

The Hardings seek freedom, 1840

Learning about the lives of my ancestors has given rise to many emotions. I was saddened to discover the extent to which death; violence and the threat of dire poverty were always present while they lived in England, the United States and Canada. I've been surprised by the number of detours, dead-ends, and false starts the Hardings and Garretts experienced before settling on their farms in Douro Township and I'm proud of their courage in the face of adversity.

In 1840, Ann and Stephen Harding boarded a sailing ship in Liverpool England for a voyage that would last about a month, depending on the winds and the seas. They were among the 55,000 emigrants from the British Isles who sought a new life in North America in 1840. It's fitting that Ann and Stephen, in their quest for freedom from poverty and violence, boarded the *Patrick Henry*,¹ a ship named after a freedom fighter who is remembered for saying in 1775 in support of the American Revolution, "Give me liberty or give me death." The ship was a three-mast, square-rigged sailing vessel built in New York in 1839, and one of the fastest on the Liverpool to New York route. She was 159 feet long and 35 feet at the widest point.

Unfortunately, the Hardings did not find instant liberty in the United States and Canada. If we define liberty as economic security and not having to go to war to defend one's country, the first generation of the Harding descendents to have freedom from want and war was born in the mid 20th century, more than a century after the Hardings landed in the port of New York.



Figure 1 *Columbia II*, sister ship of the *Patrick Henry*

The Harding's arrived in Cleveland in 1840, where the Erie Canal, completed in 1833, had made Ohio one of the most prosperous American states. There was a labour shortage in the United States and it's conceivable that Stephen worked in Cleveland as a porter on the western extremity of the canal, as he had been a porter in Bristol, England. Perhaps he received free passage from England while he worked as a porter aboard ship; although Stephen is registered on the *Patrick Henry* as a "Cow Factor," suggesting that he was an agent for selling cattle. Based on what we know of his background, it's more likely that he had limited knowledge of cattle and he was helping to look after the cattle aboard ship and learning some skills he would use again twenty

years later. The fact that there were fifty-one passengers in steerage on this ship that seven years later held three hundred famished Irish immigrants in the same space could mean it was home to a large non-human cargo, possibly cattle, and they were a source of disease such as cholera; although, as mentioned in the last chapter no deaths had been registered in the ship's manifest.



The Harding family Bible shows that three daughters died in Cleveland, perhaps at birth. The half-a-dozen years that Ann and Stephen and their new son, William—born a little over a year after they arrived in the United States—spent in cholera-ridden and violence-torn Cleveland may have been the most difficult years in their lives.

The Hardings moved to Toronto and lived at the corner of Sayer and Agnes Street, according to a street directory of 1846-7. These streets are now called Chestnut and Dundas, the location of the Eon Restaurant. In 2005, I snacked in the restaurant with my daughter Patricia and talked about the possibility of writing a family history. We did not know that we were seated where our first Canadian ancestors lived. Physicists tell us that atoms never disappear. Could it be that my ancestors' atoms hovered over our conversation and influenced my decision to write a family history?

Figure 2 Charles Dickens

Toronto was a violent place in the 1840s and 1850s. Frequent skirmishes erupted between the Irish Protestants and Catholics. Charles Dickens, who visited in 1842, wrote, "It is a matter of deep regret that political differences should have run high in this place, and led to most discreditable and disgraceful results."² The police were ineffective. Newspaper reports point to a famous rape case³ a few years after the Hardings left Toronto, involving a prostitute that occurred close to where the Harding's lived, and I surmise that Ann and her family were well-acquainted with the violence of Toronto.

The Hardings and the rest of the 20,000 souls living in Toronto faced a crisis in 1847 when 38,560 Irish immigrants, mostly Roman Catholics, landed at Rees's Warf, several boatloads a day of 200 or more via Lake Ontario. They were victims of *Gota Mor*, Irish for the Great Hunger, that left starving Irish with a choice between death or emigration. But the famished Irish who chose to emigrate were not home free. In 1847, many died on coffin ships and were tossed into the sea; an estimated 3,000 succumbed at the quarantine station on Grosse Isle near Quebec City; 3,000 to 6,000 Irish immigrants died at Windmill Point in Montreal; 1,000 died of cholera in Toronto; and more died after they were rushed out of Toronto to the countryside. After Toronto's main immigration agent died, as well as the head nurse, a doctor, and the Bishop Michael Power, Torontonians like the Hardings feared a pandemic from cholera, diphtheria, and typhus brought ashore by the Irish.



Figure 3 Toronto in the 1850s

The anticipated outbreak did not occur nor did relations between Toronto's Protestants and Catholics heat up as much as some feared, and there was a silver lining for the Hardings. With the influx of the Irish immigrants, work became available for Stephen ten minutes from where he lived helping to construct the new convalescent hospital at King and John Streets. Or there was also work building St. Michael's Cathedral a few more minutes walk from the Harding home. The church was constructed of brick, the 1847 Toronto directory listed a William Harding—possibly Stephen and Ann's relative—as a bricklayer, and in 1855 Stephen Harding was described as a brick maker in a tax record in Cavan Township, near Peterborough. So it's highly possible that Stephen worked with bricks in Toronto and he may have handled bricks used in the construction of St Michael's Cathedral and other brick buildings, either as a bricklayer or a brick maker, or both.

After a few years residing in another Protestant-Catholic hotbed, Cavan Township, where son George was born in 1852, the Hardings moved to Douro Township East of Peterborough, and daughter Maria was born in 1855 and Emma Anne was born in 1858. The Hardings officially acquired 100 acres on August 1, 1859, a grant from the Crown. Ann was now forty-two and Stephen was forty-four. They were property owners for the first time and undertaking farming, with little or no knowledge other than what they had acquired since 1855, probably under the tutelage of James Broad and their other neighbours. They took over a failed bush farm, a property granted in 1831 by the Crown to William Pye, a veteran of the War of 1812.

Figure 4 Statue to cholera victims in Toronto



There is no indication that the Hardings paid for the property, and some family members have interpreted the deed from the Crown to say that Stephen was granted the land for military service. It's hard for me to see how Stephen squeezed being a soldier into his life, and it's doubtful that he would have been entitled to the land as a discharged soldier unless he was an officer. It seems that William Pye received the East half of Lot 25 Concession 1 of Douro along with land in Prince Edward County for his services and we might assume that the land in Douro lay fallow. If that were the case it would be in the best interests of James Broad, the neighbour to see the land developed by a family and it's possible that

Broad, a leader in the community, pulled strings for the Hardings to be granted the land.

I read a letter in the Archives of Ontario in which James Broad was helping squatters to acquire land and it's possible that the Hardings became land owners in the same way with Broad's help. Broad may have written a letter on behalf of the Hardings that stretched the truth and attested that they had occupied their land for several years, and the Crown granted the land based on Broad's reputation as a long-time resident in the area. In this scenario, the Hardings would have felt beholden to Broad, who tradition says was a gruff man with few friends. Today James Broad is immortalized in Peterborough County by a haphazard heap of huge boulders on the south-east corner of Lot 26, Concession 1 of Douro Township, that some claim are remnants of what locals derisively called the James Broad Castle.

¹ http://webpages.charter.net/mcarolan/ThomasCarolan.html#The_Ship, Date accessed: 14 January 2009.

² <http://dickens.thefreelibrary.com/American-Notes-for-General-Circulation/15-1>, Date accessed: 14 January 2009.

³ “The Sayer Street Outrage: Gang Rape and Male Law in 19th-Century Toronto,” *Manitoba Law Journal*, 20, (1991), p. 46-68.