

KERRY FARMER

Title

'Migration schemes to Australia' - Understanding more about the people who were encouraged to come

Summary

Australian migration policy was often more about who to keep out than who to let in. However at various times governments, organisations and individuals encouraged immigration by subsidising the passage of those deemed to be desirable immigrants. This presentation examines some of the schemes that operated in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, considering the selection criteria and years of operation.

Abstract

The distance from England to Australia meant that the new colonies had to be self-sufficient in food production and required a population with certain necessary skills. Without financial encouragement, potential migrants were more likely to choose the cheaper alternatives of migrating to Canada or the United States.

The earliest enticement for free settlers was the promise of land grants and government-supplied labourers. Under a new scheme initiated in 1830, the proceeds of land sales were used to pay for the passage of poorer British migrants with needed skills. By varying the amount of the assistance available, immigration numbers could be manipulated as needed, for those in required occupations or preferred age groups.

Sometimes the reasons for migration were more push than pull: unemployment due to the Industrial Revolution, the Highland Clearances in Scotland and the Potato Famine in Scotland and Ireland led to various assisted migration schemes financed by British organisations and governments.

Individuals already in Australia sometimes paid the fares of selected migrants – including for the reuniting of families or employers seeking suitable workers.

Before Federation in 1901, selected migrants received passage assistance from colonial government funds, while the British government paid for the transport of convicts, paupers, the military and civil servants. From 1901 until 1922 the states continued to manage their own immigration, but after 1923 control shifted to the Commonwealth Government. World War II highlighted the risk of invasion when the population was low – leading to a major post-war immigration program.

Assisted immigrants were required to give information about their parents and place of origin plus testimonials of character and good health as evidence that they would be useful members of society.

For genealogists, understanding the scheme in place might also help explain why an ancestor lied about his age, or why in his application for assisted passage, a shoe maker in Northamptonshire might have listed his occupation as 'shepherd'.

Audience

Intermediate to Advanced