

Distillery Workers Isaac Doran, miller (1846-1854)



1849 letter to Isaac Doran c/o Wm. Gooderham
Nancy Mallett



Windmill, distillery & houses ca. 1855
DHD

In 1846, miller Isaac Doran emigrated from Newry, Ireland to Toronto with his wife Rose Anne Kennedy and four children. He landed on his feet, taking up a position as miller with Gooderham & Worts (aka Toronto City Steam Mills and Distillery) and moving into a house owned by James G. Worts right near the old windmill. During his decade with G&W, Doran experienced both the boom and terror that gripped his adopted city.

Isaac and Rose Anne's new home probably looked something like the workers' cottages depicted by [William Armstrong](#) in the mid-1850s – one-storey, timber houses, each bearing a prominently displayed ladder in case of fire. Armstrong even included a touch of domestic life, with a woman and small child pausing on the company wharf, perhaps to chat with a fisherman catching dinner. A nice reminder that the distillery was a home place as well as a work place.

Little is known of daily life at the mill and distillery in the 1840s, but Doran certainly arrived at an important moment. In 1844, Irishman [David Roberts, Sr.](#) had landed in Canada West, was soon hired to make improvements. In 1845, William Gooderham's nephew, [James G. Worts](#), became a full, and most energetic partner in the business that was renamed "Gooderham & Worts." And in 1846, according to the *British Colonist* of April 16, 1850, "the whole establishment was renewed and remodeled upon the most improved principles, at a cost of upwards of £2,000."

Renewal included installing one of the new, far more efficient, [continuous stills](#) (aka Riley's, later Maitland's patent still), described by the reporter:

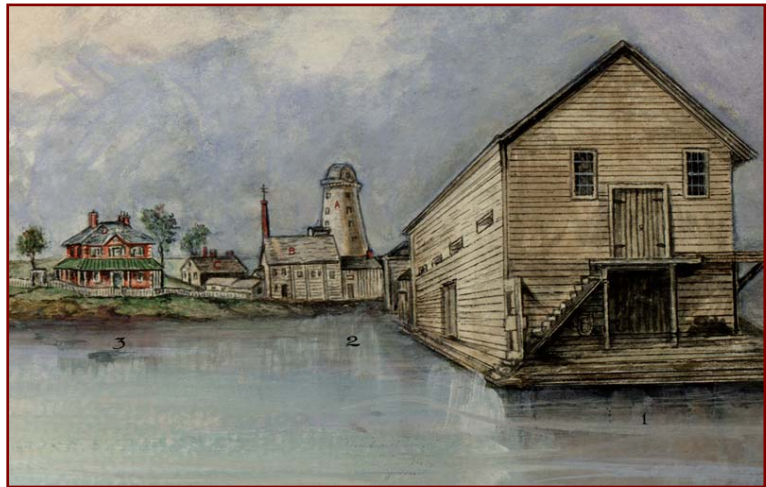
Its great utility consists in enabling the distiller to run [distill] his beer in much less time than in the old Dutch [aka pot] still; and spirits can at one operation be brought to 50 per cent over proof ... producing about 80,000 gallons of whisky [per year].

The flour mills, where Doran worked, had three pairs of millstones that could turnout 900 bushels of flour per week. According to the same *British Colonist*:

There are double coolers in the flour mill, one placed on the floor above the other. The flour, after passing through the various stages necessary for its proper manufacture, is placed in the flour barrels and packed by machinery; and such is the saving of labour from the machinery employed that from the time the wheat is taken in it is never touched by hands until the barrels are removed from the packing machine filled with flour, to be weighed off for sale or export.

Fortunately for Doran, the miller was still needed to start, stop, and otherwise monitor milling operations.

As part of the 1846 expansion, the company also built its first wharf. At the end were two large storehouses, each about 30 x 90 feet, two-storeys high, and capable of storing 20,000 bushes of wheat and 5,000 barrels of flour. From this wharf, G&W shipped out whisky, wheat and flour to Quebec, Montreal, Great Britain and the United States, sometimes aboard the company's own freight steamer, *Western Miller*. Conversely, trade goods and raw materials such as coal and grain could more readily be received and processed.



**Gooderham & Worts wharf, mill & distillery, ca. 1850
painting by Wylly Grier based on earlier drawing TPL**

The Doran family's good fortune soon became more evident. They had left County Down south of Belfast in 1846 before the full force of the famine hit, killing a million Irish and spurring two million more to emigrate. Whether they were numbered among the Irish families who could only afford to save a single member or family group is unknown. Perhaps, although Isaac Doran had a trade and might have had more resources than the average immigrant of his day. Nevertheless, as the crisis deepened, the recently arrived Dorans must have shared not only the fears gripping Torontonians from all backgrounds, but also the terrible anxieties haunting those with relatives back in Ireland.

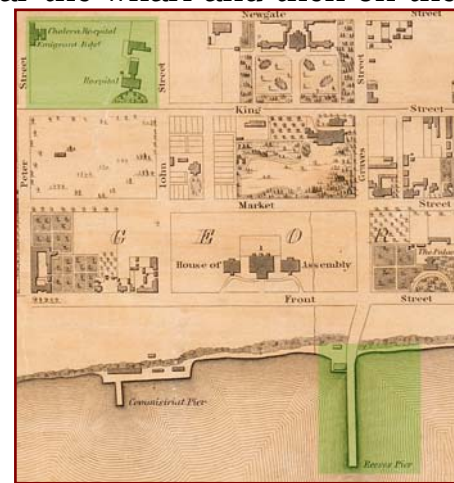
The year 1847 – “Black ’47” – became the height and the touchstone of the famine. Torontonians saw the crisis coming. As early as February 1847, newspapers were anticipating a major Irish immigration when the sailing season opened. The same month, City Council established a Board of Health. On May 15th, a pastoral letter written by Toronto’s first Catholic Bishop, Michael Power, was read from the pulpits of all Catholic churches in and around Toronto. Early in the year, Bishop Power had seen Ireland’s emaciated and impoverished gathered on the quayside in Dublin awaiting emigration. Their plight was even worse than he had expected. Before returning to Toronto to share the crisis - and dying during it - Bishop Power urged congregants to prepare for the influx of Irish famine victims who were certain to arrive soon.

And arrive they did. On May 23rd, the first ship from an Irish port, the *Jane Black*, arrived from Limerick at Quebec. Those who passed successfully through the quarantine island of Grosse Isle continued on their journey up the St. Lawrence River, many inexorably making for Canada West. On June 8th, the steamer *City of Toronto* brought the crisis to Toronto, landing 700 adults and children, including 250 described as ‘indigent.’ “This landing of the sick and indigent,” [Professor Mark G. McGowan and Michael Chard](#) have observed, “was merely a harbinger of worse things to come.”

Between June and October 1847, over 38,000 Irish immigrants disembarked at Toronto, population 20,000. Most passed quickly through to settle elsewhere in the province. About 1,100 died and were buried in Toronto: about 750 at the Catholic cemetery, about 300 at St. James Anglican cemetery, and about 50 at Potter’s Field.

Emigrants were required to land at Rees Wharf at the foot of Graves (now Simcoe) Street, near today’s Metro Convention Centre. “Emigrant sheds” – and they were little more than a roof over rows of tightly-packed beds – were constructed and provisioned, first on the shore near the wharf and then on the grounds of the Toronto General Hospital at King and John Streets. The TGH was moved temporarily to another site and its buildings became an “Emigrant Hospital” for the duration.

The crisis deepened. One local described Toronto as “a general Lazaretto” – that is, a quarantine station for maritime travelers. The Board of Health continued to pursue its dual mandate of protecting the citizens of Toronto from the spread of disease and looking after those who were sick. On July 2nd, Dr. George R. Grasett, Medical Superintendent of the Emigrant Hospital, issued a stern order on behalf of the Board of Health:



Rees Wharf & Hospital, 1842 CTA

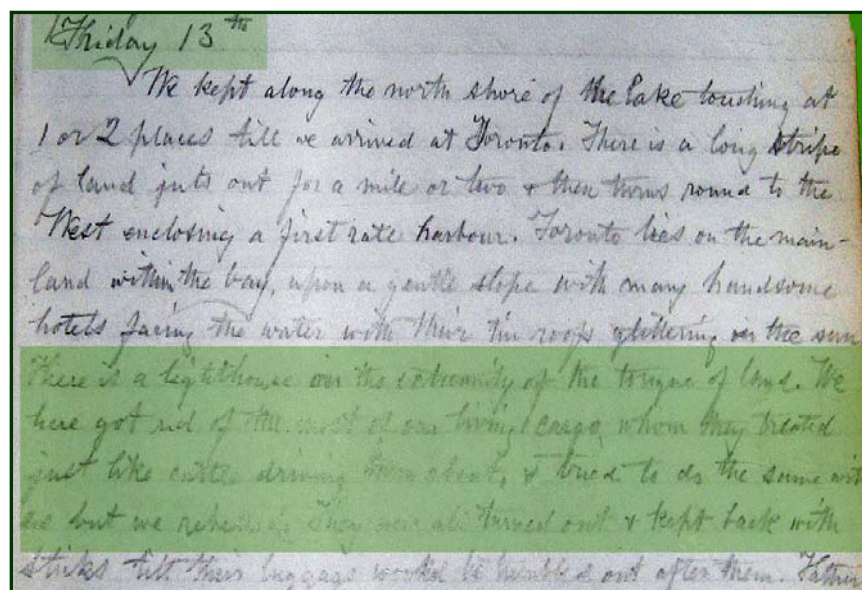
The Board have decided it necessary for reasons which have become but too obvious within the last few days, to issue an order

forbidding all carts, cab men & other persons, from removing any Emigrants from Rees's Wharf after the arrival of steamers at said Wharf until the Health Officer shall have visited & examined such Emigrants.

The adoption of this order renders it necessary that the Health Officer should visit the Steamers immediately on their arrival to prevent any unnecessary destruction or exposure of the Emigrants on the Wharf.

Exactly two weeks after issuing the order that arguably saved the town's citizens from a major outbreak of typhus, 36-year-old Dr. Grasett succumbed to the disease contracted while tending to his patients at the emigrant hospital. At the same time, construction workers building new sheds refused to continue because so many of their number had also perished. Doctors. Priests. Nurses. Officials and ordinary workers. All were among the victims of the fever.

Meanwhile conditions at the wharf were rough, even brutal. The only thing that can be said is that conditions seemed to be bad for everyone, not just one class of immigrant. Few eye-witness accounts have survived. One that has is contained in an unpublished diary by John Young, a Scotsman who had left Glasgow with his family during the height of the Irish emigration, bound for reunion with farming relatives in Ancaster, Canada West. The family was processed at Grosse Isle where they first saw evidence of "the great sickness." From Quebec to Kingston, the Youngs travelled with other Scots. When they tried to find hotel accommodation in Montreal, they were refused by locals afraid of contamination, no matter the apparent health or national origin of the applicant. In Kingston, they switched to the steamer *Princess Royal* headed for Toronto overloaded with a human cargo that included many impoverished and ailing Irish. The trip along the north shore of Lake Ontario was cold, cramped, and unfriendly. Captain Twohey treated everyone with equal contempt.



Friday 13th
We kept along the north shore of the Lake touching at 1 or 2 places till we arrived at Toronto. There is a long strip of land juts out for a mile or two & then turns round to the West enclosing a first rate harbour. Toronto lies on the mainland within the bay, upon a gentle slope with many handsome hotels facing the water with their tin roofs glistening in the sun. There is a lighthouse on the extremity of the tongue of land. We here got rid of the most of our heavy cargo whom they treated just like cattle driving from sheep, & tried to do the same with us but we refused. They were all turned out & kept back with sticks till their baggage would be hauled out after them. & then

John Young's account of landing at Rees Wharf, August 13, 1847

Nancy Mallett

On Friday, August 13th, the Youngs made a brief but memorable stop at Toronto:

There is a long strip of land juts out for a mile or two then turns round to the west enclosing a first rate harbour. Toronto lies on the mainland within the bay, upon a gentle slope with many handsome hotels facing the water with their tin roofs glittering in the sun. There is a lighthouse on the extremity of the tongue of land. We here [Rees Wharf] got rid of most of our living cargo, whom they treated just like cattle driving them about, and tried to do the same with us, but we rebelled. They were all turned out and kept back with sticks till their luggage would be tumbled out after them.



**Irish Famine Memorial
Statue by Rowan Gillespie**

The healthy and unintimidated Scots made a hasty departure for Hamilton aboard the steamer *Eclipse*. The healthy Irish were also sent quickly on their way to other ports and final destinations. But the sick were identified by the Medical Officer and hurried off to the overcrowded Emigrant Sheds and Hospital where they were tended, some improved, and over a 1,100 died. Most of the dead remained anonymous until researchers recently combed through surviving records to identify the [675 names](#) now commemorated in limestone from County Kilkenny at the Toronto Irish Famine Memorial at the foot of Bathurst Street. The search for more continues.

Many of Isaac and Rose Anne Doran's relatives did not survive the Great Famine back in Ireland. There's no way of knowing how well informed they were about events across the sea. On the last day of 1849, Isaac received a letter from an old friend, Moses McGladry, who had emigrated to New York with his grandmother in August of that year. Written from Staten Island and addressed simply to "Mr. Isaac Doran, Care of Wm. Gooderham Esq, Toronto City Mills, Canada," the letter was duly delivered, probably on New Year's Eve 1849. The contents were extremely sad. Moses names those who died during the famine:

Dear Isaac you heard of the ups ad downs that happened in and among your friends since you left Ireland. your Mother and 2 brothers and cousin and your uncle John and two children of William Cowans and Elisabeth Kennedy and my Mother and 2 sisters all died since you left the land of your birth. But wee must be submissive to the will of God and prepare ourselves for we haft to die as well.

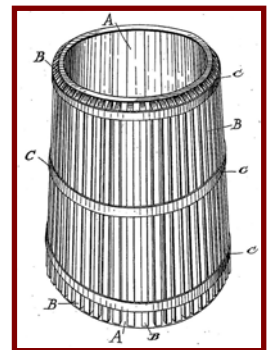
As for the writer, he had found a job on his first day in New York and seemed to be doing well. Meanwhile, Isaac Doran continued living and working at Gooderham & Worts until his death in May 1854. At that point, 15-year-old James and 13-year-old William had to leave Park School to start working at the distillery. There they both worked for a decade until James fell in love. When he married Annie Oliver in 1864 at Cooke's Presbyterian Church, a strongly Irish Presbyterian congregation on Mutual Street, he changed careers. The Olivers were fierce temperance advocates, who disapproved of their daughter marrying anyone who worked at a distillery. James, therefore, moved into less controversial comestibles: candy, vinegar, and ginger ale. First, he joined Robertson Brothers and then Robertson & Doran, Confectioners. Later, he established companies to manufacture vinegar and ginger ale.



1864 Wedding daguerrotypes of James Doran & Annie Oliver
Nancy Mallett

James Doran's early experiences at Gooderham & Worts, however, were not lost on him. In 1890, he obtained a patent for an improved wooden "vinegar tank" ... of the sort that would have made his coopering friends from the old days proud. In his patent, Doran specified:

The invention relates to an improvement in tubs or tanks used for containing vinegar or other acids; and the object of the invention is to provide means by which the soakage of the acids through the staves shall be prevented from acting upon and destroying the metal hoops employed in binding the said staves together.



1890 Vinegar Tank
Patent No. 418,784

Only the contents of his new invention would have disappointed the distillery workers of his youth.

After Isaac Doran's death in May 1854, his widow Rose Anne remained for some years in, and then behind, the same house owned by James G. Worts. She took in laundry and eventually moved to Lindsay where she died in 1901. William Doran likely continued working at the distillery, but his tale has not yet been unearthed.

Many thanks to Nancy Mallett, Chair of the Archives and Museum at St. James' Cathedral, for sharing her family history and precious family records, including the letter, diary entries, and daguerrotypes reproduced here. She also pointed out the order sent by Dr. Grasett and his death notices in the Grasett scrapbook held by the St. James Cathedral Archives. Thanks also to Carol Moore-Ede for additional help with Dr. Grasett.

For background on the impact of the Great Famine on Toronto, see "Historical Background," by Professor Mark G. McGowan with Michael Chard for [Ireland Park](#). I am certainly grateful to them and the many volunteer researchers who have dug up the names of over 675 Irish immigrants who died in Toronto during 1847, but who are now commemorated in limestone at the Irish Famine Memorial.

Please send your comments or questions to Manager of Heritage Services, Sally Gibson, sg@thedistillerydistrict.com.

For more about the history of the Distillery District, visit www.distilleryheritage.com

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