

The saga of 19th century Icelandic settlement in Brazil

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Abstract

More than 50 million Europeans migrated to non-European spaces in the 19th century and beginning of the 20th. Five million of them were Europeans that settled in Brazil, mostly the southern part of the country. Mass migration to South-America started when officials sought to increase population, strengthen borders and increase number of labour after abolition of slavery. Europeans were offered subsidised trips and cheap land, which was advertised widely in Europe.

News about European emigration to Brazil reached to Iceland, resulting in emigration of 37 Icelanders in 1863 and 1873. The Icelanders settled in southern part of Brazil and did not emphasis on their Icelandic traditions and language nor did they create a cohesive community. The aim of this paper is to examine the emigration of the Icelandic Brazil-goers in the 19th century in the larger context of mobility of Europeans to non-European spaces in that era. The paper explains the history behind the Icelandic emigration and the settlement in Brazil and we ask particularly why Icelandic traditions were not withheld and disseminated to next generations by considering memories and stories passed on to contemporary descendants from the ancestors.

Data for the article is based on ongoing Ph.D. research, including fieldwork in Brazil.

Keywords: Mobility, emigration, heritage, Brazil, Iceland