

## Our Moonraker Pioneer Ancestors

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I suspect that when you think of early European pioneers in the Peterborough area, the Peter Robinson Irish colony comes to mind, followed by the Strickland Trio (Samuel and his sisters Susanna Moodie and Catharine Parr Traill) and later the Home children starting in the 1870s. Until a couple of years ago I had not heard about the Moonrakers who settled in large numbers in the Peterborough area and other parts of Ontario in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The word Moonraker is associated in the minds of many with an Ian Fleming/James Bond novel and film. I found no explanations why Ian Fleming called one of his books *Moonraker*; although a clue might lie in the fact that Fleming is buried near Swindon, Wiltshire—even though he was born in London.

Figure 1 Map of Wiltshire with towns mentioned in this article



The term Moonraker is used to describe people from Wiltshire England, sometimes called the County of Wilts. Wiltshire is in the south west of England (Wessex). It is landlocked and surrounded by the counties of Dorset, Somerset, Hampshire, Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire and West Berkshire.

Wiltshire covers an area of 3,485 km<sup>2</sup> or 861,000 acres. Population in 2001 was 613,024. Population in the mid 1800s was around 250,000 and it remained there for some sixty years as a result of emigration.

People from Wiltshire, or Wilts, use the term Moonraker to describe themselves in a fun-way like Newfoundlanders calling themselves Newfies. The origin of the term is in the following story:

Years ago, they say, Wiltshire men smuggled liquor. One bright moonlit night—remember that, the bright moon—a couple of Wiltshire smugglers saw an Excise man coming their way. They dumped their barrels of contraband liquor into a pond. When the patroller left, the men from Wiltshire used wooden hay rakes to fish the barrels out of the pond. But the suspicious Excise man came back and caught the smugglers with their rakes in the pond. The Excise men asked the local yokels what they were doing. Raking in the cheese, they said. The government man laughed at the Wiltshire men for being so stupid and rode off.

It's said that the better-known word, Moonshine<sup>1</sup>, meaning illegal alcoholic beverage, flows from the Moonraker<sup>2</sup> story cited above.

Here written in Moonraker dialect, or what's often called West Country dialect, is some of the above story as told in a poem<sup>3</sup> written by Edward Slow in 1894 and spoken like a Hollywood actor playing the part of a pirate.

*Down Vizes way zom years agoo,  
When smuggal 'n wur nuthen new,  
An people wurden nar bit shy,  
Of who they did their sperrits buy.  
In a village liv'd a publican,  
Whi kept an Inn, The Pelican,  
A man Zid wur, a man a merrit.*

Moonrakers were the poor of the poor in England. For the most part, the Industrial Revolution by-passed Wiltshire and many of the Moonrakers were farm labourers. Their purchasing power eroded from one generation to the next. Infant mortality decreased as a result of better sanitation and Moonraker families became larger and poorer. Impoverished Moonrakers became prime

candidates for emigration, and they were often 'encouraged' by local officials.

*Sending England's Poor to the Colonies*

In the 1820s, parliamentary reformers like Wakefield promoted the settling of England's poor in the colonies<sup>4</sup> as a solution to Victorian poverty, and under this program 2,500 indigent Irish Catholics settled in the bush of the Peterborough area in September 1825. They were heavily subsidized<sup>5</sup> and the costs were deemed excessive, leading to the end of the British Parliament funding immigrants to the Canadian colonies and the beginning of private and local funding. In spite of funding ending from Westminster, between 1829 and 1831, nearly 1,000 Moonrakers living in Warminster, Wiltshire or within a radius of ten miles received assistance to emigrate. Assistance came from parishes, churches, and individuals such as the Marquis of Bath. It's estimated that 370 or 14.8 per cent of the population of Warminster Parish immigrated to Upper Canada between 1830 and 1832.<sup>6</sup>

Writing in her comprehensive book about Wiltshire farm labourers, Avice Wilson summarized her thoughts on farm labourers who emigrated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, "A population of Moonrakers came into existence in many parts of the world, their rate of success unknown; but their harsh background (in Wiltshire) must have equipped them to deal with the worst adversities emigrants had to face."<sup>7</sup>

*Moonraker Emigrants: 1830, 1831*

Reverend Silcox visited Canada in 1829 and returned the next year with 65 people from Corsley, Wiltshire, located four miles from Warminster. In 1831 he returned to Canada with 254 passengers again from Corsley who had been assisted to leave by the parish and other benefactors. Letters home from Dummer Township indicated that this group received axes and provisions for their first year.

A book published in 1909 about life in the town of Corsley comments on the the 1830 emigration; and one imagines that the same things were said about the emigrants of 1831:<sup>8</sup>

*the parish shipped off at its own cost sixty-six of the least desirable of its inhabitants, about half being adults and half children, or "under age." This was only following the example set by natives of Corsley who had previously emigrated on their own account. . . These emigrants consisted of "several families of the very class one would wish to remove—men of suspected bad habits, and bringing up their children to wickedness." There*

*were several poachers among them, and other reputed bad characters.*<sup>9</sup>

William Lyon Mackenzie, the leader of the Upper Canada Rebellion of 1837 was in Quebec City when the Corsely group arrived, he wrote the following.<sup>10</sup>

*Quebec, April 22-25, 1831.*

*One forenoon I went on board the ship Airthy Castle, from Bristol, immediately after her arrival. The passengers were in number 254, all in the hold or steerage; all English, from about Bristol, Bath, Frome, Warminster, Muden Bradley, &c. I went below. . . . These settlers were poor, but in general they were fine-looking people, and such as I was glad to see come to America. They had had a fine passage of about a month, and they told me that it was the intention of many of them to come to Upper Canada. Fortune may smile on some, and frown on others; but it is my opinion that few among them will forget being cooped up below deck for four weeks in a moveable bed-room, with 250 such fellow-lodgers. . .*

Many of the Corsley emigrants did well, according to letters supposedly written by the emigrants and edited by Poulett Scrope<sup>11</sup>, who was the brother of Charles Thomson Scrope, a British politician who rose to political prominence in the 1830's when he became involved with colonial matters and as Lord Sydenham was responsible for implementing the Union Act in 1840, which united Upper Canada and Lower Canada as the Province of Canada. And later Charles became Governor General of Canada until his death in 1841.

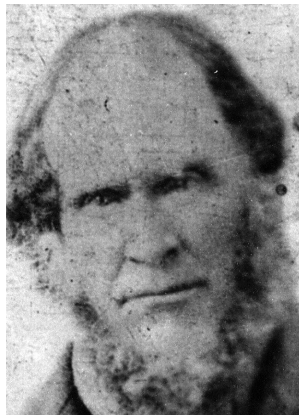


Figure 2 Stephen Harding

In his introduction to the letters, Scrope wrote: The population of these kingdoms is notoriously excessive as compared with the demand for labour. . . . many an able-bodied man. . . is unable to obtain employment, and reduced to pauperism here, to mendicancy in Ireland; becoming a burden to his country instead of a valuable instrument of production.

Large numbers of these persons are every winter on the verge of starvation, protracting a life of misery on an average allowance from their parishes of 2d. per day to each individual in a family.

*... there exist, within a few days sail, parts of the British Dominions where the labour of these persons is in such demand that they could obtain by it for themselves and their families an abundance, not only of necessaries, but of comforts even, and luxuries—and to which they may be conveyed for less than the cost of keeping them in idleness and misery during one twelvemonth in this country—it does appear evident that their removal to such a comparative paradise at so small a cost, should they be willing to go, (and how many of them would refuse ?) is the simplest and most eligible means for improving their condition. It is clear, too, that their removal in this manner would equally relieve their fellow-labourers who remain at home... would free the country from the burden of supporting a large body of unprofitable, and often criminal and turbulent, because unemployed and miserable, paupers—in short, would put an end to all the evils that are confessedly occasioned by the redundancy of our labouring population, and replace them by the benefits which must accrue to Britain from a rapidly increasing and prosperous colonial population, employed in growing food for us on the rich soils of America, and exchanging it with our home manufacturers for the produce of their labour.*

#### *My Moonraker Ancestors and Assisted Emigration*

My Moonraker great-great-grandfather, Stephen Harding arrived in the Peterborough area, actually Cavan, in 1850 when he was thirty-five via, Toronto, Cleveland, Bristol and Hindon Wiltshire. I've found no evidence to suggest that he received financial assistance with his passage in 1840 when he sailed from Liverpool. My Moonraker great-grandfather Sid Garrett, immigrated to the Peterborough area in 1870 from Warminster, England when he was eighteen, with his twenty-three year old brother Fred. In 1870, helping Britain's poor to immigrate to Canada was an industry with 26 accredited organizations assisting 9,787 emigrants on 53 voyages—of these over 3,000 were men; over 2,000 were women and about 4,000 were classified as children. Railways and ships on the Great Lakes helped move the immigrants from Quebec City inland, mostly to Ontario in 1870.<sup>12</sup>

The largest sponsor, the British and Colonial Emigration Fund assisted 5,089 people on 18 voyages in 1870. Aboard the *Scandinavian*, Frederick and Sid Garrett found themselves in the midst of 189 assisted passengers: 102 men, 25 women, and 62 children. The British and Colonial Emigration Fund sponsored 104, the Boys' Home, Southampton Street, London, sponsored 62, and

Reverend Herring's program provided financial assistance to 23 passengers.

Unfortunately, the passenger manifest does not indicate who the sponsored individuals were however on the strength of numbers we can guess that the poor Garrett lads were sponsored by the British and Colonial Emigration Society. We can imagine that Sid and Fred saved money for several months, and their father may have sent remittance money to them from Canada, and perhaps they received assistance from their parish or employer to amass the three pounds sterling required by the society as a sign of each sponsored emigrants commitment. Officials in London, who ran the British and Colonial Emigration Society, with the Lord Mayor as the titular head, looked after the details: train fare from Warminster to



Liverpool, all costs of their voyages from Liverpool to Montreal, Montreal to Cobourg, and train fare from Cobourg to Peterborough as well as a small allowance once the Garrett lads arrived in Canada.

Figure 3 Emma and Sid Garrett 1880

#### *Why Did my Great-grandfather Emigrate?*

We don't know for sure why Sid Garrett and his brother Fred left their roots in Wiltshire and emigrated to Canada, but the answer is probably revealed when we consider that they were a farm labourer in England facing a life of poverty and a decade after emigrating to the New World they had acquired their own land to farm in the Peterborough area. My guess is that Sid and Fred left their farm labourer jobs to their younger brothers when they opted to take what was being called the 'golden bridge' to the new country called Canada.

Their decision to emigrate may have been influenced by a series of six articles appearing in the *Warminster Herald* in 1869 and 1870, extolling the virtues of Canada by a man who

claimed to have lived in Warminster, England and was now residing in Warminster, Ontario. One of the articles claimed there were no poor houses in Canada in 1870 because they were not needed. In fact there were several but there was not a poor house for residents of Peterborough County living outside of the Town of Peterborough and vagrants were housed in the county jail. Sid Garrett's father Joseph died in the Peterborough County Jail in 1894, while serving his ninth sentence of six months for vagrancy.

*Birds of a Feather. . .*

In my research into my ancestors I found several indications that Moonrakers liked to keep each others' company. According to the 1871 Census, Sid Garrett was living in Ashburnham with his former Warminster neighbour Robert Scott and family. In 1873 Fred Garrett married Mary Ann Scott, his former Warminster neighbour. In 1880, Sid Garrett married Ann Harding whose father, Stephen Harding, was a Moonraker from Hindon, eight miles from Warminster. Stephen Harding started a brickyard in 1850 with Stephen Curtis, also a Moonraker from Warminster. And in the next generation sons of Moonrakers went to war together. Stan Garrett and Howard Curtis sons of Moonrakers were best friends in the First World War according to letters written by Howard. Stan buried Howard after the battle of the Somme and in a moving letter explained how he made a tombstone out of chalk. 13 Howard, Stan and his brother Bill all visited Warminster the home of their fathers when they were stationed on the nearby Salisbury Plain and Bill Garrett married a Moonraker from Warminster.



Figure 4 Fred Garrett and his sons

*Ninety Moonraker Names*

If your ancestors came from England in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and if you have any of the names below in your family tree you might have Moonraker DNA. Some of the family names of Moonrakers who emigrated from Corsley, Warminster, Downton and other areas to Peterborough and other places in Upper Canada including Oro Township and the Talbot Settlement are:<sup>14</sup>

Alexander	Chalk	Ford	Higgs	Prangleys	Thorn
Allen	Champ	Forder	Hudson	Pressy	Treasure
Allworth	Clements	Frampton	Hunt	Pretty	Watts
Amor	Compton	Friar	Jellyman	Prince	Webb
Annett	Curtis	Futcher	Jennings	Riley	Weeks
Ball	Cuzner	Gauntlett	King	Rogers	West
Bampton	Dale	Gilbert	Latty	Sanders	Westcomb
Barrow	Deare	Goulding	Light	Scott	Watley
Barter	Deere	Grant	Martin	Shergold	Whatley
Beilby	Dredge	Grish	Moody	Silcox	Wheeler
Biddlecomb	Dunford	Gutteridge	Moore	Singer	Wilshire
Bishop	Eastman	Harding	Mussell	Small	
Bridle	Edmonds	Harnett	Noyse	Smith	
Bullock	Edwards	Harrington	Payne	Snelgrove	
Bundy	Elsbury	Harris	Penny	Swayne	
Cash	Foe	Heritage	Perry	Thomas	

<sup>1</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moonshine>

<sup>2</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moonrakers>

<sup>3</sup> <http://edwardslow.wordpress.com/biography/03-wiltshire-moonraking/>

<sup>4</sup> Alan G. Brunger, "The Geographical Context of English Assisted Emigration to Upper Canada in the Early Nineteenth Century", *British Journal of Canadian Studies*, Volume 16, Number one, 2003, p. 7-33.

<sup>5</sup> Hall, Basil, *Travels in North America in the years 1827 and 1828*, 1830, Volume 1, p. 291.

"Mr. Peter Robinson, in his Evidence before the Committee of the House of Commons, 3d Report p. 349, gives the following list: "Each head of a family is to be located upon 100 acres of land, to have a small log-house built for him, and to be furnished with 15 months' provisions; 1 cow, 1 American axe, 1 auger, 1 handsaw, 1 pickaxe, 1 spade, 2 gimlets, 100 nails, 1 hammer, 1 iron wedge, 3 hoes, 1 kettle, 1 frying pan, 1 iron pot, 5 bushels of seed potatoes, 8 quarts of Indian corn; and if they are very poor, they will require also blankets, in the proportion of one to each grown person, and one among three children."

<sup>6</sup> Brunger, "English Assisted Emigration", 7-31.

<sup>7</sup> Avic Wilson, , *Forgotten Labour, the Wiltshire agricultural worker and his environment 4500 BC to AD 1950*, 2007, p. 246.

<sup>8</sup> Maude, E. Davis, *Life in an English Village, an Economic and Historical Survey of the Parish of Corsley in Wiltshire*, 1909, 80.

<sup>9</sup> See paper re Corsley emigration at the Longleat Estate Office, and Corsley MS. Overseers' Accounts for this year, as found in Davis, *Life in an English Village*, 80.

<sup>10</sup> W.L. Mackenzie, *Sketches of Canada and the United States*, 1833, p. 179-81.

<sup>11</sup> G. Poulett Scrope, *Extracts Of Letters, Poor Persons, Who Emigrated Last Year Canada and The United States*, 1832.

<sup>12</sup> <http://retirees.uwaterloo.ca/~marj/genealogy/ships/mosc1870.html>.

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.canadianletters.ca/letters.php?letterid=6403&warid=3&docid=1&collectionid=290>

<sup>14</sup> (Three sources) 1. Jean Murray Cole, *Origins, The History of Dummer Township*, 1993, p. 20-23.

2. Scrope, G. Poulett, *Extracts Of Letters, Poor Persons, Who Emigrated Last Year Canada and The United States*, 1832. He was the brother of Although Scrope did not have a particularly active political life, his brother Charles Thomson Scrope who rose to political prominence and as Lord Sydenham was responsible for implementing the Union Act in 1840, which united Upper Canada and Lower Canada as the Province of Canada. And later Charles became Governor General of Canada until his death in 1841.

3. [http://thedowntonstory.com/emigrants\\_names.htm](http://thedowntonstory.com/emigrants_names.htm) accessed on January 1, 2011.