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‘FILCHING THE ARGENTINE COLONISTS’: THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF PATAGONIANS TO THE NORTHERN TERRITORY IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

by
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Introduction

This paper explores the background to the emigration of 220 settlers from Patagonia in South America to the Northern Territory during the course of World War I. The group, which arrived in Darwin on the Kwanto Maru in 1915, comprised an unusual mixture of nationalities. The breakdown given in the passenger list and the contemporary press was 113 Spaniards, 45 Russians, 30 Italians, 28 British, 1 Argentinian [of British parents], 1 Frenchman, 1 Serbian and 1 Greek. Some of the ‘Spaniards’ were presumably Spanish speaking Argentinians but most were indeed of Spanish descent, such as the Martinez, Perez and Villalba families. Of the British amongst the group, almost all were Welsh. They came as a result of inducements held out to the Welsh amongst the party in the years immediately prior to the war by the Commonwealth Government, which administered the Northern Territory after 1911. This account provides a fascinating case study of the recruitment of immigrants to Australia, and particularly to the Northern Territory, in the early twentieth century.

Motivations for Migration: push factors

The Welsh members of the group which arrived in 1915 had been living for some years as part of a nationalist colony in the Chubut Valley in Patagonia, in southern Argentina. In 1865, 163 pioneers had left Wales in a chartered ship, the Mimosa, under the leadership of congregationalist minister, Michael D Jones, in order to preserve their distinct Welsh tongue, faith and institutions, then under threat in their homeland. The valley they inhabited was a narrow strip of irrigated land, approximately 75 kilometres long by 10 kilometres wide, surrounded by desert country. Towns grew up in the valley, such as Gaiman and Trelew (the town of Lewis), characterised by Welsh architecture, values and culture. Other smaller Welsh settlements were established to the west of the original colony, especially in the 1880s, at Esquel and Trevelin (the place of the mill) in the foothills of the Andes. By the late nineteenth century, the descendants of the original settlers, and later additions from Wales, numbered approximately four thousand. It was well known by then, however, that many were seeking new homes, preferably once again under a British flag since they adhered tenaciously to their British citizenship. This provided an ideal opportunity for the Australian states, including the Northern Territory, to procure ‘desirable’ British settlers.

The conditions under which the Welsh had originally settled in Patagonia had changed markedly over the years and there were no longer the same opportunities for the maintenance of their separate cultural identity. By the 1890s, the integrationist Argentine government was demanding that the children of the colonists attend local Spanish schools and that young men participate in national service. In addition, there were serious difficulties in relation to land tenure, especially in the western settlements, where families had been living on their lands on permits for twenty years, unable to get their deeds on tendering the purchase money or proof of compliance with the conditions of their occupation. Many found that others had bought their farms over their heads and were summarily evicted, as happened to one branch of the Davies family from the Valdez peninsula. Even titles that had been in the hands of settlers for some time were declared ‘irregular’, ‘incomplete’ or ‘faulty’. The Argentine government appeared to favour companies,
which bought up large blocks of land, rather than small settlers. These problems in securing land titles caused much anxiety amongst the colonists and the difficulty of selling their lands often delayed the departure of settlers elsewhere.7

In addition, the growth of the colony itself, through both natural increase and in-migration, led to intense population pressure on the land. There was no room for expansion and the welfare of the younger generation depended on emigration to other, preferably British, territories. As a result, some 250 left the Chubut colony for Canada in 1902 while others, such as older people reluctant to begin anew, returned to Wales.8 A small delegation of three, including David S Jones, Manager of the large Chubut Mercantile Company who later travelled to Australia, went to South Africa at the colonists’ expense to examine possibilities for group resettlement there. The idea, however, was not generally favoured. The gradual encroachment upon the Welsh settlement in Chubut by Spaniards and Italians, especially in the lower end of the valley, exacerbated the overcrowding. Annual flooding of the river and dual control of the irrigation canals by two rival companies, one Welsh, the other Latin American, caused additional problems.9 Deficiencies in the local education system, lack of markets for farm produce, and limited employment opportunities for the young all contributed to a growing unrest amongst the Welsh and the desire to find a new home.10

As the Australian states recovered from the 1890s depression and gradually reintroduced passage assistance for immigrants, their advertising spread throughout Great Britain and thence to British settlements elsewhere in the world. Some found its way to Argentina. For those Welsh and other families who ventured to Australia from Patagonia in the early twentieth century, there was the promise of both work and land.

The inducements: pull factors
Several Australian states, particularly Western Australia, Victoria and New South Wales, were anxious to procure these ‘ideal’ immigrants. Victoria sent a representative, the Hon Bloomsfield Rees, to Chubut in 1912, which resulted in at least ten adults and twelve children proceeding to Australia over the following year. This was exclusive of those who accompanied Rees himself when he returned in October 1912, such as John Edwards, who later settled in the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area. Not to be outdone, attractive inducements were held out by the Commonwealth Government in relation to the Northern Territory. The Fisher Labor Government in 1913 sent a representative, Robert Williams, Director of Lands, Darwin, to Argentina to carry out propaganda work over a period of not less than five months and to encourage the Welsh colonists there to settle in the Territory. He left in mid-May 1913 taking with him some seventy prints and eighty slides for advertising purposes. He returned to Darwin via England, on 30 January 1914. As a result of the visit, several Welshmen visited Australia with a view to future settlement. In 1912, Williams, who had offered to act as their agent, had travelled throughout the Territory and produced a forty-page report specifically for them on the prospects for land settlement. Atlee Hunt, Secretary of the Department of External Affairs, stressed that Williams was to be absolutely fair, not exaggerating the possibilities or minimising the difficulties. He was to ensure that small parties arrived at intervals so that proper arrangements could be made for them.11 The report was printed in both English and Welsh and distributed widely in Argentina. Notwithstanding Hunt’s cautionary comments, Williams strongly recommended the Northern Territory:

as a place of settlement for the Welsh Patagonians, and indeed for any British subjects desiring to enter into agricultural or pastoral pursuits under exceptionally favourable climatic and other conditions. I can fully endorse all that has been said about its being a
white man's country, and am confident that the future will justify the present policy of a white Australia...

In concluding this report, I cannot emphasise too strongly the immense advantages and opportunities which this country is now offering to those, such as yourselves, who are seeking to live by agricultural and pastoral pursuits under exceptionally good climate and other conditions. I feel that I would be wanting in duty and patriotism if I did not urge you with all my might to abandon your inhospitable home, under an alien flag, and lose no time in availing yourselves of the wonderful offer now before you. Never in the whole history of British colonisation have such inducements been held out to the white settler. Australia needs to people her vast spaces of the North.

**Her need is your opportunity!**

At the same time, Williams advised the Federal Government that Patagonia deserved regular and systematic attention with annual visits there by a representative of the Commonwealth Government. Australia, he argued, was the only 'land of promise' in the minds of the Chubut people; Canada was considered too cold. Owing to their lack of English and ignorance of the outside world, they needed continuous guidance, otherwise there was a danger on their arrival in the United Kingdom (en route to Australia) of their being sent elsewhere by immigration agents. Williams reported that the British Minister in Buenos Aires, Sir Reginald Tower, and the Consul-General, HD Mackie, were greatly interested in the movement of the Welsh from Argentina and pleased that the Australian government was taking a step of such Imperial interest. They offered to render any assistance.

In the first half of the twentieth century, for reasons of defence and national development, there was a perceived need to populate northern Australia with Europeans, especially agriculturalists. Darwin, however, was never a major port of entry for European immigrants and special inducements had to be offered to convince them to remain on ships after their initial arrival in Australia. Immigrant vessels generally arrived at Fremantle first, then Adelaide and Melbourne, or first to Melbourne if they were coming via New Zealand as several from the Americas did, before proceeding up the east coast and thence to Darwin. Having already spent some weeks at sea, most passengers were anxious to disembark at the first Australian port they reached.

The Federal Government and the Northern Territory Administrator at the time, Dr John Gilmour, extended every form of assistance, initially requesting 156 men. Williams, an ex-civil servant and customs expert of New Zealand but born in Wales, was sympathetic to the grievances of the Welsh in Chubut and, on behalf of the government, offered them perpetual leases of suitable blocks of land in the Territory in reasonable proximity to each other. In April 1913, the Hon Josiah Thomas, Minister of External Affairs, approved the payment to Williams of £500 to select suitable persons and arrange for their transport to Australia. By this time there were already three groups of recently arrived settlers from Patagonia in Australia. One, consisting of seven large Welsh families, was in Western Australia, approximately 150 kilometres north of Perth in the small locality of Moora-Miling. Another Welsh group had taken up land in Colando, near Leeton, in the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area of New South Wales. A third was in the Emerald district in Queensland where twelve members of the Day family had settled; they were English but had lived and mixed with the Welsh in Argentina. Williams feared that some of those brought to the Territory might gravitate to the more attractive conditions where others from Patagonia had settled, especially Queensland.

The Welsh were seen in Australia as model settlers, white, British and skilled in irrigation techniques. During 1913, Williams wrote personal letters of introduction, including details of
occupation, skills and capital, for many who planned to emigrate to Australia. With the approval of the Federal Government, he subsequently appointed AV Jubb, an English doctor in Gaiman, Chubut, who spoke both Welsh and Spanish, to make all the necessary arrangements, including medical examinations, for their transfer to Darwin.17 By mid-1914, Hunt expected at least 260 settlers, a significant intake of immigrants for the Territory, which at the time boasted only four thousand people, excluding Aborigines who in those days were not officially counted in the population.18 There were also plans at the time to bring a further group of people from Malta and southern Europe to work on the Pine Creek to Katherine railway line. Sixty Maltese, in addition to the Spaniards and Welsh, were requested.19

After passing the medical examinations conducted by Dr Jubb, 280 intending emigrants, almost all of whom were Spaniards, signed forms of agreement relating to loans and repayments. They included 28 married couples, 104 bachelors, 1 woman (single), and 91 children. The SS Turakina, a mail steamer of the New Zealand Shipping Company, was engaged by the Commonwealth Government to ship them from Port Madryn to London on or about 20 August 1914 to arrive on 12 September. Passage costs (ranging from £28 to £32 with half price for children) were advanced to those who required assistance. This was to be repaid in monthly instalments of £1 for single men and £2 for married men after their arrival in the Territory, excepting the sum of £8, which the government agreed to contribute towards the cost of the passage. In London, a representative of the High Commissioner’s Office was to meet them and provide assistance. Although accommodation was arranged and loans were possible, settlers were expected to cover their own expenses in London. They would then sail to Darwin via the Torres Strait on the SS Perthshire on 23 September 1914.20

Owing to the outbreak of World War I on 4 August 1914, all these plans were suspended. On 5 August, the Minister for External Affairs, Hon PM Glynn, deferred transport until after the conclusion of the war or until the situation cleared sufficiently to warrant proceeding. Naturally, this had dire consequences for the Patagonians. Many had already sold their properties, furniture, bedding, horses and implements, most at very low prices, or left the land they had rented or their employment. Their remaining possessions were on their way to Port Madryn from where they were to sail. Nonetheless, they were confident that the Australian government would reopen negotiations as soon as possible. Several months later, about 250 were still prepared to sail but by then they were quite destitute, partly because of a 50 per cent rise in the cost of living in the Chubut Territory as a result of war conditions. The other thirty, mostly Germans and Austrians, had dispersed. The British Consul in Buenos Aires, Australian members of parliament, and various individuals pressured the Australian Government to arrange for the speedy passage of the group to Australia.21

The Welsh amongst the party ultimately consisted of but two extended families, the Davies and the Brunts, and two single men. John Thomas Davies (not related to the larger Davies family) and Owen Williams. Thomas and Elizabeth Brunt were accompanied by their two sons, Albert and Arthur, and daughter, Alen, aged three. Just before boarding, Elizabeth’s brother, Hugh Kent, came along the wharf with all his belongings having decided at the last moment to join them.22 Edward Davies, at seventy-six years of age, came with his three adult sons, George V, John Richard and Enoch (the first two each bringing with them a wife and seven children). Edward Davies was the only one of his large family who could speak English with any competency; the others spoke only Welsh and Spanish. Edward had emigrated from Wales to Patagonia several years earlier and taken up land 1 300 kilometres from the nearest town. There he had farmed successfully but was unable to market his produce. The family had sufficient food from the land and stock, but led lonely, self-contained lives. The women made all their
clothes from homespun yarn. As the years went by and there was little prospect of matters improving, the Davies family began to think of relocating. Hearing of the chance to come to Australia on generous terms, George Davies travelled via England to Australia, including the Northern Territory, in 1913 to look at the prospects for settlement. His eldest daughter, Elizabeth, and his brother, Enoch, accompanied him. They communicated with officials with some difficulty owing to their limited knowledge of the English language, but were aided by a Welsh speaker, Captain Davies of the Melbourne Harbour Trust, on their way to and from the Northern Territory.

Carrying letters of introduction from Robert Williams, they spent a month in the Territory and provisionally lodged applications for blocks of land (numbers 6 and 7) south of Hundred of Howard on Stapleton Creek in the Adelaide River district, at the time, not yet opened for settlement. Whilst enthusiastic, they foresaw the need for damming the river and excavating drains for irrigation. They also undertook on their return to inform a number of other Patagonians, mostly Spaniards, of the conditions on which the Australian Government could assist immigrants to the Territory. It was their belief that many could be induced to immigrate if passages were paid and employment assured, but they stressed that they were not authorised to speak definitely for any particular individuals. They also visited New South Wales and Victoria in order to meet the Secretary, Atlee Hunt, and the Minister for External Affairs. The Department covered their extra travel costs in this regard. The Minister promised that they would be afforded facilities for settling together if they so wished, with the possibility of railway construction work at Pine Creek on arrival. The difficulties in relation to markets, and the necessity for some of the settlers to have a certain amount of capital in view of the heavy initial expenditure were pointed out to them.

The Davies party finally returned to Patagonia by the Ruahine, which left from Wellington, New Zealand. HR Carey, Government Secretary, saw this visit as building upon the work of Robert Williams in presenting the Northern Territory to the outside world as a possible field for migrant settlement. Negotiations began with a shipping company on the cost of fares to convey settlers from the Argentine to the Territory. The government kept the Davies brothers and Robert Williams informed of these developments.

Thus it was George Davies who was instrumental in getting together the group that assembled at Port Madryn in August 1914. On 24 March of that year he had written to Atlee Hunt that he had 120 men ready to leave for Australia, over two hundred in all, including families. He stated that they were prepared to pay slightly more for their passages if they could get the ship from Port Madryn, Chubut, rather than travelling the extra distance to Buenos Aires and incurring the higher costs of the capital city in the days before sailing. Port Madryn was already seventy-five kilometres by train from the Welsh settlement. The cost of the steamer passages ranged from £32 to £36 per adult. Davies took particular care to select men who were healthy, capable, ‘open-air’ people but there were few of his fellow Welshmen amongst them besides his own relatives, and many of these were children.

The whole incident, however, raised the ire of the Argentine Press. La Prensa (Buenos Aires) published an article that reflected the sense of injury felt as a result of the impending departure of such a large number of emigrants. The writer referred to the incident not as a usual event but as a collective move, characterising it as ‘seduction by the propaganda of special agents’. La Unión, a German propaganda newspaper published in Spanish, carried a scathing article on the same subject claiming that the British Empire was ‘fitching’ Argentine colonists.
The journey to Australia

The tortuous journey of these 220 immigrants during the course of World War I is an intriguing story. The party consisted of 147 men (133 single and 14 married), 12 women and over sixty children. They eventually left Port Madryn on 5 May 1915 on the SS Valdivia, a small, poorly fitted Russian vessel. About one hundred Russians presented themselves as the very last moment having journeyed by boat from Comodoro Rivadavia, Chubut, but by then there was insufficient room. The SS Valdivia had not been adequately prepared for the passengers; temporary berths of wood were provided but there were no bedclothes of any kind and there was insufficient food. Thirteen days later, after battling severe storms, the migrants discovered that the ship on which they were travelling was taking in water. After landing in Talcahuano in Chile and experiencing a further shortage of food, they re-embarked on the Japanese steamer, the Kwanto Maru owned by the shipping agents, HC Sleigh & Co, under an arrangement with the Australian Government. Robert Williams covered the expenses incurred in relation to this transshipment and there is much correspondence in the archival record between Williams and the Federal Government about his reimbursement, which was not forthcoming. En route to Australia once more, they were stopped in mid-ocean by a Japanese submarine, boarded and searched. Meanwhile, the passengers hastily packed their belongings, fearing another transshipment. When it was clear to the Japanese that they were only passengers, they were allowed to proceed. Allen Bichay, née Brunt, has vague memories of the voyage as ‘very scary’; she almost got washed overboard but was helped by a Japanese sailor.

Complaints were made both during and after the voyage through the Australian Workers’ Union, about the food on board. A Spaniard named Natale was first employed as cook but was relieved of his post, it was alleged, for not cooking all the foodstuffs supplied to him and later disposing of what he had retained for profit. What he did prepare, one passenger claimed, was so badly cooked that it was unfit to eat. Enoch Davies was appointed cook in his stead, which caused some consternation amongst the Spanish owing to his complete lack of experience and, again, there were allegations of hoarding. On arrival in Melbourne, the women on board staged a sit-down strike on the gangplank and demanded that the captain let them off to get supplies of fresh vegetables, which were in short supply. A new cook was engaged for the remainder of the voyage from Melbourne to Darwin. To add to the troubles, sixteen Russians missed the boat when it set sail for Sydney through a mistake in the time of departure. They followed two days later on the Judarra. While in Melbourne, John Thomas Davies requested permission from the Department of External Affairs to leave the vessel in Sydney or Newcastle. He also spoke on behalf of the Brunts, Hugh Kent and Walter Bould, a Britisher who was also on the ship. The Brunts wanted to join friends at the Welsh colony in the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area, while the others wanted to try for work at the Newcastle Steelworks. Only Davies eventually left the ship, however, arguing that he had heard of the oppressive heat in Darwin and complaining that his fellow passengers were a rough lot to travel with. He left a bank draft for security of payment of his passage in full, viz. £32, in accordance with his agreement with the Federal Government signed before embarkation.

While in Sydney, a young Spanish-speaking businessman with a good knowledge of South America, Vance Marshal, boarded the Kwanto Maru simply out of interest and spoke for some hours with W Archibald, Sleigh’s representative on board, and Dr Martinez Ramos, of Valparaiso. The passengers, hearing him conversing in Spanish, assumed that he was there in an official capacity, and immediately began to ply him with questions and relate their many grievances. Apart from the outcry over the food, they insisted that the terms of their contract were unclear.
to them and their futures uncertain. The following day Marshall offered himself to the Federal Government as interpreter, go-between and time-keeper for the Spanish on board, offering to organise their landing, housing and assignment to jobs, help them settle, and act as guarantor. It is unclear whether this offer was taken up - the lack of evidence in the records suggests that it was not - but it does reveal the general unrest amongst the Patagonian group before their arrival in the Northern Territory.

Arrival and experiences in the Northern Territory

It was immediately clear on arrival in Australia that the passengers were not all the ‘desirable British immigrants’, or ‘people of our own race’, which the Australian public, unions and some members of the government had been led to expect. This is somewhat surprising since the Minister for External Affairs and the Administrator of the Northern Territory were well aware that Davies was bringing predominantly Spanish immigrants. Only the small Welsh contingent, the vast majority of the twenty-eight ‘British’, was considered sufficiently ‘white’ and even they were a disappointment owing to their small numbers and the limited amount of capital they possessed. The timing of their arrival was also inopportune. It was, by then, well into the war. The ‘white Australia’ policy was becoming increasingly restrictive in relation to those considered ‘foreign’ or ‘semi-coloured’ and any immigration during wartime was fiercely

Ottavio Vacca - Julia’s Father, arrived on the Kwanto Maru
opposed. Territorians especially resented the assistance given to the immigrants by the Federal Government as it was thought that these newcomers would take the jobs of Australian soldiers fighting overseas. Their arrival remained a sensitive issue for some years to come as indicated by a question in the Federal Parliament in February 1923 relating to their arrival during the war, the cost incurred and what became of them. Opposition at the time came particularly from the Australian Workers’ Union and various Political Labor Councils across Australia.

It was not until 4 August that the *Kwanto Maru* docked in Darwin. The reception there was hostile for a number of reasons. It fed into existing hostility between Territory Administrator John Gilruth and union leader Harold Nelson. The antagonism towards recently arrived foreigners in the Northern Territory manifested itself the following year when there was a scuffle in the streets of Darwin. It was largely directed towards Greeks but the Patagonians were also targets. The federal Labor Government under WM Hughes was forced to give an assurance that, for the duration of the war, no such labour would be imported. In parliament, the Minister for External Affairs, Hugh Mahon, tried to shift responsibility on to previous Federal governments which were instrumental in arranging to bring the Patagonians to Australia. He also blamed individual state governments, particularly Victoria, for the advertising carried out in Argentina in the immediate pre-war years. He explained that the settlers, having sold their properties before the war, were penniless, that they had been ready to emigrate several
months earlier but owing to the lack of shipping, were forced to wait for a cargo ship calling at Patagonia.45

The 147 men under contract to the Federal Government were received and housed on arrival at the Immigration Home or camp pending transfer inland where they were to be employed initially on the construction of the Pine Creek to Katherine railway extension.46 The government thought it necessary to get them away from Darwin as soon as possible so that they would not be competitors for the limited work available at the time. Even this caused problems, however, since the Resident Engineer at Pine Creek had been advised that the original undertaking was to employ only one hundred men and he was not to employ more than he could conveniently and economically engage.47 Although a number of the men had been working on the railway in Chubut and were already experienced in that line of work, there were some complaints about the quality of their work at Pine Creek.48 They worked in gangs doing hard physical work, but despite this, food and fresh water were scarce. Their families were to join them some weeks later when the camp was ready.49 And camp it was; they lived for some months in tents, usually one per family, regardless of the number in each family. George Davies and his brother, John Richard Davies, and their wives (Jane and Martina respectively) each had large families. In September 1915, there were heavy storms and one tent belonging to Faustino Martinez was torn to pieces leaving two teenage girls and five small children temporarily without shelter.50 Conditions were very poor. As the line was extended so were the tents.51 Martha Redford, eighth child of George and Jane Davies, was born in one such tent on 21 December 1915.52

Although blocks of land on the Daly River were set aside for the workers to take up at a later date, there were no houses or ready-made farms as they had been promised.53 The idea was that they would be granted leases for a term of not less than twenty-one years, according to the class of tenure under which they selected land, and at a nominal rental.54 This led to criticism from James Page, Member for Maranoa, in view of the failures of government experimental farms in the Territory, established at Rum Jungle (Batchelor) on the Daly River and Mataranka in 1912.55 Others, such as Senator Newland of South Australia, objected to the whole scheme on racial grounds. Newland blamed the ‘incompetent foreigners’ for the cost of the North-South Railway and stated that if Australia wanted to populate the Northern Territory, the Patagonians should be discouraged while ‘people of our own race’ should be settled there.56 Again, apart from the Welsh, the newcomers were not seen as desirable settlers.

Overall, the net cost to the government of bringing out the group was £2 358. It was expected that the immigrants would repay the loan for their fares (a total of £6 358), in monthly instalments from their wages.57 The Commonwealth contribution of £8 was later extended to women and children.58 The agreement signed before their departure stipulated that if they did not remain in the Territory for a period of twelve months from the date of arrival, the whole amount, including the government contribution, would have to be repaid.

There is evidence to suggest that several members of the Patagonian group brought to Australia in 1915 were in distress both shortly after their arrival and in later years. Pedro Diez and Pedro Cuesta, dissatisfied with conditions in the Territory, attempted to leave on 17 April 1916 on the Empire. Just as the steamer was leaving Darwin, they were apprehended by police, since they owed money to the government and were attempting to depart before they had been in the Territory for the required twelve months. After paying their debt, they were allowed to proceed. They made their way to Newcastle, New South Wales, where they were found stranded in the streets with a third Spaniard, Pablo Carpintero, who, it was believed by officials, had been on the same vessel but remained undetected, and who still owed over £7 to the government. All were unable to speak English and though willing to take on manual work, were unable to find
employment. The Federal Government, having found them construction work on arrival, was not disposed to help them any further unless they returned to the Northern Territory at their own expense. They refused to do this and eventually found employment in the Newcastle district.59

As with many other immigrants, most of the Patagonians did not stay long in the Territory.60 After gravitating back to Darwin, some took jobs with the large new Vestey’s Brothers meatworks, which began operating in 1917 and to which the railway would contribute. It was hoped that these freezing works would play an important role in the development of the Territory and northern Australia generally.61 When Vestey’s closed three years later in March 1920, the Patagonians, along with hundreds of others from the freezer and general works, found themselves unemployed, with no prospect of work in Darwin, and no vessels to convey them elsewhere for almost two months. On the suggestion of the Acting Administrator of the Northern Territory, Staniforth Smith, their passages were paid to Cairns via the Hwath Ping on the assumption that cane-cutting work would be available.

Of the 216 men who took up this opportunity to go to north Queensland at the government’s expense, several were Patagonians. Among them were Enoch Davies, John Richard Davies and George Davies and their families, and Elizabeth Brunt, whose husband Thomas had recently been killed in Darwin, and her children.62 Of these, the Brunts eventually moved south and joined friends in the Welsh Patagonian community in Lexton. George Davies on arrival in Cairns, called upon the Mayor, believing that they were expected and that there would be work for them. Instead of being given employment, they were advised to apply to the Inspector of
Police and told that cases such as theirs came within police jurisdiction. Unable to find work, and because the proceeds of the sale of their farm in Chubut had never reached them, they were, after only a week, without accommodation or income. As the ninth child was born to George and Jane Davies while in Cairns in August 1920, they were in dire straits. On their behalf, Robert Williams sought help from the Department of Home and Territories, and eventually from the Prime Minister himself, but to no avail. By that time, the government refused to take any further financial responsibility for their employment or maintenance, arguing that they had been brought to Australia with a view to taking up land but had never made a move in that direction. The Davies families then went to Sydney and further south in search of work. While John Richard's family subsequently returned to north Queensland, the George Davies branch became share farmers in Bamawm near Rochester in Victoria where other Welsh Patagonian families had settled, and later moved to Warrnambool in the western district.

Some Patagonian families had moved to north Queensland quite early after their arrival in the Territory, such as the Villalbas who moved to the Innisfail district in 1917 where work was available. As soldiers returned from the war and the future looked bleak in Darwin, others, such as the Martinez families (of which there were several on the Kwanto Maru, though of no relation), joined them. A small Patagonian community of mixed Welsh, Spanish and Italian descent still remains in the Cairns/Gordonvale area today. Apart from the Martinez and Villalba families, these include Saez, Camerero, Garcia, Vacca and John Richard Davies descendants.

Of those Patagonians who remained in, or had returned to, the Territory, nine adults and four children from Patagonia were drawing government rations in mid-1922. They requested that they be repatriated to Chile on the grounds that the government had failed to provide work or settle them on farms. They were Antonio Mijdjo Zerazo, his wife and four children and Sg Compramones (Spaniards); F Spinolo, A Carosimo and Emilio Violi (Italians); A Chenovich (Russian); and John Thomas Davies and Enoch Davies (Welsh). The government made attempts to find them work in Queensland but refused to repatriate them. This was the same year as the Empire Settlement Act was passed in Great Britain which aimed to redistribute the population of the crowded imperial centre to the underpopulated dominions and while editorials in the daily press in Sydney and Melbourne were urging a policy of extensive immigration to Australia. But fortunes differed. Rafael Perez was another Patagonian who remained in Darwin, his son Frank later became a football legend in the Territory.

The case study outlined above illustrates the lengths to which the Federal Government in the early twentieth century was prepared to go in order to attract 'suitable' immigrants to the Northern Territory. The paper also touches upon aspects of the public response both in Argentina and Australia and sets this particular group migration in the wider context of immigration encouragement and national development within this period. Yet the findings presented here are only part of the story of a process of migration to the Northern Territory in which 220 Patagonians were involved. It is the story that is revealed largely through the official archival record and the contemporary press. Few write to governments about their successes and achievements, while many who have grievances will air them in the hope of gaining some form of recompense. The picture is therefore somewhat incomplete. In order to balance the account, a number of interviews were conducted between 1996 and 1999 with the descendants of the Welsh amongst the group and a small number of others who accompanied them on their journey from Patagonia to the Northern Territory almost a century ago. These testimonies, based on personal records and family folklore are providing valuable insights to the migration experiences of this remarkable and unique group of people. Some of these have been drawn upon here. Despite the very difficult early years, these settlers have made their mark in Australia, although few of the families have remained in the Territory.
Notes

1 The support of the Northern Territory State Government and the Northern Territory History Awards Committee for this research is gratefully acknowledged.

2 Summary of Passenger List, Kwanto Maru, Talcahuano to Darwin, National Archives of Australia (NAA), CRS A3, 1923/1031; Argus (Melbourne), 5 July 1915, p 6; Sydney Morning Herald, 12 July 1915, p 5.

3 Interview with Peter Martinez by Michele Langfield, 12 April 1999. Peter is the son of Fausto Martinez and Dolores Villalba (or Villalva), both of whom, prior to their marriage at Pine Creek in 1917, came to Australia on the Kwanto Maru. See also Peter Forrest, Patagonians make their mark in Top End, Northern Territory News, 16 March 1999, pp 27-28.


6 John E Baur, 1954, The Welsh in Patagonia: an Example of Nationalistic Migration, The Hispanic American Historical Review, Vol 34, p 488. Several descendants of the Welsh who came to Australia, although not all to the Territory, have confirmed these motivations for migration. For example, interview with David Humphreys by Michele Langfield and Peta Roberts, 8 August 1996.

7 Y Drefod (Argentina), 7 July 1911, attributes the emigration from Patagonia to Australia to unfavourable conditions, including 'inadequate government'.


10 Robert Williams to Dr JA Gilruth, Administrator, 26 August 1913, Department of External Affairs, Welsh Colonists from the Argentine, NAA, A3, 1914/7396 (Roll 14); Sydney Morning Herald, 9 November 1911, p 9.


12 Robert Williams, Report on the Northern Territory of Australia, pp 3, 16, cited in Department of External Affairs, Welsh Colonists for Northern Territory from Patagonia, NAA A3/1, 1913/1163; Bulletin of the Northern Territory, Number 9, September 1913, Department of External Affairs, Melbourne. Also see the letter of acceptance of Williams' offer to go to the Argentine and instructions from Atlee Hunt, Secretary, Department of External Affairs, 21 April 1913, NAA, 1914/7396.

13 Williams to the Administrator of the Northern Territory, 25 August 1913, NAA, CRA A3, 1914/7396; Williams to Hon PM Glynn, Minister of External Affairs, 24 February 1914, NAA, CRS A3, 1916/165 and 1916/342.

14 Despatches from Sir Reginald Tower, British Minister in Buenos Aires, 13 June, 16 December 1913; 3 March 1914 Colonial Office Records (COR), Australian Joint Copying Project (AJCP), CO418, Rec 3 No 4221, Piece Nos 118-9, pp 119-20.

15 Williams later claimed a further £250 for out-of-pocket expenses. Letter to P McMahon Glynn, Minister for External Affairs, from Robert Williams, 7 April 1914, NAA, A3, 14/7396 (Roll 14).

16 Letter from Robert Williams to Dr JA Gilruth, Administrator, Darwin, 26 August 1913, p 4, NAA, A3, 14/7396.
17 See letters from Robert Williams to Dr J.A. Gilruth, Administrator, Darwin, 26 August 1913, p. 6 and to P. McMahon Glyn, Minister for External Affairs. Williams states that 12 adults and 24 children were on their way to the Territory in early 1914 and another 19 adults and 8 children would leave in the autumn. Also see letter from Atlee Hunt, Secretary, External Affairs, to Williams, 21 April 1913; copies of letters of introduction for JW Crockett and David S Jones, NAA, A3, 14/7396; NAA, A1, 13/10691, Roll 8; and Department of External Affairs, Names of Welsh Settlers from Argentina Going to Northern Territory, NAA A3/1, 1913/10691 (housed under NT 1913/10759, Roll 8).

18 Williams also approached Commissioner LAB Wade, of the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area in NSW, 2 July 1914, about the possibilities of Welsh Patagonian settlement. Department of Land and Water Conservation, Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area files, 19111, AK21. 17/496. Population figure from Report of the Administrator of the Northern Territory for the Years 1915-1916, Northern Territory Archives Service (NTAS), Darwin.

19 Engineer-in-Chief to Secretary, Department of External Affairs, 5 August 1914, NAA, CRS A3, 1914/7396.

20 Letter to Dr AV Jubb from Atlee Hunt, Secretary, Department of External Affairs, 9 July 1914, NAA, 1914/7396.

21 Letter dated 4 August 1915 from Department of External Affairs to DC McGrath, MP Melbourne, NAA, CRS A3, 1923/1031; Letter from Spencer S Dickson, Port Madryn to Sir Reginald Tower, Buenos Aires, 2 March 1915, NAA, A3, 1923/1031; Letter from Robert Jones, Dolavon, Chubut to the Minister of External Affairs, 27 August 1914, NAA, CRS A3 1914/7396.

22 A fourth child, Norman, was born to the Brunts in Darwin but he died at the age of 18 months. Interview with Pam Arnold, daughter of Alen Richey, née Brunt, by Michele Langfield, 10 November 1996.

23 Argus, 5 July 1915, p. 6; Interview with Julia Favaro, grand-daughter of John Richard Davies, by Michele Langfield, 14 April 1999.

24 Memoranda, 22 December 1913, 13 January 1914, NAA, CRS A3, 1914/4613; and see Argus and the Age (Melbourne), 29 July 1914.


26 George Davies to Secretary, Department of External Affairs, Melbourne, 15 April 1914, NAA, CRS A3, 1914/4613.


28 Argus, 5 July 1915; Sydney Morning Herald, 12 July 1915.

29 Robert Williams to Minister of External Affairs, 12 May 1915, NAA, CRS A3, 1923/1031.

30 Prime Minister’s Department, File of Papers, Immigration (Welsh Community in Chubut to Australia), A2/1, 1915/2250.

31 Interview with Peter Martinez, son of Fausto Martinez, by Michele Langfield, 12 April 1999.

32 Interview with Alen Richey, née Brunt, by Michele Langfield, 11 November 1996. Alen died in 1998 at the age of 86.


34 See Memorandum from DB Edwards, Department of External Affairs, 9 July 1915 and letter from the Imperial Russian Consulate in Melbourne to the Secretary, Department of External Affairs, 10 July 1915. NAA, CRS A3, 1923/1031.
Memorandum from DB Edwards, 7 July 1915, NAA, CRS A3, 1923/1031.
See Lettergrams, 24 July 1914, NAA, CRS A3, 1914/7396.
Forrest, Patagonians make their mark in the Top End, p 28.
CPD, Senate, 3 October 1916, Vol LXXX, p 9226.
CPD, House of Representatives, 30 June 1915, Vol LXXVII, p 4452; Senate, 27 September 1916, Vol LXXX, p 8975. A similar letter dated 4 August 1915 from the Department of External Affairs to DC McGrath, MP, Melbourne also blamed the previous administration under the Hon Josiah Thomas, NAA, CRS A3, 1923/1031.
Despatches from A Bonar law to R Mono Ferguson, 4, 28 June 1915, NAA, A2, 15/2259 (or 2250); See also letter from Robert Jones, Trelew, to Minister for External Affairs, on the delay (received 8 December 1914), NAA, A3, 1923/7396.
The Age, 24 June 1915; CPD, Senate, 22 July 1915, Vol LXXVIII, p 5241; 29 July 1195, p 5449; 2 September 1915, p 6145; 8 September 1915, pp 6677-78, Numbers given in a letter from Secretary, Department of External Affairs to Engineer-in-Chief for Commonwealth Railways, 14 July 1915, NAA, CRS A3, 1923/1031.
Letter to the Secretary, Department of External Affairs, from Engineer-in-Chief and Acting Commissioner, 20 July 1915, NAA, CRS A3, 1923/1031.
Telegram from the Administrator, Darwin, 9 July 1915, NAA, A3, 1923/1031.
Report upon the Argentine Immigration to the Northern Territory of Australia, by Eduardo Molina, through the Secretary, Australian Workers’ Union, Darwin, NAA, CRS A3, 1922/198.
Interviews with Peter Martinez, 12 April 1999, Julia Favaro, 14 April 1999 and Alen Richey, 11 November 1996.
Her son, Robert Dunball, says jokingly that he can say to his son, ‘You’re not like my mother, shut the door, you weren’t born in a tent’, Interview with Robert Dunball, 28 September 1998.
The Age, 24 June 1915; Interview with Julia Favaro, 14 April 1999.
Letter to the Consul for Italy from Acting Secretary, Department of External Affairs, 25 September 1915, NAA, CRS A3, 1915/4577.
57 CPD. House of Representatives, Questions from Bannford to Mahon, 22 July 1915, and from Fleming to the Minister for External Affairs, 2 September 1915, NAA, CRS A3 1923/1031; PF Donovan, 1984, At the Other End of Australia: the Commonwealth and the Northern Territory 1911-1978, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, Queensland, p 23.

58 Department of External Affairs Memorandum from M Farrands, 10 November 1915, NAA, CRS A3 15/5181.

59 Memorandum, 6 June 1916, NAA, CRS, 1922/198.

60 See letter from Norman Makin to Deane, 1 February 1923 and reply, NAA, A457, V401/272; NAA, CRS A3, 1923/1031.


62 Thomas Brent had died as a result of an assault arising from a gambling debt. Interview with Alen Richey, 11 November 1996. Edward Davies died of snakebite in Darwin about 1918 after working for some years at the Botanic Gardens. Interview with Julia Favaro, 14 April 1999.

63 See several letters May to August 1920, NAA, CRS A3, 1923/1031.

64 Interview with Robert Dunball, 28 September 1998.

65 Interview with Peter Martinez, 12 April 1999.

66 Telegram from Urquhart to Secretary, Territory, Melbourne, 26 June 1922, NAA, CRS A3, 1923/1031.

67 Memorandum, Home and Territories Department, No NT 22/2433, 28 June 1922.

68 The Act is reproduced in the State Archives Office of New South Wales, 7/5941; Argus 8 April 1922, p 21.

69 Forrest, Patagonians make their mark in Top End, p 27.


71 A book on Welsh Patagonian migration to Australia, based on over fifty interviews conducted between 1996 and 1999 by Michele Langfield and Peta Roberts is forthcoming.

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