

1. Motivation

Originally a medieval Portuguese Law established in 1375 that allowed the grant of small plots of land to be used and developed ([Diégues Júnior, 1959](#), p. 16). In Brazil, the law was initially implanted with little difference based on an updated version of the law from 1446, with the first use being in 1530 ([Diégues Júnior, 1959](#), p. 16). The Law governing the *sesmarias* would have two more changes during colonial Brazil, in 1511 and 1603. However, the core of the law remained the same, the land was to be granted in order to establish settlements in Portugal’s colonial empire and allow it to develop.

Given that in order to request a land grant required the petitioner to prove that he had the financial means to develop and use the land requested, it often favored the Portuguese aristocracy ([Lobb, 1976](#)). Early studies argued it led to the development of the “economic aristocracy of the colonial society” and the “principal cause of the *latifundio*” in Brazil ([Lima, 2002](#), p. 36; [Costa Porto, 1979](#), p. 48).

2. Data Collection

The goal of the summer would work in conjunction with researchers in Brazil to transcribe the manuscripts into text documents and also extract the information from the text. Given the geographical information extracted, the next step is to georeference the original location of the *sesmaria*.

References

Costa Porto, José da (1979). *O sistema sesmarial no Brasil*. pt-BR. Editora Universidade de Brasília.

Diégues Júnior, Manuel (1959). *População e propriedade da terra no Brasil*. por. Washington: União Pan-Americana.

Lima, Ruy Cirne (2002). *Pequena história territorial do Brasil: sesmarias e terras devolutas*. pt-BR. Editora UFG.

Lobb, C Gary (1976). “The Sesmaria in Rio Grande do Sul: A Successful Frontier Institution, 1737-1823”. In: *Yearbook of the Association of Pacific Coast Geographers* 38, pp. 49–63.