

Recent storms off the coast recall other days . . .

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WHEN LIMERICK WAS HOST TO 400 NORWEGIAN EMIGRANTS

The recent storms, of which the Limerick Steamship vessel *Osannore* was a victim, recall to mind an almost forgotten but nevertheless very interesting episode of the sea when, just over a century ago, Limerick was host to some 400 shipwrecked Norwegians.

They were members of the passengers and crew of the Norwegian ship, *Hannah Parr*, commanded by Captain Sansen, which put into Scatterry Roads on May 6, 1868, dismasted and helpless.

The vessel — an emigrant ship bound for Quebec — was towed to the floating docks on the following day for refitting. She had sailed from Christiania, Norway, on April 12 and all went well until April 28 when a heavy sea struck her stern and carried away the round house,innacle and compass.

Storm

The gale still raged until it became quite a hurricane, and the vessel was only showing close reefed top sails. At nine o'clock at night a tremendous wind blew the sails out of the ropes and the vessel became unmanageable. A great sea struck her bow, sending the foremast over the lea.

The storm continued until about 4 a.m. and when the wind began to abate the crew commenced cutting away the wrecked spars, which were endangering the safety of the vessel. They rigged up substitute spars and set a course for Ireland. Without further incident, she reached the mouth of the Shannon and Limerick, where the Norwegian Consul, Mr. M. R. Ryan, saw after the wants of the passengers and crew.

The emigrant vessel lay at the New Dock for over a month as local shipwrights set to work on the repairs. The foremast, which had been broken at the cross-trees, was being replaced and a new, topmast added with the necessary rigging. A new cookhouse was being fitted.

Sensation

The arrival of such a large number of Norwegians in the port caused something of a sensation in Limerick. They were described as "of fair complexion, with blue eyes and regularity of feature and light

hair, indicative of the Saxon race from which they have sprung. Many of the men are tall and well-built, while among the females are to be found girls with exceedingly prepossessing features.

"They are all most comfortably clad, some of the females dressed in soft woollens, others in a species of serge. The men are clad in a kind of cloth somewhat similar to that worn in this country along the southern and south-western coast.

"But that which is most pleasing to observe is the evident care taken of the children, who might be seen in their mothers' arms wrapped up in woollens, with hoods of same make, like little birds in a nest, thus showing that in these natives of a cold clime the love of offspring is as deep and impassioned as those of warmer climes. Indeed, we would rejoice if our lower classes in Limerick would show outwardly the same tenderness for their little ones — then they would exhibit the true benevolence of their nature."

The deportment of the Scandinavians as they walked along the streets also excited much comment: "Their bearing is so quiet, and as they go in groups they are frequently followed by a crowd who, unable to converse with these strangers, gratify their curiosity in vacant staring."

Public fund

Several of the emigrants, however, were observed making mute appeals in the streets and at private residences for alms and, as they had to supply their own provisions on board, a local firm of drapers—Messrs. Kearse & Co.—initiated a public fund on their behalf: "We have observed the mute appeals of various groups of them from door to door and could not fail to remark their clean, orderly and respectable appearance and their ardent gratitude and thanks for even a crust of bread to their children, as evidenced by their repeatedly shaking hands with everyone within reach on receipt of the smallest donation."

Meanwhile, the repairs to the *Hannah Parr* were continuing,

and as the old foremast was found, on examination, to be too defective even for splicing, a new one was brought from Cork. Three of the children had died since the arrival of the vessel in the port and were interred in St. Munchin's churchyard.

To guard against sickness breaking out on board, steps were taken to have a large number of the passengers temporarily lodged in the dock. A local merchant, Mr. Richard Russell, having broached the idea of giving the use of one of the dock sheds for the purpose, his brother directors of the Limerick Steamship Company fell in line with his suggestion and the necessary berths were fitted up by carpenters.

The question of a public appeal for the emigrants was taken up by the Mayor, but the Norwegian Consul replied in the course of a letter "I consulted with the master and doctor of the ship, in conjunction with the masters of three other Norwegian vessels now in port, who all reported to me, after enquiry, that the people were in no present want, having abundant provision on board, and who, on the part of their country, now repudiate any appeal to public benevolence on their behalf."

Concert

However, the people of Limerick insisted on extending to the visitors the right hand of welcome. A committee, which included such prominent citizens as Messrs. B. Journeaux, W. Cochrane, J. H. Boyd, James Alexander, Edward Pitt, W. Writing to the "Chronicle," he

Hosford and Joshua Jacob, organised a grand concert for them in the city.

The "Limerick Chronicle" described the colourful cavalcade from the ship to the hall as follows:

"About half-past six o'clock p.m. almost the entire of the passengers, numbering nearly four hundred, with the captain and crew, and the doctor-in-charge, walked in procession from the docks to the hall. A more interesting and in many respects a more touching sight has rarely been witnessed in Limerick."

"Aged men and women, stalwart manhood and vigorous matrons with their infants and young children, and many of the fair-haired daughters of the far North in their fresh, joyous young womanhood—all in their simple and picturesque costume—made up such a cavalcade as we may not soon again witness."

"The tables were covered with hospitable provision and each lady in charge offered a kindly greeting to her guests as they took their places around the well-stocked board."

The evening's proceedings were brought to a close by an exhibition of dissolving views: "To say these splendid specimens of art afforded delight would inadequately convey the rapture of these simple-hearted spectators, many of whom had never even heard of wonders of the magic lantern before."

But, whatever the protestations from official quarters about the self-sufficiency of the emigrants, a subscription list was opened and the movement was headed this time by James Walsh of 9 Lower Mallow St. Writing to the "Chronicle," he

said: "It has been ascertained that a considerable number of the Norwegian emigrants at present among us furnish an occasion for the exercise of the Christian liberality of the people of Limerick. There are, in fact, about 40 or 50 of very slender means among them, to whom a gift of money for the purchase of clothing and other comforts on their arrival at their destination would be most acceptable."

Outing

The repair work was taking much longer than expected, but the citizens of Limerick ensured that time did not drag too heavily for their guests. To give them a tolerably good idea of the sylvan beauty of Ireland, a visit to the splendid park and demesne of Mount Shannon was arranged by a committee headed by Mr. Hunt.

To Mr. Cruise was allotted the task of providing for the comforts of the guests and, with the help of Archibald Murray and Mr. Journeaux, a large supply of hams and spiced beef was made into sandwiches. The Waterford and Limerick Railway Company looked after the transport arrangements.

The weather was delightful and the visitors were entranced with the beauty of the place as they explored the eight miles of avenues through Mount Shannon demesne.

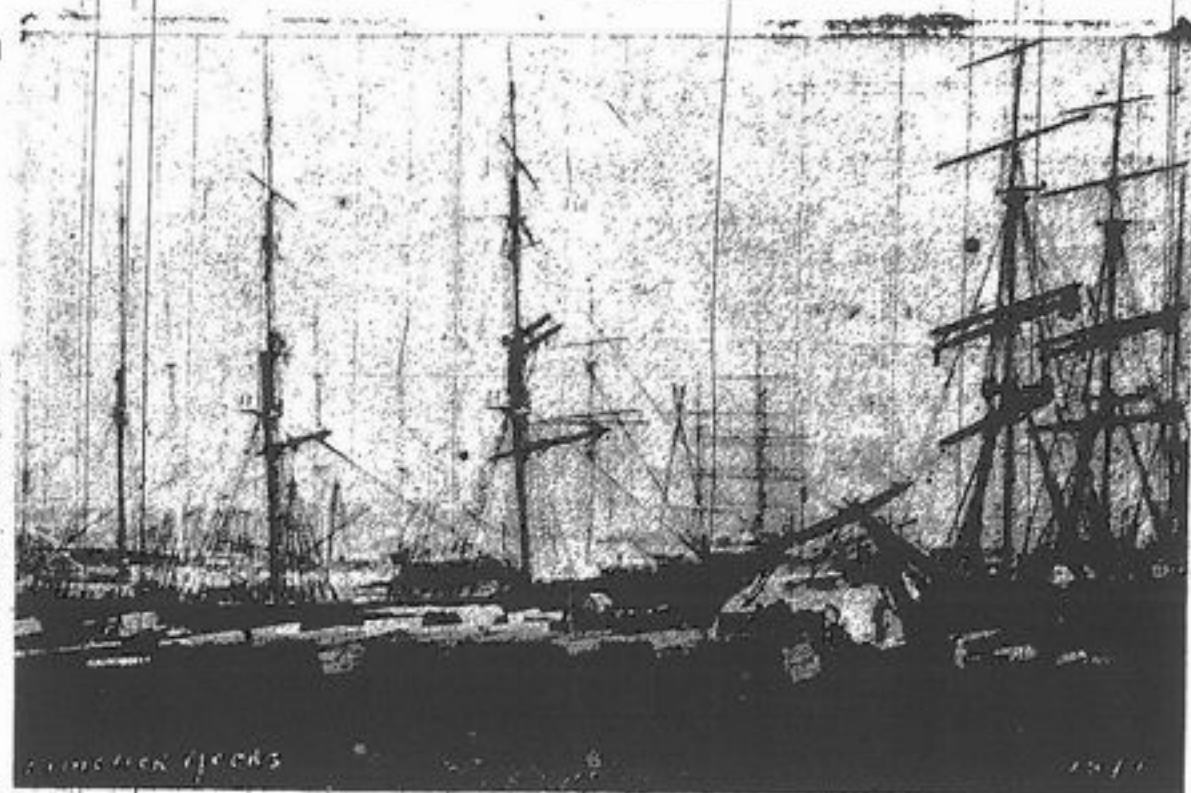
At two o'clock the courtyard bell was rung to summon the visitors to the sumptuous repast prepared for them.

The company were next invited to visit the private gardens of the place and inspect the conservatory and magnificent collection of greenhouse and exotic plants. Then the entire party proceeded through the Lisnagry gate, where a special train was in waiting to bring them back to Limerick.

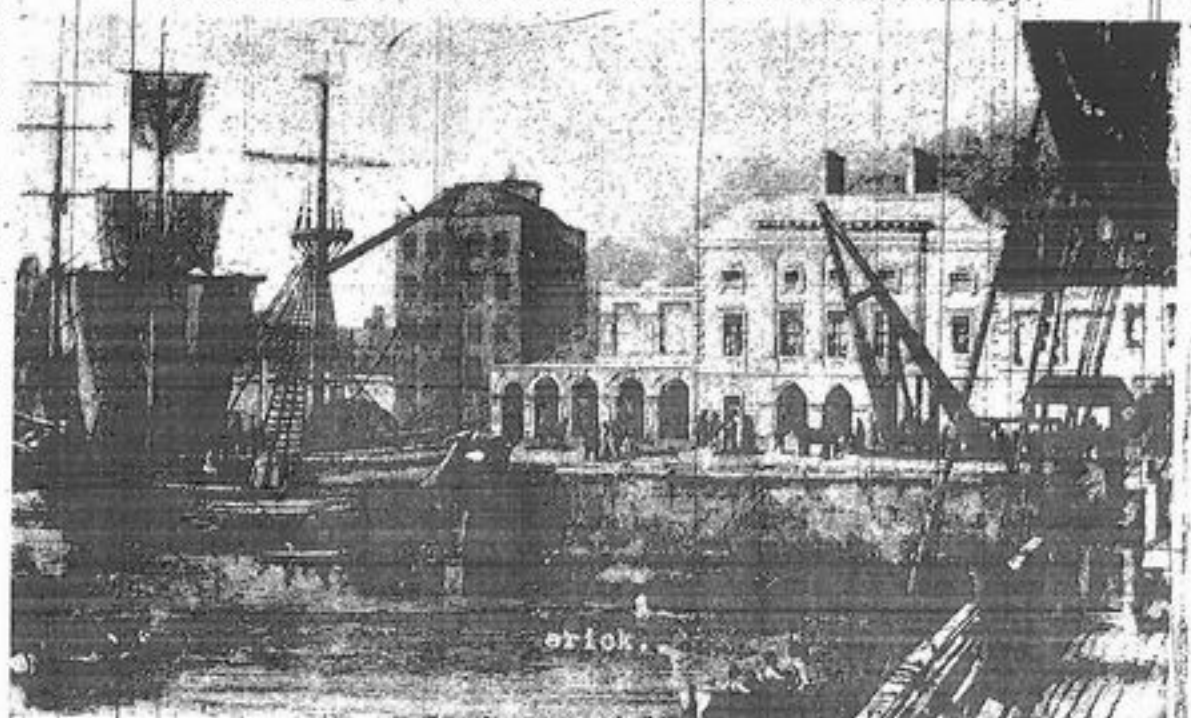
At length the time for parting came; the rears to the *Hannah Parr* were completed and she set sail with her cargo of emigrants for Quebec.

She had a prosperous voyage and Captain Losen wrote to a friend in Limerick thanking, both on his part and that of the crew and passengers, the citizens of Limerick for the courteous treatment they had received here.

Captain Losen said: "It will never be forgotten in our memory for the hospitality you have extended to us." He added that several of the emigrants were in great distress when they arrived at Quebec and would have been in a sad state were it not for the money subscribed here before the departure of the vessel.



The scene at Limerick Docks in the middle of the last century.



The Custom House Quay was the headquarters of Limerick dockland before the new docks were built in the 1830's.

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