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Irish Immigrants in the Land of Canaan: Letters and Memoirs
from Colonial and Revolutionary America, 1675-1815 (review)

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Dr Marianne Gilchrist produced for the Society of Friends of the Kirk of the Greyfriars in 1999, much of this is as new as it is refreshing.

Educated at the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich, Patrick Ferguson was commissioned first into the Scots Greys, though he subsequently transferred to the 70th Foot and died a major, acting colonel, commanding American loyalist militia at the Battle of King's Mountain. Always an enquiring soldier proud of his Scots identity, he had the passion for improvement that marked so many of his nation. He funded many of his experiments with improved weapons himself, and they were not confined to shoulder weapons, for he also experimented with a light breech-loading field-piece. That never proved itself in action as his excellent rifle did. His spirit was as remarkable as his mind, for he was plagued by illness and wounds from the start to the finish of his brief career. Latterly his right arm and hand were effectively useless due to the shattering of his arm by a musket ball, but he taught himself to write, fence and ride with his left hand. He lived and died a very brave man. That is the central message of Marianne Gilchrist, inspired by an understandable passion for her extraordinary subject.

There is a deeper point to be made, however. As the author says in this book, Ferguson, though demonised by American republicans in his lifetime and since, was one of the heroes of the War of the American Revolution. Like most ideologically-driven republican movements (the French and Irish cases are very similar), the American one has from the start been honkingly self-righteous and devoted to committing cultural genocide on those American political traditions that disagreed with it, usually starting the job with systematic physical terrorism against any unfortunate Loyalist groups caught in the maelstrom of the Revolution. Exhibitions on the 'Black Heroes of the Revolution' are intermittently held in the Capitol in Washington, without any mention of the fact that a majority of the blacks who fought heroically in the War of the Revolution fought for good reason for a good cause — that of King George III. Ferguson appears to have been the only non-American present at King's Mountain. He was a man of liberal mind and would have preferred the American crisis settled by negotiation. The war was a protracted, bloody, murky civil war marked by incompetence and bad faith on both sides. After the extremely radical concessions offered by the Carlisle Commission, Ferguson fought with a clear conscience against the irreconcilables who were going to create a new and hostile state. His only charge against the king and his ministers was the just one that they were fighting an inevitable war in a manner likely to make an unavoidably bad outcome worse. Historians are not, or should not be, cheerleaders. They need to deconstruct the aggressive over-simplification of the past. This wee book is a step in that direction.

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BRUCE LENMAN

Irish Immigrants in the Land of Canaan: Letters and Memoirs from Colonial and Revolutionary America, 1675-1815.

By Kerby A. Miller, Arnold Schrier, Bruce D. Boling and David N. Doyle.
Pp. xxvii, 788.

ISBN 0 19 5044513 0.

Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2003. £45.00.

This handsomely produced and highly readable volume on Irish immigration to America can best be understood and read as two complementary books, one an exposition of the experiences of Irish immigrants to the (future) United States and the Caribbean and the other a more argument-based work about the

identity politics of 'the confusing but creative possibilities of eighteenth-century Irish-American ethnicity' (p. 627). The value of this volume is more readily appreciated when its two personalities are disentangled.

The sixty-eight chapters that form the bulk of the book—over six hundred pages of it—are case studies sorted into seven sections: the causes of Irish emigration; the processes of Irish emigration; farmers and planters; craftsmen, labourers and servants; merchants, shopkeepers and peddlers; clergymen and schoolmasters (only three chapters, but more are to be found in other sections); and Irish immigrants in politics and war. The first section makes good use of documents from residents of Ireland who considered emigration, but did not follow through, in order to shed further light on the situations that so many others left behind. Historians of Atlantic travel will find the most material in Section II, which includes letters and memoirs regarding voyages, while historians of trade will correspondingly look to Section V. Social historians of the period will find it almost universally interesting.

Each chapter studies an individual or group and begins with the context of their circumstances before presenting one or more edited texts—most often letters—and then ending with information on the subsequent history of the person(s) involved. The prologue and epilogue to each primary text are often the fruit of research in archives on both sides of the Atlantic and include thoughtful analysis of persons, texts and contexts. The edited texts themselves, which make up perhaps one quarter of the book, are thoroughly footnoted so as to aid understanding on two levels: the literal meaning of obsolete or dialectal words and constructions, and what can be inferred from linguistic clues about the writer's cultural background, including in some cases what sort of background the writer wishes the recipient to infer. Occasionally, linguistic discussion in the footnotes digresses into, for instance, quotes from Shakespeare reflecting similar usage; many readers may find this superfluous, but it can readily be ignored. Useful information on language for those with an interest is given in an appendix by Boling.

Because this volume is a textually-based social history of a period without universal literacy, the authors were necessarily faced with the problem that some groups, particularly women and the poor, are underrepresented in the documentary record. By casting their net wider than letters and diaries, they have redressed this imbalance as far as possible. For instance, they have found petitions from Irish-born Americans in court records from Chester County, Pennsylvania and used published confessions by three Irish-born thieves being hanged in New Jersey, some of which were clearly written by amanuenses. The interpretive difficulties of dictated (and therefore possibly altered) texts are addressed appropriately, in keeping with the careful and illuminating analysis typical of this book.

The discussions of changing identity politics among 'Irish' (broadly defined) on both sides of the Atlantic are far too complex to relate in detail here, but can be summarised as follows. The late eighteenth century saw the rise of the ecumenical nationalist United Irishmen and *émigré* sympathisers who gave the term 'Irish' a broad and positive connotation, though many of those so defined, such as Anglicans, Methodists, Quakers, and indeed some Catholics and Presbyterians, distanced themselves from these anti-royalist republicans. Likewise, self-consciously 'respectable' Protestant Irish in America were often tarred with the same brush as their Catholic compatriots, despite the former being an overwhelming majority in the Americas; Irish-American Protestants, therefore, including some of no Scottish ancestry, began to distinguish themselves in early nineteenth-century America with the positively-construed term 'Scotch-Irish'. In the revolutionary and post-revolutionary United States, bitter divisions

between loyalists and revolutionaries, radical egalitarians and aristocratic parties, and city and backcountry further subdivided most groups, including at the parochial level, often parallel to similar divisions in Ireland. On both sides of the Atlantic, the temporary ecumenicity of Irishness dissolved under these and other social pressures. The results are still with us today, a point the authors make but do not labour.

The authors' arguments regarding the evolution of these identities appear in the introduction but then lie mostly dormant, if latent, in much of the subsequent material. They come to the fore only in Section VII, on politics and war, where they are finally explicated at greater length and given documentary substantiation. Many readers, not knowing that this awaits them, may be frustrated to find in the intervening four hundred pages that they are expected to accept on faith these arguments that form important context for much of what they read. Reading Section VII after Section I or II will almost certainly give greater satisfaction.

The breadth and importance of this volume will appeal to scholars working in a variety of fields on both sides of the Atlantic. It is also quite well resourced for reading by the interested layman, and even considering it as a collection of edited texts alone it would be worthy of its space on the shelves of many libraries, both academic and public.

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Adventurers and Exiles: The Great Scottish Exodus.

By Marjory Harper. Pp. 438.

ISBN 1861974523.

London: Profile Books. 2004. £9.99.

For many historians, Scotland remains an unknown, somewhat exotic, place. The country's small size and population has caused its people and their experiences to remain peripheral within the fields of both world history and British imperial studies. As a result, with several notable exceptions covering the eighteenth century, Scottish history has remained somewhat separate from other Atlantic histories. Despite the fact that Scots played a significantly large role running Britain's nineteenth-century empire and were instrumental in industrialization—arguably the most important world-historical process—Scottish studies have for the most part remained a piecemeal affair. Concerned more with people than with process, the existing scholarship has not yet connected itself to the growing historical fields of internationalization and globalization. Instead, because the Scots went everywhere in the world during this period, most establishing new lives and leaving scores of descendants, genealogists looking to trace a reverse path to Scotland regularly seek out and share information on family experiences. Blessed with excellent archival material, Scotland is often at the centre of genealogical trips to the British Isles. It is therefore puzzling to ponder the country's centrality to genealogy and its peripheral character where scholarship is concerned.

Every so often, a book comes along that holds enormous promise for bridging this gap between genealogical research and historical scholarship. Typically such works seek to make Scotland more central to world-historical processes. These books, while full of systematic and careful scholarship, are also extremely easy reading. In this way, a wider audience becomes possible, and the limitations of Scotland's small size can be more easily overcome. Marjory Harper's *Adventurers and Exiles: The Great Scottish Exodus* clearly attempts to be such a work. Concerned with telling the stories of Scottish migrants who lived mostly, but not