

The Story of the Scots-Irish

Who Were They?

- They descend from over 200,000 Scottish Presbyterians
- These people were encouraged by the English government to migrate to Ulster in the 17th century
- Most people went willingly because of the economic advantages
- England was trying to strengthen its control of Ireland by establishing a Protestant population in Ulster

Origin of Name “Scots-Irish”

- This is an Americanism almost unknown in England, Ireland or Scotland
- Some of the Scotch-Irish had little or no Scottish or Irish ancestry
 - Dissenter families included: English, Welsh, French Huguenots, and some from the German Palatinate
 - What united these groups was their common Calvinist beliefs and their separation from the Church of England, the established church of the time
- When they first came to America, they referred to themselves as “Irish” without the qualifier “Scotch”
- A century later (following the Great Irish Famine of the 1840s), they wanted to distance themselves from the largely destitute Catholic Irish immigrants so they appended “Scotch” to their ethnicity
- The title was changed in 1972 from “Scotch-Irish” to “Scots-Irish”

History

- Northern Ireland is separated from Scotland by only 20 miles
- James I of England (and VI of Scotland) ascended the English throne in 1603
- There was some conflict between England/Scotland and the native Irish who were Catholic
- James I’s solution:
 - Invite Presbyterians from Scotland plus some English, French and German Protestants to emigrate and settle in what became known as the “Ulster Plantation”
 - Problem: The lands granted to the settlers were not all vacant and some of the native Irish were displaced
 - Reality: Some 300 native landowners who had sided with the English during the Nine Years War were given grants
 - Not enough English and Scottish settlers could be imported to fill the workforce, so existing Irish tenants were used
 - However, some were moved off their land to land that was worse than before the Plantation
- The first settlers arrived in Ulster in 1609 and the Plantation was successful
- By 1619, approximately 8,000 emigrants had come to Ulster
- The settlers proved quite industrious and established towns and farms as well as industry and commercial interests
- The Scots lived in Northern Ireland for slightly over a century
- During this period, from time to time, there were resentments that erupted between the Scots and the native Irish
 - In some cases, native Irish were forbidden from owning or renting land in planted areas or even working on land owned by settlers
 - Irish Rebellion of 1641 was an attempt to reclaim native, Catholic rights
 - Oliver Cromwell crushed rebellion in 1650s

Surnames Associated with Ulster Plantation

- Allison, Andrews, Armstrong, Bethel, Blair, Bond, Boyd, Burns, Cameron, Campbell, Clyde, Craig, Cummin, Fraser, Gordon, Graham, Hall, Hart, Haslett, Kerr, King, Laird, McCarte, McGregor, McIntosh, McKay, McKenzie, Miller, Morrison, Nicolson, Patterson, Ross, Scott, Sinclair, Stewart, Taylor, Walker, Wilson

Reasons for Migration to America

- British, who first wanted Ulster settled with Protestants, ended up persecuting the residents for holding to Presbyterianism
- By 1715, Presbyterians could not hold civil or military office, nor be married by their own ministers
- In 1717, the English raised rents on improved lands so high that many farmers couldn’t afford to remain on the land
- This is called “rack-renting”
- The English imposed trade restrictions on the Scotch

- They were forbidden to export their goods to England or to the other English colonies
- They were only allowed to import from England
- Parliament's Wool Act of 1699
 - Limited wool production in Ireland
 - Forbade export of wool from American colonies
 - Restricted import of woolens and linens created in Ireland
 - Put a tax on every sale of wool or woolen or linen items
 - This represented a financial setback to the Ulster Scotch whose money was tied to this industry

First Try at Emigration

- In 1639, the 150-tonne *English Wing* was the first passenger ship to set sail from Ulster's shores to America
- Some 140 Presbyterian families had left on 9 Sep for Boston
- They left from the County Down port of Groomsport
- The trip was aborted after heavy mid-Atlantic storms made continuing impossible
- The journey ended in Carrickfergus Bay on 3 Nov with the ship's shrouds asunder, mainsail in ribbons, and rudder badly damaged and over 140 people dead
- One of the Presbyterian ministers on board, Rev John Livingston, advised that it was God's will they should return home and the captain agreed
- This voyage took place only 16 years after the Pilgrims had landed at Plymouth Rock

Migration to America

- Five waves of migration
- Began in 1717 with the greatest influx occurred from 1717-1775
 - Estimated 1/3 of the Presbyterian population of Ireland migrated to British North America
- Sailed in simple wooden sailing ships
- What propelled Ulster Scots out of Ireland?
 - Desire for religious freedom, distance from organized government, land ownership, economic advantages
 - Distance from organized government
 - First Wave (1717-1718): 5,000 leave Ulster
 - Second Wave (1725-1729): More than 5,000 additional settlers leave
- These two waves tended to enter through Philadelphia and the Delaware River
- Conflicts flared between the Ulster Scots and Quakers and Germans already living in the area

Where Did They Go?

- Those who left Ulster in 1718 came from two districts in Londonderry County
- Those from the Bann Valley north of Garvagh and Kilrea headed for Maine and New Hampshire
 - These included the parishes of Aghadowey, Macosquin, Kilrea, Dunboe, and Ballywin
- Those from the Foyle Valley, including parts of Donegal, Londonderry, and Tyrone headed for Massachusetts

Londonderry in the New World

- In 1719, after not being welcomed in Boston or Haverhill to which they had gone, about 15 families led by Rev. James MacGregor went north and founded Nutfield in New Hampshire
- It was named after the great quantity of chestnuts, walnuts, and butternuts found there
- In June 1722, the settlement was incorporated as a town and the following year was renamed Londonderry
- After 1723, Londonderry served as a staging post for many other Scots-Irish settlers in their journeys to Nova Scotia, Pennsylvania, and elsewhere

1722 List of "Proprietors of Londonderry"

- James McKeen, John Barnett, Archibald Clendinin/Clendenin, John Mitchell, James Sterrett/Sterret, James Anderson, Allen Anderson, Randall Alexander, James Gregg, James Clark, James Nesmith, Robert Weir, John Morrison, Samuel Allison, Thomas Steele, John Stewart/Stuart

Nova Scotia

- Alexander McNutt, a British army officer, colonist, and land agent was living in Londonderry, New Hampshire in 1758
- He was responsible for seeing approximately 500 Ulster Scots arrive in Nova Scotia in the early 1760s
- In the Spring of 1761, he advertised in Ulster for "industrious farmers and useful mechanics" to emigrate
- They were promised 200 acres of land to the head of the family and 50 acres to each member
- In October 1761, 300 colonists arrived in Halifax aboard the ships *Hopewell* and *Nancy*
- Many stayed though others migrated south to the Appalachian area

Migration to America

- Third Wave (1740-1741)
 - Characterized by push to the West, across Pennsylvania and into the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia and then on into the Carolinas
 - Following the American Revolution, they would move into Georgia, Kentucky, Tennessee, the Ozarks of Southern Missouri, and Northwest Arkansas
 - The effect of Ireland's 1740 drought would be the single most significant factor driving migration for the following 10 years
- As early as 1740, the Shenandoah Valley was the course of The Great Valley Road (or Great Wagon Road) of Virginia
- During the middle of the 1700s, the route was called "The Irish Road" because the majority of the travelers were Scotch-Irish immigrants
- Before 1746, the primary port of entry to the American colonies was Philadelphia
- After 1746, Alexandria, Virginia on the Potomac River became a vital port of entry for the Scotch-Irish
- During the 18th century, many Scotch-Irish who immigrated to America headed for western North Carolina in the part now known as Tennessee
- Fourth Wave (1754-1755); Fifth Wave (1771-1775);
- During the 4th and 5th waves, close to 250,000 individuals migrated
 - Reasons: Effective propaganda from America took two forms
 - Encouragement from family members already in America
 - Relocation schemes promulgated by several North Carolina governors
- Within about a half century from when the migrations began, fully half of the Ulsterites had emigrated

The typical Scotch-Irish Ozarker has an ancestral history of comparative isolation in the southern Appalachians from the early to middle 1700s, followed by migration to the Ozarks in the 1820s and 1830s.

Ulster Scots in America

- By the end of the 18th century, the Scots-Irish became the most influential of the white population (next to the English)
- In 1790, they were 14% of the population and this figure was higher in the Appalachian states
- In the U.S. today an estimated 44 million people claim Irish extraction. Of these, 56% can trace their roots back to the Scots-Irish Presbyterians who moved to America in the 18th century
- They were almost always supporters of American independence
 - At the time of the Revolution, they constituted 1/6 of the whole population in 13 colonies
 - They or their descendants contributed 12 of the 56 signers of the Declaration of Independence and 12 of the 54 delegates to the Constitutional Convention
 - The Mecklenburg Resolves voted by the Scots-Irish in North Carolina anticipated by more than a year the Declaration of Independence
- In the Civil War, they were predominantly loyal to the Union, no matter where they lived
 - Noted for total reverence for the Almighty, deep devotion to their families, sincere love of country, and passionate belief in liberty
 - In fact, the four cornerstones of their life are God, Country, Family, and Liberty
- They were recognized for heroism, raw courage, determination
- Also noted for economy in use of language and hesitancy in expressing emotion publically
 - They spoke rather through their eyes and hearts

How the Scots-Irish Influenced Daniel Boone

- In 1775, the Cherokee tribe sells Kentucky to a Scots-Irishman named Richard Henderson and his Transylvania Co
- Henderson hires Daniel Boone and 38 woodsmen to blaze the Wilderness Road
- The migration of thousands of Ulster families over the Wilderness Road and through the Cumberland Gap enabled southern Appalachia and later the Ozarks of Arkansas and Missouri to become the only Scots-Irish "ethnic islands" (areas of concentration) in the United States
- By 1775, between 200,000 and 300,000 Scots-Irish had immigrated to America
- The man who originally piqued Boone's interest in Kentucky was a Scots-Irishman named John Finley
 - John led Boone and 4 others from their homes in the Yadkin Valley of western North Carolina to the Cumberland Gap in 1769
 - Of the 4 men who accompanied Boone on his first visit through Powell Valley, 3 were Scots-Irish. Only 1 was English

Naming Customs

- Many times, Scottish women kept their own family names in legal documents or lists
- They also preserved the mother's identity by using maternal surnames as middle names of children
- If the line was Huguenot, the surname will be carried down through each generation and given to both boys and girls
- Eldest son named after paternal grandfather with mother's maiden name as middle name
- Second son named after maternal grandfather with grandmother's maiden name as middle name
- Third son named after father with possibly a saint's name as middle name
- First daughter named after maternal grandmother; Second daughter named after paternal grandmother
- Third daughter named after mother; The middle name of daughters was drawn from grandmothers, aunts, and extended family women
- Younger children took the names of other ancestors, aunts, uncles, or close family friends and associates. If the first son died, the fourth son might be given his name

Contributions of Scots-Irish

- Squirrel rifle (A small-caliber rifle suitable only for small game)
- Scotch-whiskey, including moonshine (The English drank ale; The Scotch and Irish preferred whiskey)
- Music, including acoustic bluegrass, country and old-time gospel melodies of the Ozark region
 - Songwriter Stephen Collins Foster ("My Old Kentucky Home") was of Scots-Irish ancestry
- Quilts
 - Reflect Scotch-Irish social history; Espoused individual autonomy and self-reliance within a strong kinship structure
- Zeal for education
- At the beginning of the 18th century, Ulster probably had a lower percentage of illiteracy than anywhere else in the world
 - A petition to one of the colonial governors in America asking for advice about emigrating was signed by 322 men. Only 13 had to make their mark
- Established Princeton as 4th institution of higher learning in America in 1746
 - First known as College of New Jersey before moving to Princeton, New Jersey, and being renamed in 1756
 - The college was the educational and religious capital of Scotch-Irish America
- Also established many other colleges
- Pennsylvania, original rallying ground of the transplanted Ulster Scots, was first state to make provision for free public schools

Scots-Irish Superstitions

- Scotch-Irish superstitions were handed down for many years
 - If the nose itches, a letter is coming (a very important event to our ancestors, most of whom received only two or three letters a year)
 - If your right ear itches, what is being said about you is good
 - If your left ear itches, someone is speaking ill of you
 - One should get out of bed on the right hand side; it was bad luck to rise on the left
 - When visiting the sick, be sure that it is the right foot that is first inside the door
 - Home builders placed a piece of silver under the door-post to bring good luck on all those who enter
 - If one borrows salt from a neighbor, return it as quickly as possible—if the borrower should die before returning the salt, his ghost will come back to haunt
 - It's unlucky to look back after starting out
 - If one should see a snake, rat or mouse while journeying, then one might as well turn back for no good will come out of the trip
 - The Scottish cook knew never to throw away a remnant of bread dough—the leftover dough was made into small cakes for children or else there would be bad luck. Even better was to punch a hole into the dough to keep evil spirits away. This is said to be the origin of doughnuts

Some Famous Scots-Irish

- 17 of the U.S. presidents have Scots-Irish ancestry
- Davy Crockett, grandson of an Ulster emigrant from East Donegal/North Tyrone
- Sam Houston of Texas was of an East Antrim family

Davy Crockett Story

- When he was running for Congress in Tennessee, Davy was to debate the issues at a backwoods picnic with his opponent
- His opponent, a great spellbinder in the region, spoke learnedly about the tariff and the national bank
- Crockett knew little or nothing about either subject
- When it was his turn to speak, he invited his all-male audience to join him for a drink
- The response was said to be a spontaneous “YES!”
- Crockett won the election

Some Famous Scots-Irish

- Samuel Clemens aka Mark Twain
- Edgar Allen Poe
- William Clark of the Lewis & Clark Expedition
- Ulysses S. Grant & J.E.B. Stuart—Civil War generals
- John Wayne
- Hearst publishing dynasty traces its Virginia family back to John Hearst, a County Monaghan Presbyterian who, along with 300 kinsfolk, sailed from Newry, County Down in 1764 for a fare of 6 shillings and 8 pence each

Quotes Regarding the Scots-Irish

- James Buchanan (15th President of U.S. whose family came from County Tyrone):
 - “My Ulster blood is my most priceless heritage”
- General George Washington:
 - “If defeated everywhere else, I will make my stand for liberty among the Scots-Irish in my native Virginia”
- President Woodrow Wilson (28th President of U.S.):
 - “The beauty about a Scotch-Irishman is that he not only thinks he is right, but he knows he is right”

Scots-Irish Prayer

- “Lord grant that I may always be right, for Thou knowest I am hard to turn”

INFORMATION: Scots-Irish were overwhelmingly Presbyterian but, on the frontiers, they became Methodists and Baptists after becoming disenchanted with the Presbyterian Church. Many nationalities changed religion on the prairie. People worshipped at whatever church was available in town.

Some Web Resources

- Belfast Newsletter newspaper index, 1737-1800
- www.uclouisiana.edu/bnl
- Cyndi’s List: Ireland
cyndislist.com/ireland.htm
- Eneclann
www.eneclann.ie
- Ulster Heritage
www.ulsterheritage.com
- Ulster Ancestry
www.ulsterancestry.com

Let’s Celebrate the Scots-Irish!