

History Hub
From the Archives
2018

MS 13 552

MR. VERE FOSTER'S IRISH FEMALE EMIGRATION FUND,

UNDER THE AUSPICES OF
ALL THE CLERGY OF ALL DENOMINATIONS IN THE WEST OF IRELAND.

Exodus of 20,250 Girls from the West of Ireland.

List of Subscriptions received from 1880 to 1884, Report, and List of nearly 1,200 Clergymen, with the number of persons applied for by each.

LIST OF SUBSCRIPTIONS RECEIVED,

More than Nine-tenths of them being entirely unsolicited.

The Duchess of Marlborough (from the balance of her Irish Relief Fund)	£100 0 0	John Ward, Belfast	£30 0 0
Right Hon. W. E. Forster, M.P. (when Chief Secretary for Ireland)	100 0 0	Rev. E. Redmond, D.D., Chudleigh, Devon	15 0 0
James H. Tuke, Hitchin, Herts	100 0 0	Hon. A. K. Digby, London	10 0 0
Committee of Mr. Tuke's Emigration Fund	130 0 0	Earl Clermont	10 0 0
Charles Wilson, Cheltenham (two sums of £100 each)	200 0 0	Lady Vere Cameron (in two sums of £5 each)	10 0 0
John Wilson, Jarrow, Cheshire (three sums of £100 each)	300 0 0	R. N. Phillips, M.P.	10 0 0
J. A. S., London (four sums of £100 each)	400 0 0	Rev. J. C. Street, Belfast	6 0 0
J. Rathbone, M.P.	100 0 0	The Marchioness (Louisa) of Waterford	5 0 0
Collected by S. Laing, M.P. —		The Earl of Shaftesbury	5 0 0
C. Waring, Esq.	£25 0 0	The Earl of Carysfort	5 0 0
Mrs. Byass	5 0 0	Lord O'Hagan	5 0 0
Theresa Byass	4 0 0	William Ewart, M.P.	5 0 0
Lady Georgiana Pakenham	2 0 0	F. C. Capel	5 0 0
T. Walker, Esq.	2 0 0	John Rooney, Ballina	5 0 0
E. Kennard, Esq.	5 0 0	Miss Margaret A. Hardwick, Burgess Hill, Sussex	3 0 0
Mrs. Kennard	1 0 0	R. B. Heathcote, Friday Hill	2 0 0
C. Macrae, Esq.	4 0 0	Mrs. R. B. Heathcote, Friday Hill	2 0 0
Mrs. Macrae	1 0 0	Miss Mabel S. Crawford, Cannes	2 0 0
H. Laing, Esq.	2 10 0	C. T. Redington, H. M. Commissioner of Emigration	2 0 0
Members of the London Stock Exchange, per H. Laing	8 0 0	Murrough O'Brien, Ballybrack	2 0 0
S. Laing, M.P. (in two sums of £50 each)	100 0 0	Mrs. Otto Jaffe, Belfast	2 0 0
Mrs. Laing	10 0 0	Rev. Sir Cavenish H. Foster, Bart.	2 0 0
Sundry other Subscriptions	25 0 0	Samuel Young, Belfast	2 0 0
	194 12 0	Charles Walsh, Castlebar	2 0 0
W. & Son, Glasgow	35 0 0	R. Leyper, Belfast	1 0 0
Right Hon. G. Cubitt, M.P.	25 0 0	John C. Kieran, Rathfriland	1 0 0
Right Hon. King, Green Street, London	25 0 0	Lord John Browne	1 0 0
Samuel J. McCaughey, Coonong, New South Wales	25 0 0	Edward Birney, Belfast	0 0 0
Most Rev. Dr. ———, R. C. Bishop of ——— (in two sums of £10 each)	20 0 0		
The Duke of Devonshire	20 0 0		
S.	20 0 0		
		Balance paid by Mr. Foster	£1,251 26/948
			£37,300 9

Mr. Foster's Irish Female
Emigration Fund
National Library of Ireland
Ms. 13,552

Four letters of Vere Foster to Mr. O'Brien, 1884 and 1886, with associated printed items - cuttings, etc. dealing with aided female emigration from the west of Ireland and associated topics.

Ms. 13,552, National Library of Ireland

I have not seen such a desire for going to America since 1847 as there is at present. The people have almost despaired at being able to live in Ireland.

These were the words of one parish priest in Co. Leitrim, such was the distress in the West of Ireland in the early 1880s. Widespread failure of the potato crop, high rents, a lack of seasonal migration opportunities coupled with over-population and continued sub-division of the land meant that starvation, eviction, and all-out destitution were very real threats once more. This month's 'From the Archives' piece examines a report written by Vere Henry Louis Foster (1819-1900) regarding the assisted emigration fund he founded and managed. The report, published in October 1884, highlights the hardship in Ireland at the time and the desperation among people to emigrate. It also gives an insight into how Foster operated his scheme.

Foster was born into a wealthy aristocratic family and initially followed his father into the diplomatic service, serving as an attaché in Rio de Janeiro, Buenos Aires and Montevideo between 1842 and 1847. Following the death of his father in 1847, Foster visited his father's estate in Co. Louth and became concerned with the plight of the Irish poor. From then on, and with the aid of a newly-acquired and plentiful inheritance, Foster devoted his life to philanthropic endeavours. Apart from establishing an assisted emigration fund, Foster also agitated for better conditions on passenger ships, sought better treatment for teachers, and became the first President of the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO). Foster's prosperous background makes his humanitarian nature quite remarkable, but even more so considering he contributed approximately £50,000 to his Irish Female Emigration Fund from its inception in 1849 to its conclusion in 1889. Living frugally for most of his life, he had just £75 to his name when he died in 1900.

The Irish Female Emigration Fund was a private fund and was first established by Foster in 1852. It was revived in 1880 with the aim of assisting 'young women of good character of the farm and domestic servant class' between the ages of eighteen and thirty. A simple scheme in

which travel vouchers worth up to £2 were issued, this allowed a staggering total of 20,250 young women (from 34,000 applications) to emigrate between 1880 and 1884. The total cost of this scheme during its four-year revival was £28,934, of which Foster contributed £26,948. No government aid was received to support the fund and more than nine-tenths of the subscriptions received were unsolicited. A number of high-profile figures donated to the fund including the Duchess of Marlborough, Frances Ann Spencer-Churchill, the grandmother of future British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. She donated £100 from the balance of her Irish Relief Fund, as did W.E. Forster MP and Chief Secretary of Ireland 1880-1882.

Foster deliberately reserved the scheme for women because he believed that if young women were to stay in Ireland, marry and raise a family, they would likely remain in poverty for their entire lives 'thus perpetuating and increasing the present evil'. Greater employment opportunities existed for young women in America and Canada, and by sending money home they could ease the hardship of their parents. This exodus centred around eight western counties – Donegal, Galway, Leitrim, Mayo, Roscommon, Sligo, Clare and Kerry – however, Foster also received requests from a further twenty-two counties. Applications were received through local clergymen, of both the Catholic and Protestant faith, who wrote to Foster despairing at the 'wretched existence' of their parishioners. One parish priest, of Moyrus and Clifden (Co. Galway), stated that 'penal servitude would be a paradise to many of them compared to their present condition' and reflected the sentiment of the parish priest of Carna (Co. Galway) who remarked that 'there could not be a greater act of charity done than sending them to America'.

Letters sent to Foster reassure him that the young women had settled in well overseas and had been comfortable enough to send money home. These positive reports suggest that the fund was successful in relieving these young women from poverty. This surely encouraged Foster to make a request in this document for additional funds of £1,000 to continue his work. However, Foster did not view assisted emigration as a panacea to Irish poverty and he opposed the emigration of whole families for fear that it would lead to the de-population of the country. That said, he considered it to be the most practical means of providing both immediate and long-lasting relief in times of crisis. 'I would very much prefer to see the Irish people prosperous and contented on their own native soil', he comments in this document,

'but I see no use in waiting here for such a millennium'. Evidently, Foster was frustrated by the lack of relief measures available to the people of Ireland.

By October 1884 the fund was empty but the yearning to emigrate remained. Foster's program was just one of many assisted emigration schemes in this period. The comprehensive and detailed nature of this report gives us an insight into how and why this fund was established. More importantly, however, it informs us about Irish society in this period. From Cork to Donegal, whether Catholic or Protestant, this crisis extended across the whole island and did not differentiate between religious affiliation. Since the time of the Great Famine 30 years prior, the Irish poor were continuously forced to make the transatlantic journey in search of a better life.

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2017-18 MA in Public History
UCD School of History
Series Editor: Abigail Smith

Further reading

Desmond McCabe, 'Foster, Vere Henry Louis', in, *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, ed. James McGuire and James Quinn (Cambridge, 2009).

Mary McNeill, *Vere Foster 1819-1900: An Irish Benefactor* (Newton Abbott, 1971).

Gerard Moran, 'Near Famine: The Crisis in the West of Ireland, 1879-82', *Irish Studies Review* 5, no. 18 (1997), pp 14-21.

Gerard Moran, *Sending out Ireland's poor: assisted emigration to North America in the nineteenth century* (Dublin, 2004).

'Mr. Vere Foster's Irish Female Emigration Fund'

Four letters of Vere Foster to Mr. O'Brien, 1884 and 1886, with associated printed items - cuttings, etc. dealing with aided female emigration from the west of Ireland and associated topics. Ms 13,552, National Library of Ireland.

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Committee of Mr. Tuke's Emigration Fund	150 0 0	Hon. A. K. Digby, London	10 0 0
Charles Wilson, Cheltenham (two sums of £100 each)	200 0 0	Earl Clermont	10 0 0
Joshua Dixon, Turpary, Cheshire (three sums of £100 each)	300 0 0	Lady Vere Cameron (in two sums of £5 each)	10 0 0
S. S. E., London (three sums of £100 each)	300 0 0	R. N. Phillips, M.P.	6 0 0
S. A. S., London (four sums of £100 each)	400 0 0	Rev. J. C. Street, Belfast	5 0 0
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Bolton King, Green Street, London	25 0 0	John C. Kieran, Rathbrist	1 0 0
Samuel J. McCaughey, Coonong, New South Wales	25 0 0	Lord John Browne	1 0 0
The Most Rev. Dr. ———, R. C. Bishop of ——— (in two sums of £10 each)	20 0 0	Edward Birney, Belfast	0 10 0
The Duke of Devonshire	20 0 0		
S. S.	20 0 0		
		Balance paid by Mr. Foster	£2,251 6 0
			26,948 14 0
			£27,200 0 0
			9

EXPENDITURE.

Assisted Passages of 20,250 Young Women, between eighteen and thirty years of age, from Ireland to Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand	£26,914 2 0
Printing, Stationery, and Postage	200 0 0
Travelling Expenses for Five Years in Ireland and America	65 18 0
	£27,200 0 0
	9

REPORT.

THE object of this Fund is to relieve present poverty and to prevent its recurrence in the too densely peopled districts of the West of Ireland. The Fund is expended in assisting the emigration of young women of good character of the *farrá* and domestic servant class. The results which may naturally be expected are, that the girls who emigrate will obtain better prospects elsewhere, and that their departure will so decrease competition for employment in Ireland as to ensure constant employment and higher wages for those who remain. If these young persons were to remain in this country, they would most of them in all probability marry here and rear families here, with a prospect of poverty, or perhaps in some cases of destitution, thus perpetuating and increasing the present evil; whereas by going abroad they may better themselves and be more able to assist their parents, and may rear families in America or Australia with prospects of comfort and independence.

The scheme is a resumption of that which I adopted with the most gratifying results thirty-five years ago, immediately after the great famine of 1847, and which subsequently, in consequence of more prosperous times, I discontinued for many years, with the exception of a subscription of £500 to the East London Family Emigration Fund, per Lady Hobart.

To prevent misunderstanding, I wish to remark that I do not advocate assisted emigration, especially by Government, as a panacea for the poverty of the Irish people,—that I deplore the unjust and demoralizing legislation, and its unprincipled and capricious administration for the last few years on the subject of the relations between landlord and tenant in Ireland, and that in my opinion no solution of the Irish question will be complete without the establishment by *honest means* of Peasant Proprietary on such a scale that, instead of the present ratio of 30,000 owners of one acre and upwards to 600,000 tenants, those proportions shall be reversed by some such method as that adopted under the Code Napoléon in France. I would expect as results of such legislation, accompanied by *some* assisted emigration from overcrowded districts, that owner and occupier would become as a rule synonymous terms; that the curse of absenteeism would gradually diminish, until eventually it would be absolutely abolished; that the soil would generally be made more productive, and therefore capable of supporting in comfort a greater number of persons than at present; that towns and villages would flourish, and fresh enterprizes spring up in all directions; and that a period of prosperity and contentment would succeed to the present era of stagnation, poverty, discontent, and agrarian agitation. I would very much prefer to see the Irish people prosperous and contented on their own native soil and in their own congenial climate, but I see no use in their waiting here for such a millennium; and I think it is better for *young* persons of both sexes, whose prospects are poor in this little Old Ireland, to emulate the example of the Germans, Swedes, Norwegians, &c., by emigrating to the more favoured regions of the expanded and greater Ireland beyond the seas, where literally every Irish family will find relatives already settled in greater numbers than in Ireland.

On reference to the following pages, it will be seen that I have been so fortunate as to be favored with the cordial co-operation of all the clergy of all denominations in the West of Ireland, *i.e.*, about 900 Roman Catholic and about 300 Protestant clergymen. The number of applications which I have received within the last five years has been 34,000, and the number of persons who have actually availed themselves of my assistance has been 20,250, all being young women between 18 and 30 years of age, and their average age being 20½. If I had been sufficiently supplied with funds, and if I had publicly announced my scheme through the columns of the Press and by personal intercourse with the people, I suppose I would have received at least ten times as many applications.

My plan is very simple, and has been in successful operation for the last five years.

I issue to all persons seeking information blank forms of application, and in case of my approval of the applicants, I issue vouchers usually to the value of £2, but varying in amount according to circumstances, in favor of the persons recommended, and available within three months of issue for embarkation from Liverpool, or from any port in Ireland by any steamer belonging to any Company with which I may have succeeded in making satisfactory arrangements. The lines by which my vouchers have been hitherto available have been as follows:—Allan, Inman, White Star, Cunard, Anchor, National, American, Guion, Beaver, Dominion, and State. I do not approve of shipping young girls in large companies or in batches, but desire to give them the utmost freedom of choice of ship and port and time of embarkation, so as to enable them to proceed by ships in which they will have the company of friends and neighbours, such company and protection being far more satisfactory than any that I could possibly provide.

In accordance with a suggestion from the largest subscriber to my fund, who wished me to try the experiment of giving assistance by loan instead of by gift, and who has given me a special subscription for that purpose of £300, I have given assistance by loan to 400 girls who have promised to repay me. If they will honestly do so, I shall be able to assist at least 400 more with the same money.

Having now spent all that I could possibly spare of my own means, and having also exhausted all the funds kindly placed by subscription at my disposal, I shall feel most grateful for further assistance. One Thousand Pounds prudently expended would ensure the emigration of at least 500 girls, who would rejoin friends and relatives beyond the seas with brighter prospects than those which await them in the West of Ireland.

BELFAST, October, 1884.

VERE FOSTER.