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Nine Ships 1825 Bicentennial Project

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The anniversary being commemorated is the 200th anniversary of the 'Peter Robinson Irish Emigration', the emigration of 2,024 Irish immigrants (223 family units) who embarked from Cobh, County Cork, Ireland in 1825 on nine ships bound for what was then known as Lower Canada & Upper Canada. The emigration scheme was organized through the British Government and led by Peter Robinson who resided in Upper Canada at that time. Through the scheme, the migrants were ultimately settled in what are now the municipalities of Peterborough County, Peterborough City, and the City of Kawartha Lakes.

Community Significance

This historical event is important to our community in several ways:

Foundation of Communities

The Peter Robinson Irish Emigration played a significant role in the establishment and development of local communities. The Peter Robinson Irish Emigration brought nearly 2000 settlers to an area that had previously had a population of 500-750 people. This had a significant impact on the development of the region, particularly in Peterborough, which served as the administrative center for supplying rations to the Robinson settlers. Peterborough was surveyed as the Robinson settlers were arriving and was named for Peter Robinson in 1825; the anniversary of the Peter Robinson Irish Emigration coincides with the naming of Peterborough.

Ancestral Connection

The families who settled through the Peter Robinson Irish Emigration have remained in our local communities. Unique to the worldwide Irish diaspora is the number of descendants of these 223 families that have remained in this same area for two centuries, where they still live and work amongst the farms, roads, and communities which their ancestors established. Today, the City and County Peterborough and the City of Kawartha Lakes are home to thousands of descendants of those families that arrived here in 1825. In the County of Peterborough, the townships have such Irish place names as Douro, Ennismore, Galway, Cavan, Monaghan, and Assumption. Due to the long-standing tendencies of oral tradition and interest in documenting regional history from various community members over a span of generations, many of these descendants can still trace their family trees back to Ireland through the Peter Robinson Irish Emigration of 1825.

Canadian Historical Ramifications

The Peter Robinson Irish Emigration has additional historical significance as a government sponsored emigration scheme. The Peter Robinson Irish Emigration was a British experiment in supervised and

subsidized emigration, which was unique in British- Canadian history. The British were not convinced that the experiment proved necessary compared to other options, and the two Peter Robinson Irish Emigrations remain the only civilian (as opposed to military) attempts by the British to fully fund the costs of settlement of British subjects in Canada.

Keeping Stories Alive

The historical significance of the Peter Robinson Irish Emigration is further amplified by the quality and quantity of archival records. These emigrations are some of the best documented historic emigrations in Canada, with detailed records of the settlement from before the migrants left Ireland, through the various stages of travel, and for approximately 18 months after arrival, until November 1826. There are few examples of such well-documented emigrations to Canada, and the experience of the Robinson settlers allows us to ground the experiences felt by millions of emigrants since then.

Reconciliation

The Peter Robinson Irish Emigration is significant in the history of Indigenous and settler relations in the region. While Indigenous knowledge and support played a role in the adaptation and survival of the emigrants, the history of the Robinson emigrants is indelibly connected to the displacement and colonization of Mississauga First Nations, whose descendants are today a part of the Hiawatha First Nation, Curve Lake First Nation, Alderville and Scugog First Nation communities and beyond. The Bicentenary of the Robinson emigration provides an opportunity to advance reconciliation locally and to recognize our many interconnections.

How the Nine Ships 1825 Project Began

The development of our project has been deeply rooted in community engagement and collaboration from its inception. There is a proud history of marking this important historic event in our community.

The Peterborough Canadian Irish Club, which will celebrate its 50th anniversary in 2025, each year hosts a day long Irish entertainment event. The annual St. Patrick's Day Parade, engaging a diverse range of community groups and businesses has proudly been in existence in Peterborough for 21 years.

In 1975, a dedicated group of volunteers from the City and County of Peterborough organized a very successful "HOMECOMING '75. This event commemorated the 150th anniversary of the Peter Robinson Irish Emigration.

In 2015, a dedicated group of individuals, including members of the Peterborough Canadian Irish Club (PCIC) and local historians, initiated discussions with the support of the County of Peterborough. Recognizing the significance of the upcoming 200th anniversary of the Peter Robinson Irish Emigration in 2025, these stakeholders convened to plan a commemoration befitting this historic occasion.

The journey towards this commemoration began with the organization of the Peter Robinson Festival in 2015, which coincided with the 190th anniversary of this emigration. At that time there was active participation from various local heritage organizations and featured educational displays and Irish entertainment at Morrow Park. This event laid the foundation for ongoing community involvement and collaboration over the ensuing year.

At that time local author Patrick Leahy published a series of articles in the local newspaper, the Peterborough Examiner, detailing the various aspects of the Peter Robinson 1825 Irish Emigration. Throughout this period, extensive efforts were made to engage with diverse stakeholders and cultivate connections both locally and internationally. Calls with key figures such as Amanda Slattery from Ballyhoura Economic Development in County Cork, Professor John Tierney leading the Historic Graveyards Project, and Nathan Mannion from the EPIC Museum in Dublin facilitated invaluable exchanges of knowledge and ideas. Moreover, community forums, such as the one held at the Peterborough & the Kawarthas Economic Development office in April 2019, provided platforms for sharing plans and soliciting input from approximately 35 attendees. Ideas ranging from organizing resource listings for visitors to hosting galas with local and international dignitaries were actively discussed during these forums and subsequent meetings.

While the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic interrupted our face-to-face engagements, communication channels were revitalized in late 2022, allowing for the resumption of planning efforts. The renewed collaboration between the County and City of Peterborough, the PCIC, and other stakeholders underscores our unwavering commitment to community involvement and ensures that the commemoration in 2025 reflects the collective vision and aspirations of our diverse community. Currently, our project benefits from the partnership of more than a dozen community organizations, with representation from across the Peterborough region and they have provided letters of support.

Our Goals

The goals of the Bicentennial include:

- Fostering informed historical representations of this anniversary and respectful and thoughtful ways of commemorating it.
- Highlighting the tangible and intangible heritage of our region through the involvement of local artists, historians, artisans, crafters, and other community knowledge keepers, particularly relating to Indigenous and Irish diasporic heritage.
- Encouraging people of all backgrounds in our region to take interest in their own ancestral paths as well as those of others.
- Catalyzing understanding of and appreciation for reconciliation in our region.

The Nine Ships 1825 Bicentennial Project

The Nine Ships 1825 Bicentennial project will include a calendar of local events and festive occasions showcasing local music, writing, arts, and theatre events and highlighting the universal experience of immigration, Irish heritage, and the two hundred years of settler and Indigenous (Mississauga) interaction.

The Bicentennial Activities: August 1 - 10, 2025:

The Bicentennial will take place in the City of Peterborough, County of Peterborough, and City of Kawartha Lakes with invitations for Hiawatha, Curve Lake, Alderville and Scugog First Nations to participate as they see appropriate. Additional commemoration events throughout 2025 will be included in the calendar of events promoted in advance of and following the Bicentennial. The Bicentennial will welcome participation and engagement from regional community members of all ages, including but not limited to the descendants of Robinson Emigrants, local Indigenous

communities, and Newcomer communities. We also expect that descendants of the Irish Diaspora in Canada will travel from outside of our region to take part in the Bicentennial.

Coordinating community arts and heritage events

Our project will provide leadership and promotional support to local community, historical, arts and cultural groups in the region to organize commemoration and community engagement events in their various communities throughout the course of the anniversary year. We will develop a calendar of all regional commemoration events, available digitally through our website and in print publication. We will coordinate collaboration among, and support promotion for all Bicentennial events.

Opening reception

Our project will coordinate a community event to kick-off the Bicentennial. This event will include cultural performances and local art and heritage exhibits. The opening reception will be held on August 1, 2025.

Heritage bus tour

Our project will develop and coordinate a tour of local heritage sites, cultural events, and arts installations throughout the Bicentennial, with volunteers providing on-site interpretation and bus transportation between sites. Bus tours will be available on multiple dates during the Bicentennial (August 1-10, 2025).

Develop a self-guided heritage tour

Our project will develop a self-guided heritage tour that will be launched to the public during the Bicentennial and will be hosted on a website following the Bicentennial, to continue engaging community members in the arts and heritage of our community following the commemoration year. The self-guided heritage tour will be launched at the opening reception on August 1, 2025, and will be available to the public online and in print following the commemoration events.

Host an arts and heritage performance/presentation series

Our project will include 4 days of arts and heritage performances and presentations.

Host a Welcome Centre

Our project will include a welcome centre, open to the public, throughout the Bicentennial from August 1 - 10 2025. The welcome centre will provide a one-stop-shop for community engagement and will share information and guidance to Bicentennial attendees. The welcome centre will also include an arts and heritage exhibit linked to the Robinson Emigration.

Souvenir Publication

Prepare and distribute a souvenir booklet that includes a summary of the Peter Robinson Irish Emigration.

Activities Connected to History

Activities will be directly linked to the 200th anniversary of the Peter Robinson Irish Emigration, in one or more of the following ways:

- 1 Activities will include exhibits relating to the Peter Robinson Irish Emigration, including archival documents, photographs, historical texts, heritage site tours.
- 2 Activities will feature arts, culture, sport, or recreation related to the Peter Robinson Irish Emigration.
- 3 Activities will generate awareness and understanding of the social, political, economic, and environmental factors related to the Peter Robinson Irish Emigration.
- 4 Activities will include artistic depictions and interpretations of the Peter Robinson Irish Emigration and its significance on the local culture, economy, politics, and environment.
- 5 The Bicentenary of the Robinson emigration provides an opportunity to advance reconciliation locally and to recognize our many interconnections.

Consideration & Incorporation of Indigenous Perspectives

The 200th anniversary of the Peter Robinson Irish Emigration is a significant opportunity to reflect on the history of Indigenous and settler relations in the region and build a stronger and more respectful foundation for reconciliation. We know Indigenous knowledge and support played a role in the adaptation and survival of the Robinson emigrants, and we hope to draw attention to this nation-to-nation relationship. Nevertheless, we must also acknowledge that the history of the Robinson emigrants is indelibly connected to the displacement and colonization of the Mississauga Nations, with an ever-present impact on local Indigenous communities.

The commemoration of this anniversary has catalyzed increased dialogue, awareness, respect and sensitivity regarding truth and reconciliation with the First Nations communities of our region. Steering committee members of Nine Ships 1825 continue to offer updates to Chiefs, staff, Elders and cultural carriers of Hiawatha, Curve Lake, Alderville and Scugog First Nations around plans for the commemoration and include them in invitations to meetings and events associated with the anniversary. There is also a renewed interest from communities and historical groups associated with the anniversary to understand the impact that this emigration has had on the land and Indigenous Peoples of the area.

It is our intention to approach this commemoration with honesty and respect, providing opportunities for dialogue, reciprocity, and reconciliation.

Bicentennial Inclusivity

As our region grows and becomes more diverse with people of many geographical, religious, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, a commemoration of this historic emigration and the hardships endured prior to and after emigration can also be a catalyst for empathy towards newcomers, and help build a shared understanding with New Canadians, many of whom have left incredibly difficult situations, also in search of a better life, free of discrimination and persecution.

The commemoration of this specific anniversary, highlighting a historical story of a group of people building community in the face of adversity, offers universal themes that all community members, regardless of background, abilities, sexual orientations, or gender identities can relate to and should feel welcome to participate in. Along with understanding and respecting differences across many cultural backgrounds, all of which have shared some experience with migration from nearby or distant places, the Bicentennial proves opportunities to reflect and appreciate the resilience of people often leaving disruptive situations or seeking a family strategy of improvement.

Fostering Community Engagement

Volunteer participation is a key component of community engagement. We expect that there will be significant volunteer involvement in the Bicentennial. Many community groups have already expressed their desire to be involved and have provided their extensive initial plans.

Planning & Outreach

- Two update sessions with historical/heritage community groups have been held in February and October and approximately 40 people were in attendance sharing their ideas and plans.
- Liaising with economic development organizations and museums in the areas of Ireland where the Robinson settlers emigrated from (including Ballyhoura Economic Development, Avondu Blackwater Partnership and the EPIC Museum).
- Liaising with Peterborough Economic Development Corporation, including Peterborough and Kawarthas Tourism, Peterborough and Kawarthas Chamber of Commerce and Peterborough DBIA.
- Developing, planning, and curating arts and heritage exhibits
- Performances at arts, heritage, and culture events (e.g. play “Tide of Hope” produced by Trent Valley Archives and “Wild Irish Geese” produced by 4th Line Theatre.
- Hosting tours of cultural and historical significance and hosting the ‘welcome centre and providing information and support to Bicentennial attendees.]

Project Management

Our organization, Nine Ships 1825 Inc. does not have any paid staff; however, we do hope to hire a temporary contractor to help coordinate and manage the Nine Ships 1825 Bicentennial Project in the following way:

- Responding to emails and inquiries.
- Event descriptions, setting up ticketing link through the website.
- Assist with marketing and communications
- Assist Volunteer Manager to register and record volunteer hours.
- Merchandise - Engage on product design and assist with developing a distributor

Capital Projects and Other Commemorative Items

Our project will include the development of a commemorative self-guided ‘Nine Ships 1825 Community Heritage Tour’. The Heritage Tour will guide individuals/groups to various sites of historical and cultural significance in the region that relate directly to the Peter Robinson Irish Emigration, telling the story of the emigration, how it has shaped our local settler and Indigenous communities, and setting the stage for present-day community engagement and reconciliation.

The Heritage Tour will be available in digital and print copy. It will include a map and description of each site, with interpretation that relates to the historical and ongoing significance of each location. The digital version of the Tour will be housed with a community partner for accessibility. Hard copies of the Heritage Tour will be provided to local arts, culture, and heritage organizations, as well as local tourist organizations. An education resource package will be developed for use in local and regional school curricula.

We expect to launch the self-guided Heritage Tour at the opening reception of the Bicentennial, on August 1, 2025.

Board Members

Dennis Carter-Edwards

With over three decades of experience as a historian and cultural resource manager at Parks Canada, Dennis brings invaluable expertise in heritage preservation and project management. His leadership roles in organizations such as the Peterborough Historical Society demonstrate his adeptness at budget management and community engagement.

Brendan Moher

Brendan's multifaceted background as a lawyer and community leader offers our organization a wealth of expertise in legal affairs, financial management, and strategic planning. His extensive involvement in various boards and committees, coupled with his experience in budget preparation and review, enhances our capacity for effective project governance and resource management.

Elwood Jones

Elwood's extensive background as an archivist, historian, and professor emeritus at Trent University equips our organization with deep knowledge in historical research, archival management, and publication coordination. His tenure as a board member and treasurer of the Trent Valley Archives underscores his financial acumen and commitment to preserving local heritage.

Maureen Crowley

Maureen's diverse professional experiences, including roles in emergency services, injury prevention programs, and community organizations, provide our organization with valuable insights into public education, volunteer management, and event coordination. Her leadership as a board member of the Peterborough Canadian Irish Club demonstrates her dedication to community engagement and cultural preservation.

Mary Smith

Mary brings decades of municipal leadership experience to our organization, having served as Mayor of the Township of Selwyn and Councillor for the County of Peterborough. Her extensive involvement in committees such as the Peterborough Public Health Board and the Ontario Municipal Property Assessment

Corporation Board of Directors demonstrates her adeptness in governance and oversight. Mary possesses strong financial management and stakeholder engagement abilities. Her active participation in community initiatives, from environmental stewardship to historical preservation, proves her dedication to enhancing community well-being.

