

## 1819: FIRST WAVE OF EMIGRATION TO BRAZIL

**The first major wave of transatlantic emigration took place as early as 1819 with Brazil as destination.**

Natural occurrences were responsible in part for these departures: the eruption of the volcano Tambora in Indonesia in 1815?one of the most violent on record?had effects on the climate worldwide, in particular destroying crops. Three years later, in what was called the "debacle of the Giétroz", floods in the Valais caused the death of 44 persons in Bagnes and Martigny.

These dramatic circumstances explain why most of the 160 Valaisans who embarked for Rio de Janeiro came from the regions of Bagnes, Martigny and Entremont, which had experienced the brunt of the catastrophe. In all, 2,006 persons participated in the first departure from Switzerland in the autumn of 1819, including 830 from Fribourg. Indeed, the Brazilian authorities, acting on behalf of the Portuguese colonial administration, had signed a colonization agreement with the city of Fribourg. Among the conditions to be met by the emigrants was being Catholic, adopting the Portuguese nationality and swearing an oath of allegiance to the king of Portugal. In exchange, they were granted a compensation for the departure, land, cattle and the right to own slaves. The Swiss colony was given the name Nova Friburgo.

However, the reality did not meet the promises and expectations, as 16 Valaisans perished of typhus and malaria during the ocean crossing. The last emigrants reached their destination only in February 1820. Nearly one out of five did not survive the journey and there were many deaths after their establishment. Most did not stay long and left the Nova Friburgo colony in order to create new settlements, move to urban centres or enlist in the army. Many were forced to turn to their relations in the Valais for assistance, having incurred debts in order to finance their trip.

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