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## Review of *The British and Irish in Oklahoma* By Patrick J. Blessing

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*The British and Irish in Oklahoma.* By Patrick J. Blessing. *Newcomers in a New Land.* Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980. Maps, illustrations, bibliographical essay, tables. 57 pp. \$2.95.

To suggest accurately the impact of the British-Irish immigration on Oklahoma is a difficult and perhaps an impossible task. Eighteenth-century Americans were primarily of British-Irish stock, and the immigration movement increased throughout the nineteenth century. Between 1815 and 1914 some 14 million persons from the United Kingdom arrived in the United States. The British-Irish were also the most heterogeneous of all immigrant groups. They rarely cooperated in attempting American settlement, and their speech, culture, and ideology have rendered them the most difficult nationality to isolate and study historically. As a whole, migrants from the United Kingdom found immigration a less disruptive ordeal than other Europeans, and, despite the anti-Irish and anti-Catholic movements, the British-Irish rather quickly blended into American society.

To relate the United Kingdom immigrants to a specific state, particularly to a distant, inland, late-maturing state such as Oklahoma, compounds the problem. Oklahoma's lands, railroads, mines, and other features were not highly touted in United Kingdom newspapers or in London financial circles. In short, there were no plans devised like those for Runnymede and Wakefield in Kansas, Le Mars in Iowa, or Rugby in Tennessee. Indeed, Patrick Blessing found that "only about 1 in 550 Scots, 1 in 770 Welsh, 1 in 1,000 English, and 1 in 3,600 Irish arriving in the United States between 1899 and 1910 declared Oklahoma as their destination" (p. 4). Consequently "community life for British and Irish homesteaders differed little from that of other settlers" (p. 14).

The author has found that about the only British-Irish characteristic distinguishable in Oklahoma was a tendency to be somewhat older than native-born Americans; moreover,

men were in a majority over women by a ratio of three to two. With these limitations, the author has tended to emphasize the careers of colorful or famous immigrants: railroad workers such as Pat Shanahan; labor activists such as Peter Hanraty, "Mother" Jones, and "Red Tom" Hickey; and mine superintendents such as William Cameron. British-Irish immigrants, however, represented no particular political or economic class; they were to be found on every step of the social ladder. The author concludes that the "immigrant pioneers were a sturdy hard-case lot . . . whose primary assets were optimism, endurance, and confidence in themselves" (p. 24).

This volume is one of ten in a University of Oklahoma Press series entitled *Newcomers to a New Land*. The studies are brief and directed to a non-academic audience. The recognition that thousands of immigrants failed and that suffering and sacrifice was the lot of the typical settler on the Oklahoma prairie should help elevate all immigrants to a historic place in the popular American psyche.

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