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Irish Immigrants in the Land of Canaan: Letters and Memoirs from Colonial and Revolutionary America, 1675–1815. Written and edited by Kerby A. Miller, Arnold Schrier, Bruce D. Boling, and David N. Doyle. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003. xvii+788 pp. ISBN13: 978-0195154894. ISBN10: 0195154894. \$95.00.

James M. Perry

The Irish Diaspora and the influx of Irish immigrants to North America have received much attention in recent decades. The multitudes of Irish-Catholics arriving in the middle nineteenth century in the aftermath of Ireland's Potato Famine have received the majority of this scholarly attention. In *Irish Immigrants in the Land of Canaan*, Kerby A. Miller, Arnold Schrier, Bruce D. Boling, and David N. Doyle tackle an often overlooked aspect of the Irish migration to North America, the largely Protestant immigrants arriving before the American Revolution and in its immediate aftermath. Using letters, and occasionally other sources such as personal memoirs and diaries, the authors seek to illuminate the immigrant experience of the "approximately four hundred thousand emigrants from Ireland who settled in North America between the late 1600s and the end of the Napoleonic War in 1815" (p. 4).

The authors (a more appropriate term than "editors," given the amount of analysis presented) parade a fascinating collection of first-person accounts in front of the reader. Informative and scholarly essays accompany each document. The first-person accounts and essays collectively highlight the push-and-pull factors of emigration, the search for personal and ethnic identity, and the impact of Irish immigrants during the years of the American colonial period and the fledgling United States. The results justify the book's imposing length. *Irish Immigrants in the Land of Canaan* is a stunning accomplishment and will long be an influential work in multiple fields. It is also a testament to the quality of work produced when top scholars collaborate. Miller, author of the landmark *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America* (1985), assumes responsibility for historical interpretation. The rest of the lineup is equally impressive, as Miller's co-contributors, Schrier, Boling, and Doyle, are experts in the fields of Irish emigration, manuscript interpretation, philology, and Irish America. Each contributor provides something unique to the finished product.

The seven sections (containing a total of sixty-eight chapters) of *Irish Immigrants in the Land of Canaan* each highlight a different aspect of the immigrant experience. The first two sections engage the causes and processes of Irish emigration. The next four sections are separated according to the occupations Irish

immigrants held in the New World, with chapters relating to farmers and planters; craftsmen, laborers and servants; merchants, shopkeepers and peddlers; and clergymen and schoolmasters. The final section chronicles Irish immigrants and their maneuverings through the tumultuous era of revolution against Great Britain. Within each section, the chapters center on the personal narratives of either a single individual or a collection of related individuals. The method of organization will undoubtedly benefit future scholars who use this work; as examples, those interested in transatlantic travel or eighteenth-century labor can easily find the sections that appeal to their own interests.

This collection of documents is the product of years of research in numerous depositories. The documents come from university libraries, state and local historical societies, archives in the United States and abroad, and private collections. In selecting the appropriate texts for inclusion, the compilers sought documents that they deemed both “historically representative and inherently interesting” (p. vii). In this endeavor their work is a success. The selected documents shed light on multiple facets of history and are ripe with personal details indicating a cornucopia of immigrants’ hopes, fears, and ambitions. As personal stories, the documents humanize the immigrants in a way that monographs on immigration often do not. Documents are presented unabridged, with the exception of some lengthy memoirs which have been edited for manageable presentation. Most of the selections make for an easy read, except for those selections written with a heavy emphasis on regional dialects. The latter documents require special attention to the purposefully and thoughtfully employed footnotes. The authors rightly suggest in the preface that “understanding how and why immigrants express themselves in certain ways is crucial to appreciating what they wrote and the cultures that shaped their perceptions and interpretations of experience” (p. viii).

The letters, memoirs, and diaries in this volume represent a broad and encompassing segment of immigrant experiences. The selections embrace immigrants from the whole of Ireland, not just Ulster, and are representative of a broad range of experiences, of wealthy merchants, indentured servants, struggling farmers, and clergy searching for congregations. This diversity is apparent in the examples of Robert Witherspoon and Robert Pillson. Witherspoon’s memoirs recall his family’s attempts to carve out a farm amidst hostile Indians, swamps, and the unsettled wilderness of South Carolina (pp. 135–43). A very different experience is that of Robert Pillson, a merchant who settled in the more “civilized” confines of New York and wrote home to Irish business associates peddling butter, flaxseed, and cloth (pp. 323–28). While the authors admit in the preface that “low literacy rates that prevailed among poor immigrants and among Irish Catholics and women, generally, determined that members of those groups remain underrepresented” (p. viii), they made efforts to find examples of these

groups to include in their final work. These include the Catholic Margaret Carey Murphy Burke, whose letter to her brother Matthew Carey (among the more prominent Irish immigrants of his era) details the problems of a widow operating a tavern frequented predominantly by male drinkers and gamblers (pp. 353–55).

Historical essays introduce and conclude each chapter to accompany the voices of the immigrants. These essays provide clarity, and in some cases closure, to the lives in which we are allowed voyeuristic entry. Although the essays vary in scope and length, they serve to place the letters into larger cultural, economic, religious, and historical contexts, further enriching the value of the documents. The essays are superb both in content and in the writing style that makes the reading accessible to a large audience.

In the Introduction, the authors address the notion of “Irish identity” as it relates to these trailblazers of Irish America. The authors contend that during the period from the mid-1700s until the early 1800s, “close affinities between Irish and American economic and political developments” and migration to America resulted in “modern ‘Irish’ (and ‘Scotch-Irish’) ethnic and political identities on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean” (p. 8). In the final section of the book this theme becomes central to discussions of Irish immigrant roles in the political arena of revolutionary America. The delayed gratification of this discussion does not diminish its effectiveness, but readers searching for the core of this argument may wonder why it does not appear until the latter pages. When the matter is finally advanced, readers learn that the concept of an “Irish” or “Scotch-Irish” identity proved remarkably fluid, changing connotations as the political winds changed on both sides of the ocean. The early nature of this transatlantic search for identity appears largely framed by anti-English sentiment. Irish Presbyterians, constituting the bulk of the immigrants in the period studied, regularly struggled for acceptance and equality in Ireland despite sharing Protestant beliefs with the Anglican establishment. Some Irish Presbyterians fomented rebellion in Ireland through the Society of United Irishmen, mirroring the actions of their relatives who participated in the American Revolution. The anti-English sentiment carried over to other non-Anglican denominations in varying degrees. One example is the case of John Morton, a Quaker originally from County Down. Morton maintained conflicted loyalties during the American Revolution, apparently failing to support either side completely. Yet when British regulations interfered with Morton’s business interests, the authors note a “transplanted resentment against British restrictions on Irish trade” as a factor in Morton’s “youthful enthusiasm for ‘the good Cause of Liberty’ ” (p. 527). In the aftermath of the American Revolution, political and religious tribalism precluded a unified identity for the Irish at home and abroad, regardless of their affinity for Great Britain. “Irish” and “Scotch-Irish” as terms accumulated new connotations that served to divide rather than unite Irish and Irish-American populations.

Reliance on friendship and kinship networks from Ireland marked the immigrant experience, both in deciding to leave Ireland and in orienting immigrants to their new homes. James Wansbrough of County Westmeath, having watched his neighbors and relatives emigrate, wrote to his sister in New Jersey in 1728 begging for information on the New World in order to decide if he should join them. Wansbrough implored his sister to “write unto me and give me good Encouragment” (p. 22). John Smilie, writing in 1762 from Pennsylvania to family in County Down, warned his relatives contemplating the Atlantic voyage to avoid contracting with a nefarious seaman named “Captain Taylor” (pp. 91–93). Upon arrival, immigrants sought help from their Irish connections to aid in starting their new lives. Charles Lewis Reilly of New York wrote in 1749 to a man he did not personally know seeking employment based on the friendship of their parents in County Meath (pp. 465–68). Others who arrived without connections in place could seek the help of networks and organizations such as the Hibernian Society for the Relief of Emigrants from Ireland. One such person, Thomas McMahon, wrote the Hibernian Society for assistance upon hearing of the “goodness & readiness” of the organization to serve fellow “Country men” (p. 289).

In addition to the documents presented and the historical analysis in the body of the book, *Irish Immigrants in the Land of Canaan* contains useful aids that add clarity and context to the volume. Front matter includes maps of Ireland, the early colonies and the United States, and the Caribbean. The maps are clear and straightforward—each map includes an easily understood key for references to the documents. There are also three appendices, two of which are worth noting here. Boling’s appendix on editorial conventions and language offers transparency to the emendations made in the documents. The majority of these emendations are unavoidable owing to the condition of the manuscripts, where the occasional hole or fold renders a word unreadable. Boling explains the language, spelling, and syntax of the era. Miller’s appendix, co-written with Kennedy, is an impressive commentary on the religious demographics of the Irish locations mentioned in the immigrants’ writings.

Liberal footnotes accompany each document. Sometimes these annotations are longer than the actual document. It would be easy to criticize the notes as excessive if they were not of such value in understanding each document. The annotations include, but are not limited to, definitions of archaic words and phrases, locations of towns and villages that no longer appear on modern maps, and brief biographical descriptions of otherwise obscure persons mentioned in each letter. The annotations provide insight into the cultural background of each immigrant in a way that a casual reading of the letters alone cannot. In the case of *Irish Immigrants in the Land of Canaan*, fewer annotations would have resulted in an inferior volume.

Irish Immigrants in the Land of Canaan is prodigious in content and achievement, enhancing and altering our understanding of Irish-American immigration, notions of ethnic identity, and colonial and revolutionary America. This fine work of history will be useful for linguists, genealogists, anthropologists, historians in a variety of subfields, and many other disciplines. The fresh perspective offered here on the lesser known, less studied period of Irish immigration should inspire more complete treatment of the topic in subsequent studies of the Irish in America.