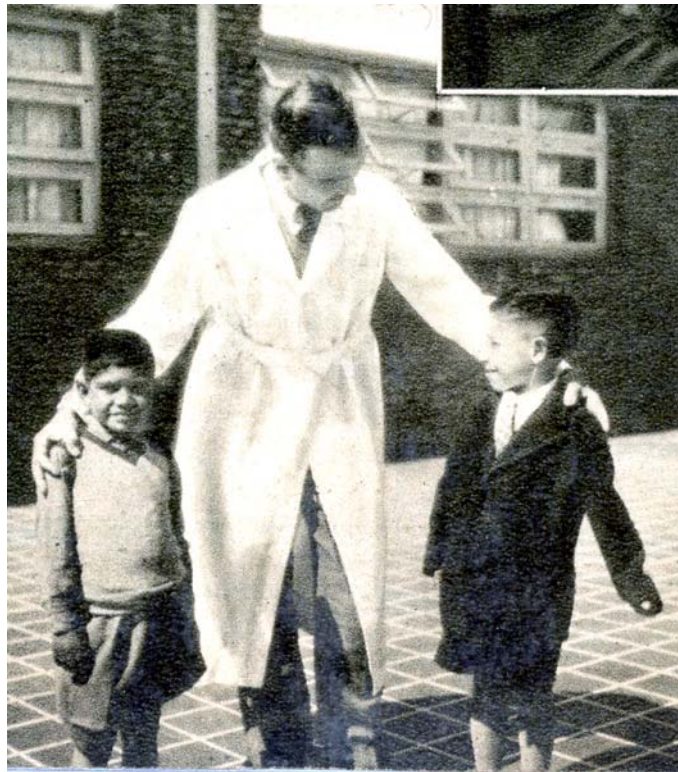


Ireland, Latin America and Education: An Introduction

By María José Roger
Guest Editor



Juancito Young, schoolmaster of Colegio de Artesanos,
La Chacra, San Pedro, 1953
(*Centro Argentino Irlandés de San Pedro*)

That the ancient Irish scholars were ardent seekers and bearers of knowledge is a well-known phenomenon. That modern Ireland boasts a unique and interesting culture is another. However, the impact of this scholarly tradition and unique culture, or rather the imprint left by the Irish immigrants and their descendants, on Latin American culture remains relatively unknown. For decades, those Irishmen who fought in this troubled region with the sword were prone to greater fame than the men and women who struggled to develop the faculties of children and young people through teaching and schooling.

In this special issue of *Irish Migration Studies in Latin America*, different contributors deal with the link between Latin America and various aspects of Irish schools and education. They propose a fascinating journey that takes us not only to the Argentinean Pampas, but also to Peru and back to Ireland itself. The means through which Irish culture and values were

transmitted were varied: schools, university courses and books. Irishmen and women were also enriched by their contact with the Latin American peoples.

Carla Battezzati analyses the evolution of two traditional Irish-Argentine schools to prove that education, as understood by religious and lay Irish, goes beyond teaching (and learning) knowledge and skills, it also encompasses moral development. Learning English as a first (and later second) language was (and is) of great importance, but a sound formation in values is also essential. This message has been understood by those parents who have sent their children to Saint Ciarán's or Saint Bridget's for the last 80 to 100 years.

The Sisters of Mercy, responsible for running Saint Bridget's, were not the only religious order that stamped their mark in Argentina. The Passionists, who included many Irish and Irish-Argentine Sisters, accepted the challenge of

establishing the Michael Ham Memorial School in 1926. Damasia Becu, a former pupil, draws our attention to the fact that a large number of alumni were in turn, heads and founders of schools throughout Argentina.

Desmond Kelleher takes us away from the Río de la Plata and secondary schools, placing us in the midst of rural Peru. His sensitive personal account of a national art contest organised by NGOs speaks volumes of the *campesinos'* ability to take their indigenous and their European heritage, and create a new cultural manifestation. This experience had a strong impact on the author - a former Irish missionary - and will have a similar effect on our readers.

Edmundo Murray's interview of Hilda Sabato, a well-known professor of history at the University of Buenos Aires, provides us with insight into current educational issues. The historian, who revived the study of Irish immigration in Argentina, also explains that the many stories about her father's Irish side of the family, along with her parents' intellectual commitment, paved the way for her own career.

David Barnwell, drawing from his experience at the Spanish Department of NUI Maynooth in Ireland and various sources, proves that cultural exchange is mutual. Thousands of Irish students choose to take Spanish as a second language at school and many others do the same at university or in language institutes. Although the focus is placed on Spain and its culture, rather than Latin America, the region is increasingly represented in different courses. However, we are left with the impression that both Irish and Latin American institutions and individuals would do well to foster new ties. Another university professor, Laura Izarra, has inspired the work of a team of scholars working at the University of La Pampa. Eliggi, Adamoli and Basabe describe the early stages of their programme, which seeks to recover, translate and analyse Irish literary sources. They prove that it is not necessary to have Irish roots to appreciate the richness of Irish culture.

Clearly, the educational traditions of the 'Island of Saints and Scholars' have left deep impressions in distant Latin America, and they are still growing strong.

María José Roger