

COMMUNITY

A bit of Chester County in Brazil

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After the Civil War, some Confederates left for new lands

When the Civil War ended, some Southerners felt their way of life ended, too. Three colonies formed to seek new homes. One group went to Mexico, one to British Honduras and one to Brazil.

Louise Pettus



NEARBY HISTORY

Brazil attracted a group of Chester County planters led by Dr. James McFadden Gaston. He was practicing medicine in Columbia before it was burned by Sherman's army in February 1865. Not long after the burning, Gaston visited Brazil and met with Emperor Dom Pedro II. Dom Pedro was excited about the prospect of a colony coming with agricultural skills. Dom Pedro was a Mason, as was Gaston. The emperor told Gaston the Southern-

ers were free to live anywhere they wished.

Gaston decided on the state of Sao Paulo and came back to Chester County, where most of the prospective emigres lived. Among the more-than-60 families were names such as Hall, Miller, McIntyre, Pyles, Norris, McFadden, McCord, Whitaker, Ferguson, McKnight, Mills, Ellis, Grady, Stegal, Barnsley, Baird, Finley, Mobley, Jones and Hawthorn. The group sailed from Savannah, Ga., and landed at Rio de Janeiro.

From there, the party went by pack mule to Villa Americana, where it built wooden and brick homes that were superior to the homes of their neighbors. The Brazilians were fascinated with the chimneys and fireplaces, which they had never seen.

The first group, all farmers, soon found two of their crops, watermelons and cotton, had a ready market. The Chester farmers also introduced the moldboard plow, invented by Thomas Jefferson a half-century before but unknown to the Brazilians.

Gaston did not settle at Americana but established the most modern hospital in the country at Cam-

pinas. In 1883, Gaston returned to the United States to practice medicine in Atlanta.

Not all of the Chester Confederates stayed in Brazil. Homesickness and disillusionment caused some to return.

Others, who expected to continue being slaveholders, were upset because Brazil denied the newcomers the right to own slaves unless they denounced American citizenship and became legal citizens of Brazil.

Still, a majority stayed in Brazil. The first generation mostly intermarried.

A majority of the Confederates were Presbyterian, and there were marriages with Presbyterian missionaries assigned to Brazil. Two of Gaston's daughters married missionaries named Kolb and Blackford.

By the second generation, a majority of the ex-Confederates had become fluent in Portuguese; many married Brazilians. By the third generation, the colonists were absorbed into the Brazilian culture and were speaking Portuguese more fluently than English.

A great deal of sentiment for

their past remained. In the church, they placed an American flag in one corner and a Brazilian flag in the other. A Confederate flag was placed over the pulpit during the church service.

They continued eating Southern foods like fried chicken and corn bread, but, like their Brazilian neighbors, they also ate black beans over rice.

When World War I came along, more than 30 young men descended from the Confederate pioneers volunteered to fight for the United States, pledging they would fight as hard for the Stars and Stripes as their grandfathers had fought for the Stars and Bars.

Most of the Confederates have moved into other parts of Brazil, but they still meet four times a year at the old cemetery at Campo, where their ancestors are buried. Occasionally, Portuguese-speaking individuals or families with familiar surnames travel to the Old Country of Chester County, USA, to see where their ancestors lived before The War.

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