**JOSEPH ABBOTT'S *EMIGRANT TO NORTH AMERICA*:
THE GROWTH AND SPREAD OF A TEXT**

Prominent among the many 19th century publications dealing with Canada are the books in a special category of publishing, the emigrant handbooks. Small in physical size for portability and low in price, these little books calling themselves tracts, handbooks, guides, etc., were carried all over the world — at least to every area where the Union Jack waved. No doubt they were often read to pieces as they made the rounds of the steerage; no doubt they were instructive for those who could concentrate upon their closely-printed pages through the pitch and toss of the North Atlantic. These emigrant guides are a sub-species of the educational tract; their form is dictated by cheap publishing, and their message “useful knowledge.” Readers of genteel stock might inform themselves from the high-priced, finely-produced travel literature; for these people also were drawing-room publications showing the beautiful scenery (both cultivated and wild) of British North America. Another class of emigrant, called in the handbooks by a variety of condescending euphemisms for “working class” or “poor”, read (at least those who were sufficiently lettered read) emigrant literature from a variety of sources on both sides of the Atlantic. As each year passed, and more emigrants came, the data in the handbooks became outdated. Thus there was always a fresh market for this sort of publishing enterprise.

One who wished to inform the intending settler about Canada was the Rev. Joseph Abbott, a missionary with the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, who had come to Lower Canada from England in 1818. Let us hear Abbott in his own words describe what prompted him to write:¹

In the following work, the Author has no other object in view, than to convey to the mind of the Emigrant, before he leaves his native country, some idea of the nature and importance of the step he is about to take, with such hints and information as he will find useful for his guidance afterwards: and it owes its origin to the great and palpable want of plain and practical information, as to the general face and appearance of the country, its climate, soil, and agricultural capabilities and resources . . . in short, as to every thing connected with a Settler's life in the woods of Canada.

To remedy the evils arising from this want of information, was the Author's primary object, and he entered upon the task, with the most sanguine and enthusiastic anticipations of success; but obstacles and

¹ Joseph Abbott, *The emigrant to North America*, 2nd. ed., 1843, p. [vii].

rebuffs, of which he never dreamt, although only such as are naturally incidental to similar undertakings, damped his ardour and prevented the completion of his design, when his labours were thrown aside among his useless papers . . .

The papers remained undisturbed, so we learn, for seven years. They came to the attention of William Kemble, the publisher of the *Quebec Mercury*, and he published Abbott's material serially in 1841-2. The series was a great success. Although it was regular practice for newspapers to reprint articles from one another, it does say something for the practical value of Abbott's information that it was reprinted in several journals (eleven in Lower Canada alone, according to the "Favourable notices" printed in the second edition), and even appeared in *The Emigration Gazette* of London, England. Newspaper publication (and attendant re-publication by other journals) was a means not only of assaying the worth of one's writings before formal publication, but also of reaching a large audience quickly, and from the reader's point of view, cheaply. Some of the most famous writings from this period in our literary history, Haliburton's *Clockmaker* is the best example, began their literary lives in this manner. If the work proved successful, a monograph might follow. Abbott's letters duly appeared in 1842 as *Memoranda of a Settler in Lower Canada*.

The Emigration Gazette was an important weekly newspaper to which that most energetic promoter of emigration to Canada, Dr. Thomas Rolph, contributed. Rolph had seen Abbott's articles in the *Quebec Mercury* and had written the editor of that paper:

Montreal, Feb. 20, 1842

Dear Sir,

I have been so delighted with the "Memoranda of a Settler in Lower Canada," lately published in the *Quebec Mercury*, that I have an idea of publishing them in pamphlet form in England, with notes and remarks of my own. You would therefore much oblige me by sending me the whole of the numbers containing it. I am obliged to you also for your frequent and kind mention of

Yours gratefully and truly,
Thomas Rolph.²

Thus were the settler's letters recognized as important aids to intending emigrants by a most influential authority who, if he were to carry out his expressed intention, would give Abbott's labours a truly international circulation. Whether Rolph wrote the editor of *The Emigration Gazette* and recommended the letters, I do not know; they appeared, however, from April 9 to April 30, 1842, beginning as "Diary of a settler in Canada" and concluding as "The Memoranda by a Settler in Lower Canada". The series was praised by the *Gazette* as "a valuable mass of practical knowledge, of the deepest interest to the intending Emigrant, and which may be perused with singular advantage" (April 9, 1842). Thus Abbott's effort on the settlers' behalf had seen print and favourable

²*Op. cit.*, p. [iii].

comment in both Canada and Britain. There was a market for separate publication as a book. At this point, the textual history of Abbott's *Memoranda* becomes complicated, for two men, the author in Canada and the emigration agent in Britain, set about producing a book on the basis of the original newspaper articles' success.

Before the series had finished its course in the *Quebec Mercury*, Abbott had received, he tells the reader in the second edition, "flattering and substantial proofs of public favour, in the shape of orders for more than a thousand copies of his work, provided it could be got out by the opening of the navigation . . ."³ So near at hand was this time limit that the text had to be hurried into print. It appeared as an eighty-page pamphlet, printed for the author by Lovell and Gibson, and was a success:

The first edition, consisting of rather a large impression, met with the anticipated reception from the public, and had a ready sale, notwithstanding it was of so local a nature, being confined chiefly to the lower portion of the Province.⁴

Later that year the untiring Dr. Rolph carried out his intention of publishing a pamphlet. Abbott's *Memoranda*, the text based on the Lovell and Gibson pamphlet, appeared again as a sizeable portion of Rolph's *The emigrant's manual: particularly addressed to the industrious classes and others who intend settling abroad; together with "The memoranda of a settler in Canada." Being an account of his first settlement, daily occupations, prices of labour, provisions, travelling, etc. By Thomas Rolph, Esq. Government agent for Emigration . . .* London, Cunningham and Mortimer.⁵ This book is not dated, but is reported as "just issued" in the November 5, 1842, issue of *The Emigration Gazette*. In his book, Rolph states

It is well known that I have devoted my humble efforts to the diffusion of more correct information on this important subject, and it is with no little pleasure that I reflect on the results that have flowed from my endeavours. I have the satisfaction of knowing that from the simple statements I have made as to the advantages presented by British North America, I have preserved many loyal subjects to her Majesty, and have advanced in no slight degree the comfort of the individuals, and the prosperity of the provinces. It is from no feelings of vanity that I thus refer to my own efforts, but rather as an apology for adding another to the many works that have appeared on the subject of emigration.⁶

That such a large portion of *The emigrant's manual* is the work of another does not trouble the modest doctor; he acknowledges that the work was

³*Op. cit.*, p. [viii].

⁴*Ibid.*

⁵Bodleian Library copy described.

⁶Thomas Rolph, *The emigrant's manual*, p.2.

suggested to him by the letters published in the *Quebec Mercury*, and that he is re-publishing the *Memoranda* with additional material.

It may seem to us unjust, but it was then perfectly legal, to reprint Abbott's work, for it was not protected by copyright, having been first published outside the United Kingdom. Although works first published in the United Kingdom were accorded copyright protection throughout the Queen's dominions (Rolph's *Emigrant's manual* could not be reprinted by Lovell and Gibson in Montreal, for example), judicial decisions had affirmed that in order to secure imperial copyright, a work had to be published in the United Kingdom, or, after 1838, in a country having a copyright treaty with Great Britain.⁷ A work by a colonial author, first published in his native colony, was unprotected: any local copyright statutes, and the British North American provinces all had them before Confederation, gave authors local protection only.

Abbott was dissatisfied that his *Memoranda* (1842) had been rushed into print. He felt that Upper Canada deserved attention too. He thus set to work preparing a second edition which appeared the following year. With an expanded text to include information on Upper Canada, the little handbook took on a new title (*The emigrant to North America: from Memoranda of a settler in Canada*) but retained anonymity of authorship. On its title-page it called itself the "second edition"; so it was, of the *Memoranda* material which had appeared the year previously. But the nature of the additional letters, nearly half of the whole, is such that we must revise our description of the book. *The emigrant to North America* is in fact a work of joint authorship, for the section of Upper Canada letters from the fictional "Robert Stevenson" are the work of yet another zealous advocate of emigration, Dr. William Dunlop. This fact emerges from Abbott's correspondence with the Edinburgh publisher Blackwood regarding the third edition of *The emigrant to North America*. This correspondence sheds light on the bibliographical history of Abbott's book, and documents some of the problems of the colonial writer who was seeking an overseas market for his work.

Abbott wrote Messrs. Ballantyne of Edinburgh on March 3, 1843 (the letter is in the correspondence files of Blackwood,⁸ with other letters from Abbott, so Ballantyne's firm must have passed the first of the series on). With his letter, Abbott enclosed a copy of *Memoranda of a Settler*, and provided the following explanation:

I published it . . . in this country where it met with a ready sale, as far at least as the impression of 1000 copies at 1/6 each

D^r Tho^s Rolph published an undigested copy of it as it had appeared in the public prints.

Although the *Memoranda* refers to Lower Canada exclusively, he states

I am however prepared with materials, to extend it to the Upper

⁷1 & 2 Vict., c. 59 ("An Act for securing to Authors, in certain Cases, the Benefit of International Copyright").

⁸National Library of Scotland, MS 4063, folio 1-11.

portion also, by the kind assistance of my friend D^r Dunlop who has furnished all the information necessary, & that in his best style.

The new Edition therefore will now form a book of about 200 pages.

I wish therefore that you would make me an offer for this new Edition, contingent, I suppose, upon the sale of it, as I am quite ignorant of the nature of such transactions, only this I know that they ought to be made with the probable prospect of mutual benefit to the parties.

If a map of the Province & a few wood cuts could be added its popularity would be materially increased. But I need not make such suggestions to you.

Blackwood made Abbott an offer on May 17, 1843. The firm thought the book likely to sell if published at a cheap rate, and it offered to publish and divide profits after expenses had been met. In a letter of June 26, Abbott accepted their terms, adding

I hope you will allow me to take a few hundred copies, if I should wish to do so, in allowing for presswork, paper, & binding . . . although I do not make this a positive condition, nor am I sure that I should require *any*, except a couple or three dozen copies to distribute among my friends here.

He noted that governmental authorities had expressed interest in the book,

and as they might take a number of copies for gratuitous distribution, I think it would be but fair that I should reap the benefit, if they should do so, especially as it would tend rather to increase the [?demand] for sales, inasmuch as it would make it better known and give it a character.

Abbott enclosed some additional matter, all that he could get ready for the next mail, and concluded

I would not like to see any material alteration in the *matter* but as to the manner style &c I of course give you unlimited authority with full power to add any thing in the way of preface you might think proper.

I have only further to remark that I hope you will publish a large impression — of this however you are much better judges than I am.

The letters in the second part have been furnished from the pen of Dr. W. Dunlop (The Tyge[r]) who [sic] I think you must know.

A letter of July 25, 1843 sent additional material (likely the “Advertisement to third edition” which is dated July 1843) and suggested

M^r J. Newman 30 Bridge Row London has the plate of a very pretty view of Quebec impressions from which might be obtained for a frontispiece at a very trifling cost if you should think it worth while.

Again, Abbott sent corrections on September 11 of the same year. These were trifling changes, and they arrived too late. Interestingly, one passage Abbott wanted to alter was a reference to Thomas Rolph, whose name was to be replaced by the phrase “an emigration agent”.

Concluding the correspondence is a letter of September 26. Abbott apologizes for sending yet another correction (“I fear you will begin to think that there will be no end of my communications . . .”) and encloses press cuttings about Captain Barclay’s exaggerated comments on Canada⁹ and comments in detail about them. He announces his appointment to the post of Registrar of McGill College, adding

By the bye I think you might make this infant University a present of a copy of your Magazine without probably any ultimate sacrifice to yourselves inasmuch as it would make it more known among the educated portion of the people here, the principles it advocates both political and religious are in perfect accordance with those of the College.

The difficulties inherent in transatlantic discussions concerning the issue of a book are apparent in the selections from Abbott’s correspondence with Blackwood. Author and publisher are at such removes of time and space that dealings are severely limited. The author, rightly proud of his work, suggests illustration, and a large press run. He also comments on distribution. Blackwood’s eyes are on the economic aspects, and the publisher sees the book’s market value. The book appeared without illustration, and without the last-minute changes, admittedly minor, that Abbott kept sending.¹⁰

How important a factor was Dunlop’s name with regard to Blackwood’s acceptance of *The emigrant*? “The Tiger” was a personal friend of the publisher, and a contributor to *Blackwood’s Magazine*. Certainly his having had a hand in *The emigrant* would have been a persuasive factor in its acceptance. But why was the seemingly well-kept secret of joint authorship not acknowledged, especially when the Tiger’s name (better known than that of Abbott) might have stimulated sales of the book? Both literary and pragmatic answers suggest themselves. For reasons of verisimilitude, the letters from “Robert Stevenson,” which form the bulk of the Upper Canada section, would have to appear to be authentic. Fictionalized settlers’ experiences would not have the ring of truth that the original *Memoranda*, now part one of *The emigrant* had. As for the remarks in Dunlop’s section on the Canada Company, with which he was directly associated, it would not do to have the favourable comments of settler “Stevenson” shown as being from the pen of one of the Canada Company’s employees. Abbott had been careful to dissociate himself from “Colonial Land Companies, Emigration Associations, as well as private individual landholders”,

⁹Robert Barclay Allardice (1779-1854), also known as Robert Barclay-Allardice, or Captain Barclay of Ury. His *Agricultural tour in the United States and Upper Canada* (Edinburgh, Blackwood, 1842) was attacked by Rolph in his *Comparative advantages between the United States and Canada* (London, Smith, Elder, 1842).

¹⁰Blackwood’s accounts (National Library of Scotland MS 5644/F2) dated October 1843 show that the book was sold at 1s. 6d. There is also an entry: “1000 Sold at 8d. to Canada Assocⁿ [] 33.6.8”. The press run was 2080.

stating that he had no connection with them. "This he mentions under the conviction, that it is very important that the reader should be assured of the fact."¹¹ With these strong assurances, it would have been imprudent to mention that part two of the book, of which the final letter deals almost entirely with the Canada Company's Huron Tract, was the work of the Warden of the Forests of that same company.

Did this new, joint production of Abbott and Dunlop achieve the objectives of Abbott's original series of letters in the *Quebec Mercury*? If the repeated appearance of the material bespeaks a need for such information, entertainingly presented, we might assume that *The emigrant* was a success. The careful modern reader will detect a difference in style between part one (with its later echoes in Abbott's fictional Philip Musgrave¹²) and part two (the dry humour and irony of which are characteristic of Dunlop, and which now and then look back to his own *Statistical sketches of Upper Canada*). Copies of *The emigrant to North America* no doubt instructed and entertained many a prospective farmer as the book made its way around the occupants of the steerage; it surely afforded the future backwoodsmen some amusement as well, and no doubt did achieve its aims and merit the popularity that it was accorded in its own time.

Bibliographical Appendix

Revised entries for the manuals discussed in the text:

1. Abbott, Joseph.
Memoranda of a settler in Lower Canada; or, The emigrant to North America. Montreal, Printed for the author, by Lovell and Gibson, 1842. viii, 80 p.
1000 copies; price 1s. 6d.
2. Rolph, Thomas.
The emigrant's manual: particularly addressed to the industrious classes and others who intend settling abroad; together with "The memoranda of a settler in Canada" [by Joseph Abbott] . . . London, Cunningham and Mortimer [1842]. [4], 97 p.
3. Abbott, Joseph, and William Dunlop.
The emigrant to North America: from Memoranda of a settler in Canada . . . Second edition. By an immigrant farmer, of twenty years experience . . . Montreal, Printed for the author, by Lovell & Gibson, 1843. 116 p.
Price 50 cents, or 2 shillings, sterling.
4. Abbott, Joseph, and William Dunlop.
The emigrant to North America, from Memoranda of a settler in Canada . . . By an emigrant farmer of twenty years experience. [Third edition.] Edinburgh and London, William Blackwood & Sons, 1844. viii, 120 p.
2080 copies printed; price 1s. 6d.

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¹¹ Joseph Abbott, *The emigrant to North America* 3rd ed. p. viii.

¹² Joseph Abbott, *Philip Musgrave; or, Memoirs of a Church of England missionary in the North American colonies*. (London, Murray, 1846).