The King William’s Town Brides

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British travel writer H.V. Morton wrote a book called In Search of South Africa. Is it he tells an anecdot about why there are so many German names around the town of King William’s Town. Due to the tragic Xosa cattle killing and consequent starvation, large areas of Northeastern Cape Province were empty. To colonise them, the Government in Cape Town offered free land to German farmers—many of whom had fought with Britain in the Crimean War. Unfortunately, most of these were bachelors and not always models of virtue and responsibility! To remedy the situation, in 1857 King William’s Town raised enough money to bring out a shipload of Irish girls, who quickly transformed most of the roving males into steady, respected members of the community. It is these women who inspired the song, J. Dauncey.

The maidens of dear Ireland are growing pale and thin South Africa needs women as the colonies begin. There’s one less mouth for us to feed as sister sails away To be a bride in Billy’s Town just north of Mossel Bay.

The agony of waiting for departure finally ends They cry and wave their last goodbyes to family and friends, Then turn their faces to the sun, the anchor is aweigh, A ship of brides for Billy’s Town just north of Mossel Bay.

The lonely farmers line the quay and welcome them ashore And they blush to think they’ll join a man they’ve never seen before. The blue skies of South Africa smile on them there as they Become the brides of Billy’s Town just north of Mossel Bay.

The gardens of the Empire are always in the sun And Irish seeds blow far and wide to strengthen every one, Leaving friends and families, we up and steal away, Like the brides of Billy’s Town just north of Mossel Bay.