

A HISTORY OF THE SCOTCH-IRISH AND THEIR INFLUENCE IN KENTUCKY

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In 1787 Historian John Fiske, in writing about the Carolina frontier, noted that the Scotch-Irish from Ulster were more important and far more numerous than all the other elements in the population, and have played a much greater and more extensive part in American history than has yet been realized. There was hardly one of the thirteen colonies upon which these Scotch-Irish did not leave their mark.¹ The Scotch-Irish trail is conspicuous through Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, the Carolinas, and Virginia before is entered Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi, Ohio, Kansas, and on out to California.

Who were the people called by this compound name, Scotch-Irish? The answer takes us back to 1610. The same year that Jamestown was founded King James I planned another colony in Northern Ireland. This colony, known as the Ulster Plantation, was to develop the resources of the country and to protect England. The settlers were picked men and women of the most excellent sort from the lowlands of Scotland, and from England.

Originally, the plan was designed for Englishmen; however, the King's Scottish subjects were allotted a share in the project. The Scots had easy access to the area, and the Ulster opportunities were more attractive and necessary to them than to the English. So, the mainstay of the Ulster Plantation turned out to be the Scottish participation.²

The lands were divided into parcels of 1,000, 1,500, and 2,000 acres; these parcels were granted to settlers of repute on conditions. The large occupier was required within four years to build a castle and bawn, or walled enclosure with towers at the angles, and to plant forty-eight men of Scotch or English extraction on the estate. Other settlers were required to build a bawn in addition to their building. All the colonists were required to be well supplied with arms. Many of the Scottish Undertakers who made up the list in 1610 were Lords, Dukes, and Earls. They included Andrew Stewart, Lord Ochiltree who settled in county Tyrone; Sir Alexander Hamilton (in county Cavan); Sir Robert MacLellan (county Donegal); Sir Thomas Boyd (county Tyrone); John Brown (county Cavan); and there were the Crawfords, Fowlers, Johnstones, Lockharts, and others.³

Because the Scotch-Irish sailed from Northern Ireland (Ulster) to America they have been confused in the colonies and in the annals of history with the Irish. The belief that marriage between the Scots and Irish produced the race is erroneous. The Protestant Ulster Scots in the North and their Southern neighbors mixed very little. Marriage was prohibited and their children attended different schools.⁴

In Northern Ireland the term Ulster Scot seems to have been a preferred appellation as the people regarded and spoke of themselves as belonging to the Scottish nation. The term occurs in old Ulster documents. The appellation Scotch-Irish is also ancient, being the designation used in Scottish universities for the students returning to them from Ulster. Their Scottish character was fully recognized, but at the same time they were not from Scotland, so, the Ulster student was registered as *Scoto-Hibernus*.

When the Ulster emigrants arrived in the American colonies they objected to being called Irish, so the term Scotch-Irish is a sufficiently accurate description of the race-stock. Religious security, which varied for the Ulstermen according to the English ruler in power, plus England's exorbitant tax system, caused the Scots to turn to America in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The emigration which started around 1680 lasted for a hundred years in a never-ceasing stream. Of all the migrations to America previous to the days of steamships, this was by far the largest in volume.⁵

The first distinctively Scotch-Irish settlements known to have taken place in America were supposed to have been on the eastern shores of Maryland. In the colony granted to Lord Baltimore, in 1632, there were "five hundred people of British or Irish descent to come from other places to plant and reside within our said province . . ." Since there was little emigration from Ireland, except from Ulster, until after the War of 1812 it is assumed the Irish mentioned were the Scotch-Irish.⁶ Other known facts, especially in ministerial notices and State Papers, harmonize with the assumption.

The arrival of greater numbers of these pioneers in the colonies marked a beginning of expansion. From 1714 to 1720 fifty-four vessels arrived in Boston harbour from Ireland with immigrants. And larger numbers poured into Pennsylvania, a recognized Scotch-Irish stronghold. From December, 1728, to December, 1729, out of 6,208 Pennsylvania immigrants, 5,605 were Scotch-Irish. Later the arrivals exceeded 10,000 in a year. More than half the Presbyterians of Ulster were transplanted to America between 1730 and 1770, altogether about half a million persons. They made up about one-sixth of the population of colonial America at the time of the Revolution.⁷

Prepared by their life in Ulster to meet hostilities, the Scotch-Irish moved on to the frontiers, settling by streams in the valleys of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Virginia, and the Carolinas. At a later time they formed almost the entire population of West Virginia, and they were the men who chiefly built up the Commonwealth of Kentucky and Tennessee.⁸

While the blood of many nations flows in the veins of Kentuckians, the original strong type of English and Scotch-Irish has been preserved. From the first explorers and surveyors the Scotch-Irish have played a dominant part in the state's history. One of the earliest of these explorers was John Finley who, in 1769, piloted Daniel Boone and his four companions into the Kentucky territory two years after he had found what is now Cumberland Gap.

In September, 1734, Michael Finley from county Armagh, Ireland, presumably accompanied by his brother, Archibald Finley, settled in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. According to the best authorities, Archibald was the father of John Finley, or Findlay. Also it is a well known fact that the illustrious Samuel Finley, president of Princeton, and the Rev. James Finley were both born in county Armagh, Ireland. (Northern Ireland from which the Scotch-Irish came to America is made up of the following six counties: Londonderry, Antrim, Down, Tyrone, Fermanagh, and Armagh. These counties today are an integral part of the British Crown. Eire, Southern Ireland, composed of 26 counties, proclaimed itself the Republic of Ireland, April 18, 1949, and severed its last ties with Great Britain.)⁹

Following the Finley-Boone exploration came Colonel James Henry Knox, of county Antrim stock, and his Long Hunters. Knox, for whom Knox County was named in 1799, was Washington's friend, confidant, and finally Secretary of War. He took part in all the major engagements in the Revolutionary War up to the siege of Yorktown. This expedition started in 1770 and was the second one worthy of note. Knox's party was from Holston, on Clinch River, and thoroughly explored the middle and southern regions of Kentucky.

The third expedition worthy of note was carried out by the distinguished Captain Thomas Bullitt (not Scotch-Irish) and the Scotch-Irish brothers from Botetourt County, Virginia, James, George, and Robert McAfee in 1773. McAfee Station became one of the early centers of settlement. And a few years later the McAfees and McCouns erected a log church which they named Providence.¹⁰ This could well be one of the first churches in the Kentucky territory.

The father of the McAfee boys, James McAfee, came to Pennsylvania from Northern Ireland about 1739, and later moved to Western Virginia. Robert Breckinridge McAfee (1784-1849), grandson of

James, and son of Robert, one of the early explorers, was born in what is now Mercer County. Soldier, lawyer, statesman, theologian, and writer, Robert McAfee followed the pattern of the early Scotch-Irish who brought their love for learning with them to the New World. A proficient pupil, he studied at Transylvania Seminary from 1795 to 1797. After becoming aroused over the Alien and Sedition Acts he decided to become a politician. In 1800 he began the study of law under John Breckinridge. He served in both the Senate and House of Representatives; was a member of the first National Democratic Convention of 1832; and was appointed by President Jackson to serve as Chargé at Bogota, New Granada, from 1833 to 1837. He died while in retirement on his farm in Mercer County.

Perhaps very few men of his generation held a more commanding position, or took a more decisive part in all the great questions that confronted Kentucky from 1793 to 1806 than the Honorable John Breckinridge, the Jeffersonian leader in Kentucky. His ancestors were among those in Scotland who suffered long and heroically for liberty and the reformed church before moving to Northern Ireland, and from there to America. Like many of the early Kentucky patriots, John Breckinridge was born in Augusta County, Virginia, where Staunton now stands. At an early age his family moved to Botetourt County where his father, Colonel Robert Breckinridge, died when John was eleven. His education, both preparatory and professional, was conducted privately, except for two years at William and Mary, in Virginia.

At about the age of 19, while he was still at William and Mary, John Breckinridge was elected to the Virginia House of Burgesses without his knowledge. Because of his youth the election was twice set aside, and it was on the third return, and against his wishes, that he took his seat. From that time until his death he lived constantly as a lawyer and statesman. In the Spring of 1793 he moved to Kentucky, and settled in Lexington at "Cabell's Dale."

The constitution of 1798-99 was more the work of John Breckinridge's hands than of any other single man.¹¹ The question of slavery, the civil and criminal laws, the land laws, the law of descents, the penitentiary system — all of these felt the guiding hand of John Breckinridge. It was said of him that there was implanted in his being, from earliest childhood, a thirst for knowledge that seemed to the end of his life insatiable.

John Breckinridge, loved by all who knew him, had nine children, and his descendants are numerous, both by his name and others. His son, John, Princeton theologian, is said to have feared God, but not the face of man. John Cabell, Robert Jefferson, and others

of this illustrious family have honored Kentucky with their distinguished services.

Among the pioneers of Kentucky another conspicuous family played an important part. From 1782 until his death in Frankfort, in 1837, John Brown, patriot, statesman, and citizen, played a great role in the beginning of the state's political history. John, the son of another Scotch-Irish minister, the Rev. John Brown and Margaret Preston, was born at Staunton, Virginia, in 1757. He was at Princeton (founded by Scotch-Irish ministers and educators) when the American army made its memorable retreat through New Jersey. The college was broken up and John joined Washington's forces and crossed the Delaware with them. Later he completed his education at William and Mary; assisted the celebrated blind minister, Dr. Waddill, for two years as a teacher in his school; read law in the office of Mr. Jefferson; and moved to Kentucky in 1782 — just after the battle of the Blue Licks. He first settled at Danville, political center at that time, and later moved to Frankfort.

The Honorable John Brown was a distinguished actor in all the events that attended the admission of Kentucky into the union, and securing for the West the navigation of the Mississippi.¹² His accomplished wife was the daughter of the Rev. John Mason, a distinguished divine. Their home, Liberty Hall, which was built in Frankfort in 1796, is now owned by the National Society of the Colonial Dames of America, Commonwealth of Kentucky. It was formally displayed, September 4, 1957, in honor of Frankfort LaFayette Day. The society also owns the Orlando Brown House in Frankfort. Orlando was the son of John Brown, and both historic houses were built by Kentucky's first senator.¹³

Other members of the Brown family have been James, a distinguished lawyer, United States Senator, and minister to France; Dr. Samuel Brown, known for his medical writings and his theory and practice of medicine in Transylvania University; and Dr. Preston W. Brown, the youngest, known as a successful practitioner of medicine in Kentucky.

General Benjamin Logan, for whom Logan County was named, was originally of Scotch stock, too. The Logan family emigrated from Northern Ireland to Pennsylvania early in the eighteenth century, and, following the Scotch-Irish trail, moved on to Augusta County, Virginia, where Benjamin was born in 1743.

Possessor of the qualities that helped make America great, Benjamin Logan has been described as follows: "As the eye wanders along the serried [probably means seriate] ranks of those stern and iron men, who stand so firm and fearless amid the gloom of overhanging forests,

it is arrested by a commanding form which towers conspicuous among them all — tall, athletic, dignified, a face cast in the finest mould of manly beauty, dark, grave, and contemplative, and which, while it evidences unyielding fortitude and impenetrable reserve, invites to a confidence which never betrays."¹⁴

Such was Benjamin Logan, a member of the Virginia Assembly from Lincoln County for three terms; member of the convention, 1792, which made the first constitution of Kentucky; member of the electoral college which made Isaac Shelby first Governor of Kentucky; and was one of the most influential and trusted of Kentucky leaders throughout the Revolution. He is said to be one of those bold pioneers who laid the foundation of arts, civilization, religion and law in what was then the howling wilderness of Kentucky. He first came into the Kentucky area in 1775, brought his family the next year and built a fort in what is now Lincoln County.

In the field of religion the Ulster Scots established and propagated the Presbyterian Church in America and in Kentucky. In Ulster the term Ulster Scot and Ulster Presbyterian was practically synonymous. But the identification began to fail, somewhat, in America. There was a large leakage from Presbyterianism to Congregationalism, and later the faith was diffused with other denominations throughout the country.

The early history of Presbyterianism in Kentucky centers around the Rev. David Rice who immigrated from Virginia to Kentucky in 1783, nine years before the state was recognized. Following him shortly were other Scotch-Irish ministers — Adam Rankin, James Crawford, Thomas Craighead, and Andrew McClure — who organized the Presbytery of Transylvania at Danville, October 17, 1786. Eighty years before, the Scotch-Irish had formed the Presbytery of Philadelphia, the first in America.

A number of other influential Presbyterian ministers whose fathers or grandfathers were from Northern Ireland came into the territory at an early date. The Rev. Robert Marshall was a native of Northern Ireland, and was ordained, in 1793, pastor of Bethel and Blue Spring churches. He was one of the leaders in the great revival of 1800, but soon returned to his former doctrine.

The Rev. Robert Wilson was descended from ancestors whom persecution had driven from Northern Ireland to Western Virginia. He came to Kentucky as a missionary in 1798, married and settled in Mason County. It was through him the Presbyterian churches of Maysville and Augusta were organized. Histories of the Presbyterian Church in Kentucky have records of many more of these gentlemen who were well versed in Latin and Greek.

Ephriam McDowell, the internationally-known surgeon who performed the first ovariectomy, was the grandson of Ephriam McDowell who with brothers James and John came from Ulster. Other McDowells were well and favorably known in American history.¹⁵

Among other distinguished physicians was the courteous, dignified Joseph Nathaniel McCormack whose father was a native of county Fermanagh, Northern Ireland. Dr. McCormack, responsible for many noteworthy reforms, drafted the state's first sanitary code and was an influence in its enactment into law. From 1899 to 1913 he was chairman of the committee on organization of the American Medical Association, and he stumped the country in an effort to bring eligible members into the society.

Dr. McCormack was instrumental in the erection and equipping of a model office and laboratory building in Louisville for the State Board of Health. And in 1888 he received personal thanks from President Cleveland for his work in the cholera epidemic.¹⁶

It is impossible to tell the story of the American nation without considering the contributions of the Scotch-Irish. In promoting the movement for national independence the names are legion. The active part which the Scotch-Irish took in the American Revolution was a continuation of popular resistance to the British that began in Ulster, and even earlier. The Scotch-Irish in America and in the homeland of Ulster had interests in common that gave them a strong political sympathy. Both were dependencies of the British Crown so it was natural that they should form a large part of the revolutionary armies which severed the New World from Britain.

At the close of the Revolution immigration was greatly increased in Kentucky by the coming of Revolutionary soldiers, and among them were the Scotch-Irish who believed in "government of the people, by the people, and for the people." Their memories have been perpetuated in numerous ways. Campbell County received its name from Col. John Campbell, a native of Northern Ireland, who received a grant of four thousand acres of land from the Commonwealth of Virginia adjoining the grant on which Louisville now stands.¹⁷

Todd County was named for Col. John Todd who fell at the battle of the Blue Licks. The Todd family was of ancient Scottish descent and lived in Northern Ireland considerable time before emigrating to America.¹⁸ McCracken County, named for Captain Virgil McCracken, son of Cyrus McCracken, perpetuates the name of one of the first adventurers to Kentucky. The McCrackens, Alexanders, Blairs, Kilpatrick, Pattersons, McCleans, and Morrisons were among a company of twenty-seven Ulster families who received 100 acres of land

each, in 1735, on the shores of eastern Maine.¹⁹ Captain McCracken fell in the War of 1812 in the battle of the River Raisin, in 1813. Other counties such as Perry, Knox, and Morgan have been named for national figures, whose ancestors were of Scotch-Irish stock.

The Clarks, Johnsons, Lewises, Caldwells, McClellands, Prestons, Marshalls, Reeds, Stewarts, and many other Scotch-Irish families have helped push the frontiers of America beyond colonial imagination. The blood of their descendants now mingles with the blood of all the great races that have made America, and Kentucky, "the land of the free and the home of the brave."

FOOTNOTES

¹ John Fiske, *Old Virginia and Her Neighbors*, Vol. II, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1897, Boston and New York, p. 319.

² Henry Jones Ford, *The Scotch-Irish In America*, Princeton Press, February 1915.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 248-254.

⁴ Maude Glasgow, *The Scotch-Irish in Northern Ireland and the American Colonies*, Putnam's Sons, New York, 1936, pp. 25-26.

⁵ Fiske, *op. cit.*, p. 393.

⁶ Ford, *op. cit.*, p. 220.

⁷ Fiske, *op. cit.*, p. 394.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 394.

⁹ Information Please Almanac, 1956, p. 605.

¹⁰ Lewis Collins, *History of Kentucky*, Maysville, Ky., (1847), pp. 452-453.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 214-215.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 308.

¹³ *The Paducah Sun-Democrat*, September 3, 1957, p. 12.

¹⁴ Collins, *op. cit.*, p. 411.

¹⁵ Glasgow, *op. cit.*, p. 314.

¹⁶ *Dictionary of American Biography*, Vol. XI, p. 606.

¹⁷ Collins, *op. cit.*, p. 227.

¹⁸ *Dictionary of American Biography*, Vol. I, p. 133.

¹⁹ Ford, *op. cit.*, p. 247.