

*Castles of Gold: A History of New Zealand's West Coast Irish*. By Lyndon Fraser. Otago University Press, Dunedin, 2007. 203pp. NZ price: \$39.95. ISBN 978-1-877372-44-5.

IN THE POPULAR IMAGINATION, no part of New Zealand is more closely associated with the Irish than the West Coast. Whether as gold seekers, settlers, workers or rabble rousers, the Irish made an indelible impact on the region. And yet, notwithstanding that legacy, knowledge of the Irish immigrants' backgrounds, experiences and attitudes has remained partial and inadequately understood. Lyndon Fraser's new study of the West Coast Irish, a fitting successor to his earlier study of Christchurch's Catholics, provides a sharply focused piece of regional history that enhances tremendously our knowledge of the local West Coast experience and illuminates the broader national dimensions of the Irish immigrant experience in New Zealand.

*Castles of Gold* commences with a comprehensive examination of Irish migration to the West Coast. Fraser provides an excellent discussion of the newcomers' homeland origins and backgrounds, and highlights in particular the close connections between the West Coast and the neighbouring Australian colonies. Citing with approval Philip Ross May's observation that Hokitika was 'a trans-Tasman suburb of Melbourne', Fraser shows through the course of the book the extent to which the Irish on the Coast were experienced and adaptable New World voyagers, possessed of valuable colonial experience, not hapless newcomers ill-prepared for life in the frantic New World they encountered. In doing so, he provides convincing new support for the growing body of international scholarship that challenges older stereotypes of the Irish as feeble migrant people ill-suited to life outside their homeland. At the same time, he demonstrates the ongoing importance of family and kinship to the Irish in the migration process. These ties provided 'an important source of companionship, material assistance and information for new arrivals and considerably reduced the risks involved in moving to the West Coast' (pp.39–40).

Successive chapters in *Castles of Gold* address in rich detail key aspects of the Irish immigrants' lives. Fraser first examines the working experiences of the West Coast Irish, drawing upon a wide variety of sources, including death certificates and probate files. He finds that as early arrivals in a society where the demand for labour was strong and co-operation with fellow colonists was essential, Irish immigrants achieved levels of occupational attainment and wealth accumulation consistent with other newcomers in the region. These were Irish men and women in the mainstream, not cast to the bottom rungs of the socio-economic ladder. The book then examines marriage patterns, a topic of particular significance given the extensive amount of Irish scholarship on shifts in demographic behaviour in Ireland between the late eighteenth century and the end of the Union with Great Britain. Unsurprisingly, Fraser points to marked differences between the marital patterns of women in post-famine Ireland and their compatriots who arrived in New Zealand. The newcomers' demographic behaviour on the West Coast conformed closely to the patterns then prevalent in the colony. Subsequent chapters explore the importance of religion among the Irish on the West Coast and the persistence of ethnic politics among the immigrant population there. *Castles of Gold* shows convincingly that interest in Ireland and its institutions did not disappear. More tellingly, these chapters emphasize the extent to which the lives of the West Coast Irish were fashioned by the contours of colonial life and highlight the consummate ability of most immigrants to prioritize identities, issues and commitments as they made pragmatic adjustments to their new society.

The strengths of *Castles of Gold* are readily apparent. Fraser possesses a thorough knowledge of the international scholarship on Irish migration and brings this expertise to bear by asking searching questions of his data. The research here is extensive, utilizing a wide variety of sources, including several series of immigrant correspondence, to

explore in rich detail the lives of his immigrant subjects. The writing is well-paced and engaging. As a result, this book achieves a new level of maturity in scholarship on the Irish in New Zealand.

However, there are issues raised here that will give specialist readers cause for reflection. Fraser brings to his subject an unusual richness of disciplinary background and experience, and is aware how his work has been affected by this. *Castles of Gold*, he writes, is ‘far more “ethnographically informed” than any of my previous writing’ (p.22). Signs of this are evident, and welcome, though perhaps readers will, like me, wish for an even more self-conscious and sustained engagement with disciplinary difference and the possibilities for innovation in content and style that it raises. More importantly, the trans-Tasman connections so effectively identified in this book continue to raise questions about how we should best deal with those immigrants who moved throughout the New World in fits and starts, mobile people whose identities were made and remade in colonial or other national settings. The revival of interest over the last two decades in the diversity of New Zealand’s nineteenth-century European population has been a major achievement. However, the significant challenge remains to fully factor into our histories the ways in which New World experiences transformed what it was, and what contemporaries thought it meant, to be Irish.

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*Dominion of New Zealand: Statesmen and Status 1907–1945*. By W. David McIntyre. New Zealand Institute of International Affairs, Wellington, 2007. 211pp. NZ price: \$47.00. ISBN 0-978-0-908772-27-8.

WHEN DID NEW ZEALAND BECOME INDEPENDENT? The *CIA World Factbook* appears to leave no doubt: ‘26 September 1907 (from UK).’<sup>1</sup> That was the day on which New Zealand became a ‘dominion’, by an Order-in-Council in London following a request from the New Zealand Parliament. Yet, as this work demonstrates, the change did little more than recognize the status New Zealand effectively already enjoyed as equivalent to certain white settler-ruled countries of the British Empire and greater than its numerous largely ‘non-white’ colonies. Certainly the Prime Minister, Sir Joseph Ward, emphasized that the change would ‘lift us out of . . . amongst a great number of colonies concerning which no distinction is made’ (p.16) and stressed the need to maintain racial purity.

The slightly misdated *Dominion of New Zealand: Statesmen and Status 1907–1945* traces the development of New Zealand’s constitutional relationship with Britain from that first Dominion Day to the adoption of the Statute of Westminster in 1947 and the formulation of a membership rubric to accommodate an Indian republic in 1949. An epilogue brings us up to the present. Unlike the *CIA World Factbook*, it recognizes that ‘gaining independence’ was a process rather than an event and was achieved in a manner befitting two countries with ‘unwritten constitutions’. *Dominion of New Zealand* examines in greater depth than any previous work the steps by which the ‘reluctant dominion’ (as Angus Ross characterized it)<sup>2</sup> was drawn protesting down a road largely constructed by the ‘restless dominions’ of South Africa and the Irish Free State. From William Massey’s disappointment that the Imperial War Cabinet had not survived into peacetime, through Gordon Coates’s condemnation of the Balfour Declaration as ‘a rotten formula’ and George Forbes’s exemption of New Zealand from the Statute of Westminster, to Peter Fraser’s doubts about republics in the Commonwealth and the way it lacked any formal commitments, especially in defence, New Zealand opposed the ‘watering down’ of imperial ties. The largely implicit explanation here is that its governments considered