

Gerald Keegan's Journal

Gerald Keegan was an Irish school master who visited British North America in 1847 just before he died. In a daily journal, he recorded his impressions of the trip from Ireland.

May 2

The gale blew itself out during the night and today it is calm, the ship pitching and rolling on a glassy swell, and the sails flapping as if they would split. There is a mist, and it is very cold, which the boatswain tells me, indicates ice is near. Lead cast and soundings found, showing we are on the Banks. Some of our people, who are fishermen, bargained with the cook for a piece of salt pork and using it as bait cast our lines. Their patience was tried for a while, until we struck a school of fish, when for half an hour they caught cod and dogfish as fast as they could haul them in. The school then left and fewer caught afterwards. They gave a few of the best fish to the cook and in consideration, he cooked what they had, so for one day all between decks had enough to eat. The drinking water has been growing daily worse, and now the smell of it is shocking. The barrels must have been filled from the Liffey near a sewer. Repugnant as it is to sight, smell and taste it continues to be doled out in such meagre measure that the sick are continually crying for water with not a drop to give them. The number now sick is appalling—the young of dysentery, the old of fever, the cause of both diseases starvation. Uncle's second boy died this afternoon of dysentery. Poor uncle, his lot is a sore one, yet he never complains.

Excerpts from Gerald Keegan's *Journal of the Voyage from Ireland, 1847*, cited in *A Few Acres of Snow: Documents in Canadian History, 1577-1867*, Thomas Thorner, ed. (Toronto: Broadview Press, 1997).