 for each of their children over 12 months of age, £15 for unmarried women 15-30, and £10 for single men. The single and married men should be mechanics or farm labourers. The bounty was only received if the immigrants were approved by the Board.

The government had no control over this system. Colonists employed an agent to find suitable immigrants. The agent chartered a ship to carry them, and if there were vacant places, the agent could recruit suitable people from the UK to fill those spaces. In those cases, the bounty went to the agent and/or the shipowner. The government's involvement only began when the Immigration Board examined the newcomers to make sure they were suitable. No bounty was paid for people who were too old, unfit or who died on the voyage.

By 1837 the agents were having difficulty filling the ships, so the immigration committee recommended raising the age to 40 for men, not specifying the wife's maximum age, and that the amount of bounties be increased. In 1840 half-bounties were introduced for men & women over 40 who accompanied their families.

Shipowners sometimes provided ineligible applicants with forged references of age, occupation or character, especially after the bounties increased. Some parishes gave good references to undesirables in order to get rid of them.

Many more people were brought out by the Government System than by the Bounty system, even though it was involved more cost to the colonial coffers. The system was still limited to the same occupations, age restrictions and supervision of single women by a married couple. Written testimonials as to a person's character were also still required. Similar payments were made to defray the cost of the voyage, but this was not considered a bounty scheme. It was a subsidy to assist the immigrant. The system still also attracted lots of criticism from the colonists that paupers unsuitable for work were being sent out, but it was a definite improvement on the previous system.

In 1840 the Colonial Land & Emigration Commissioner (head of the Land Board) replaced the Agent-General for Emigration. They directed land policy and emigration policy for the whole empire, however the systems were still being abused and complaints about abuses of the system increased. Emigration to NSW was suspended from 1842.

The Land Board then developed a modified Bounty System. They assumed control over shipping arrangements and the appointment of surgeon-superintendents. Board's certificates were abolished: the fitness of applicants were left entirely to the bounty agents and colonial authorities in England. The first arrivals under this new system arrived in 1844. There was much less criticism of the arrivals, though there were still some unsuitable arrivals.

Problems with the colonies' finances stopped immigration 1845-48, but when it restarted it was under new rules drafted in 1847. The government was to select ALL immigrants, and the shipowner was paid for each passenger. There were to be no bounties, and no Board in the colonies to examine the immigrants. Immigrants were to be divided equally between the Sydney and Port Phillip districts. Again, there were age restrictions, occupational restrictions and the need for testimonials. From January 1848 Matrons could be appointed to look after single females. In 1849 the increase in the number of applicants meant that commissioners could demand some payment from the emigrants. This system remained in place until 1852. From that date immigrants either had to repay their passage within 14 days of arrival, or be indentured to work with a colonist while the balance of the "loan" was repaid. Boys and girls over 13 from orphanages, ragged schools, parishes and so on could be brought out if they were bound as apprentices for four years, their masters paying the passage money due.

Also from this point onwards, colonists could contribute an amount to bring out a friend or relative. These are recorded in the Immigration Deposit Journals. Remittance regulations started from 1856.

## **South Australia**

South Australia adopted the Wakefield Scheme in 1834. People came out for free, funded by land sales, and it was intended that they would work as labourers for the land owners, over time with hard work and thrift, it was anticipated that they would be able to buy their own smallholding. However, despite accepting the free passage, many immigrants had no intention of working as labourers. Some of them came with enough money to buy a small farming block immediately, and some always intended to work as tradesmen or businessmen.

## **Earl Grey Orphans**

From 1848-1850 4114 female "orphans" (who might still have one living parent) were brought out from Irish workhouses in a reaction to the Irish Famine. The girls were sent to NSW, Victoria and South Australia.

## **Other Schemes**

There were a variety of other schemes that helped prospective emigrant to come out to the Australian colonies. Many of these required the passengers to pay part of the cost of the passage, and receive a loan for the balance, which had to be repaid.

Some of these schemes are:

- The Family Colonization Loan Society
- Protestants who were brought out by the Rev. John Dunmore Lang,
- The Highlands and Islands Emigration Society
- Female Middle Class Emigration Society
- Female Emigration Society
- Donegal Relief Fund
- National Emigration Aid Society
- Working Men's Emigration Society
- Scottish-Australia Company
- Calais Lace Makers
- Distressed Cotton Workers
- Launceston Immigration Aid Society