

Ronald Hoffman. *Princes of Ireland, Planters of Maryland: A Carroll Saga, 1500-1782.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000. 464 pp. \$39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8078-2556-3.



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This large and impressively-researched book traces the history of one family, the Carrolls. Originally they were a Gaelic Irish clan with a patrimony in the Irish midlands which straddled two ancient provinces – Leinster to the north-east, Munster to the south-west – and two of the shires – King’s County (Offaly) and Tipperary – created by the spread of English authority throughout Ireland in the early-modern period. In the year 1688 Charles Carroll emigrated to Maryland, and found that area of the Chesapeake relatively tolerant of Catholicism. He had connections to the Lords Baltimore and managed to become an attorney general. The son of the Settler, Charles Carroll of Annapolis, survived the penal laws, and his son, Charles Carroll of Carrollton, translated a tradition and memory of his family’s struggle to keep faith with Catholicism into support for the independence fight of the American colonies. Charles Carroll of Carrollton was the only Catholic to sign the American Declaration of Independence.

This book should be viewed as something hugely more important, however, than a family history, no matter how important the individuals within the family might have been. It is written with the style and flourishes of a work designed to appeal to family historians, but this work makes a valuable contribution to at least three directional approaches to history. Firstly, it is part

of a move to put the European foundations back into the history of the early Americas, making this as much a narrative about England, Ireland, their struggles, the reasons behind emigration to the Americas and the inheritance of European ideas within the Americas, as it is about the development of a distinctive, independent America. The Carrolls in Maryland acted in the way in which they did because they arrived with a family memory of confiscation, persecution, and denial of freedom of worship, as well as a well-developed knowledge of what was needed to ensure the survival of their Gaelic culture, their Catholic faith, and their social status.

Secondly, studies detailing the survival of Catholicism and Catholic practice are proliferating, and this is a useful extension of these studies over a much greater area. As Hoffman makes clear, the tolerant image which has settled around the Maryland colony, sponsored by the Calvert Proprietorship, was pressured into contraction as the eighteenth century progressed. The Carrolls’ participation in the Revolutionary war and the consequent economic troubles the disruption caused, must provoke us to think about revolutionary ideology and trace its non-English and non-Protestant antecedents as well as the more obvious routes to 1776. Finally, there are historians who are tracing the Irish Diaspora, and in doing so in such a wide-ranging chronological and geo-

graphical study, through the eyes of one family, Hoffman also makes a contribution to this debate.

The same things that make this an important and valuable book display its weaknesses. It could have been a far longer work. It has all the hallmarks of grand-chronology sweeps: one end of the period is studied in much more detail than another. In Hoffman's case, the history of the Carrolls in Ireland, from 1500 to 1688, accounts for the first fifty-nine pages: the Maryland family, from 1688 to 1782, the remaining 330. In part, this is hardly Hoffman's fault – the Irish records have been lost. However, the account presents Ireland as a background introduction, predominantly reliant on secondary works, whereas the American sections are densely and heavily referenced. It is also a difficult balance to deal with so

many different types of history – constitutional, the relationship of core and periphery, colonialism, family history, biography – and to keep the emphasis of each in balance and the parts in harmony with each other.

In other words, this is an ambitious and important piece of work, masquerading as something smaller and more domestic in scale. Its range and scope will make it easier for specialist historians to pick holes, but this should not take away from Hoffman's achievement, or lessen the degree to which we accept Hoffman's challenge to work in our own fields.

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