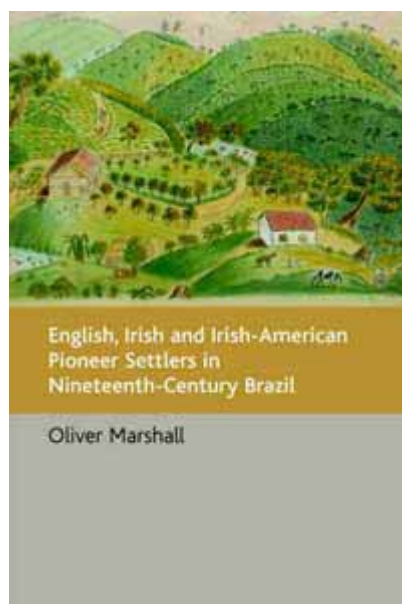


## Review of Oliver Marshall's *English, Irish and Irish-American Pioneer Settlers in Nineteenth-Century Brazil*

By Edmundo Murray



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Apparent in any bibliography of the Irish in Latin America is the disproportionate number of works on the Irish in Argentina compared to the very meagre amount of research on Irish people in other Latin American countries. With the exception of some topics that continue to attract the attention of authors - such as the San Patricio battalion in Mexico and Eliza Lynch in Paraguay - an overwhelming number of books and articles are dedicated to the Irish on the Argentine pampas. [\[1\]](#) This is the first book ever to study British and Irish emigrants to Brazil and is, therefore, a valuable addition to the reference books and articles already published in this area.

Above and beyond its pioneering characteristics, Marshall's book represents an important piece of research for which a wide array of primary sources was consulted in several archives in Brazil, England and the United States. In publishing *English, Irish and Irish-American Pioneer Settlers*, Marshall is adding a new title to his already prolific list: *The English-Language Press in Latin America* (London: Institute of Latin American Studies, University of London, 1996), *Brazil in British and Irish Archives* (Centre for Brazilian Studies, University of Oxford, 2002), and (as editor), *English-Speaking Communities in Latin America* (London: Macmillan, 2000).



A Chamberlain-family wedding gathering, Cêro Azul, c. 1927  
(Margarida Chamberlain), p. 209.

The author opens his study with a discussion of emigration from Britain and Ireland to Brazil. 'Before an immigrant-based community can assert its identity, be it influential or assimilate' he says, 'it has to be established. Before it can be established, it has to be imagined' (p. 7). The ways in which the Brazilian government, agents, priests, trade union leaders and emigrants imagined the possibility of starting a new life in Brazil are analysed in detail in the chapters that follow. In this analysis, the living conditions of the English and Irish people in England and the United States are studied in the context of the complexity of the migration process, which 'often involves more than a simple one-way passage' (9). This complexity and the multiple migration waves and actors, in spite of the author's rigorous and meticulous writing, sometimes make the book difficult to follow as a coherent narrative, and render it more of a work of reference than a single story of settlement in a foreign country.

Before proceeding to a detailed description of the colonies, the complete background of Brazilian immigration policy is analysed for the reader, including a brief account of William Cotter's recruitment of soldiers in Cork in 1826 and Fr. T. Donovan's settlement of Wexford immigrants in Monte Bonito (Rio Grande do Sul) in 1852. The key role of Tipperary-born journalist William Scully, founder of the *Anglo-Brazilian Times* and co-founder of the International Immigration Society, is also discussed in relation to the establishment of new colonies in Brazil.

The Irish emigrated to Brazil from New York City, Birmingham and Wednesbury in the Black Country of England. They were 'desperate to believe that a better life could be found in far-off South America' (38). It was a migration scheme conceived by promoters of agricultural colonisation in Brazil who worked in England, and United States agents who were paid a commission for each person sent. In Wednesbury, Father George Montgomery was wont to preach to his poor Irish parishioners: 'We hear our divine Saviour saying, "When they persecute you in one state, flee ye to another," and we look whither we may flee to obey this precept' (50). Fr. Montgomery, together with Brazilian agents in London, imagined 'a network of New Irelands' in South America, that is, colonies that would appeal to 'single men and lads, free, healthy, brave, strong, generous, and disposed to live as becomes good Catholics' (61).

There was a stark contrast between the mid-nineteenth-century Irish and English colonies in Brazil and the Mexican settlements of the Irish *empresarios* in Texas in the 1820s, but notorious similarities between the situation in Brazil and the Argentine immigration policy of the 1870s-1880s. [2] This comparison is only mentioned in Marshall's book and offers an opportunity for further studies evaluating the three government initiatives in the broader context of Latin American immigration policy in relation to other regions in Europe. [3]

Between 1867 and 1870, many hundreds of Irish and English emigrants were sent to Colônia Príncipe Dom Pedro, near Brusque, in the province of Santa Catarina. Initial enthusiasm swiftly dissolved due to ethnic conflict with German and other settlers, lack of official support, mismanagement by the government-appointed directors and, more than anything else, the poor agricultural and transport facilities of

the settlement. The colony did not take too much time in collapsing completely. By 1870, all of the Irish 'colonos' of Príncipe Dom Pedro had left the colony. Many travelled north to Rio de Janeiro and from there on to the United States, where the majority settled in Pennsylvania. The English and Irish colonists of Cananéia (São Paulo) and Assunguy (Paraná) barely met a more fortunate fate than those in Príncipe Dom Pedro. Their ignorance of the conditions in Brazil and the lies of the immigration agents are best epitomised by a mother who lost her children in appalling conditions: 'We would not have come here for all the world if we had known' (123). These letters also included stories of some of the immigrants' children who were 'sold ... at 5 mil reis apiece' and girls who resorted to prostitution in order to survive (131).



Luiza da Conceição Blane and  
Ernesto Fitz (Gerald).  
(Oliver Marshall), p. 211.

In the closing chapters, Marshall offers a thorough study of the colonies Príncipe Dom Pedro, Cananéia and Assunguy. Among other themes, he analyses land, produce and market, population, administration, social life, immigrant settlement, agriculture, employment and debts, and health.

The author's presentation of his research does not end with a conventional conclusion. In a practical version of Pierre Nora's *lieux de mémoire*, this book proposes an epilogue which effectively links the past with the present. [4] Tracing the diverse destinations of the migrants and their families, Marshall managed to locate some of their descendants and interview them. The photographs of three generations of the Chamberlain family, Luiza de Conceição and Ernesto Fitz(Gerald) and João and David Davies (210-215) are a testimony of the living presence of the English and Irish 'colonos' in present-day Brazil, as well as of their complete assimilation into the larger Brazilian society. Dona Luiza 'recalls her father speaking with her grandparents in a "foreign language". None of the bearers of English and Irish names today in Cêro Azul 'have more than the faintest knowledge (or interest) in their immigrant origins' (210). In the appendices, the author includes a petition addressed to Pope Pius IX by families representing several hundred of the emigrants, a final appeal for assistance in 1898, and a list of British immigrants in Príncipe Dom Pedro, Cananéia and Assunguy. These documents exemplify the author's commitment to offering primary sources together with a consistent and helpful interpretation.

Oliver Marshall's book is an important contribution to the study of British and Irish diasporas, and to the research of migrations in Latin America. Its strongest points are its inclusive perspective that covers English, Irish and Irish-American migrants - a point of view frequently absent from often narrowly focused Irish historiography - as well as the analytical tools borrowed from social, economic and family history, together with a careful coverage of several types of primary sources. Students of identities will find this book extremely valuable, if somewhat arduous for beginners, in illustrating on the basis of new examples the interesting phenomenon of nation-building using collective imagery.

Edmundo Murray

[1] For general and country-specific bibliographies of the Irish in Latin America see *The Irish in Latin America and Iberia: A Bibliography*. Website ([www.irlandeses.org](http://www.irlandeses.org)), accessed 24 March 2006.

[2] See Davis, Graham, *Land! Irish Pioneers in Mexican and Revolutionary Texas* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2002).

[3] For a general reference of English-speaking colonies in Latin America, see Platt, D.C.M. 'British Agricultural Colonization in Latin America' in *Inter-American Economic Affairs* 18:3 (1964), pp. 3-38.

[4] Nora, Pierre, 'Between Memory and History' and 'The Era of Commemoration' in Nora, Pierre (ed.), *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past* (New York, 1996-1998), 3 Vols.

#### Author's Reply

The author accepts this review and does not wish to comment further.