

CAJUNS, CREOLES, PIRATES AND PLANTERS

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IMMIGRATION, EMIGRATION: With immigration in the news so much lately, let's take a look at this subject in a different way by studying some documented compilations of our early history. I can explain this better by taking a look at some books from Peter Wilson Coldham, and the first one that comes to mind is *Emigrants in Chains*, a groundbreaking study that demonstrates once and for all that the recruitment of labor for the American colonies was achieved in large measure through the emptying of English jails, workhouses, brothels, and houses of correction. This book is a social history of forced emigration to the Americas of felons, destitute children, political and religious non-conformists, vagabonds, beggars, and other undesirables between 1607 and 1776.

Few colonizing powers can have relied so heavily and consistently on the wholesale deportation of their prison population as did England through two-and-a-half centuries of imperial expansion. By the time America made her Declaration of Independence in 1776, the prisons of England had disgorged some 50,000 of their inmates to the colonies, most of them destined to survive and, with their descendants, to populate the land of their exile.

This is a story largely untold until the release of this particular book and certainly never told as well. Coldham's groundbreaking study demonstrates once and for all that the recruitment of labor for the American colonies was achieved in large measure through the above methods. Supported by a massive array of documentary evidence and first-hand testimony, the book focuses on the emergence and use of transportation as a means of dealing with an unwanted population, dwelling at length on the processes involved, the men charged with the administration of the system of transportation or engaged in transportation as a business, then proceeding with a fascinating look at the transportees themselves, their lives and hapless careers, and their reception in the colonies. The whole unhappy saga of enforced transportation is here recounted with such force and eloquence that it is bound to set some popular notions about the peopling of the American colonies on their head. It is an astounding study.

Come forward to some of the problems faced today. It is different, but yet history will tell all the similarities. The borders in America's early history are quite different from what they are today. Step back in time once more, and history tells us that few transportees contrived to return to their native country when their sentences expired, and it must be assumed that most such involuntary emigrants were assimilated into colonial society. Their untold story may lack the romance of the cavaliers of Virginia and Maryland, but it has the distinct advantage of being true. Without diminishing or debunking the past, this book is the story that nevertheless challenges perceptions and attitudes. What will future books on immigration tell us?

From this Coldham's book, another one comes to mind – *British Emigrants in Bondage, 1614-1788*. Between 1614 and 1775, some 50,000 English men, women, and children were sentenced by judicial process to be sent to the American colonies for a variety of crimes. The data on these involuntary colonists came from a variety of official records which the author of this work spent over fifteen years studying. Among those covered were minutes of eleven Courts of Assize and Jail Delivery and of twenty-eight Courts of Quarter Session, as well as Treasury Papers, Money Books, Patent Rolls, State Papers, and Sessions Papers.

The names of those deported are printed in alphabetical order and form what can be considered the largest passenger list of its kind ever published. The data presented in this volume is highly condensed but most entries include some or all of the following information: parish of origin, sentencing court, nature of the offense, date of sentence, date and ship on which transported, date and place landed in America, and the English county in which the sentence was passed.

Coldham has made it his task as England's foremost authority on 17th and 18th century emigration to America to abstract from every surviving record the names and histories of all those sentenced to be transported to America for their alleged crimes. This particular work contains a record of 48,000 felons carried from the jails of England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland to help populate colonial America.

As you readily see, there is more to the early history of our great land than just thinking about happy people making their way to the new world for a new life. Of course, this did happen, but there was so much more to this story than most people realize.

After years of painstaking research, the names of nearly all those transported were extracted from official court records by Coldham and published in the landmark work *The Complete Book of Emigrants in Bondage* in 1988 and its *Supplement* in 1992, forming the largest and most complete passenger list of its kind ever published. From this unexpected source, the researcher at last had the means of learning the names of the persons transported to the colonies, the charges against them, the dates and places of sentencing, the ship names, and the places of arrival in the colonies.

The original volume of *Emigrants in Bondage* published in 1988 acknowledged that there were some notable omissions from the list of transported felons then printed, which remained to be researched and remedied. The *Supplement* of 1992 began to supply the omissions, but then with the publication of *More Emigrants in Bondage*, Coldham closed the remaining gaps. Altogether there are some 9,000 new and amended records in this important work, which is arranged and annotated in the same way as the parent volume. To the original list of 50,000 records, these additions come as a windfall, arising from the availability of previously closed archival resources and the re-examination of conventional transportation records

such as Assize Court records, Circuit Court records, and the quaintly-named Sheriffs' Cravings, to which can be added newspapers and printed memoirs.

The addition of 9,000 records to the canon makes this the most important list of ships' passengers to be published in years. Whether as a list of additions or corrections, this work is an indispensable tool in the researcher's arsenal, and anyone using the parent volume and supplement cannot possibly ignore this volume. Questions about the peopling of colonial America come readily to mind when looking at a book like this, questions about ancestors, too, and the answers found here are both challenging and surprising.

There are quite a few books covering immigration, and these books are very important when compiling family histories. It is beyond my comprehension as to how this will all be documented for future generations when you look at present-day immigration. Documentation of illegal immigration will be something that will be very difficult to achieve, maybe impossible.

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FREE SERVICE: Correspondence to this column should be directed to Damon Veach, Cajuns, Creoles, Pirates and Planters, 709 Bungalow Lane, Baton Rouge, LA 70802-5337. The e-mail address is ancestorslaveach@cox.net. Queries can be any length, and book reviews are printed as space permits, and you are encouraged to take advantage of this free service. All genealogical/historical/preservation books are reviewed in this column format, but a review copy is necessary for this service. Another service is offered here too. Claitor's Publishing can serve as a distributor for self-published genealogy titles. Go to their homepage for details on how you can obtain this excellent service. It is a way to get out-of-print books back into the system and definitely is a great assistance to genealogists who may need this information.