



Land!: Irish Pioneers in Mexican and Revolutionary Texas (Centennial Series of the Association of Former Students, Texas A&M University)

Graham Davis

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The only successful European impresarios in mid-nineteenth century Mexican Texas—men authorized to bring immigrants to settle the vast spaces of Mexico's northern territories—were Irish. On their land grants, Irish settlers founded Refugio and San Patricio and went on to take active roles in the economic and political development of Texas. It required a hardy spirit and strong ambition to weather the perils that accompanied these opportunities—the long journey, shipwrecks, hostile Indians, injury and disease—and Irish pioneers proved fit for the task. They were not seeking relief from famine or English oppression in their own country. These were vigorous, strong-willed people who possessed the monetary means to remove themselves from their insular surroundings. What they were seeking, and what they obtained, was land.

Graham Davis tells this Irish-Texan story of the search for land by recounting the experiences of the original empresarios John McMullen, James McGloin, James Power, and James Hewetson, and he finishes the book with an impressive description of the ranching empire of Power's nephew, Thomas O'Connor. In between, he examines the marriages, commercial contacts, political alliances, and language ties that "Mexicanized" these successful entrepreneurs. Living in the heart of the war zone, some of the Irish settlers fought for independence while others remained loyal to the Mexican government that had made them citizens and given them land.

Davis offers a vivid picture of the hardships of pioneer life and the building of communities, churches, and schools. He describes how Irish ranchers had the opportunity to thrive after the annexation of Texas and emphasizes their willing acceptance of Mexican ranching methods. He makes a convincing case that the Irish came to Texas not as victims but as entrepreneurs and opportunists in search of land.

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