

Heading Home: The Deportation of Irish Immigrants from Canada in the Early 20th Century

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In an exchange of letters in 1901, P.G. Keyes, Secretary in Canada's Department of the Interior, described the fate of several Irish "servant girls" whose immigration to Canada had been aided by C.R. Devlin, the Canadian Commissioner of Immigration in Dublin. Of the 12 Irish immigrants who had been sent to Winnipeg in 1899, four -- Mary Doyle, Lizzie Cox, Nora McSweeney and Mary Ryan -- were on the brink of being returned. Keyes discussed the condition of Mary Doyle: "It would appear from the reports we have in this case, that the girl has been almost continuously in Institutions for the Insane since her arrival in Canada, and that she is liable to become a permanent charge, if allowed to remain in this country."¹ Two others, Lizzie Cox and Nora McSweeney, had been sent by Father McCarthy to St. Bernard's Convent in Grand Forks, British Columbia, in February 1900, deemed by him to be "quite unsuitable for domestic service."²

In his reply to Keyes, Devlin professed to have seen Mary Doyle's "testimonials" and judged them to be "excellent." She had subsequently contracted diphtheria, which, he acknowledged, rendered her "no doubt useless." He also explained that "Nora Sweeney" [*sic*] had been sent out to replace a girl who had decided at the last moment not to venture to Canada. As for Mary Ryan, Devlin described her as a "good, diligent girl" who had been so satisfied upon her arrival in Canada that she had sent for her sisters. But she then discovered that the "climate did no [*sic*] agree with her" and had subsequently "used every possible means to get back."³ Mary Ryan was now working happily in Dublin as a domestic servant. As to the intimation that these cases reflected wider problems in his Dublin office, Devlin insisted that "mistakes will naturally occur" and that amongst the many immigrants sent out from Ireland to Canada "there will always be some in the number undesirable."

The category of the "undesirable" immigrant was the subject of considerable public and bureaucratic attention in the subsequent decade, during which deportation became increasingly codified, regulated and integrated within systems of immigration control. Deportation in this period has not been closely studied through the lens of ethnicity -- or, in contemporary bureaucratic terminology, "nationality" -- partly because surviving records lack comprehensive documentation of individual cases, and printed returns that

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¹ P.G. Keyes to C.R. Devlin, February 14, 1901. Library and Archives Canada (LAC), RG 76, vol. 113, file 22,787, part 2.

² J. Obed Smith, Commissioner of Immigration, *ibid.*

³ C.R. Devlin to P.G. Keyes, March 8, 1901. LAC, RG 76, vol. 113, file 22,787, part 2.

aggregate immigrant populations are difficult to use in a systematic analysis. Yet the remarkably diverse deportation experiences of immigrants of different “nationalities” offer a valuable focus for exploring the intersection of ethnicity, citizenship and social regulation in early 20th-century Canada.

Included on the new agenda set by historians of Canadian immigration are the “comings and goings” of immigrant populations -- through seasonal return migration or “sojourning,” for instance -- and the analysis of how these movements were integrated within communal livelihood strategies and trans-national economic, social and cultural exchanges.⁴ These migrations helped to bridge the putative gap between the world that migrants “left behind” and the one they encountered in Canada. Research into their movements across borders and time has implanted “comings and goings” within our renderings of the social, economic and cultural worlds of immigrants, and the concept is now at the forefront of how we conceive of, and study, the immigration process.⁵

Since the publication of Roberts’ work on deportation,⁶ Canadian immigration historians have had an authoritative analysis of the policies and practices that constituted an important form of the immigrant “return.” Roberts, Fiona Miller and Henry Drystek have contributed to a much greater understanding of the policy frameworks and political debates that influenced deportation, but the study of ethnicity and deportation has largely focused on non-British “nationalities.”⁷

Underlying the state’s formulation of deportation policy were assumptions about specific immigrant populations, diseases and behaviours, and appraisals of their variable “adaptability” to precepts of Canadian citizenship. Ideas about the inculcation of Canadian values in immigrant populations were reflected in restrictions that created different degrees of access to Canada -- and also through deportation, which regulated the behaviour of those who were admitted to the country. Challenging Donald Avery’s interpretation of deportation as a mechanism through which the state regulated an industrial proletariat, Barbara Roberts offers an analysis of deportation policy that underscores its protean character: strategies behind deportation shifted according to the

⁴ Bruce Elliott has played a critical role in developing this trans-national approach; see Bruce Elliott, David Gerber & Suzanne Sinke (eds.), *Letters Across Borders: The Epistolary Practices of International Migrants* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); see also Marjory Harper (ed.), *Emigrant Homecomings: The Return Movements of Emigrants, 1600-2000* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006).

⁵ See, for instance, Vic Satzewich & Lloyd Wong (eds.), *Transnational Identities and Practices in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006).

⁶ Barbara Roberts, *Whence They Came: Deportation from Canada, 1900-1935* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1988).

⁷ Henry E. Drystek, “‘The Simplest and Cheapest Mode of Dealing With Them’: Deportation from Canada before World War II,” *Histoire sociale -- Social History* 15, 30 (1982), pp. 407-41; Barbara Roberts, “Doctors and Deports: The Role of the Medical Profession in Canadian Deportation, 1900-20,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 18, 3 (1986), pp. 17-36; Barbara Roberts, “Shovelling Out the ‘Mutinous’: Political Deportation from Canada Before 1936,” *Labour/Le Travail* 18 (1986), pp. 77-110; Fiona Alice Miller, “Making Citizens, Banishing Immigrants: The Discipline of Deportation Investigations, 1908-1913,” *Left History* 7, 1 (2000), pp. 62-88.

changing priorities of the state. They varied not only over time, but also with respect to different immigrant populations.⁸

During the first decade of the 20th century, the laws and practices of deportation were “reconstructed” according to political priorities and became foundational to the state’s social regulation of immigrants. While Avery’s contention that the primary function of deportation policy was the regulation of labour, there were clearly other objectives centred on the production and regulation of good citizens. A comparative case study of deportation in the first decade of the 20th century illuminates how several “nationalities” experienced this regulation.

“Nationality,” Deportation and Social Regulation

During the first decade of the 20th century, official deportation and immigration policies were in flux. Formal procedures regarding deportation were codified in legislation, including the 1902 *Immigration Act* amendment, which provided for the return of immigrants who entered Canada on terms that contravened the Act; the 1906 Immigration Act, which broadened the category of undesirable immigrants who could be rejected at ports of entry or deported, and required that deaf, dumb and infirm immigrants have assurances of permanent support; a 1907 order-in-council aimed at tightening the procedures for assisted migration; and the further extension of deportation provisions in 1910.⁹

There is evidence that even after 1910, deportation was not implemented in a systematic or uniform manner; indeed, there remained confusion over which levels of government had authority over deportation. In Ontario, for instance, the provincial police in border communities practised informal deportation, often without the knowledge of border immigration officers: their activities came under close scrutiny in 1915.¹⁰ The case of one man who faced deportation in 1914 illustrates the range of authorities involved in such cases, as well as the ambiguities surrounding the representation of immigrants’ “nationality.”¹¹ In a warrant issued for his arrest and associated documents, it was alleged that he had stolen \$62.12 from the butchers who employed him, and had then absconded to the United States. The Toronto Police, the Inspector of Prisons and Public Charities, and the Superintendent of Immigration were all involved in the case, the alleged perpetrator being described as a man of “English” nationality, age 30, with a “Scotch accent,” who had landed at Québec in May 1911.¹² While this analysis focuses on

⁸ Donald Avery, *“Dangerous Foreigners”: European Immigrant Workers and Labour Radicalism in Canada, 1896-1932* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1979); Barbara Roberts, *Whence They Came: Deportation from Canada, 1900-1935* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1988).

⁹ See Roberts, *Whence They Came*, Chapter 2, “The Law and Deportation,” pp. 11-36.

¹⁰ See the file that describes this practice: RG 23, E-8, 1.4, Archives of Ontario, Toronto.

¹¹ The identity of the individual has been protected as a condition of accessing the records.

¹² See the handwritten note on Toronto Police Force Detective Department letterhead, City Hall, Toronto, dated December 15, 1914, and a form detailing the reasons for the recommendation that the man be deported, dated December 31, 1914, in RG 23, E-8, 1.5, Archives of Ontario, Toronto.

“formal” deportations documented in the printed reports of the Department of the Interior, other forms of compulsory return were commonly practised. The intersection of formal deportation processes and immigrant “nationalities” must be analyzed in terms of how policies and practices were formulated and implemented according to contemporary perceptions of immigrant “nationalities.” No doubt practices also varied depending on where immigrants lived and worked, and which individuals or agencies were involved in their regulation, either within or outside their formal legal jurisdiction.

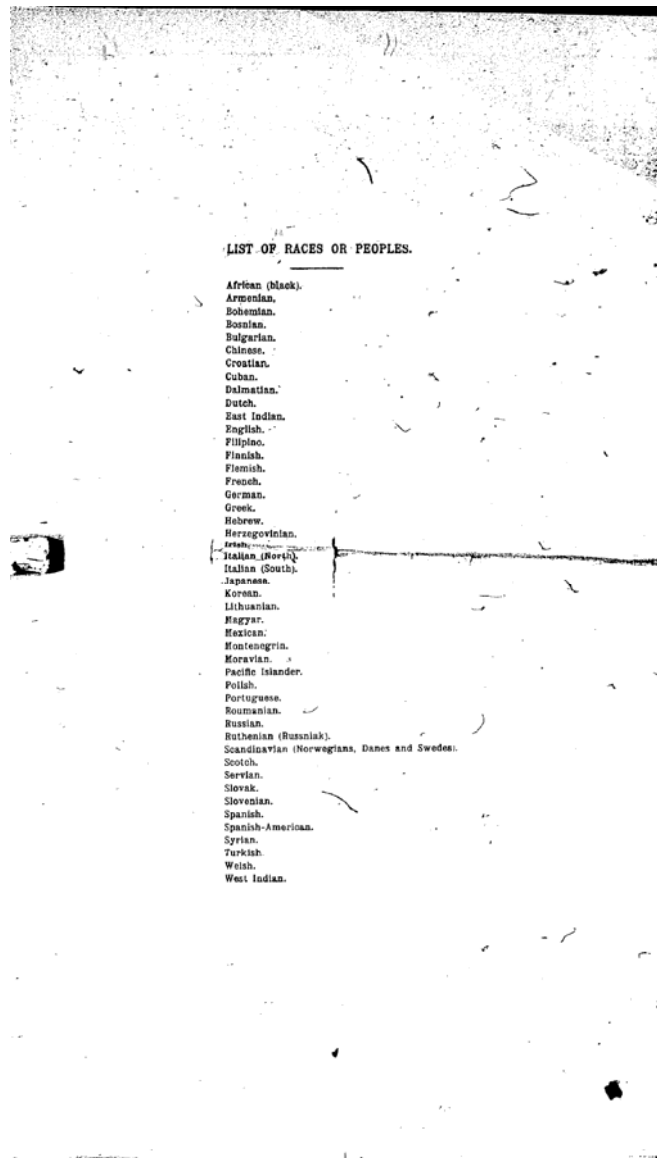
Sources: Constructing “Nationality” and Deportation

The first challenge historians encounter when examining deportation records is one of taxonomy, namely, the contemporary classification of immigrants from the United Kingdom by “nationality” -- English, “Scotch,” Welsh and Irish. The taxonomy of “nationality” used in bureaucratic documents was inconsistent and requires scrutiny. In immigration records the term “nationality” often distinguished an immigrant’s race or national origins from his or her point of departure. In many cases, as with immigrants from the United Kingdom, “nationality” was not congruent with citizenship or residence in a particular state. It was also distinct from the country from which the immigrant departed for Canada. We know that many Irish immigrants left from English ports, as did many Scots and continental Europeans. Early 20th-century immigration records required a separate enumeration of their “nationality.” Established systems of classification guided this enumeration, categorizing immigrants by “race,” “nationality” or “people.” For instance, in a list of “races or peoples” accompanying immigration forms in archival records of this period, alongside the categories of “English,” “Irish,” “Welsh” and “Scotch” we find the categories “Hebrew,” “African (black),” “Italian (North)” and “Italian (South).” As well as indicating that formal political borders did not necessarily endow “nationality,” these records illustrate the variety of racial, ethnic and religious criteria underlying these systems of classification.¹³

The deportation tables published in the annual returns of the Department of the Interior included a number of “nationality” classifications. They are often difficult to compare with other immigration records, and even with similar tables from previous or later years, as classification systems changed. In contrast to some records, for instance, deportation tables disaggregated the “Scandinavian” category, included a “From United States” category, and disaggregated “Hebrew” into “Hebrew, Russian;” “Hebrew, Austrian;” “Hebrew, N.E.S.,” and other groupings (“N.E.S.” standing for “nationality not elsewhere stated”).¹⁴ Moreover, the annual returns of the Chief Medical Officer of Health documenting immigrants who were debarred at ports of entry sometimes used a system which, though similar, included other nationalities.

¹³ See “List of races or peoples,” Immigration of criminal classes, 1893-1923, LAC, RG 76, reel C-4714, file 2174.

¹⁴ See *Report of the Chief Medical Officer*, Department of the Interior, annual report, Immigration, fiscal year 1904-05, p. 123.



Source: Immigration of criminal classes, 1893-1923. LAC, RG 76, reel C-4714, file 2174

“Nationality,” however fluid a category, was thus subject to enumeration and calculation within the Department of the Interior; indeed it was a central focus of bureaucratic attention at all stages of the immigration process. The annual reports of the Chief Medical Officer and Superintendent of Immigration are rich sources for examining the construction of “nationality” and its relationship to deportation. The 1906-07 report included the table reproduced below, in which immigrant populations were ranked in the descending order of their “deportation rate.” The Irish were 10th on the list. The English followed Icelanders, Danes and Welsh immigrants in the rankings of those deported in highest proportion to their immigrant population, though the first three comprised much smaller immigrant cohorts.

TABLE XI.

STATEMENT showing the number and nationality of immigrants deported after admission to Canada during the three Fiscal Years 1904-5-6-7.

Nationality.	Total No. Arriving.	Deported.	Ratio of Deported to Number arriving.
Icelander.....	627	5	1 in 125
Danes.....	1,232	6	1 in 205
Welsh.....	2,069	6	1 in 345
English.....	155,138	313	1 in 496
Swedes.....	4,720	9	1 in 525
Norwegian.....	3,688	7	1 in 527
Poles, N.E.S.....	546	1	1 in 546
Hebrew, N.E.S.....	2,275	4	1 in 569
Finns.....	3,475	4	1 in 869
Irish.....	12,420	13	1 in 955
Dutch.....	1,054	1	1 in 1,054
Hungarian, N.E.S.....	2,219	2	1 in 1,109
French.....	4,705	4	1 in 1,176
Galician.....	14,234	10	1 in 1,423
Newfoundlander.....	1,559	1	1 in 1,559
Scotch.....	38,319	23	1 in 1,666
Russian, N.E.S.....	6,005	3	1 in 2,332
Belgian.....	2,552	1	1 in 2,552
Austrian, N.E.S.....	2,723	1	1 in 2,723
Russian Hebrew.....	18,064	3	1 in 6,021
German, N.E.S.....	6,338	1	1 in 6,338
Italian.....	16,546	1	1 in 16,546
From United States.....	136,319	5	1 in 27,263
Totals.....	437,683	424	1 in 1,039

Source: *Report of the Chief Medical Officer, Department of the Interior, annual report, Immigration, fiscal year 1906-07, p. 135*

A second table, published three years later, is curious both in its construction and its content. Unlike the previous table, “nationalities” were not listed according to rates of deportation, nor to levels of immigration. Absent from this table were nationalities enumerated only a few years previously: data for “Icelanders,” “Danes” and “Welsh” immigrants were not included.¹⁵ The English were top-ranked, and listed first.

¹⁵ Barbara Roberts proposes a more precise identification of immigrant populations eligible for deportation, using a three-year moving average. See *Whence They Came*, Chapter 3, “Incidence and Patterns of Deportation,” pp. 37-52. Her approach provides a foundation for developing more systematic “rates of deportation,” with the moving-average requiring adjustment as the period to establish Canadian domicile changed in the first two decades of the 20th century.

TABLE VI.—Table of deportations by nationalities for nine years.

Deportations in nine years.		Total immigrants.
English.....	1 to every 190 in	505,157
Scotch.....	1 to every 336 in	133,909
Irish.....	1 to every 290 in	41,001
Austro-Hungarian.....	1 to every 903 in	121,001
Italian.....	1 to every 1,046 in	63,817
Hebrew.....	1 to every 600 in	43,673
Russian.....	1 to every 564 in	33,950
German.....	1 to every 480 in	21,145
Swedish.....	1 to every 471 in	19,349
French.....	1 to every 324 in	16,236
Norwegian.....	1 to every 405 in	13,798
Japanese.....	1 to every 2,188 in	13,128
Finnish.....	1 to every 749 in	13,498
Chinese.....	1 to every 1,618 in	11,324
United States.....	1 to every 1,429 in	618,700

Source: *Report of the Chief Medical Officer*, Department of the Interior, annual report, Immigration, fiscal year 1910-11, p. 127

These data clearly show that there was considerable change in the documentation of deportation rates, as well as fluctuations in annual levels of immigration and deportation. English immigrants were, however, more likely than either Irish or Scottish immigrants to be deported in the period 1902–1914.

Before we draw conclusions from contemporary empirical analyses of the “ethnic” dimension of Canadian deportation, we must recall that deportation as both a policy and practice was subject to reformulation, as well as to varied implementation. Recorded reasons for deportation, for instance, could vary significantly according to the local authority overseeing the removal. Although instructions were provided to the various authorities, it is likely that they were applied with considerable local discretion. Deportation also operated within a vast and complex system that included emigration agents across Europe and the United States. Their activities -- their strategies for promoting immigration from specific places and for vetting emigrants, for instance -- could affect the composition of a departing cohort. The four Irish servants in the introduction to this paper, for instance, are documented in correspondence between the Dublin commissioner and a central immigration bureaucracy concerned about the number of deportees it could trace to his office. Subsequent comments by the Chief Medical Officer of Health on the decline in British deportees after 1910 attributed the trend to improved local vetting procedures and contrasted them with lax procedures in central Europe that enabled less “desirable” immigrants to enter the country. Contemporary observers were aware of this lack of uniformity in the implementation of emigration and immigration policies, for which deportation was but one “remedy.”

Deportation: The Experiences of U.K. Immigrants

Using these contemporary systems of classification to examine immigrants deported from Canada between the fiscal years 1902-03 (when this series of records began) and 1913-14, distinct experiences amongst Irish, Scottish and English populations become

apparent. English immigrants were notably over-represented amongst deportees, especially in comparison with their share of overall immigration to Canada in this period. The same held true for Irish deportees, while Scots were deported in numbers roughly proportional to their share of overall immigration.¹⁶

**English, Scottish and Irish immigrants as a proportion of
(1) total immigration to Canada, July 1, 1900 to March 31, 1914; and
(2) deportees, December 1, 1902 to March 31, 1914**

Nationality	Proportion of immigrants (1900-14)	Proportion of deportees (1902-14)
English	27.66	47.67
Irish	2.36	3.35
"Scotch"	7.98	9.24

Sources: *Report[s] of the Superintendent of Immigration and the Chief Medical Officer*, Department of the Interior, annual reports, Immigration, fiscal years 1901-02 to 1913-14; M.C. Urquhart (ed.), *Historical Statistics of Canada* (Toronto: Macmillan Co. of Canada, 1965), p. 27

The data clearly show fluctuations in the rates of deportation and in the proportion of English, Irish and Scottish immigrants deported on an annual basis. This instability is partly the result of changing deportation policies. These were under debate and revision during this time, as legislation codified procedures that had been used, often without a clear legal foundation, for many decades, and as they focused on new priorities in the social, economic and political regulation of immigrant groups.

¹⁶ Following Roberts, I employ a three-year moving average in this calculation. See footnote 14.

Deportation, by nationality, as a proportion of total deportees in fiscal years 1902-03 to 1913-14

Fiscal year	Deportees (N.)	English (%)	Irish (%)	“Scotch” (%)
1902-03	67	64.18	0.00	10.45
1903-04	85	68.24	2.35	9.41
1904-05	86	70.93	2.33	10.47
1905-06	137	71.53	2.19	5.84
1906-07	201	64.68	4.98	12.94
1907-8	825	62.18	3.76	7.39
1908-9	1,748	61.84	1.95	6.81
1909-10	734	48.37	5.04	12.13
1910-11	784	43.62	2.93	11.48
1911-12	959	42.34	4.28	9.28
1912-13	1,281	30.21	3.67	9.21
1913-14	1,834	37.79	3.44	10.03

Source: *Report of the Superintendent of Immigration*, Department of the Interior, annual report, Immigration, fiscal year 1913-14, p. 79

In fact, there were fluctuations in the numbers of both deportees and immigrants recorded in annual reports between fiscal years 1902-03 and 1913-14. The proportion of continental European deportees rose significantly after 1910. Until the outbreak of the First World War, they came to figure prominently in discourses surrounding the “immigrant problem” -- for which deportation was part of the state’s solution. Barbara Roberts has explored many factors behind the fluctuating rates of deportation, and her data-mapping suggests a correlation in this specific period between levels of immigration to Canada and corresponding rates of deportation, using a three-year moving average as basis for identifying eligible immigrant populations.¹⁷ There was a notable peak in overall deportations in 1908-09 -- a pattern mirrored by the deportation rate for English immigrants, which surpassed 1.5% of average annual English immigration levels, while the Scots and the Irish stood at just over 0.6%.¹⁸ In addition to higher rates than their Irish and Scottish counterparts, between 1902-03 and 1908-09 English immigrants consistently represented over 60% of the total number of deportees. There are several possible explanations for variations between the English and Irish deportation rates, some related to the characteristics of the immigrant cohorts, others to the impact of bureaucratic and wider cultural assumptions about specific nationalities adapting to the demands of life in Canada.

¹⁷ Roberts, *Whence They Came*, Chapter 3, “Incidence and Patterns of Deportation,” pp. 37-52.

¹⁸ This rate is based on a calculation of the numbers deported in 1908-09 as a proportion of the three-year moving average of immigration by these national groups.

Could the predominance of U.K. immigrants in deportation tables point to their privileged status as new residents of the Dominion? Certainly there is no doubt that these English-speaking immigrants were regarded, along with Americans, as especially desirable “nationalities”; British and Irish immigrants held an advantage even over Americans, as the Deputy Minister of the Department of the Interior declared in his report for 1909-10: “The bond of blood and sympathetic interest which connects Canada with the motherland makes immigration from this source most acceptable.”¹⁹ One indicator of the privileged status of British and Irish immigrants was their likelihood to be admitted into Canada without being debarred at their port of entry. In fact they were much less likely to be returned at points of entry than other immigrants, many of whom were the subject of considerable public and political anxiety as unhealthy races. Yet though British and Irish immigrants were privileged at this stage of the immigration process, they were still subject to intense scrutiny and regulation following their admission to Canada. Indeed, deportation policy seems to have been a primary instrument by which they were regulated, and the main mechanism through which the state remedied problems associated with “undesirable” U.K. immigrants.

Proportion of English, Irish and Scottish immigrants rejected at Canadian ocean ports, December 1, 1902 to March 31, 1914

Nationality	Percentage Barred
English	9.56
Irish	1.30
“Scotch”	1.69

Source: *Report of the Superintendent of Immigration*, Department of the Interior, annual report, fiscal year 1913-14, p. 76

While British and Irish immigrants were generally admitted to Canada with ease, the various criteria by which deportation policy evaluated “citizenship” -- and expelled immigrants on grounds of health, criminality and cost to the state -- governed their first two years in the country (a period extended to three and then five years by 1919).

Roberts notes the variation, year-on-year, in the aggregated “causes” for deportation, and the dramatic surge in “public-charge” deportations in 1908-09, which was accompanied by a marked increase in deportations for criminality.²⁰ This period coincided with acute economic distress in much of Canada, which may have heightened fears surrounding specific immigrant populations. The “public-charge” provisions were detailed in clause 28 of the *Immigration Act*, mandating the deportation of an immigrant “who is a pauper,

¹⁹ *Report of the Deputy Minister*, Department of the Interior, annual report, Immigration, fiscal year 1909-10, p. xxviii.

²⁰ Roberts, *Whence They Came*, pp. 43-52.

or destitute, a professional beggar, or vagrant, or who is likely to become a public charge,” as well as an immigrant who within two years of immigration had “become a charge upon the public funds, whether municipal, provincial, or federal, or an inmate of or a charge upon any charitable institution.”²¹ As this provision was more frequently invoked, the number of deportees climbed.²² The pre-war surge in public-charge deportations in 1908-09 corresponded with a peak in the rate of English immigrant deportations. Curiously, though, the deportation of Irish immigrants did not follow the same trend.

Deportation: Plotting a Distinctive Irish Experience?

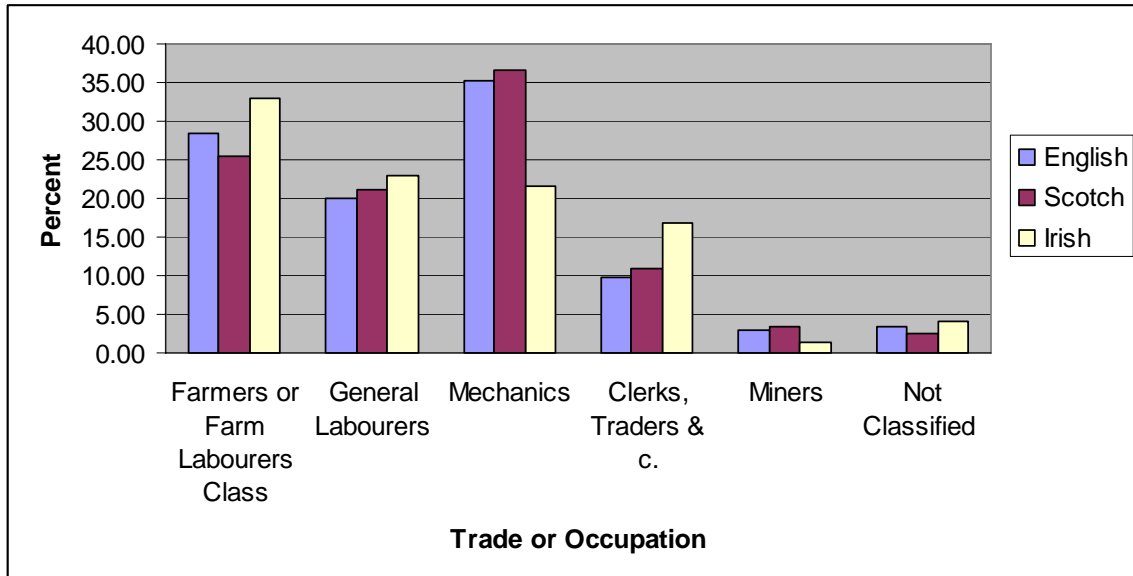
The spike in deportations in 1908-09 (which was also apparent in the previous fiscal year) appears to have been driven by political assessment that immigrants generally, and some groups specifically, risked becoming an unbearable charge upon the public purse. Did Canadian authorities perceive the Irish, in contrast to their English counterparts, as preferable immigrants and citizens who were received within supportive institutional or cultural environments, arrived in more “manageable” numbers, and were concentrated in specific occupations that insulated them from deportation? Both structural features of the immigrant populations and cultural appraisals of their “adaptability” to Canadian life offer insight into why experiences of deportation varied widely.

We can use printed reports to construct an occupational, or skills, profile of the immigrant population eligible for deportation during the 1908-09 fiscal year, though it is based on trades or occupations enumerated before immigrants had settled in Canada. Here we observe marked divergences in the profile of the English and Scottish immigrant populations on one hand, and the Irish on the other. Male English and Scottish immigrants during the fiscal years from 1906-07 to 1908-09 were far more likely to be listed as “mechanics” than their Irish counterparts, who were more highly represented amongst clerks, traders and agricultural workers.

²¹ Quoted in *Report of the Chief Medical Officer*, Department of the Interior, annual report, Immigration, fiscal year 1907-08, p. 126.

²² Roberts, *Whence They Came*, p. 46.

Occupational profile of male immigrants arriving at Canadian ocean ports, fiscal years 1906-07 (9 months), 1907-08 and 1908-09



Source: *Reports of the Superintendent of Immigration*, Department of the Interior, annual reports, fiscal years 1906-07, 1907-08 and 1908-09. The occupational categories reproduced here are those used in the original reports.

To observers such as the Chief Medical Officer, P.H. Bryce, who framed immigrant “desirability” in specific ways, the Irish immigrant appeared well suited to the exigencies of Canadian life. This view may have been partly based on the Irish population’s occupational profile. Take the case of the pre-eminent occupation for Irish female immigrants -- domestic service -- in which they were represented to a much greater extent than Scottish and English immigrants.

English, Irish and Scottish immigrants arriving at Canadian ocean ports and identified as female domestic servants, fiscal years 1906-07 (9 months), 1907-08 and 1908-09

Nationality	N.	Domestic Servants %
English	43,779	20.80
Irish	4,146	41.27
“Scotch”	12,361	32.78

Source: *Reports of the Superintendent of Immigration*, Department of the Interior, annual reports, fiscal years 1906-07, 1907-08 and 1908-09

There is strong evidence of a persistent shortage of female domestics in Canada during the first decade of the 20th century. Might this occupational choice have protected Irish immigrants from distress associated with fluctuating economic conditions, and made

them less likely to be identified as “undesirable”? Domestic servants’ search for work was facilitated by a large number of agencies committed to connecting prospective employers with workers, which may have mitigated the risks of un- or under-employment after immigration. Additionally, the nature of the employment contract, the resources and amenities provided to domestic servants, and, perhaps, the more personal nature of domestic employee-employer relationships may have contributed to the stability of their employment in periods in which other workers faced unemployment. Certainly this employment also carried risks for the immigrants, who were often unmarried, without family, working in isolation and without easy access to formal immigrant networks in the community. Yet it is possible that in this period of high demand for domestic servants, female Irish immigrants enjoyed a degree of labour mobility that reduced their risk of becoming a “public charge.”

Another possible difference between English and Irish immigrant populations was the extent and resources of ethnic associational networks that helped them adapt to their new economic, social and cultural situation. Generally, the institutional support available through established immigrant communities varied according to historic patterns of settlement and levels of migration (which, if very high, might overwhelm even long-established associational networks). The Chief Medical Officer’s report for 1903-04 cited this as a possible factor behind the low deportation rates for some nationalities. He also suggested that a number of cultural, social and institutional factors accounted for the high proportion of “British” (subsequently referred to as “English”) deportees during that period, including a historic tendency amongst people in England to rely on institutional relief under the Poor Law, in contrast to people from countries with fewer developed social services; and the presence in the English immigrant cohort of a higher proportion of urban dwellers, who found the adjustment to “pioneer life” in Canada challenging.²³

In his report for 1906-07, the Chief Medical Officer, P.H. Bryce, expanded this analysis, arguing that the comparatively low deportation rate of Italian immigrants might be explained by a freedom from insanity and tuberculosis due to “their outdoor life in sunny Italy.”²⁴ He also commented favourably on “the remarkable interest and care taken by the Russian Hebrews for their own people,” which partly accounted for their low rate of deportation, and asserted that the very low rate amongst Americans was an outgrowth of their pursuit of agricultural livelihoods and their relatively plentiful resources. Commenting on the high levels of English immigrant deportation over the previous nine years, Bryce offered the opinion that deportation rates were linked to “antecedent social conditions in the various countries from which immigrants have come.”²⁵ For the English, these included a lamentable propensity to drift towards state institutions “when in need or distress or sick.”

²³ *Report of the Chief Medical Officer*, Department of the Interior, annual report, Immigration, fiscal year 1903-04, p. 170.

²⁴ *Report of the Chief Medical Officer*, Department of the Interior, annual report, Immigration, fiscal year 1906-07, p. 135.

²⁵ *Report of the Chief Medical Officer*, Department of the Interior, annual report, Immigration, fiscal year 1910-11, p. 127.

In addition to these putatively intrinsic features of “national” populations, Bryce saw the apparatus of the immigration bureaucracy as critical to the quality of human inflows into Canada. In his 1910-11 report, for instance, he offered an explanation for the overall decline in deportations, and in the proportion of both German and English deportees, by noting that more stringent regulations had been adopted in certain ports of departure.²⁶ He also identified another factor that he believed was of particular concern “in the earlier years of the past decade” -- the tendency of the British state to send out “physical and moral ‘misfits’ to the colonies.”²⁷ This necessitated vigilance on the part of Canadian immigration authorities. Bryce also asserted that immigration controls were instruments by which the state could regulate the quality of prospective immigrants before they left for Canada. He argued that the declining proportion of medical deportees was linked to the tightening of vetting procedures. Indeed, in 1908-09 he concluded that there was likely a smaller proportion of immigrant than native-born “defectives” in Canada.²⁸ The apparent tightening of procedures provided a foundation for Canadian authorities to re-affirm the desirability of British immigration. The Deputy Minister of the Department of the Interior hailed the quality of British immigrants during 1910-11, the year of heaviest immigration, and praised the stringent regulations then in force for producing a better class of newcomers.²⁹

Important social and institutional factors such as the resources provided by ethnic associational networks, levels of immigration, and the occupational or skills profile of immigrant populations seem central to any explanation of their relative susceptibility to deportation. Yet the operation of policies and procedures that privileged U.K. immigrants as intrinsically well-suited to life in Canada -- and the regulation of these populations through deportation, rather than de-barring -- did not result in uniform experiences amongst their various constituent “nationalities.” Curiously, though their rate of deportation was lower than that of the English immigrant population, Irish immigrants were more likely to be deported under “public-charge” provisions in 1907-08 (a year for which the published records included particularly detailed case reports, and in which the number of deportations began to rise sharply). These data must qualify any conclusions about the greater resources or uniformly positive contemporary appraisals of the resourcefulness of the Irish immigrant population.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 114.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 127.

²⁸ *Report of the Chief Medical Officer*, Department of the Interior, annual report, Immigration, fiscal year 1908-09, p. 110.

²⁹ *Report of the Deputy Minister*, Department of the Interior, annual report, Immigration, fiscal year 1910-11, p. xxxii.

**Deportations due to “public charge” provisions, fiscal year 1907-08,
by U.K. “nationality”**

Nationality	Number deported	“Public-charge” deportations (N.)	“Public-charge” deportations as proportion of total deportations(%)
English	513	152	29.63
Irish	31	11	35.48
‘Scotch’	61	16	26.23
Bulgarian	63	63	100.00
Other	157	37	23.57

Source: *Report of the Chief Medical Officer*, Department of the Interior, annual report, Immigration, fiscal year 1907-08, pp. 131-135

Still, as deportations -- particularly public-charge deportations -- increased, the Irish population remained relatively insulated from the upswing and outside the orbit of the authorities who mandated deportation. Even after deportations rose in 1907-08 and public-charge deportations skyrocketed from 23 the previous year to 279, the Chief Medical Officer, P.H. Bryce, expressed satisfaction that so few deportations under the *Immigration Act* had occurred in light of “the stress of a sudden stoppage of work during a Canadian winter,” and noted that the Ontario annual reports of the Public Charities had returned a small increase in the number of immigrants in the institutions of that province, amounting to less than 3% of the total.³⁰ Moreover, he recorded that the House of Industry in Toronto had seen a sharp rise in outdoor relief during an acute industrial depression over the winter, chiefly given to about 200 mostly English families, only two of which were subsequently deported.³¹

How, then, did he reconcile this analysis with the steep rise in deportations and account for the predominantly English hue of the deported population? Bryce contended that a large number of English immigrants came from cities, particularly “‘ne’er-do-wells,’ social and moral derelicts, and ineffectives in general,” many of whom were ill-suited to rural life and especially to the Canadian winter.³² These characteristics of the English immigrant group apparently contrasted with the Irish cohort, whose numbers were tapering after a much earlier peak. Drawn from a predominantly rural country, the Irish were also received within long-established associational networks and had a comparatively distinctive occupational profile.

³⁰ *Report of the Chief Medical Officer*, Department of the Interior, annual report, Immigration, fiscal year 1907-08, p. 129.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, p. 136.

Conclusion

These data offer a complex picture of deportation, and suggest that deportation policies and practices were embedded within and guided by cultural assumptions about immigration and citizenship. They were expressed in the markedly different experiences of various immigrant populations, including those “nationalities” that constituted the U.K. immigrant cohort. Both the English and the Scots were migrating to Canada in large numbers at this time, while the influx of immigrants from Ireland, having peaked many decades earlier, was tapering off.

During the dramatic increase in deportations in 1908-09, the Irish immigrant population often served as a foil for the English “ne'er-do-wells” widely seen as the face of the immigrant problem in Canada -- the male Irish being disproportionately agricultural and commercial workers and the females domestic servants, all drawn from a country that was much less urbanized than England and with an historically different institutional apparatus for social relief. Furthermore, arriving in comparatively small numbers, Irish immigrants, like their Scottish counterparts perhaps, were able to draw on -- but not strain -- established voluntary institutional networks within Irish-Canadian communities. Even though their rate of deportation under public-charge provisions may have been higher than that of English immigrants, they did not evoke images of a tidal wave of newcomers, nor were they regarded as a population unaccustomed to the rural life or climate of the young Dominion.

The goal of immigration policy was, after all, in the words of Chief Medical Officer P.H. Bryce, to attract people of such calibre that they required only “the influence of social and educational environments to transform them into good citizens and absorb them into the masses of our law-abiding and progressive communities.”³³ By most contemporary accounts, U.K. immigrants were seen as uniquely well-suited to these tasks, though they did not escape surveillance as potential citizens.

To answer the question of whether or why Irish immigrants were seen as more desirable than their English counterparts at this time requires an expanded analysis of the institutional reception of these immigrant populations by the state, the communities in which they settled, and their own immigrant populations, as well as a more systematic analysis of political, bureaucratic and broader cultural appraisals of immigrant “nationality” and Canadian citizenship in the early 20th century.

Published records suggest that situational and contextual factors were critical influences over immigrant deportations. This brief overview of annual deportation reports invites historians to further explore how deportation was designed and implemented as part of a process of ethnic regulation, and how it was constructed and reconstructed around a range of social, economic and political priorities that focused on integrating various “nationalities” within the young Dominion.

³³ *Report of the Chief Medical Officer*, Department of the Interior, annual report, Immigration, fiscal year 1908-09, p. 110.

