

SCOTS, IRISH or SCOTCH-IRISH?

"Scotch-Irish" is a term used by many in North America with the mistaken belief that they are descendants of blends of some Scots and some Irish. In most cases this is not so. Although the term "Scotch-Irish" can be traced to 1744, it was not widely used until the middle of the nineteenth century.

Scottish immigration to America was not encouraged prior to the Act of Union (1707). Most Scots who found their way to America prior to the Act came as either employees of English firms, indentured servants, or as prisoners of war. The American colonies were English, not Scottish. Recall that speedy and sure execution was reserved for only the top few on the losing side in each civil war but that the thousands of Scots captured at such battles as Worcester posed a difficult problem to Cromwell. He solved this by sending prisoners to the Americas as indentured servants. The majority of those that went to Barbados died; the fortunate minority sent to the North American colonies from Massachusetts (then embracing Maine) to Virginia survived to become citizens. While Scottish mercenaries were valued among the Protestant armies on the Continent, Ireland was the only 'foreign' field readily open to the migration of men with families - and it is only twelve miles away.

Queen Elizabeth forfeited the titles of the earls of Ulster who were in revolt against the crown and gave their lands away to loyal Englishmen. A century before the Act of the Union, Elizabeth and her heir, James VI and I, "planted" thousands of immigrants in the north of Ireland -- ninety-eight percent of whom were Protestant Scots. After several generations in Ireland, these Scots considered themselves to be 'Irish' but maintained the close relationship with Scotland which exists even today. Four or five generations later, these "Ulster Scots" found the gates open to migrate to the American colonies.

It is estimated that between 1720 and 1775 some three hundred thousand Protestant Ulster Scots entered the American colonies, largely through the ports of Newcastle, Delaware, and Annapolis, Maryland. They called themselves 'Irish.' A century later the Roman Catholic "real" Irish, fleeing the great potato famine, began to arrive in America. In an effort to distance themselves from the later arrivals, the descendants of the earlier influx from Ireland began to call themselves "Scotch-Irish". The preferred term today is "Ulster Scots "

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