

Irish Migration Studies in Latin America

Society for Irish Latin American Studies

Conquistadores, Soldiers and Entrepreneurs: Early Irish Presence in Chile

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The first Irish people to travel to Chile were 'Guillermo' and 'Juan' from Galway, who arrived with Magellan's expedition, and discovered the strait that bears his name in 1520. The first Irishman to start a family in Chile was John Evans who bore the title of Captain. In 1737, he settled in the region of Chillán and married Manuela de Vizcarra, a lady who according to family lore was related to Pedro de Vizcarra, who had been Governor of the Kingdom. Evans dedicated himself to trade and cattle-breeding. He made a fortune and bought a house and land, and later, in 1754, a large estate between Longavi and Perquilauquén, close to where Parral is today. He was also the owner of some mountain land, known as the 'Cajón de los Ibañez,' (Evans' Chest) where there were thermal waters.

The *chillanejo* locals did not understand the name 'Evans,' or 'Ivans' as Don Juan would have perhaps pronounced it, and quickly hispanicised the surname to 'Ibañez.' Roa y Ursúa recorded eight children from the Ibañez Vizcarra marriage (Gonzalo Vial II), whose descendants constituted, one hundred years later, according to Vicuña Mackenna, 'a vigorous and numerous tribe' that 'conserved the characteristics of its founder.' In the following century, the son of the great-grandson of John Evans, Carlos Ibañez, was twice president of the Republic of Chile, 1927-1931 and 1952-1958.

The second Irishman to arrive in Chile was John Garland, a cavalry officer in the Military Order of Santiago, who had been a cadet in the Hibernia Regiment in Spain. In Chile, as Planning Engineer, he was the boss of his countryman Ambrose O'Higgins, with whom he shared his plans for the moving of Concepción to the place where it is currently situated, far from the dangers of the rivers and the sea. In 1764, Garland was named Military Governor of Valdivia and later Director of Fortifications. He died on a trip to Europe.

Another Irishman who arrived in Chile in those days was John Clarke, among whose descendants was the engineer of that surname who was involved in the construction of the trans-Andean railway. Thomas O'Fallon also arrived during this time, travelling from Ireland to Spain and thence to Chile. In Castro, he married a woman with the surname Cárcamo, of a family of landowners. They had at least one daughter, Josefa O'Fallon, who married Tomás Valentín O'Shee y Ramery. His father Edmund had been born in Dublin to a family whom the war and the Penal Laws had destroyed. Like many others, he had fled to Spain and wished to naturalise there, having provided proof of his nobility in 1721. The document states that 'there is no need for proof in the Kingdom of Ireland, as it is widely known that the reign of Henry VIII and the heresy in the kingdom, the rigour of established laws and the persecution of the natives who by Divine Mercy remain in the sway and obedience of the Holy Roman Church,



Francisco de Quiñones, Martín García Óñez de Loyola y Pedro de Vizcarra, in: *Histórica relación del Reyno de Chile* by Alonso de Ovalle (1646) (*Memoria Chilena*)

disloyally prohibit the sacred baptism, faith, sacraments, marriages and any legal proof of Catholic acts. He shows himself to be a true Catholic as his forebears were. The witnesses and documents presented here prove that the applicant is noble. There are houses and lands in Ireland that bear his name.' In Spain, Don Edmundo married Ana Catalina Ramery, related to María Luisa Esterripa y Ramery, wife of Luis Muñoz de Guzmán, the Santiago-born governor of Quito and later of Chile.

Turning now to the biography of Tomás Valentín O'Shee, who, similarly to other emigrants and according to Roa y Urzúa, 'was a cadet in the infantry regiment in Ireland of which many members of the Irish nobility were members. In 1774, he travelled to Spain and thence to the war in Italy, where he assisted in the siege and taking of Tortona Square. He was finally made Lieutenant in 1753 and fell prisoner during the bombardment of Placencia. He was rescued, and arrived in Barcelona where he studied mathematics in the Military Academy. He left for Ceuta which was threatened by the Moroccan Emperor and there he remained until 1759. He was made captain in 1767 and saw action in the wars against Portugal. He was among those who obtained rendition at the Almeyda Square. O'Shee then travelled to Peru where he was named *Corregidor*, a position that he held for seven years. Due to his actions during the English manoeuvres in the South Seas, he was brought before the Viceroy in Lima, who sent him to the islands of the Chiloé Archipelago in 1779 in the capacity of Commander. He served until 1784 and graduated as Lieutenant Colonel in December 1788. In 1790 he requested the government of Coquimbro and of La Serena. Ambrosio O'Higgins recommended the request.' O'Shee's principal residence was in Serena. In 1797, he asked the Court to promote him to Army Colonel, stating that he had served for a long time and that he was seventy-two years of age, and married with nine children. He died in 1801.

During those years another Irishman also arrived, the physician Dominic Nevin, who was a professor at the Royal University of San Felipe in Santiago de Chile. We must also mention William Knaresbrough, a Second Lieutenant in the Navy, married to Catalina de Gatica, a native of Chillán. The surname was hispanicised to Canisbro, which is the name borne today by his descendants.



Drivers of mining produce (1824), in: *Travels into Chile over the Andes in the years 1820 and 1821*, by Peter Schmidtmeier (London, 1824). (*Memoria Chilena*)

Ambrose O'Higgins, who arrived in Chile in winter 1757, was the most illustrious of the Irish in that part of the world. He was the son of Charles and Margaret O'Higgins and grandson of Seán O'Higgins of Ballinarry, in County Sligo. 'The life of his father,' writes Juan Mackenna to Bernardo O'Higgins in a letter of 20 February 1811, 'faithfully related, presents one of the most beautiful moral lessons in the history of humanity. I do not know of any better way of imposing upon young spirits the inestimable value of unbending honour, of indefatigable

diligence and unmoving firmness.'

However, there is very little that can be said with certainty about the infancy and youth of Ambrose until the first years of his maturity, because of a complete lack of sources. Equally, little is known about his private life. On the other hand, the trajectory of his public services, which 'constitute an eloquent lesson for statesmen,' benefits from a multitude of documents.

O'Higgins arrived in Chile for the first time in 1757, returned to Cádiz and then back to Chile in 1764. According to Roa y Urzúa he twice held a commission in the Military Service at Valdivia Square. He set up a project to render the Andes mountain range passable in all seasons, built six refuges and personally directed these works. He travelled from Chile to the Spanish Court where he had friends; with a licence to return to Chile in 1768. He served in the war against the indigenous people from 1769 to 1777 as Dra-

goon Captain, Cavalry Captain, Lieutenant Colonel and Cavalry Commander, before being named Cavalry Colonel in 1777.

At the helm of a flying field of 500 soldiers, he was interned among the indigenous Pehuenches at the Antuco mountain range, and saw himself surrounded by far superior indigenous forces, but valiantly defended his post; on that occasion he received two injuries. O'Higgins later managed to defeat the indigenous people and served as Cavalry Commander and Brigadier General (*Maestre de Campo*). He subsequently managed to make peace with the indigenous people. Because of a great and deserved confidence in O'Higgins, the Captain General delegated to him his personal faculties.

While it was threatened by the possibility of an English attack, O'Higgins governed the province of Concepción in 1786. His record of services in 1787 began as follows: 'His homeland, Ireland: his status, noble; his health, moderate' (Governor and Captain General of the Kingdom of Chile. Royal *cédula* 1787). He was governor of Chile from 1788 to 1795. O'Higgins then re-founded the city of Osorno. King Charles III of Spain afforded him his own title in 1795, that of 'Baron of Ballinary,' and later Marquis of Osorno. He was promoted to Viceroy of Peru in the same year. This was the highest position to which anyone could aspire in America. He died in Lima in 1801.

Notable during O'Higgins' years as Governor of Chile was the foundation of Combarbalá and Vallenar in the Andes, San José de Maipú, Parral and Linares and the Port of Constitución, and the repopulation of Illapel and Osorno. From his concern for people's well-being and facility of access and communication between people and regions stemmed the construction of the first pavements in Santiago and the drainage system for the Mapocho River, to prevent flooding. O'Higgins made great sacrifices in travelling by foot and on horseback from the Northern roads to the South, to familiarise himself with them. He also traversed the road between Santiago and Mendoza that crosses the Andes, and the road from Santiago to Valparaíso via Lo Prado, where a commemorative stone gave the year of this trip as 1795 and was recently reinstalled at the 'Plazoleta de Irlanda' in Santiago de Chile.

O'Higgins' preoccupation with defending the land from piracy along the coast and from invasions by the Araucanians inland led to his amicable relations with the indigenous leaders (*caciques*), which were cemented at the Parliament of Negrete. The Araucanians accepted the passage through Araucania of the Camino Real to Osorno, and the development of trade. Relations with the Araucanians were in fact so amicable that they were among the last defenders of the King in Chile during the wars of independence.

As governor, Ambrosio was also concerned that the accounts be set in order and be transparent, and in other matters, he sought to stimulate the creation of a Chilean merchant marine, to promote the fishing industry and the sugar cane plantations, and to develop mining. He founded the Institution of the Consulate in Chile, abolished the *encomiendas* (rights granted to Spanish colonial subjects to exact tributes, including labour, from indigenous Americans) and undertook a thousand other works in his indefatigable industriousness. In the midst of all this, his wife gave birth to a son, who would be a prominent figure during the wars of independence, Bernardo O'Higgins.

The illustriousness that both the Viceroy Ambrosio and his son the Liberator brought to the name O'Higgins left the rest of the family somewhat in their shadow. In fact a nephew also travelled to America, Demetrio O'Higgins (there are various men of this name in the family). He was a *Guardia de Corps* in Madrid in 1793 and in Peru he married Mariana Echeverria, with whom he had no children. As a widow she married José Bernardo de Tagle y Portocarrero, Fourth Marquis of Torre Tagle. An older brother of Ambrosio, William, migrated to Paraguay, and started a family there.

Six nephews of the Viceroy migrated to Spain, of whom two re-migrated to Chile. Among the sons of Ambrosio's brother Michael were Thomas, who died of yellow fever in Cádiz en route from Lima to Spain and was aided by Bernardo; Ambrose, who had no known descendants; and Peter, a cadet in the Hibernia Regiment, who died at a young age. Ambrosio's brother Thomas had four sons, William and Patrick, who were both cadets in the Hibernia Regiment and died in Spain fighting the French; Charles, who was in the Ireland Regiment in Spain and arrived in Chile as Grenadier Captain, working with his brother Thomas on the Quiriquina Island. He died without descendants.

Thomas O'Higgins was born in Ireland in 1773 and travelled to Spain to join the Ireland Regiment, like his brother. In 1790 he was named cadet and fought against the French. In 1794 he joined the Cavalry Grenadiers Regiment, and after the Peace of Basilea he arrived in Chile at the behest of his uncle, Ambrosio. In 1795 he was made Captain of the Frontier Dragoon Regiment; in 1796 and 1797 he was Inspector of Troops in Chiloé, Valdivia and Osorno and at the forts of Alcudia and María Luisa. His uncle, having become Viceroy, then called him to Lima as Captain of the Guards. He was governor of the province of Huarochiri, where he organised the Battalion of the Princess of Asturias.



Corral, ca. 1859, in: *Fünfzehn Jahre in Süd-Amerika an den Ufern des Stillen Oceans*, by Paul Treutler (Leipzig, 1882) (*Memoria Chilena*)

In 1799, Thomas travelled to Europe. He returned to Chile and was governor of the Juan Fernández Island, and in 1811 of La Serena and Coquimbo. In 1822 he was named Mayor of Santiago. Thomas married Josefa Aldunate Larraín, niece of the Bishop of Santiago and Vice President of the First Governmental Junta in 1810, José Antonio M de Aldunate. The couple, who had no children, lived in a large corner house next to the consulate building where the Open Meeting (*Cabildo Abierto*) was celebrated in 1810. Thomas was the sole heir of his uncle the Viceroy, receiving extensive *haciendas* in Cauquenes, Puchucay and Quiriquina Island. He died in 1827.

Another Irishman who also arrived in Chile on the request of Ambrosio was Thomas Delphin, born in 1736. Delphin had fled to Spain and later fought in the war in Chile. He was named Lieutenant Colonel, later Colonel and in 1800 was called to Lima as advisor to Viceroy O'Higgins. He died in Concepción on 1 September 1807.

John Mackenna y O'Reilly was also called to Chile by the Viceroy. He was a maternal nephew of General Alejandro O'Reilly, born in Dublin in 1728, who commanded the Spanish troops in Africa and received the nobility title of *Conde* O'Reilly. John was born in Clogher, King's County (Offaly), in 1771. He travelled to Spain and fought in Africa and later against the French. He arrived in Peru in 1797 by request of Viceroy O'Higgins, who named him Governor of Osorno. In 1811 he was appointed Military Governor of Valparaíso, later Artillery Commander, Colonel and Speaker of the Governmental Junta. He was then confined for two years in the *Hacienda* of Catapilco, the property of his wife's family. He was married to Josefa Vicuña Larraín y Salas, whose family enthusiastically furthered the process of independence. His wife was the sister of the future first Archbishop of Santiago, Manuel Vicuña. Prior to the invasion of Antonio Pareja, Mackenna was sent to the South as Major-Chief-of-State, participated in various battles, among them that of Membrillar, was promoted to Brigadier General and Commander-General of the Forces of Santiago. He was killed by Luis Carrera in a shotgun duel in Buenos Aires. Mackenna had been a friend and confidant of Viceroy O'Higgins and later of his son Bernardo. Among his numerous and illustrious descendants is the historian Benjamin Vicuña Mackenna.

Stanislaus Lynch, John O'Brien and Charles Mary O'Carroll arrived in Chile with the liberating army. Lynch married María del Carmen Solo de Zaldivar in Chile and their son Patricio had a brilliant career, participating in the war against the Confederation, and later joining the British Navy. He was present at the attacks on Shanghai and Canton (Guangzhou). In the Pacific War, he was at the Battle of Chorrillos and Miraflores and was General-in-Chief of the Army during the Chilean occupation of Lima.

Two presidents of the Republic of Chile had Irish ancestry, Germán Riesco Errázuriz and Juan Luis Sanfuentes Andonaegui, as they were both descendants of Joaquín Antonio Pérez de Uriendo and his wife Inés Vicenta Ménendez y Valdés de Cornellana.

Many other Irish would settle in Chile after the Independence, including businessmen in search of fortunes, mining industrialists in the north and sheep-farmers in Patagonia, professionals, teachers, missionaries and physicians. They integrated into the Chilean society and contributed with their work and experience to building the modern country.

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