Scottish Settlers [1]

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See also: Argyll Colony [2]; Crofter Immigration [3]; Gaelic Language [4]; Highland Games [5]; Highland Scots; [6]

Flora McDonald College, May Day Scottishh Dancers doing the Scottish Fling, dated between 1910-1916. From the Barden Collection, North Carolina State Archives, call #: N.53.16.3780.

[7]Cape Fear Valley Scottish Festival [8]

Scots—as individuals and in families—have been in North Carolina since the beginning of permanent settlement. The first Proprietary governor of Albemarle, William Drummond [9], was born in Scotland, and later Scots-such as the Glaswegian Thomas Pollock [10], who came to North Carolina in 1683-achieved prominence in the mercantile and political life of the colony. The earliest surviving court and land grant records reveal modest numbers of distinctively Scottish names.

The first sizable group of Scots to arrive in North Carolina in a body was the so-called Argyll Colony [2] of 1739, which came from the Highland county of Argyll and settled on the Cape Fear River between Cross Creek and the Lower Little River. Numbering some 350 men, women, and children, the group was led by Highland gentry who provided much of the financing for the venture and received the largest grants of land. Gabriel Johnston [11], a Lowland Scot and North Carolina governor from 1734 to 1752, was accused of showing favoritism to his compatriots, and the General Assembly exempted the newcomers from taxation for ten years after their arrival.

The second large wave of Highland immigrants began in the late 1760s and reached its peak in 1774. It is not known exactly how many Highlanders [6] came to North Carolina, but in 1784 James Knox estimated that 20,000 Highlanders migrated to America during this second wave. Most of the Highlanders who came as part of the second wave settled in the Upper Cape Fear region that includes modern-day Cumberland [12], Harnett [13], Hoke [14], and Moore [15] Counties. Many Highlanders lived in the rural areas on the roads leading to the town of Cross Creek (later Fayetteville [16]), which was chartered by the General Assembly in 1760. The abundance of pine trees in the Sandhills enabled these settlers to make their living in naval stores [17], extracting the sap and processing it into tar, pitch, and turpentine, which they sent down the Cape Fear River [18] to Wilmington [19] on flatboats made of logs. Many Highlanders were also small farmers growing crops and raising horses, cattle, and hogs.

Other individuals and families found their way directly from the Scottish Highlands to North Carolina during the remainder of the colonial era, mainly through the ports of Brunswick [20] and Wilmington [19]. The colony, in fact, came to be extolled as "the best poor man's country" as promotional tracts and letters home praised its climate and soil and the ease with which land could be acquired. Lowland Scots also immigrated individually or in small groups to North Carolina and other colonies throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Because Lowland Scots were widely dispersed and more readily assimilated in the colonies, their story is less easily told than that of their Highland compatriots. While there were far fewer Lowland Scots than Highland Scots in North Carolina, some Lowlanders filled important roles as merchants, high-ranking officials, or military officers. Others ranged from poor immigrants and indentured servants to well-educated teachers, physicians, and clergymen.

The migration of Scot-Irish settlers to America began in the 1680s but did not occur in large numbers until the 1720s. Pennsylvania was the most popular destination, but Scot-Irish immigrants also settled in South Carolina, New Jersey, and Maryland. The Scot-Irish, or Ulster Scots, were descendants of the Lowland Scots, whom James I of England [21] had settled in Ulster, the northern and most isolated and conservative part of Ireland. During the reign of Elizabeth I, [22]the native aristocracy of Ulster had rebelled against the English government and its newly established Anglican Church. The earliest concentrated settlement of Scot-Irish immigrants in North Carolina was in Duplin [23] and New Hanover Counties [24] around 1740. The Scot-Irish were also the largest ethnic group among the settlers in the Carolina backcountry in the eighteenth century, and they were the largest group among the pioneers who crossed the Blue Ridge [25] and Allegheny Mountains [26] and settled in southwestern North Carolina in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Although the Scottish emigrants, in coming to America, were assured freedom to exercise theirPresbyterian [27] religion at a time when the Stuart monarchy favored spreading the Anglican Church throughout the British Isles, the most important motivation for Scottish emigration was economic. Profound changes in agricultural organization following the Jacobite insurrection of 1745 raised rents to unprecedented heights and resulted in large numbers of evictions. Entire communities often emigrated, with the enterprise many times being organized by "tacksmen"-leaseholders who traditionally held long leases from the landowner and in turn rented to tenants.

Several North Carolina Scots gained prominence in the colony, withGovernor Johnston [11], Royal Council member John Rutherfurd [28], and official and planter James Murray [29] being examples. Scots were also important in the religious life of the colony, being well represented among both Presbyterian and Anglican clergy. A Scottish immigrant, James Innes [30], was a notable military leader in the French and Indian War [31] (1754-63). The military prowess of North Carolina Loyalist [32] Scots was put to the test at theBattle of Moore's Creek Bridge [33] in February 1776. Although they suffered a bloody defeat in that contest, Scots constituted the backbone of North Carolina Loyalism throughout the war, and with the establishment of independence many of them sought refuge in the British colonies of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick.

After the Revolutionary War [34], Scottish immigration to North Carolina gradually resumed and continued until theWar of 1812 [35]. The number of immigrants who came to the state during this period is unknown, but Scottish port records of the 1790s and the opening years of the nineteenth century list several dozen emigrant vessels clearing for North Carolina, mainly Wilmington [19]. After the War of 1812, at least a trickle of immigration resumed: in 1820, for example, a ship carrying migrants was cleared from Campbelltown to Wilmington. The U.S. Census of 1850 [36] listed some 1,200 Scottish-born citizens in North Carolina, most of them residing in the counties of Cumberland [12], Moore [15], Robeson [37], and Richmond [38]. In the census of 1880 the number was down to some 400. A Scottish corporation in the 1880s purchased land in Madison [39] and Haywood [40]Counties with a view to bringing in Scottish settlers. The venture was unsuccessful, as was the effort to bring Highland crofters (tenant farmers) to the Sandhills at about the same time. A similar attempt of the early 1890s to attract Scots to the lands of J. Bryan Grimes [41] in Pitt County [42] fared little better.

Immigrants from the Scottish Highlands often retained distinctive elements of their culture. TheGaelic language [4] was spoken by some to at least a limited extent until the mid-nineteenth century. Presbyterianism continues to flourish in the areas of Scottish settlement, and Scottish music influenced the development of local musical forms. Clan societies and the Highland Games [5] at Grandfather Mountain [43] and elsewhere in North Carolina continue to help keep alive a sense of the importance of the state's Scottish heritage.

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Image Credit:

Flora McDonald College, May Day Scotch Dancers doing the Scottish Fling, dated between 1910-1916. From the Barden Collection, North Carolina State Archives, call #: N.53.16.3780. Available from https://www.flickr.com/photos/north-carolina-state-archives/2348111892/ [7] (accessed August 14, 2012).

Subjects:
American Revolution (1763-1789) [53]
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Cumberland County [61]
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Pitt County [66]
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Moore County [68]
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