

The Jeanie Johnston: Historical Background

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Escape to a new life

Graceful and sleek, the *Jeanie Johnston* is a thing of beauty, and a testament to the skill, dedication and craftsmanship that went into building her. We are entranced by the possibility she trails before us – the lure of a life on the ocean wave that moves to the natural rhythm of wind and tide. Our senses quicken as we imagine our hands touching canvas, wood and rope, the crack and snap of sails in our ears, the tang of salt on our tongues and the briny smell of the sea in our nostrils, our horizons unconfined by office walls and city streets.

For us, a tall ship like the *Jeanie Johnston* is about escape: the dream of casting off the shackles of our ordinary lives and stepping into a simpler world where we can get in touch with ourselves again. We are as far as we can be from the elemental need for survival that drove our ancestors to sea in ships like the original *Jeanie Johnston*. They too saw the ship as an escape route, but they were escaping starvation, fleeing from a country devastated by famine.

The Famine began when a fungal disease struck the potato crop in 1845. It was an ecological disaster that had far-reaching consequences for a population over-dependent on just one source of food. Crop failures were not new, but never before had the crop failed repeatedly, and it resulted in a social cataclysm that was to be felt for many generations both at home and abroad. In just ten years over one million people died and over two million left the country.

In 1847, such were the numbers leaving that people were packed onto over-crowded ships, some of which were unseaworthy. Many of the emigrants were already infected with contagious diseases and weakened by hunger even before they left shore. The worst affected were those sailing on ships to Quebec: this was the cheapest route to North America and carried the poorest and most debilitated of the emigrants. Over 5,000 people perished at sea and 5,424 were buried on Grosse Isle, the quarantine station in the St Lawrence River. Thousands more, who had survived Grosse Isle, died in fever hospitals in Quebec City, Montreal, Kingston and Toronto. The same situation was repeated up and down the east coast of Canada and the United States, although not on the same scale. Almost 50,000 people died; a death toll so great that the ships that brought them across the Atlantic became known as ‘coffin ships’.

The term is often used as convenient shorthand to describe the Irish emigrant experience in the nineteenth century, even though the tragedy of 1847 did not recur. The ‘coffin ship’ experience was at the extreme end of a broad spectrum of misery for Irish emigrants, and it was the exception rather than the rule. The vast majority of the emigrant ships were not ‘coffin ships’, but even so the journey across the Atlantic was a feat of endurance. This was the first mass movement of people from Europe to North America, and it took place at a time when sail had yet to give way to steam, and on cargo ships that doubled as emigrant vessels. The concept of specialised passenger shipping had yet to develop, and transporting emigrants was seen as an opportunity to keep the ship in profit on the outward leg until more valuable cargo could be loaded for the return.

The emigrants were berthed below deck, in the steerage, four sharing a six foot-square berth, in makeshift quarters that would be swept away as soon as they disembarked so that the cargo, usually timber, could be taken on board. They brought their own bedding and cooking utensils. They provided their own meals from food they had brought themselves to supplement the ship’s ration, which was sufficient merely for basic survival. The open hatchways provided the only light and ventilation; when they were closed in bad weather, people sat in the dark, which was pungent with the smell of sweat and sea-sickness, as well as urine and excrement from the overflowing chamber pots. Huddled together for a voyage that lasted on average six weeks, there was plenty of time to contemplate the uncertain future that lay ahead and to gaze into the abyss of what they had left behind.

You don’t have to go as far as the ‘coffin ships’ to find a journey that challenged to the limit the resilience of people worn down by years of hunger. This was the experience for hundreds of thousands of Irish emigrants in the 1840s and 1850s. In the floating forest of ships leaving Ireland the story of the *Jeanie Johnston* is just one among many, but in its unfolding we see the people behind the cold statistics, hear their voices and connect with them on an individual level.

What’s in a name

The *Jeanie Johnston* was built by John Munn, one of the most prolific shipbuilders in Quebec. His career encompassed the golden age of shipbuilding in that city and by the

1850s Munn had one of the largest shipyards in Quebec. Between 1811 and 1857 he built over a hundred vessels, including thirty-two fully rigged ships, forty-five barques and sixteen brigs. The *Jeanie Johnston* was one of four barques that he built in 1847, and, at 408 tons, it was the smallest.

The name of the ship is something of a puzzle. There was no Jeanie Johnston – after whom the ship might have been named – in John Munn’s background, so we have to look elsewhere for clues. Shipbuilders often followed a pattern in naming their ships, and Munn was no exception. For instance, there is a very distinct pattern to the names of the six vessels that Munn built between 1850 and 1851: *Martin Luther, John Calvin, Pilgrim, Progress, John Bunyan, Covenanter*. The pattern is not so easy to discern in the four ships that he built in 1847: *Jeanie Johnston, England, Cromwell, and Blake*.

Perhaps a clue is to be found in Munn’s Scottish background. He was born in Irvine, where the poet Robert Burns also lived for a few years. Some of Munn’s ships are named after characters in Burns’ poems, for instance *Jeanie Deans, Douce Davie, Highland Mary*. Burns wrote of a number of Jeanies in his poems, but not, as far as we are aware, of a Jeanie Johnston. Perhaps Munn decided on an amalgam of characters in order to get the full alliterative effect on the name of his ship.

Charity begins at home

The *Jeanie Johnston* was launched in Quebec in June 1847 and sold towards the end of that year to the firm of John Donovan & Sons of Tralee. The registered owners were John Donovan, the head of the firm, and his eldest son, Nicholas. It cost them over £2,000, the equivalent of around €238,000 today, and it was a sound business proposition. By 1847 theirs was one of the largest hardware firms in Kerry, with an extensive timber yard, warehouses and stores in the Square in the centre of Tralee. They owned some smaller cargo vessels that plied between Britain and Ireland, but the *Jeanie* was their first Atlantic trader. Previously, they had always chartered ships to bring the timber in, but in 1847 the number of ships involved in the emigrant trade was so great that it drove up the cost of chartering. It was also clear by this stage that emigration, hitherto unpredictable, was set to continue for a number of years. Buying a ship of their own made sense: they could send emigrants on the outward journey – on which the ship would otherwise be empty – and then load the all-important cargo of timber for the return voyage.

The Donovans combined Victorian philanthropy with a keen business sense. The *Jeanie Johnston* had a remarkably good record for an emigrant ship of the time, her passengers never having had a serious outbreak of disease in the seven years that she sailed between Tralee and Quebec. This was because the Donovans took the trouble to employ a reliable captain and, unusually, a doctor on many of the voyages. But it was also because the passengers came from a 30-40 mile radius of the town of Tralee and the Donovans were astute enough to realise that word would travel fast if their ship was a disease-ridden tub with a hard-driving captain. A clean safe ship would ensure continued business. That there were limits to their philanthropy can be seen from Nicholas Donovan’s involvement in an assisted passage scheme on the *Jeanie Johnston* in 1851.

In January of that year William Denny, agent for the large Denny estate in Tralee, proposed that under the Poor Law legislation he would pay the passage money for a number of inmates of the Tralee Workhouse. He would advance the money and the Board of Guardians would repay him at a later date. Nicholas Donovan, who owned approximately 1,000 acres of land north-west of Tralee, was also in favour of the idea. The matter caused some debate because Denny and Donovan both selected workhouse inmates who came from their own estates, arguing that they didn't see why they should fund the emigration of tenants from the estates of others.

Nicholas Donovan bore the brunt of the controversy: it was alleged that one of his tenants was not deserving of charity because he had been registered as a workhouse inmate solely for the purpose of emigrating; and that Donovan was taking advantage by sending his own tenants on his own ship and getting paid for it by the Board of Guardians. Donovan vigorously defended himself, pointing out that the man in question, James Stack, had lost a large farm during the Famine, and he was now living with his eleven children in a hovel made of wattles built against a ditch. He and his family would end up in the workhouse sooner rather than later and so it was better for all concerned if the money were provided for the family to emigrate. His argument proved persuasive and the Stack family left on the *Jeanie Johnston* that spring. Interestingly, the records show that when the ship arrived in Quebec the Denny tenants were provided with £1 per family as landing money to get them started, while the Donovan tenants got nothing. Perhaps Nicholas Donovan felt that free passage on the ship was as far as his charity could stretch.

Captain courageous

During the years that she sailed out of Tralee (1848-1855) the *Jeanie Johnston* followed a regular pattern, both in the times that she sailed and in her destination. Every April she left Tralee carrying passengers to Quebec; the passengers disembarked and a cargo of timber was taken on. She arrived back in Tralee in late July, ready to exchange the timber for passengers, and left again at the end of August, arriving in Quebec usually in early October. She generally left Quebec in early November with a cargo of timber, on the way making a detour to Liverpool or Cardiff to discharge or take on crewmen, returning back to Tralee in March. The only deviation from this pattern was in March 1849 when the ship sailed to Baltimore in Maryland.

One of the remarkable things about the ship is the number of letters that the passengers wrote on arrival in Quebec as testimonials to her captain, James Attridge, and which were published in the *Quebec Morning Chronicle*. Testimonials to captains in the *Quebec Morning Chronicle* were not uncommon, but six to the one captain in the space of four years was unusual. Because some of the letters were reprinted in the local Kerry newspapers they can be seen as advertising to the home audience the merits of sailing on the *Jeanie Johnston*. Furthermore, they were also an effective way of announcing the safe arrival of the ship and passengers.

But first and foremost they were letters of praise for the captain, and James Attridge was certainly a worthy recipient. By 1848, when he joined the *Jeanie Johnston*, he had been at sea for twenty-eight years, twenty of them as a captain. He was from Castletownsend in

Co. Cork and first went to sea as a fifteen-year-old in 1820. A ship's captain at the age of twenty-three, he served on a number of ships before taking on the *Abeona*, sailing out of Cork, in 1838. He was master of the *Abeona* for ten years, making frequent trips to Tralee with cargo for the Donovans.

James Attridge ran a well-ordered ship and allowed no spirits on board. We know this because almost all of the ship's crew lists and agreements survive. Because of these documents we know substantially more about the sailors on the *Jeanie Johnston* than we do about the passengers: very few of the passenger lists exist today. Even though sailors lived transitory lives, moving from ship to ship, at this point in the mid-nineteenth century they are relatively well documented.

Between 1845 and 1854 all seamen had to have a Register Ticket Number and the Register of Seamen's Tickets contains detailed information on each seaman. For instance, Thomas Campion, First Mate until 1853, was born at Whitby in 1815. He went to sea as an apprentice at the age of fourteen: he was 5 feet 9 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches tall, with brown hair, blue eyes and a fair complexion; and he had an anchor tattooed on his left hand.

There were usually seventeen crew members on board, including at least two apprentices. They came from all points on the globe, one of them even from as far away as Valparaiso in Chile. There were generally a few desertions at Quebec as the crew were expected to help with the loading of cargo and no shore leave was allowed until this was completed. Another reason for deserting at Quebec was the fact that sailors were paid a higher wage on the journey from Quebec. For example, in June 1854 Morgan King, an eighteen-year-old from Tralee, was paid £8 (approximately €6,000 today) for the trip from Quebec to Tralee, in comparison with the average wage of £3 10s (about €2,700 today) paid to sailors of equal rank who had signed on at Tralee for the round trip.

A life less ordinary

The *Jeanie Johnston* differed from many other ships in that a doctor was employed on board, and not just the usual ship's quack but a well-educated local man, Richard Blennerhassett. Most nineteenth-century ships' doctors had a terrible reputation. Many of them were badly educated at dubious medical schools and quite often not educated at all. Others were qualified but had failed in their careers, mainly because of alcoholism or incompetence or because scandal at home had necessitated a retreat to the high seas. The dilemma of trying to employ competent doctors who had qualified at recognised medical schools was one that defied solution until quite late in the nineteenth century. The crux of the problem was that even if ship owners wanted to employ a doctor (which they usually didn't), it was extremely difficult to find a reputable one who would put up with irregular employment, dreadful conditions on board, and a salary much lower than could be obtained on land.

In this context, Richard Blennerhassett was an exception. As a graduate of Edinburgh, then one of the most prestigious medical colleges in Britain and Ireland, and with a well-connected family, Blennerhassett would have had a whole range of more comfortable career options than that of a ship's doctor. Richard's father, also an Edinburgh graduate,

was a well-respected doctor in Dublin and Kerry, and a regular contributor to the *Dublin Journal of Medical Science*. The large and extended family of the Blennerhassetts was one of the leading gentry families in Kerry, connected by marriage to most of the other gentry families in the county.

Richard finished his medical studies in 1845 and he spent the next two years as the ship's doctor on board the *Bassora Merchant*, which sailed from Calcutta to Demerara in Guyana, transporting over 250 Indian labourers to the sugar plantations there. As an introduction to his new career, the journey on the *Bassora Merchant* was a baptism of fire, illustrating the reality of life as a doctor on the high seas.

Almost inevitably, cholera, which was endemic in India, quickly made its appearance in the cramped steerage. Over fifty people died on the journey and Richard was obliged to despatch them, single-handedly, to a watery grave as the sailors were afraid of infection and the surviving Indians were afraid of defilement and loss of caste. There was very little he could do to minimise the scale of the epidemic as cholera thrived in the fetid atmosphere of the overcrowded steerage. Once cholera appeared there was very little that could be done to contain it beyond a wholesale purification that was impossible while the ship was sailing.

Richard's odyssey on the *Bassora Merchant* affected him deeply, but didn't dissuade him from a life at sea. Shortly after he returned to Ireland he set off again, this time for Quebec on board the *Jeanie Johnston* in April 1848. This was the first voyage of the *Jeanie Johnston* to Quebec and Richard was to remain with the ship for the next four years. After the *Jeanie*, he served on two more emigrant ships, the *Lady Russell* and the *Ben Nevis*. In September 1854 he was employed as one of two doctors on board the *Ben Nevis*, which was scheduled to sail from Liverpool to Galveston, Texas, with 446 German emigrants. Soon after leaving Liverpool, however, a major outbreak of cholera on board forced the ship to put in at Cobh, and, tragically, Richard died of the disease there. He was 36 years of age.

All of the available evidence suggests that Richard Blennerhassett was far from being a typical nineteenth-century ship's doctor. That the *Jeanie's* crew were of this view is clear from their parting gift to him of an inscribed surgical bone saw. It is most unlikely that they would have gone to such trouble had he been the average type of quack who served on board emigrant ships. After his death, his father, Dr Henry Blennerhassett, wrote a letter to the *Tralee Chronicle* outlining his son's career and including testimonials from Captain Smiley of the *Lady Russell* and from John Donovan & Sons. The Donovans wrote of Richard that, 'his reputation for skill and humanity were so great that one of the first questions asked before taking a berth by an emigrant was does Richard Blennerhassett sail in the ship this voyage?'

Flight from home

For the *Jeanie Johnston's* passengers the journey began at Blennerville, then the port of Tralee, but it was not a simple matter of stepping from the quayside onto the ship. By the mid-nineteenth century, a build-up of silt in Tralee Bay meant that large vessels like the

Jeanie could only infrequently make it as far as Blennerville. Instead, ships came to anchor in the shelter of the two Samphire Islands at Fenit, seven miles from Tralee. Fenit Pier had yet to be built, so both emigrants and cargo were loaded and unloaded from lighter vessels sent down the bay from Blennerville.

This would have been the first time on the water for many of the *Jeanie*'s passengers, giving them a view of their native county from a new perspective just as they were leaving it for ever. The boat would be brought alongside the ship so that the emigrants could clamber aboard while all around them the sailors were busy getting the ship ready to sail, stowing luggage and shouting directions at each other.

Bewildering and chaotic for people unused to ships and the sea, the embarkation process was just the first of many challenges in the journey across the Atlantic. It must have been an even bigger ordeal for a heavily pregnant woman like Margaret Ryal, scrambling up the side of the ship in April 1848. She had barely made it on board before going into labour and the day before the ship was due to sail she gave birth to a baby boy. To mark the unusual circumstances of his birth the baby was named after the ship and her owner, and so Nicholas Johnston Ryal was added to the passenger list.

When they were planning their journey, Margaret and her husband Daniel must have known that the baby would be born along the way, but they decided to go ahead, even though the *Jeanie Johnston* was not the only ship they could have sailed on from Tralee that year. It is perhaps an indication of how desperate people were to leave. From every social class they surged out of the country in the late 1840s and early 1850s. This is reflected in the *Jeanie* passengers, from Daniel Harnett, who is listed as a 'Gentleman' on the voyage to Baltimore in 1849, to the very poor observed on the ship later that year by the emigration agent at Quebec, A.C. Buchanan.

From her sixteen sailings across the Atlantic from Tralee, thirteen of the *Jeanie*'s crew lists survive. In comparison, only one full passenger list still exists, along with the fragments of two more. This gives us the names of just over 400 people, too small a figure to generalise from but enough to suggest that the circumstances of the passengers on the *Jeanie Johnston* were no different from those of the people on all the other ships leaving Ireland.

Whole families departed, such as John and Mary Ryle, from Ballymcquin, who sailed to Quebec in 1851 with their nine children ranging in age from sixteen down to nine months. The composition of some of the family groups reflects the devastation wrought by the Famine, and Margaret Lynch, from Ballyheigue, was by no means the only young widow leaving with her children to find a new life on the other side of the Atlantic.

Some emigrants' passage was paid for by landlords, anxious to return their land to profitability by getting rid of tenants who could no longer pay their rent. In April 1853 sixty-five tenants from the Earl of Kenmare's estate in Killarney set sail for Quebec at his expense. The Earl had just inherited his title and, along with it, an estate burdened by rent arrears and defaulting middlemen. From his point of view, paying £220 (approximately

€28,000 today) to get rid of sixty-five uneconomic tenants was the best way to finding a more profitable use for the land.

The *Tralee Chronicle*'s report was upbeat: 'A great many of those emigrated had very fair means of their own, but the passage money of the entire was paid by the noble Earl, while those in a less comfortable position were provided with abundant clothing and sea store.' However, the emigration agent in Quebec, A.C. Buchanan, took a different view, reporting that 'there were a large number of very destitute persons on board the *Jeanie Johnston*, consisting chiefly of females and children who were coming out to relations in western Canada and the US, and they had to be assisted from the emigrant fund.'

The fare to Quebec was £3 10s (approximately €2,700 today) and because it was the cheapest way to get to North America it was favoured by the poorest emigrants. The route to the United States was more tightly regulated and more expensive, and, as a result, farmers and skilled workers who could better afford the higher fare appear more often on the American passenger lists. For instance, in March 1849 the passengers on the *Jeanie* paid £4 4s to go to Baltimore, and a wider variety of skilled workers are listed than on the Quebec lists, including a tailor, a mason, a blacksmith, a cartwright, a cabinetmaker, a shoemaker, a cooper and a dressmaker, as well as a number of carpenters and farmers.

Although it was the cheapest fare, £3 10s still represented a considerable sum for a labourer, almost half a year's wages in fact. Despite this obstacle, from the late 1840s and early 1850s the majority of Irish emigrants came from the ranks of the unskilled, poorest sections of Irish society. These were the surplus sons and daughters of small farmers and labourers, whose fares were subsidised by family members who had already emigrated. Chain migration quickly became a reality of Irish life and in 1850 it was estimated that £1 million had been sent back to Ireland from America to encourage further emigration.

Women left in almost equal numbers to men, a parity that was to remain a characteristic of Irish emigration right up to the present day. In this Ireland differed from other European countries: elsewhere women were not encouraged to emigrate alone. In contrast, young single women contributed heavily to Irish emigration. Ellen Leyne, Julia Ferris and Bridget Brosnan, all from Tralee, Ellen Clifford from Obrennan, Bridget Houran from Chapelstown and Ellen Connor from Ballyheigue were just some of the eighteen-year-olds travelling on their own on the *Jeanie*.

There were a number of sibling groups on the Baltimore sailing in 1849, for instance eighteen-year-old Mary Rice from Tralee and her brother Thomas, seventeen; Julia Dooling from Tralee, also eighteen, and her two brothers Michael and Thomas, both in their early twenties; Mary Donoghue, twenty and her brother Dan, twenty-five, from Killorglin. The sibling bond was a significant feature in Irish emigration, with brothers and sisters sending the money home to allow the next member of the family to leave, as well as looking out for each other during the journey and on arrival. The importance of this bond is even more poignantly illustrated by the youth of some of the siblings: fifteen-year-old Margaret Conway from Arda and her twelve-year-old brother John, travelling

together to Quebec in April 1851; or James Hare, sixteen, and his thirteen-year-old brother Denis, from Barrow, sailing to Quebec in April 1854.

Ice, wind and snow

The journey to Quebec generally took six weeks, four if the weather co-operated, but that happened only infrequently. Ice in the Gulf of St Lawrence was the hazard of the spring sailing, something the passengers would have been well aware of following the wreck in April 1849 of the *Exmouth*, which sank in forty minutes after hitting ice on the way to Quebec. Over seventy of the 200 emigrants on board died, drowned or were crushed to death between icebergs. In April 1850 the *Jeanie* ran into large quantities of ice and in April 1854 she was trapped for six days before breaking free.

Her longest journey was in the spring and summer of 1852, when it took her seventy-four days to reach Quebec. She left Tralee on 14 of April but two weeks later had to turn back because the ballast had shifted. Instead of the usual stone ballast, the ship had taken on iron in Cardiff in March of that year. In this period many ships carried an iron cargo as ballast to North America in order to meet the demand created by the expansion of the railways. It had a tendency to shift unless it was properly stowed, and shifting iron ballast was a common problem on emigrant ships in the early 1850s. Two weeks out from Tralee, the *Jeanie* had to turn around and make for Queenstown so that the iron could be re-stowed properly. It was 19 May before she was ready for sea again and it was the end of June before the 188 passengers reached Quebec.

Gales were a feature of the autumn sailings and in September 1850 a three-day storm severely tested the *Jeanie*. Three years later, in October 1853, the ship was twice blown away from the Gulf of St Lawrence and eventually had to put into St Andrews, New Brunswick. Captain Attridge paid for 137 of the passengers to be sent on to their destination via Portland, Maine, but fifty-seven remained in St Andrews, induced by promises of work on the railway line. The reality turned out to be very different from what they had been promised. The work was irregular, the wages were poor and there was no fuel or bedding in the accommodation provided by the railway company. The passengers rightly concluded that under such conditions they would never be able to survive the winter and decided to leave.

The problem was that they had no means to travel any further. They decided that Thomas Jones, the emigration agent in St Andrews, was their best hope, and about thirty of them arrived at his house in the middle of a snowstorm. Jones provided for them for eight days while he tried to make contact with his superior in St John to see whether money could be found to carry the cost of sending them onwards. He remonstrated with the railway contractors to no avail and had no luck either with his superior in St John. With no further assistance likely in St Andrews, most of the thirty decided to take the short ferry crossing across the border to the United States. They then proceeded on foot to Portland, Maine; for Kerry people bred in a milder climate that 250-mile journey through a freezing North American winter must have challenged them to the limit of their endurance.

Journey's end?

For most of the passengers Quebec was not the end of the journey and many of them continued into the Great Lakes region on steamers that took them to the United States. The search for employment took them from place to place and contact between family and friends was often lost during the process of migration. The *Boston Pilot* newspaper had a column called 'Missing Friends' where people could place advertisements looking for each other. It was widely read by the Irish community and it had a national circulation of over one million in the nineteenth century.

The readership of the paper was not confined to Boston City but covered the whole north-eastern area of the United States, and was read as far away as Louisiana and Florida. The poignant stories told in the brief advertisements bring home the reality of emigration in a way that few other sources can. For example, on 2 July 1853: 'Information is wanted of Denis Mahony, native of Beehenough, parish of Kilgobbin, sailed from Tralee 3 years last April in the ship *Jeanie Johnston*; when last heard from he worked in Pleasant Valley, Nicholas County, Kentucky. Any account of him will be thankfully received by his wife and 2 children. Direct to Ellen Mahony, care of Wm Garnett, corner of Genesee and Clinton St., Syracuse NY.'

Although the majority of the Irish arriving in America came from rural backgrounds, most of them settled in urban areas. Some of the *Jeanie* passengers bucked that trend, however, and continued working as farmers in the New World. Daniel and Margaret Ryal (also spelled Reilly), the parents of baby Nicholas Johnston, who had been born on board, travelled onwards to Liberty, Indiana, where Daniel got a job working on the railroad. Soon afterwards, however, they moved again, this time settling on their own farm in Silver Creek, Michigan. When he grew up, Nicholas left the farm and moved to Fergus Falls in Minnesota, where he worked as a bartender in O'Brien's Saloon. He married the owner's sister-in-law, and the two of them moved to Minneapolis, where Nicholas eventually opened his own wholesale/retail liquor store.

Another passenger who made a successful life on the land was Patrick Kearney, who was twenty-three when he sailed on the *Jeanie* to Baltimore in 1849. The following year he was living in Harford County, Maryland, working on the farm of David Ferris. Ten years later Patrick's position had improved: he was still living in Harford County, but by now he had married and had five children. In the 1860 census he was listed as a farmer, with his farm valued at \$1,500, and his personal estate was valued at \$150 – the equivalent today of \$31,500 and \$3,150. His circumstances had improved to the extent that he was now employing a labourer.

Also on that Baltimore sailing was Daniel Dowd, about whom his descendant, John Kudlik from Pittsburgh, provided further information. Dowd had four children by his first wife, Julia Cahill; it is not clear what happened to Julia, but by 1849 Daniel had married again, and he and his second wife, Margaret, and their infant daughter, Mary, sailed on the *Jeanie Johnston* to Baltimore. The four sons from the earlier marriage appear to have followed on at a later date.

Daniel acquired a 150-acre dairy farm in Rockville County, Maryland, and he also owned a row of buildings in Washington, DC. According to John Kudlik, the milk from the dairy farm in Maryland was sent by canal down to Washington, DC. Daniel died in 1869. The farmhouse in Maryland is still standing, although it is no longer in the family's possession. Daniel's eldest son John (from whom John Kudlik is descended) worked on the railroad and eventually became a superintendent of a section of railway line in western Pennsylvania.

What is even more remarkable about the Kudliks is the fact that John Kudlik's wife, Susan Showalter, also has a connection with the *Jeanie Johnston* and this only came to light when they visited Blennerville in 1999. She had spent some years tracing her family tree, and she knew that one of her grandparents was a Babbington from Currow, near Castleisland, Co. Kerry. What she didn't realise, however, was that an earlier generation of Babbingtons from Castleisland had sailed on the *Jeanie Johnston*. In April 1854 John and Mary Babbington and their four children left Tralee on the *Jeanie*, bound for Quebec. Their names were on a fragment of a passenger list that was discovered in Tralee only at the end of 1998.

To the bottom of the sea

By the end of 1855 the Donovans had decided to sell the *Jeanie Johnston*. Specialised passenger shipping, which had been slow to develop up to the 1840s, was now more common, and increasingly rigorous passenger legislation restricted the use of cargo vessels as passenger ships. The cargo/passenger trade was no longer as profitable and so the decision was taken to sell.

In 1855 the *Jeanie Johnston* was sold to William Johnson of North Shields in England. The ship became primarily a cargo vessel, trading between the north of England, the Mediterranean and Quebec. In 1858 she was en route from Quebec to Hull with a cargo of timber, some of which was stowed on deck. The timber became waterlogged and began to weigh the ship down. As she sank lower the crew climbed up to the main-top, and after nine days they were rescued by a passing Dutch vessel, the *Sophie Elizabeth*. Totally abandoned, the *Jeanie* was left to descend slowly to the bottom of the sea.

A tale of two ships

The sinking of the *Jeanie Johnston* passed by un-remarked except in *Lloyd's List*, where it was noted that she had been abandoned at sea. At the time, her disappearance was unexceptional because, as a basic workhorse of the sea, eleven years would have been considered a reasonable lifespan. Now, however, it seems extraordinary that it was functional cargo ships like the *Jeanie* that carried the first mass migration from Europe to North America.

The aim of the replica *Jeanie* was to recreate the experience of the nineteenth-century emigrants who sailed on these unheralded ships. The project also had many other ambitious and worthwhile aims, most of which it achieved: it created jobs; attracted tourists; boosted the local economy; provided skills training; passed on the traditional

craft of timber shipbuilding; cemented already close Irish links with the USA and Canada; contributed to the peace process through cross-border initiatives. By any measure these are all solid achievements.

What it didn't achieve was to recreate the nineteenth-century emigrant experience: this is simply not possible. A replica built to modern sailing requirements and meeting twenty-first-century health and safety standards can never replicate the experience on board a nineteenth-century emigrant ship. In fact, it gets in the way of our understanding of what it was like because it sanitises that experience. Equipped with a level of comfort unimaginable to the original passengers, it obscures the reality that, for them, there was no safety net.

There are two *Jeanie Johnstons* – the original nineteenth-century ship and the modern replica built in Blennerville, Co Kerry in the late 1990s. Both ships are better served by remembering that each has her own story to tell. It is perhaps too soon for that of the replica because hers is a story that is still unfolding. And while it unfolds against a backdrop of economic crisis and recession, we can be thankful that it does not include the elemental need for survival that drives the story of the original *Jeanie Johnston*.

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