

# Re-Writing the Irish Immigration

Those who Arrived by Sea

## *Irish Immigration into Argentina\**

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### *The "Spanish Irish"*

Many Irish settled in this country having arrived as part of the colonial administration as soldiers or in commerce, especially during the XVIII century.

Their descendants still hold important positions in Argentine society. Many of them cannot be identified as being of Irish descent since their last names were adapted to Spanish or were simply translated to the latter language.

The following names appear among the founding families: **Barfield, Butler (Butler), O'Donnell, French, Warnes, O'Han, Ogan (Duggan), O'Garra, Cullen and Lynch**, who arrived from different parts of the island by way of Spain. We can also point out **Campana** and **Cueli** from the original **Campbell** and **Kelly**.

Finally, it should be mentioned that the Irish presence goes back to the very origins of the country. Cities such as Buenos Aires, which was founded in 1536, or Corrientes, founded in 1686, had Irish people among their population. The first Irish known to have set foot in Argentina were the members of the expedition conducted by Admiral Hernando de Magallanes, in Southern Patagonia, in 1520.

### *The "British-Irish"*

The "British-Irish" would be those that, in one way or another, arrived in the country as members of military expeditions, such as the English invasions in 1606 and 1607 and the hardly known 1703 invasion, which, under the leadership of **Captain Juan MacNamara**, tried unsuccessfully, to conquer Colonia del Sacramento. As a result, 78 soldiers were imprisoned and deported to the interior of the country. Some of those soldiers' worthy descendants asked General San Martín, in 1817, to be incorporated into the Army of Liberation being formed in the Province of Mendoza. Among them were the descendants of **Hoffernan, Mahan, Lynch, Brown, Young, Hughes, O'arr and MacGeoghagan**.

At the time of the so-called "English invasions", many of the officers and soldiers



were Irish-born. Some of them played a very active role while others took the opportunity to desert and settle down in this country. (ref. "Amores en la Historia Argentina" - *Martina Céspedes y sus hijas*, by Horacio Salduna).

In the first group, Irish-born General **Beresford** played a leading role when he was in charge of the expedition; he claimed the title of "Governor of Buenos Aires". Among the officers we find **Browne, Nugent, Kenny, Donnelly, Murray, Mahon, Cadogan and Duff**, undoubtedly of Irish origin. Among those who switched sides we can mention Peter **Campbell**, a "gaucho" from Tipperary who was later to govern the province of Corrientes and who eventually founded the Uruguayan navy. We could also mention **Patrick Island**, root of the **Isla** family with important branches in the province of Buenos Aires and **Miguel Skennon**.

### *Irish at the Time of Independence*

Among those who attended the open town council meeting held on May 22 we find several of Irish blood, as is the case of **Joaquín Campana (Campbell)** who spoke eloquently demanding the resignation of the Viceroy, Cisneros. In turn, Colonel **Domingo French** entered history by distributing cockades with the national colours. Admiral **William Brown** was undoubtedly the Irishman most closely linked to Independence, as the founder of the national navy. To this brilliant seaman fell the honour of defeating the Spaniards at sea in the Battle of

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Montevideo. On this memorable occasion, before attacking, he had the band play "St. Patrick's Day in the morning" which later became one of the official navy themes. Among the officers who fought with him we find **Craig, King, Kearney and Turner**, among others.

As to the Army, General San Martin could always count on the invaluable cooperation of General **John T. O'Brien**, who developed several enterprises in different Southamerican countries and who was one of the promoters of the Irish immigration to this country.

Other Irishmen joined the Army of General Belgrano, including Dr. **Juan Oughan**, a distinguished doctor who, several years later, would become the first president of the Irish Catholic Association in Buenos Aires.

### *The Visionaries*

Before and after the time of independence, several Irishmen arrived in the country, individually, started prosperous businesses and in many cases married into local society.

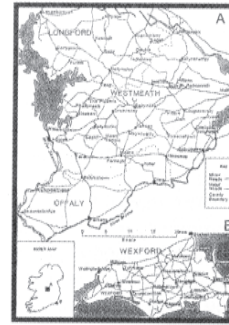
To increase trade, which was their objective, they needed to develop the available raw materials, basically meat and hides. Some modern techniques for cattle improvement were adopted by former soldiers of the Irish invasions, who had been recruited in the military barracks of Mullingar and Athlone, the Irish sheep center.

It is in this context that, in the years prior to independence, we record the arrival of several Irishmen who brought a certain amount of money with them and settled down in Buenos Aires, where they noticed the lack of human resources to develop sheep-farming as well as the salting industry. Therefore **Patricio Browne**, born in Wexford, **Pedro Sheridan**, born in Cavan, **Guillermo Mooney and Patricio Bookey**, both from Westmeath, born in Cavan, began to contact their fellow countrymen, urging them to settle in these promising land where work was guaranteed. The visits to Ireland of General O'Brien and Tomás Armstrong, an influential trader of Buenos Aires, contributed further to the flow in immigration. Many of these first immigrants were sons and daughters of Irish farmers, and with a good level of education were able, in a few years, to become important Argentine ranchers.

### *The Great Immigration*

As a consequence of this business process, the flow of immigration grew, increasing yearly, aided by the Irish Catholic Church, which regularly sent chaplains to Argentina. Father Anthony Fahy stood out among

them. He arrived in our country in 1844 and, in addition to providing spiritual assistance and celebrating numerous marriages between Irishmen settled in the countryside and newly-arrived Irishwomen temporarily residing in the cities, he became a counselor, financier and administrator of the goods of many members of the Community. To such end, he had the generous assistance of a friend of his family, Tomás Armstrong, a prominent business man in Buenos Aires, who was a protestant. Together they established a model which kept the community separate from the rest of the population, delaying its integration. Father Fahy would keep in touch with the Irish while Armstrong handled relations with traders and authorities.



Most of these Irishmen and women would have come from two specific areas of Ireland, the counties of Westmeath and Longford as well as from an area near the city of Wexford, in the county of the same name (see map).

In numerous towns of the provinces of Buenos Aires and Santa Fe, the Irish built their own churches, school and clubs. The big immigration flow lasted until the 40's when the crisis in international wool prices, among other factors, slowed it down. Slowly and progressively, the total integration with the national community took place simultaneously with the settling of Irish families in towns and cities, and, above all, with the beginning of mixed marriages.

### *The "Other" Irish*

Under this arbitrary classification we will place the Irish or Irish descendants who arrived in our country from English-speaking countries, the United States, Canada and Australia, while others arrived from France, Russia or Austria, some of whose last names were already transformed. In this group the "Irish Yankees" stand out, especially those who arrived in the 1850's, and who became part of the craftsmen of the city of Buenos Aires. Among other occupations, they became tailors, hotel owners, coachmen and even teachers. In that they differed from the main group, which, following the dictates of the local Irish elite, avoided cities and settled in the countryside.

## *The Recently Arrived Irish*

After the great immigration wave of the last century, it continued at a much slower pace. In some cases they were the relatives of those already settled in Argentina. Even nowadays men and women continue to arrive from different parts of the island, in search of work opportunities. Others are members of international companies, who later settled here.

## *The Distinctive Symbol*

At present, more than half a million Argentines with Irish blood are totally integrated to the national community.

Many of their descendants, as shown in this special edition of "The Southern Cross" have been outstanding in many different activities. Their origins and relations can be traced in Eduardo Coghlan's remarkable work "Los Irlandeses en la Argentina - Su actividad y descendencia" (*The Irish in Argentina - Their participation and descendants*) including the genealogy of 5007 Irish who settled in this country. The last census, sponsored by the **Federation of Argentine Irish Societies** has already counted 4,000

members. Contrary to the popular belief, the immigration to our country is not directly related to the Famine of the 40's. The Irish who arrived from the above areas were not running away from hunger and, in many cases, brought a certain amount of money with them, although their principal treasure was their educational level.

Due to several reasons, mainly economic, the immigration wave was interrupted, as different to other destinations which continued to receive Irish immigrants until a short time back. This fact resulted in most families losing contact with their relatives in Ireland.

The great majority of Irish immigrants were of the Catholic faith, although some protestants also came.

Lastly, there was a special model of immigration, designed by the local Irish elite, with the support of local authorities, which planned to populate the countryside, and develop the salting-houses and the wool industry. For this reason, several generations concentrated in the rural areas and later moved to the cities.

We wanted to briefly describe the Irish presence in Argentina, which is proud of its Irish roots and the contribution which their ancestors made to the creation of the Argentine Nation.



members of the Community. Compared to other emigrations, those who arrived in our country, though not great in number, had particular characteristics that make it stand out. First, it was the largest emigration to a non-English-speaking country. Most of the immigrants knew little or nothing of Spanish. Their social insertion was different. They were very well received in Argentina, and furthermore, many of them became prosperous in a very short time, integrating with the higher social classes.

There are Irish descendants from every spot of the island, but in their majority, they come from two specific areas. Unlike popu-

*"I dedicate this work to the memory of my father, **Herberto E. MacLoughlin**, who recently passed away, and who was able to transmit the love for everything Irish and who guided me in my first steps in my investigative work.*