Imigration To Canada Essay, Research Paper

INTRODUCTION

Many people immigrated to Canada with hopes of a better life and refuge from places and times of uncertainty. People in foreign countries were made aware of Canada and all it supposedly had to offer through channels such as relatives who were already living in Canada and governmental advertising. Information given was not always as accurate as it should have been. Views on the early settlement of Canada varied depending on the person and his or her experiences, for interpretations of particular situations often varied. Descriptions of Canada and all it had to offer tended to enhance the positive aspects while trying to hide or lessen the negative ones as advertisement often does; nonetheless immigration to and settlement in Canada did not go without struggle or barriers to overcome. This paper will paper will specifically look at a single Dutch-Canadian family, observing their trials and tribulations of the development of a new life in a new world through the eyes of a second generation Dutch-Canadian by way of comparing the proceedings of an interview to that of material found in various history collections. The reconstruction of one’s life after such tragedies as war can be compared to that of childbirth. Many women pronounce its excruciating pain and suffering but after seeing the end result of a new life, that same pain is often forgotten or seen as considerably less significant.

IMMIGRATION TO CANADA

War wreaked such havoc over all of Europe that people in the Netherlands were living with constant feelings of instability for a considerable length of time even after it was over. With “ruined cities, shattered transportation networks, devastated industrial centers, and a barely functioning economy…[amongst]…overpopulation, unemployment, and [a] limited amount of arable land,” many people could no longer live in a place of ceaseless uncertainty (Ganzevoort, 1988: 62, 63). To some, emigration seemed to be the most prospective solution to their social and economic problems. Through emigration, people could reestablish relationships with relatives already in Canada. “Promises of jobs and housing were enhanced by grand descriptions of the possibilities that existed,” some being more accurate than others (Ganzevoort, 1988: 65). All these factors: the after effects of war, instability, encouragement of emigration, and advertised opportunity, contributed to the move of many people from the Netherlands to Canada. The accuracies of descriptions of this supposed wonderful journey wouldn’t be found out until their move was underway. Surely there was much land and many opportunities, but all of this was easier said than done.

Moving from one country to another involved immense risk, and this risk was greater to some than others. After the war many men had wives and children to support. At this time, my grandparents had seven children and one on the way. My grandfather felt that is was a greater risk to stay in a country with no promise of immediate reconstruction and a very bleak future of instability than to go on to a new world, still uncertain, but of endless possibilities. Once everyone boarded the ship to set sail for Canada there was no turning back, but this is where some people started to second guess their decisions as the conditions on the ship were horrendous. Families were separated, women in different sections than the men. Because ships were few in number, they were loaded with as many people as possible, making for cramped quarters. This transition was a time of fear and uncertainty; however, upon arrival to Canada much anxiety was alleviated at the sight of the beautiful expanse of new land (Larosa, 1997). The landscape was much different from that of the Netherlands with “the green, tree-lined shores” and rolling, mountainous terrain (Ganzevoort, 1988: 78). Stepping off the ship onto the land of a new world awakened new excitement at the thought of freedom in such a beautiful place, a place of rebirth.

SETTLEMENT

Canada is where the reconstruction of many immigrants’ lives began. Once off the ship, people started going in all different directions, many depending on the location of their connections or sponsors. From the ports, people boarded trains to “journey into the heart of Canada …to meet church officials or family…or employer[s] who had sponsored them”(Ganzevoort, 1988: 79). Settlement was in various locations and in varying numbers. Many people settled together in similar ethnic groups in order to maintain their culture and affiliation. Through this they could achieve a sense of place with little alienation in their new home. Some drew comfort from large numbers of similar people, however, my family did not settle amongst a Dutch colony. My grandfather’s main goal was in establishing his own family where they were provided with the best opportunities and making their lives as prosperous as he knew how. He did this through hard work and determination. They traveled to Alberta where they met his brother who was already a resident. Here they settled on a farm.

The Dutch were classified as preferred immigrants in contrast with non-preferred (Bone, 2000: Ch.4). Preferred immigrants may have experienced fewer barriers, but faced barriers nonetheless. Language, which is a key component of ethnicity, is one of those barriers. My grandmother’s solution to this was to never allow her children to speak Dutch (Bouwmeester, 2000). This way they learned English faster, were less different and fit in faster at school. Today not one of eleven, second-generation Dutch-Canadian, children speak fluent Dutch; and not one of my 33 cousins, third-generation Dutch-Canadians can even understand the language when spoken. This was a very fast loss of culture. Diversity of people due to ethnic and cultural differences was a very prevalent issue in the development and growth of Canada and often led to friction between certain groups of people. Moreover, assimilation decreased difference and therefore reduced conflicts. Assimilation resulted in the gradual loss of one’s culture as they adopted another. Despite loss of certain cultures, some still remain and are what make up Canada as a multicultural nation.

Losing certain aspects of one’s culture doesn’t come as a complete loss because several things were also gained and beneficial to immigrants. A mere sense of family pride through accomplishments and significant feats created a sense of place. Even if Canada were not their original home, they would always have their family to turn to. My grandparent instilled this in their children by providing them with a stable home. Although it was for some, finding work for my grandfather was no a barrier as it had been arranged prior to their descent. From farming in Alberta he moved to British Columbia and into the construction industry with various jobs along the way. Each job was always better than the preceding one. Change and growth were his reasons for immigration and in doing so he continually bettered his and his family’s future.

Religion also played an important role in the settling lives of immigrants. After losing their language, religion seemed to be their only link to some of their culture. Family members and their relationship with each other was also important as their closeness and dependability gave them comfort during hard times.

CONCLUSION

Through immigration opportunities were offered and goals were sought after and achieved through hard work and determination. Evidence of these past traits still linger in the following generations of these immigrants because they have their own obstacle to overcome. Today, we don’t always encounter the same barriers; we just encounter new and different ones. My family has come a long way over three generations, first immigrating to Canada as part of an unfamiliar segregated group to then becoming prominent well-known members of society. Past hardships and the reconstruction of immigrants lives built a home and created a sense of place for subsequent generations who would know nothing of past struggles except through past recollections and story telling. Immigrants have made Canada what it is today.

SOURCES

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