

Limerick and the proposed Ecuador expedition of 1846



On the 30th September 1846 The Limerick Chronicle carried the following advertisement:-

Free Emigration

Persons wishing to Emigrate to the Equador, will receive the amount of their Travelling Expences (at the rate of 3s each) to Cork, and on their arriving on board the Emigrant Ship, a present for their families of £2 each, together with a complete suit of Clothing, and Linen, for themselves will be given them. On their agreeing to remain in the country, a Free Passage to each of their Wives and Children will be granted them, and on their finally settling in the Country, 25 ACRES OF GOOD LAND Will be granted to each Settler, with a Yoke of Bullocks and a well built Cottage, and Milch Cow, free and for ever. If however the proposed Emigrant wishes to return to Europe, a Free Passage will be granted to him, and in many cases the value in Cash of the proposed grant will be also given him. Until the land is made over to each Emigrant he will be Fed, Clothed, Lodged and have a certain daily allowance granted him. For further particulars apply to the agent,
No. 28 George Street, Limerick.

The same edition of that newspaper also contained the editorial comment:-

We have heard with satisfaction that a gentleman closely connected with this city, (though long absent from it) has just arrived in Limerick with a plan of emigration which promises the most flattering results to such of our poor starving peasantry as are wise enough to embrace it. The proposed site of emigration is the Equador, one of the most fertile soils-one of the finest climates in the world. The terms, we understand are most liberal - the project bona fide, and the whole under the most respectable patronage. The best guarantee for the emigrants will be, that several Irish gentlemen, of rank and good fortune-some even in this county-will accompany the emigration, which will sail, we understand, in about a fortnight, from Cork.

If the advert seemed too good to be true then it was. The scheme was nothing more

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than a thinly disguised attempt to recruit mercenary soldiers for a proposed expedition to Ecuador. In 1845 General Flores the President of Ecuador had been deposed and sent into exile. Making his way to London he immediately began to plot his return. Travelling via France and Rome he arrived in Spain where, in order to gain support, he offered to create a monarchy in Ecuador with a Spanish prince on its throne. Flores soon had the use of Spanish bases and the funding to raise an army. Initially it was hoped to raise 3,000 men in Spain and about 500 in Ireland. It was probably Colonel Wright, an Irishman, and an adviser of the General who suggested the use of Irishmen who would be eager to get out of a country then in the throes of the Famine. Initially the British authorities seem to have turned a blind eye to this blatant breach of the Foreign Enlistments Act, especially when Wright purchased and armed three ships, the *Glenelg*, *Neptune* and *Monarch*, in England. Commercial advantage and even the handing over of the Galapagos Islands were proposed to sweeten matters with the British authorities. By September 1846 the Spanish end of the expedition was not going well. The number of recruits fell short of the required total, Flores became notorious for womanising and one of his top aides, Colonel Buenaga, resigned in protest. As time progressed it became impossible to keep the shroud of secrecy as details of the project began to appear in the Spanish press. In Britain pressure was brought to bear by Latin American governments and when the three ships attempted to leave the Thames they were stopped, searched and seized under the Foreign Enlistment Act and charges brought. Deprived of its means of transport the expedition was effectively at an end. The final nail in the coffin was the loss of Spanish support after the collapse of the government.¹

In Limerick the response to the advert by the authorities was immediate, though at that stage they took the scheme at face value. On 7 October the local magistrates put the following notice into the *Limerick Chronicle*:-

Emigration to Equador
Magistrates' Office
3rd Oct. 1846

The Magistrates of the City of Limerick, deeming it their duty, as protectors of their fellow citizens, and especially of the labouring and operative classes, to

investigate every project purporting to hold out advantages to them, have assembled for the purpose of enquiring into a hand bill, recently circulated here, inviting them to avail of the promises it holds out to those who will emigrate to Equador, Columbia; and, on a very anxious investigation of the professions which this hand-bill contains do not discover *any substantial or satisfactory security* for the performance of those promises; and, therefore, so far from encouraging or advising their fellow-citizens to avail of it, deem it an imperative duty and obligation to dissuade them therefrom, not only for the essential reason already assigned, but for may others too numerous to introduce. (Signed)

E.F.G. Ryan, Mayor
William Roche, High Sheriff, City of Limerick
John Boyse, J.P.
John Crips, J.P.
William S. Tracy, R.M.
Samuel Dickson J.P.
Richard Kane, J.P.
William Howley J.P., D.L.
William Hartigan, J.P.

The true purpose of the project was, however, soon clear. On 17 October one of the project organisers, Sir William Ogilvie, published a letter in the *Limerick Chronicle* in which he complained:-

On my arrival in Limerick, I was not a little surprized to find that placards were posted up through this city, signed by a person named Walcott, declaring that the approaching emigration to Equador *was neither more nor less than a military expedition, destined to fight in an unwholesome climate.*

After a description of the climate and denial of a military aspect he concluded his letter:-

I, therefore, have, by hand-bills invited every Irishman of good character (agriculturalists and mechanics alike) to come out with me -NOT AS SOLDIERS (as designing persons would lead them to suppose) -NOT as the object of anonymous or sordid speculation (as ignorant persons have set forth) but as moral and hard working inhabitants of a soil which requires but industry and good will to render it the most flourishing spot on the globe. Nature has done all she can- it is left to us to prove (under Providence) that we *can*, and *will*, do the rest.

On 21 October the *Limerick Chronicle* carried a letter from John Courtenay Locke of Newcastle West, son of Lieut. General John Locke, in defence of the expedition:-

Sir-As a Settler about to proceed to Equador having obtained a considerable grant of rich land in that Salubrious Climate, I beg you will accept my testimony to the purposes of this Emigration, the object of which is to populate the Country, and bring into cultivation the fine lands which now are waste, an assertion which I am ready to maintain against the base hints of those who shrink from straightforward and manly assertion.

A week later on 28 October, the *Limerick Chronicle* recorded:-

The Chairman of the South American and Mexican association in London has addressed a letter to Lord Palmerston, Chief Secretary at the Foreign Office, complaining of the active steps taken in this country to send out a military expedition against the Republic of the Equador. He states- "This armament is got up for the avowed purpose of restoring the political administration of the country into the hands of an eminent individual who, for several years, exercised the office of President of that republic, but who has for some time ceased to do so. It is notorious that funds have been placed in this country from Spain for the purpose of purchasing military equipments and shipping, and that the enlisting of men under the pretence of emigration is going on in Ireland also for the purpose of this expedition. The committee suggest that, in order to remove all doubt as to the conduct of the British nation in this matter, it would be expedient for her Majesty's Government, either by proclamation, or in such other way as it may think fit, to call public attention to the provisions of the Foreign Enlistment Bill, and to give instructions for the rigid enforcement of its provisions."

On 31 October the following notice appeared in the *Limerick Chronicle*:-

Sir,
In consequence of the opposition offered to the enrolment of emigrants, by the Worshipful Mayor and a portion of the magistrates of this city, as well as the objections made by those from whom I had every right to expect aid and support, I beg leave to say that I shall elsewhere confer (for the time to come) that which I had intended as a boon and a relief to the suffering poor of this district, and shall not, consequently, accept any more emigrants in the city and county of Limerick. I shall now only remain here to superintend the embarkation of those whom I have already enrolled. Future can-

didates therefore, for this emigration, are consequently referred to Sir William Ogilvie, Bart. in London, or to Sir James Hamilton Hay Bart. our agent for emigration in Scotland.

The annual vessel from Ireland, which will sail early next year for Equador, will call for emigrants at Cork.

By inserting this notice, you will much oblige your obedient servant

H.R. Addison

P.S. It may perhaps, be as well to add that I have already enrolled as many emigrants as I desired to obtain.

Henry Robert Addison was the gentleman referred to in the editorial of 30 September as arriving in the city to promote the expedition. In fact his arrival was noted in the previous paragraph:-

Yesterday Capt. Addison arrived from London at his father in law's T.P. Vokes C.M. Police in this City.

Addison had married Mary Vokes at St Michael's church Limerick in 1828 and she died shortly after giving birth to their third child in 1832. It is, therefore, interesting to note that Vokes did not put his name to the published comments about the proposed expedition signed by the other City magistrates. In 1862 Addison was to publish a memoir of his late father in law, *Recollections of an Irish Police Magistrate, and other reminiscences of the South of Ireland*.

The seizure of the expedition's three ships was reported in the *Limerick Chronicle* of 25 November:-

The Flores Expedition. On Thursday evening last, Mr. Forsyth, the principal searcher of the Customs, accompanied by other officers, boarded the ship *Glenelg*, lying off Gravesend, and, after inspection, seized her for a contemplated breach of the Foreign Enlistment and Equipment Act; and he, also, upon the same grounds, seized the *Monarch* and *Neptune* steam-vessels, lying in the East India Docks Blackwall. It is understood that the three vessels form part of an expedition which has been secretly fitted out in this country with the intention, by hostile means, to effect a revolution of Government in a state of South America with which we are on terms of peace and friendship. When the *Glenelg* was seized there had just been received on board 350 men, under pretence of being emigrants, but intended to serve as soldiers or marines. Mr Forsyth is in possession of information concerning them that leaves no doubt of all three vessels being ultimately condemned as forfeited to the Crown.

By the end of November, John Locke had reversed his earlier opinion; in a letter dated the 28th, which appeared in the *Limerick Chronicle* on 2 December, he wrote:-

Dear Sir- In a paragraph in last *Chronicle* the words "so-called Emigration scheme" have given unintentional offence, and are, therefore, withdrawn. My object was to put an end to applications to myself, respecting the Equador expedition, which, as an Irishman I contemplate with undisguised apprehension. Even if the expedition was unobjectionable, the Irish peasant will never amalgamate with the mixed races of South America. He needs no naturalization in the Northern Continent, already swayed by the genius of British language and civilisation, and in the untilled wastes of which the whole human race might find room and food.

It does not appear generally known, that the 51st section of our Poor Law Act provides for levying a rate to defray expenses of emigration to our colonies, which section may be made available at the present distressing juncture. But on this subject no further observations at present from

Your obliged and obedient
John Locke

On December 4 1846, the *Freeman's Journal* recorded:-

The Ecuador expedition is completely at an end. At the very moment that the navy of General Flores was seized in the Thames his army was dispersed in Biscay.

The *Clamor Publico* published the following extract from a letter-dated Vittoria Nov. 20;

The expedition of General Flores is at an end, in consequence of the revolt of his troops at the depots of Durango and that of Orduña, who on being commanded to march to Santander for embarkation, dispersed through the country.¹

Incidentally, one of the participants in the project was William Leith Butts, son of the William Butts whose court-martial in Limerick Gaol is the subject of another article in this edition of the journal. Giving evidence at the trial of participants, Butts stated among other things that he had consulted with his father before joining the scheme and had previously served in Portugal and Spain where he had achieved the rank of major.²

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REFERENCES

- 1 Most of the background of this paragraph came from Mark J. Van Aken's, *King of the Night; Juan Jose Flores and Ecuador, 1824-64*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1989), pp 209-33.
- 2 *The Times* 13 January 1847 contains a summary of his evidence.