

**The Collective versus the Individual: A Comparative Analysis of Canadian Immigration Policies In 1825
and the Twenty-First-Century**

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As a nation built on settler colonialism, Canada has a diverse history of immigration that shapes its ethnic makeup today. By comparing Canada's past immigration patterns with those of the present, one can better understand why individuals chose, and continue to choose, to settle in Canada. Specifically, the immigration patterns of Peterborough, Ontario demonstrate interesting similarities. Peterborough has a unique history rooted in the mass emigration of settlers from Cork, Ireland to the region.¹ Conducted by Peter Robinson, the 1825 emigration to Peterborough, sought to develop the backwoods of Canada into becoming a prosperous city within Upper Canada. Similarly, modern immigration practices of the twenty-first century are based on the philosophy of developing the local economy and community, thus contributing to the overall prosperity of the nation.² Both the Peter Robinson Emigration of 1825 and twenty-first-century Canadian immigration utilized discriminatory practices to cultivate a prosperous nation. While the Peter Robinson Emigration was discriminatory in practice to create a cohesive community, modern Canadian immigration has focused on the value of the individual. Through both periods, discriminatory biases have influenced the immigration process, government aid, and the way new immigrants approach challenges.

During the Peter Robinson emigration of 1825, Robinson employed discriminatory requirements to ensure those emigrating to Upper Canada would establish a successful settler community. The British government had two motivations when petitioning the emigration that influenced the selection process. Heading into 1825, Ireland suffered increasing overpopulation as wheat prices dropped, and potato crops failed causing famine, leaving many farmers destitute.³ Simultaneously, Ireland also suffered an oversaturation of the labour market as the

¹ Bill LaBranche, *The Peter Robinson Settlement of 1825: The story of the Irish immigration to the city and county of Peterborough, Ontario. Homecoming '75 Robinson Immigration 1975* (1975), 10.

² Evan Cleave, Cailin Wark, and Emmanuel Kyeremeh, "Immigrant Attraction and Retention: An Exploration of Local Government Policies," *Wellbeing, Space and Society* 5 (December 1, 2023): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wss.2023.100161>.

³ LaBranche, *The Peter Robinson Settlement of 1825*, 6.

Crown disbanded multiple military regiments following the defeat of Napoleon Bonaparte.⁴ The combined issues of overpopulation and unproductive land became push factors for immigrants, as Ireland's agriculture system and economy became unsustainable.⁵ Staging a mass emigration targeting unemployed farmers would "rid this country of so many paupers,"⁶ alleviating the country's overpopulation issue. However, "poor and wretched,"⁷ were not Robinson's only requirements for a desirable settler. By choosing settlers who were younger than fifty-years of age but older than four months, of Roman Catholic faith, and former farmers, Robinson cultivated a group of emigrants that he hoped would carry aristocratic traditions to Upper Canada.⁸ The government believed Upper Canada's success lay in modeling the colony after British aristocratic traditions and values, to establish a new aristocracy that would uphold similar values, and further strengthen the colonies' connection to the Mother Country. Robinson's requirements display a particular bias towards individuals he deemed "useful members of society,"⁹ discriminating against age, physical abilities, religion, and trade, to reflect societal values rooted in functionality. This emphasis on functionality was vital to the emigration, as Robinson surmised that the "waste lands"¹⁰ around Peterborough would prove difficult to cultivate. Robinson's criteria required skilled and able-bodied farmers to make Peterborough a prosperous area rooted in an agricultural economy. While enforced by Peter Robinson, these policies were introduced by the British government to select a maximum of 2,000 individuals

⁴ Francis Hincks Dobbin, *Our Old Home Town*. Toronto: J.M. Dent & Sons (Canada) Ltd (1943), 48.

⁵ Lucille H. Campey, *Atlantic Canada's Irish Immigrants: A Fish and Timber Story*. Canada: Dundurn Press (2016), 23.

⁶ Mount Cashell to Peter Robinson, October 20, 1824, *Peter Robinson's Papers*, Ontario Archives Toronto, reel 3.

⁷ Mount Cashell to Peter Robinson, October 20, 1824, *Peter Robinson's Papers*, Ontario Archives Toronto, reel 3.

⁸ Mount Cashell to Peter Robinson, October 20, 1824, *Peter Robinson's Papers*, Ontario Archives Toronto, reel 3.

⁹ Peter Robinson, December 19, 1824, *Peter Robinson's Papers*, Ontario Archives Toronto, reel 3.

¹⁰ Peter Robinson, December 19, 1824, *Peter Robinson's Papers*, Ontario Archives Toronto, reel 3.

from the 50,200 original applications.¹¹ As such a desirable opportunity for destitute Irish settlers, the demand to emigrate far outweighed the available spots. As the British government was fully financing the trip, they could not sponsor all 50,200 applicants, making discriminatory policies necessary to aid the selection process. They believed discriminatory policies were necessary to ensure the success of the emigration, and that operating under a specific criteria would unite the settlers through their shared lived experiences. By selecting individuals based on economic status and functionality, the government simultaneously countered Ireland's overpopulation issues, and established a colony that would uphold British tradition within a collective community.

Twenty-first-century Canadian immigration focuses on the value of the individual. Since the 1970s, skilled workers throughout Canada have been migrating to large city centres leaving smaller, less populated areas, with fewer qualified workers, leading to declining local economies.¹² This created gaps in the local skilled workforce, necessitating the shift of focus to the individual merits of immigrants. In response to this migration of workers, municipal governments across Canada have increasingly been implementing place-specific policies designed to attract and retain skilled new immigrants to combat this phenomenon.¹³ Aligning with Britain's reasoning for the Peter Robinson Emigration, Canada hopes that immigration will help bolster local economies throughout the Country.¹⁴ According to Cleave, Wark, and Kyeremeh's article "Immigrant attraction and retention: an exploration of local government policies," 69% of cities within Ontario have developed an immigrant attraction and retention

¹¹ Dobbin, *Our Old Home Town*, 50.

¹² Cleave, Wark, and Kyeremeh, "Immigrant Attraction and Retention," 1.

¹³ Cleave, Wark, and Kyeremeh, 1.

¹⁴ Jeffrey G. Reitz, "The Distinctiveness of Canadian Immigration Experience," *Patterns of Prejudice* 46, no. 5 (December 1, 2012): 518, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0031322X.2012.718168>.

plan as of 2020 stressing how important municipalities believed immigration was to their local economies.¹⁵ Cities in Ontario are specifically dedicated to attracting and retaining “high-skilled and well-educated”¹⁶ immigrants through these place-based policies, revealing that discriminatory practices are at play to maximize the economic potential of each immigrant. Peterborough-Nogojwanong is one of these cities with their initial plan implemented in 2016 and their latest plan implemented in 2022.¹⁷ Peterborough-Nogojwanong’s 2016 plan had two primary goals, the language of which suggests they were valued for their contribution to the economy, “economic well-being,”¹⁸ and that the community was invested in retaining the immigrants, “building an inclusive and engaged community.”¹⁹ The plan suggests that the community was interested in the individual by including the focus on social inclusion, ultimately to convince immigrants to remain in Peterborough-Nogojwanong. Ethnicity does not play the same discriminatory role that it did in the Peter Robinson Emigration with the top five places of birth for recent immigrants between 2016 and 2021 to the Peterborough-Nogojwanong area being Syria, India, the Philippines, the United States of America, and the United Kingdom.²⁰ Instead, there is more focus on the merits of the individual as opposed to the place of birth. Canada has three main categories of immigration – family class, economic class, and refugee class – of which for the purpose of comparison to the Peter Robinson Emigration, the focus here will be on the economic class of immigrants.²¹ To determine whether an applicant receives a visa

¹⁵ Cleave, Wark, and Kyeremeh, 5.

¹⁶ Cleave, Wark, and Kyeremeh, 1.

¹⁷ Peterborough Immigration Partnership, “Peterborough Immigration Partnership: Strategic Plan 2022-2025” (Peterborough Immigration Partnership, 2022), 3.

¹⁸ Peterborough Immigration Partnership, “Community Immigrant Integration Plan 2016-2021” (Peterborough Immigration Partnership, 2015), 1.

¹⁹ Peterborough Immigration Partnership, 1.

²⁰ Statistics Canada Government of Canada, “Focus on Geography Series, 2021 Census - Peterborough (Census Division),” July 13, 2022, <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/as-sa/fogs-spg/page.cfm?lang=e&topic=9&dguid=2021A00033515>.

²¹ Jay Sinha and Margaret Young, “Bill C-11: The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (LS-397E)” (Government Of Canada, 2001), pt. 1.2.

under the economic class category an individual must receive 67 out of 100 possible points within the scoring system.²² Several factors considered include “education, work experience, age, English and French language facility, arranged employment in Canada and the educational qualifications of the principal applicant’s spouse”²³. Canadian immigration policy makers believe strength in these areas increases an individual’s chances of economic success which is one of the driving forces behind Canadian immigration policy. Therefore, the use of this discriminatory policy benefits the nation while allowing the individual to stand on their own merit. While several of these characteristics were also used in the Peter Robinson Emigration, in the modern context, individuals are being considered based on their future potential economic success within the nation, instead of establishing a specific community rooted in a shared collective identity.

By employing discriminatory practices in the selection process, the British government ensured settlers would begin contributing to the colonial economy early on, as opposed to relying on continued government aid. Within the settlement agreement, the Crown ensured that emigrants were supplied with initial provisions to make the settlement a success: “a cow, an auger, an axe, a handsaw, a hammer, 100 nails, two gimlets, three hoes, a kettle, a fry-pan, an iron pot, three bushels of seed potatoes and one peck of seed corn. One pound of salt pork and one pound of flour per day were given to all settlers over the age of 14 for the next 18 months with half rations for those between 5 and 14 and quarter rations for those under 5 years”.²⁴ While the government supplied settlers from the Peter Robinson emigration with initial government aid such as housing, supplies, and food rations, the careful selection process ensured immigrants

²² Nupur Gogia and Bonnie Slade, *About Canada: Immigration* (Black Point, Nova Scotia: Fernwood Publishing, 2011), 39.

²³ Gogia and Slade, 39–40.

²⁴ LaBranche, *The Peter Robinson Settlement of 1825*, 20.

would become independent soon afterward. This independence would enable settlers to pay off their sixty-pound debt to the British government through annual installments of produce.²⁵ The exchange of produce for the settler's debt motivated Peter Robinson's emigrants to immediately begin cultivating a prosperous agricultural economy within the community, which would contribute to the overall economic development of the colony. While the emigrants were selected in part because of their limited financial resources, the government expected them to become leaders of the local elite through "wise property investments and local experience".²⁶ Installing a local elite ensured that leadership roles were established within the community to influence the growth of the agricultural economy. Robinson assumed that supplying the immigrants with the base materials would, in due time and through their own improvements, provide the Crown with cattle and produce as evidence of the settlement's success.²⁷ This filled a gaping demand in the market left by the famine in Ireland, and the economic depression it caused within the agriculture market.²⁸ Through initial government aid and provisions granted by the settlement agreement, the Peter Robinson emigrants became a self-sustaining population that contributed to the overall economy of the British Crown and the success of the colony.

Twenty-first-century Canadian immigrants receive government aid primarily through diverse programs and services. These programs and services are focused on attracting, retaining, and aiding immigrants through areas deemed most vital to immigrants' economic success.²⁹ A few of these areas include housing, employment, and immigrant services.³⁰ Without a permanent

²⁵ Peter Robinson, n.d., *Peter Robinson's Papers*, Ontario Archives Toronto, reel 3.

²⁶ Michael A. Peterman, *My old friend the Otonabee: Glimpses by Samuel Strickland, Catharine Parr Traill & Susanna Moodie*. Peterborough, Ontario: Peterborough Historical Society (1999), 4.

²⁷ Peter Robinson, May 4, 1824, *Peter Robinson's Papers*, Ontario Archives Toronto, reel 3.

²⁸ Dobbin, *Our Old Home Town*, 48.

²⁹ Glenda Tibe Bonifacio and Julie L. Drolet, *Canadian Perspectives on Immigration in Small Cities*, International Perspectives on Migration ([Cham]: Springer, 2017), 19, 62.

³⁰ Glenda Tibe Bonifacio and Julie L. Drolet, 62.

residence, it is difficult to find employment, and without employment, the immigrants are not contributing to the local economy. Immigrant services provide a way for immigrants to find the information and get the assistance they need to increase their success. Within Peterborough-Nogojwanong there are two key organizations outside municipal government — although both receive government funding — working to ensure a positive experience for new immigrants: the Community and Race Relations Committee of Peterborough, which works to combat racism within the community and the New Canadians Centre which serves newcomers to the area.³¹ The Community and Race Relations Committee combat racism “through outreach, education and community programming”³² which aids in creating a positive, safe community for minority immigrants increasing the likelihood of them remaining in the area.³³ The New Canadians Centre offers programs for new immigrants that allow them to get assistance for their individual needs to succeed in the workforce. Whether that is reducing the language barrier through ESL classes, providing childcare so the parent can find work, or offering career services to aid in securing employment.³⁴ In addition to their own programming, these organizations spearheaded the formation of the Peterborough Partnership Council on Immigrant Integration which is a council that connects “municipal government, social service delivery organizations, community groups, literacy agencies, employment groups, economic development agencies, police services and educational institutions”³⁵ to improve immigration outreach programming.³⁶ This shows how dedicated the Peterborough-Nogojwanong community is to meeting the individual needs of immigrants in an attempt to retain them. Olena, a Ukrainian immigrant to the Peterborough-

³¹ Glenda Tibe Bonifacio and Julie L. Drolet, *Canadian Perspectives on Immigration in Small Cities*, International Perspectives on Migration ([Cham]: Springer, 2017), 57.

³² Glenda Tibe Bonifacio and Julie L. Drolet, 57.

³³ Government of Canada, “Focus on Geography Series, 2021 Census - Peterborough (Census Division).”

³⁴ Glenda Tibe Bonifacio and Julie L. Drolet, *Canadian Perspectives on Immigration in Small Cities*, 57.

³⁵ Glenda Tibe Bonifacio and Julie L. Drolet, 58.

³⁶ Glenda Tibe Bonifacio and Julie L. Drolet, 58.

Nogojiwanong area found both the New Canadian's Centre and Fleming College's ESL program helpful in her transition into Canadian Culture.³⁷ Another Ukrainian immigrant to the Peterborough-Nogojiwanong area, Kateryna, found assistance from the New Canadians Centre in finding, applying, and preparing for a job.³⁸ Both of these individuals sought out the programs that offered the aid they needed to improve their employment opportunities. The Community and Race Relations Committee and the New Canadian's Centre offer programs that increase immigrants' economic value and the retention factors of Peterborough-Nogojiwanong in the pursuit of local economic improvement.

Despite various challenges the new settlers faced, the careful discrimination policies contributed to the success of the Peter Robinson emigration by ensuring settlers could adapt to the backwoods of Upper Canada. Upon arrival, many of the new emigrants suffered “from fever and ague, occasioned by the excessive heat of the Season,”³⁹ unused to the climate in Upper Canada. Emigrants were also ailing from an epidemic of ship fever, or typhoid, resulting from inadequate sanitary conditions on the ships.⁴⁰ While British authorities employed medical services and aids following the Peter Robinson emigration, the emigrants relied on one another for mutual support.⁴¹ Without the support of the Crown, the community built the first isolation hospital in Peterborough at “Hospital Point,”⁴² furnishing the building with supplies donated by individuals within the locality. This emphasis on community support fostered strong ties among the emigrants, contributing to their independence within the colony in the absence of government aid. Housing also proved challenging for the settlers as small log houses were only built for the

³⁷ Serena Karevich, “5079: Memory Project and the Newcomer's Narrative,” June 2022, 29.

³⁸ Sahar Afroz, “Memory Project and the Newcomers' Narrative: The Ukrainian Newcomers” (New Canadian's Centre, 2022), 29.

³⁹ Peter Robinson, May 4, 1824, *Peter Robinson's Papers*, Ontario Archives Toronto, reel 3.

⁴⁰ Dobbin, *Our Old Home Town*, 120

⁴¹ Dobbin, *Our Old Home Town*, 119.

⁴² Dobbin, *Our Old Home Town*, 121.

emigrants after they had arrived.⁴³ In the meantime, the emigrants lived in huts “made with poles standing up, boughs or branches of trees interwoven,”⁴⁴ and plastered with mud. These were not the accommodations settlers expected but their skills as farmers provided them with the craftiness to construct livable, temporary homes. With the construction of these huts, the area referred to as Scott’s Plain established itself as one of the first villages in the area, creating a physical community.⁴⁵ Three years after the Peter Robinson emigration, the British government concluded that the mass emigration was relatively successful, and proposed assisting more Irish in emigrating to Upper Canada.⁴⁶ This success was attributed to the belief that “by industry, good conduct, and willingness [the emigrants] had adapted themselves to the life on which they had entered,”⁴⁷ bringing with them British values, and traditions. These qualities were ensured by the discriminatory policies the government employed, making the Peter Robinson migration a demonstration of the success of a selective emigration policy targeting individuals who aligned with the collective interests of the nation. While government aid assisted early settlement, the curated skills and independence of the emigrants ensured the success of the migration policy in Upper Canada as one based in community efforts.

Discriminatory practices influence the perspective of the Canadian government on the challenges that twenty-first-century Canadian immigrants face. The Peter Robinson Emigration of 1825 worked as a community to problem solve in contrast to new Canadian’s who turn to institutions and programs to solve their problems. Adjusting to cultural norms is a difficult undertaking for new immigrants. One example is that work culture in Canada is different from

⁴³ Peter Robinson, May 4, 1824, *Peter Robinson’s Papers*, Ontario Archives Toronto, reel 3.

⁴⁴ LaBranche, *The Peter Robinson Settlement of 1825*, 15.

⁴⁵ LaBranche, *The Peter Robinson Settlement of 1825*, 15.

⁴⁶ Dobbin, *Our Old Home Town*, 64.

⁴⁷ Dobbin, *Our Old Home Town*, 64.

other cultures as experienced by a Ukrainian immigrant who responded to the interview question: how to handle conflict with a coworker.⁴⁸ They believed that the correct response was to attempt to solve the issue independently before approaching the supervisor but Canadian work culture dictates that the supervisor be notified at the beginning of the conflict.⁴⁹ There is an assumption made by Canadian immigration organizations that educated, skilled immigrants will adapt quickly to Canadian work culture even though these differences determine whether an immigrant is hired. Instead, immigrants have to learn the expectations of Canadian work culture while trying to navigate it. Peterborough-Nogojwanong's unreliable public transit system shows why immigrants find it challenging to travel within Canadian cities and find employment without cars because of Canada's car-centric society and poor public transit.⁵⁰ Without a reliable mode of transportation, employers will question an immigrant's ability to arrive on time further adding to the barriers to finding employment. This adds additional stress to navigating the process of finding housing, cars, suitable healthcare,⁵¹ and employment which is complicated and difficult due to a lack of knowledge of the systems, cultural norms, and the language barrier.⁵² The Canadian government and immigration organizations offer numerous programs targeted at improving literacy as it is one factor considered to improve economic success but often the other areas are neglected. Financially, many immigrants struggle when first arriving in Canada partially due to having spent most of their funds getting to Canada.⁵³ As a result, many immigrants turn to food banks to supplement their food costs, "the Daily Bread Food Bank of Toronto reported that 46 percent of the 952,883 people who relied on the food bank . . . in 2007-

⁴⁸ Afroz, "Memory Project and the Newcomers' Narrative: The Ukrainian Newcomers," 29–30.

⁴⁹ Afroz, 29–30.

⁵⁰ Afroz, 30–31.

⁵¹ Yung Seles, "Immigrant Status and Unmet Home Care Needs: Results from the Canadian Community Health Survey," *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health* 24, no. 1 (February 2022): 159, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10903-020-01135-x>.

⁵² Gogia and Slade, *About Canada*, 59.

⁵³ Afroz, "Memory Project and the Newcomers' Narrative: The Ukrainian Newcomers," 26–28.

2008 were immigrants.”⁵⁴ 37% of whom had completed at least one post-secondary program which contradicts the expectation that higher-educated people are more economically successful.⁵⁵ This shows that while education may be a factor, it does not guarantee economic success showcasing how the Canadian government and immigration organizations may be missing factors that influence the economic success of new immigrants. As a result, most of these challenges immigrants either have to solve on their own or reach out to institutions and organizations to find solutions. This approach is reliant on an individual’s drive to seek assistance when needed primarily in anticipated areas of need even though the government and community immigrant organizations may not be prepared for these needs.

The Peter Robinson Emigration of 1825 and twenty-first-century Canadian immigration share similarities and differences in their approach to successful immigration. Both the Peter Robinson Emigration and modern Canadian immigration utilized discriminatory practices to cultivate a prosperous nation. However, the Peter Robinson Emigration focused on creating a successful, cohesive community and modern Canadian immigration focuses on the value of the individual. Through both periods, discriminatory biases influence the immigration process, government aid, and the way new immigrants approach challenges. These two periods show how discriminatory biases can be successful in cohesive community-based immigration practices as well as individually focused immigration. By comparing immigration across time, Canadian immigration policymakers and immigrant-focused organizations can develop a better understanding of attraction and retention factors. Thus, allowing them to develop more successful and efficient policies and programs to improve the immigrant experience and increase the economic benefit.

⁵⁴ Gogia and Slade, *About Canada*, 58.

⁵⁵ Gogia and Slade, 58.

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