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Our Scotch-Irish Heritage

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The Term: Scotch-Irish

Who are the Scotch-Irish, and what does the term mean?

"The term "Scotch-Irish" is an Americanism, generally unknown in Scotland and Ireland, and rarely used by British historians. In American usage, it refers to people of Scottish descent who, having lived for a time in the north of Ireland, migrated in considerable numbers to the American colonies in the eighteenth century." The Scotch-Irish, A Social History, pg. i - James G. Leyburn.

The "plantation" of Ulster, in northern Ireland, with Scottish immigrants, took place from roughly 1606 through 1700. The "Great Migration" of Scotch-Irish to America took place from 1717 through 1776. An estimated 200-250,000 Scotch-Irish migrated to America during this period. The period of the "Great Migration" of Scotch-Irish took place at approximately the same time as the German Palatine migration.

It is believed that, at the time of the Revolution, they comprised 10-15% of the population of the United States. Their negative feelings toward England played no small part in the emotion of the "stew" that led to the American Revolution.

Although there is evidence of the use of this term, or others, (Ulster Irish, Northern Irish, Irish Presbyterians) to differentiate the Scotch/Irish immigrants from other citizens of America, it is believed to have generally fallen into non-use by the 1840's, wherever it had been used. The use of the term "Irish" in the United States up to that time usually meant Scotch-Irish, as the Catholic Irish simply had not been a major immigrating force until that time.

All that changed, however, with the potato famine and the resulting crunch of the greatest immigration America has ever experienced, from the southern regions of Ireland. An estimated 2 million Irishmen, mostly Catholic, and mostly from the southern parts of Ireland, immigrated to America during the period 1846-1856. They were poor. They congregated in the cities in which they landed in ghetto clusters. They were Catholic. They would work for next to nothing while native born American workers saw jobs threatened and the decline of value in their own labor. The Irish, as many new classes of immigrants are in a new country, were not looked on favorably by the general population.

This caused a renewal in the resident population of Scotch-Irish Americans to identify

themselves in such a manner that they would not be thrown in the same "class" of citizenry as the new, Catholic, Irish immigrants. Thus, a renewal in the use of the term Scotch-Irish.

It is a useful term to the family historian as the Scotch-Irish people are definitely a different class of immigrant than the southern, Catholic Irish; nor, can they be thrown in the same pot as their Scottish brethren. "..the Scots who lived in Ulster before they came to America simply were not, in background, religion, and many other aspects of culture, identical with the Irish of the southern provinces of Leinster, Munster, and Connaught; neither were they, after many decades, any longer identical with the people of Scotland." The Scotch-Irish, A Social History, pg. 333 - James G. Leyburn.

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Chronology - Time-Line of the Scotch-Irish History

Before 1603 - - Background: For centuries, England had tried repeatedly and constantly to subdue the island of Ireland and the Irish had stubbornly resisted. There had been attempts over the years to transplant English settlers to Ireland in an attempt to "infiltrate" and/or "control" the Irish people and their society, but these had failed. By 1603, the problem was even more acute:

- From a financial standpoint, Ireland was a drain on the treasury of England.
- Ireland was one of the areas in Europe where the Catholic faith held steady while Protestantism had spread across much of the continent and even into England and Scotland. Aside from the missionary goal of converting the Irish was the real consideration of not having a neighbor that might hold a religion in common with its enemies.

In the closing years of the 1500's, England had sent a 20,000 man army to Ireland to quell an uprising. After an initial failure, the commander was replaced by a man named Lord Mountjoy, who was particularly ruthless. He destroyed all the food, houses, and cattle he could find. Starvation in their bellies and defeats on the battlefields finally made the Irish submit to England, again, just as Queen Elizabeth lay dieing in 1603.

An area that had been hit hard during this destruction was the north, the "kingdom" of Ireland called Ulster, consisting of nine counties.

In the meantime, in Scotland, times were never all that good, but the turn of the century saw the typical Scottish farmer in dire straits. The western coast of Scotland is only 20-30 miles from the Ulster coast.

Thus, the scene was set for a series of developments leading to:

- Ireland being carved into two pieces causing disharmony and discord to this day.
- A "double emigration" from Scotland: to Ireland and then to the United States of hundreds of thousands of immigrants we have come to know as the Scotch-Irish.

1603.. Elizabeth I dies and James VI, King of Scotland, becomes King James I of England

1606.. The first Ulster colonies are settled. Ironically, by private entrepreneurs, and Scottish at that. Some Scottish entrepreneurs had come up with the idea of acquiring some land and transplanting their own countrymen to farm them. These beginning colonies were successful and word quickly spread back to Scotland.

1607.. King James I declared that the land held by the defeated Irish rebel leaders, who had

fled to the continent, was reverted to the Crown. This legal action was over-reaching, but when you're the King, what the heck. King James I took control of 3,000,000 acres of Ulster land.

1609.. James I inform the Privy Council of Scotland: "the King.. out of his unspeakable love and tender affection for his Scottish subjects, has decided that they will be allowed to participate in this great adventure". Remember, James I, becoming King of England in 1603, had already been King of Scotland for 35 years before that (he was crowned the King of Scotland when he was one year old.)

1620.. An estimated 50,000 Scottish (and some English) settlers are now in northern Ireland (Ulster).

1625.. King James I died and his son Charles I was crowned King. King James I was a definitely pro-Anglican and anti-Presbyterian, but at least he was somewhat of a politician about trying to convert the Scots to the more traditional Church of England. Charles I, however, had no tact, he tried to force the Anglican church down the throats of the Scottish people and deprive them of their Presbyterianism. (This is the same climate that led to the first flight of Puritans to found the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1630.)

1637.. King Charles required changes in the churches of Scotland to more closely resemble the Church of England. The Scottish people arise and overthrow the episcopacy that Charles I has tried to implement. Presbyterianism in Scotland survived.

1640.. An estimated 100,000 Scottish (and some English) settlers are now in northern Ireland (Ulster).

1642.. England is now in a Civil War, principally over the religious issues of the day: Puritanism versus the Church of England. The Scots are on the fringes of this war. They favor the more like-minded Puritans, but, after all, Charles I is still a Scot.

1642.. The Catholics in Ireland rebel against the north. Estimates of the deaths in this uprising vary, but many thousands die. The emigration of Scots to Ireland drops off.

1650.. The English Civil War ends with Oliver Cromwell responsible for the beheading of King Charles I. Then, he invaded Scotland, conquering the Scots at Dunbar. He then set out to crush the Scottish spirit.

1650.. Meanwhile, back in Ireland, the Irish rebellion went on for ten long years, until Cromwell came from England in 1650 and crushed the rebellion. He took neither side, however. He killed both Catholics and Presbyterians alike to let them know that England was in charge and wouldn't take disobedience from either side. He was particularly cruel and vicious during his campaigns.

Whether the ends justify the means or not, at least peace did follow Cromwell's "policing action". The immigration of Scots Ireland now resume in 1650.

1653.. Cromwell ordered venerated leaders of their church driven from their places of meeting by English soldiers and led like criminals through the streets of Edinburgh.

1660.. The Puritan Cromwell dies and Charles II resumes the crown. Here we go again, a pro-Anglican as head of the country. As bad as times were for the Scots under Cromwell, worse times were ahead. During the 1660's, the Scottish suffered through what is called the "killing times", as the English tried again to force the Church of England down the throats of the Scots. This was the time of the rise of the term "covenanter", those Scots that, in

effect, were guerillas fighting against the English landlords.

We have an example of the "killing times" that has been passed down in our family. A fourteen year old girl was arrested because of her failure to give allegiance to the English King in a way that connoted his being head of the church. This fourteen year old girl was ordered to DEATH BY DROWNING for refusing. This is how cruel things were getting over there at that time.

Emigration from Scotland to Ireland increased with the killing times.

1679.. The Covenanters (protestant rebels) are decisively defeated at the Battle of Bothwell Bridge in Scotland.

1690.. The King of England, William of Orange soundly defeats James II at the Battle of Boyne in Ireland. William is staunchly protestant, James is Catholic. This assures the continuation of the protestant Irish of the north, most Scottish descendants, to continue their protestant faith.

A result of of the English victory at the Battle of Boyne is reponsible for the last wave of immigrants from Scotland to England in the last decade of the 1600's. An estimated 50,000 Scots leave Scotland for northern Ireland.

1717.. The Exodus of the Scotch-Irish from Ulster to America now begins in earnest. Five thousand Ulstermen leave for America that year. Between 1717 and the American Revolution, approximately a quarter of a million Scotch-Irish will leave Ireland for America. Approximately 100 years after the original Ulster plantations have been planted they have succeeded... and they have also failed. In 100 years, Ulster had been transformed from a totally obliterated landscape to a respectable area with an economy that produced goods. Plagued by high rents, four years of drought, English import/export policies, and the religious factor thrown in (although religion wasn't a prime motivating factor in the Scotch/Irish migration as it was, say, with the Puritans.), many Scots look for a better life in America.

It is interesting to note that even though the Catholic Irish endured many of the same hardships as their Northern counterparts, the Catholic Irish did not participate in this Exodus. The emigration was 99% Protestant, Ulster-Scots leaving for the America's. Although there were Catholic Irish who fled to other Catholic countries, principally France and Spain.

1776.. The American Revolution marks the end of this immigration era. Approximately 200-250,000 thousand Scotch-Irish have immigrated to America since 1717. There are more than that by 1776. If one is to assume the doubling of a population every 30 years, and a ratable rate of immigration, one could expect the Scotch-Irish numbered perhaps 10-25% of the 2 1/4 million Americans in 1776. At the time of the Revolution, the Scotch-Irish comprised the second largest ethnic group in America after the English, and ahead of the Germans.

(PS. As you do your census work, you may see the results of a study done by the census bureau by categorizing names based on where the name "might" have come from in estimating the ethnic make-up of the 1790 census. That study is a joke. Pay no attention to it. (How can one look at a Scottish name and tell if it is Scottish or Scotch-Irish? Or look at Smith or Taylor and tell what nationality it is?).

One parting word. All of the above history speaks in terms of generalities. As we family historians try to discover and unlock the secrets of the past of our individual ancestors, there

are always individual exceptions to account for. There were English settlers in northern Ireland. There were French Huguenots (the French protestant rebels, "roughly" equivalent to the Puritans in England and the Covenanters in Scotland) in northern Ireland. There were German Palatine refugees in northern Ireland. There were refugees from other parts of the world to Ireland, as well, at various times.

My recommendation is to not worry about the actual blood line of your ancestry, but to appreciate the historical significance of the above events that your ancestor lived through, no matter how he or she got there. (e.g. your ancestor passing through Scotland for a generation or two, or three, or four, was simply one more stop on the genealogical chain of your past, just as significant as two or three generations of your ancestors living in Ohio in the 1800's.)

You also certainly cannot rely on a name to guarantee any source of your ancestry. French, English, and German names could all be "Irish'd" on coming to Ireland, as they might have been again been "anglicized" in coming to America. In fact, Scotch names were "Irish'd", as well as the other way around, on coming to America, ie O'Neill switched to MacNeil or vice versa. I even have one line of Scotch-Irish relatives that changed their name from Campbell to McCampbell on coming to America. There is no equivalent for McCampbell in either Ireland or Scotland - it is an all-American original made-up name!

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Scotch-Irish links:

Scotch-Irish history and/or migration:

[The Seawright Clan Page](#) - interesting Scotch-Irish material

Scotch-Irish Heritage / Genealogy Topics (leading to more links)

[Northern Ireland and the US Presidency](#), lists US Presidents with ties to Northern Ireland

Many Scotch/Irish settled in Pennsylvania. Here is a [history of early Pennsylvania](#) that you might find interesting that discusses the different immigrant classes, including the Scotch/Irish to Pennsylvania.

A [Chronicle to the Scotch-Irish in Virginia](#). A specific, surname indexed, listing of Scotch-Irish settlers tied to events.

See [the Canada Ulster Scots Page](#) for an interesting perspective of our Scotch-Irish heritage.

A family that married into the first generation of descendants from the Edwin Taylor's were the McBrides, Scotch / Irish immigrants. Read their story, passed through the generations, of their McBride and McKee ancestors' story in coming to America: [A Miracle Finding of Lost Love](#).

Family Histories of our ancestors, who were most likely Scotch/Irish, include: [Beaty](#), [McCart](#), [Pollock](#), [Taylor](#)

[Our Scottish Heritage](#) and, also [Our Irish Heritage](#)

[Island Ireland](#)

The Huguenots were the French equivalent of the Puritan movement - Protestant reformation in the 16th and 17th centuries. Here is a [list of Huguenot resources](#).

The Current Situation in Northern Ireland

[The Cothrom Page](#) presents a fairly comprehensive overview of the current conflict in Ireland and points of view of folks with the differing interests.

The [Ulster Cyber Community FAQ](#) presents a summary of the differences between Gaelic-Irish and Scotch-Irish. This is their [Home page](#).

Read More About It:

The Scotch-Irish - A Social History, James G. Leyburn, Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 1962. (Available in paperback at many bookstores.)

The [Romancing the Web On-Line Bookstore](#) has an on-line collection of Scottish Books. (I am not connected with this commercial site. I only list it here for your information.)

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