

2.3 SELECTION OF EMIGRANT LABOURERS¹ AND MIGRATION PROCESS

SELECTION

The Act of Parliament establishing the Colony declared that the whole of the funds arising from the sale and rent of land was to form an emigration fund to be used to provide free passage to the colony from Great Britain and Ireland for poor persons *“provided that they shall, as far as possible be, adult persons of the two sexes in equal proportions and not exceeding the age of 30 years.”*

A free passage was to include provisions and every expense of the voyage but the emigrants had to be:

- Honest, sober, industrious and of general good character
- Able bodied, of sane mind, and not less than 15 or more than 30 years of age
- Superior artisans, excellent agricultural labourers or other very desirable emigrants would occasionally be accepted though of an older age.

Emigrants who were married were preferred although the unmarried were not rejected. They had to be bona fide labourers going out to work for wages as for example artisans, agriculturalists, domestic servants and sailors and fishermen to participate in coastal trade or fisheries. It was recommended that labourers should be hired by some capitalist for at least one year on their arrival with the wages as were agreed upon between them. Assistance in obtaining such a hiring was to be given to approved emigrants.

The wives of labourers, *“if of the approved age”* were to receive a free passage. Children under 3 were free of charge and from 3 to under 15, the fare was 5 Pounds. 15 year olds could obtain a free passage. Alternatively, the migrant could agree a price with the owner of the ship. Parents going out at their own cost to occupy land and engage in business could obtain a free passage for their children and other dependants provided they went out as bona fide labourers to work for their parents or others as long as they conformed in age and other particulars in the rules.

Occupations were to be the more common and useful kind. Agricultural labourers of every description were wanted. They were stated to include builders, bakers, butchers, wheelwrights, carriers, farriers, tailors, tanners, brickmakers and others. For women preference was given to those accustomed to farm and dairy work, seamstresses and domestic servants.

Those ineligible for free passage, could pay their own way with the fare for an adult (15 years or over) being 15/-. Children under 2 were free and 5/- for those 2 to 6 years, 6/- for 6 year olds and 7/- for 7 year olds.

If approved notice of the time and place of embarkation was given, the expense of reaching the vessel was to be borne by the migrant and they would be received on board on the date notified at no cost even if the sailing was to be delayed.

On arrival in the colony the emigrants were to be received by an officer *“who will be ready to supply their immediate wants, assist them in reaching their place of destination, be ready to advise them in case of difficulty, and at all times give them employment, at reduced wages, on government works, if from any cause they should be unable to obtain it elsewhere.”*

¹ Appendix A Free Passage to Paradise Pat Button. Appendix No 4 to the First Annual Report of the Colonization Commissioners of South Australia to his Majesty's Principal private Secretary of State for the Colonies, 1836.

On arrival, the emigrant labourers “*will be at perfect liberty to work for anyone willing to employ them and will make their own bargain for wages*”. The Commissioners would not supply any details of the likely level of wages but they stated that general wage levels in the neighbouring colonies “*are much higher than in England.*”

The thrust of the scheme was to establish a laboring base or working class that would have an incentive and ample opportunity to earn enough money to eventually buy land or own their own business.

MIGRATION PROCESS²

Emigration was a difficult process for many people. It was not simply the difficult decision of leaving family and friends which in most cases carried the realization that there would never be any return. For many there had to be a total separation and this might have involved the sale of property and chattels that could not be taken with them.

For the better off this was a more significant problem than for **Samuel** the ex convict. He would have returned from Van Diemen’s Land with little to his name and it would have been a matter of convincing Mary Ann to return with him. It is unlikely there was any property to sell.

Once a person like **Samuel** had been accepted for migration, he had to make all the necessary arrangements and be ready to travel. In **Samuel’s** case, he had 22 days to return to Heytesbury to organize things and return to London with his wife and family to take his ship.

In many cases this was difficult for people because they had to sell their property but they still required accommodation before the ship was due to sail. They also had to know when to make the start to London and of course in 1837 there was no railway and coaches would have been costly for **Samuel**. Added to this was that it was very rare for the ship to sail on the date that was first announced. The Colonization Commissioners made an attempt to provide hostel type of accommodation near the ship but only for a short time prior to departure. All else had to be paid for by the migrant.

Provisions for the voyage had to be provided by the ship in accordance with the *Passenger Act* but everything else for his and his family’s comfort had to be provided by the migrant. The notice advising when the ship was to depart also included:

...(you) must provide bedding and the necessary utensils such as fork and knife, plate, spoon, drinking mug etc (which should be of tin and pewter)...

All of this equipment and baggage had to be carried aboard by the migrant and his family and placed in the berths of his own choosing. The crew would have been working and there were no stewards. Space was minimal. The total area comprised their bunks and a few feet of space along one side and the space under the lower bunk. This for 100 days is completely beyond the comprehension of today’s travellers.

Decisions were also necessary on what to take as ready to use, as changes of clothes and linen were needed, and what to place in the baggage that would go into the hold. Once it was placed in the hold there would be little chance of getting it out till the end of the trip. This is alright on today’s aircraft but for three or four months, with little storage space, it was a significant problem.

There were numerous other problems involving access to fresh water (or lack of it) washing facilities which mainly involved washing with salt water, and toilet facilities and the need for passengers to cook their own food. Add to these the miserable weather conditions that would be experienced at various stages throughout the voyage. It must have had many thinking that they should never have started.

² Migrant Ships for South Australia Ronald Parsons Chapter 1