



The Ulster-Scots in the USA Today

How the Bonds Remain . . .



Ulster-Scots Agency
Tha Boord o Ulstèr-Scotch

Ulster-Scots (Scots-Irish) influences in the United States have been meaningful and enriching since the nation was established in 1776. Even 100 years before, when America was a colonial region, the cultural and social expression of folk from the north of Ireland was manifesting itself in a positive way.

Today, in various parts of the United States the distinctive Scots-Irish culture is deep-rooted and manifestly identifiable amongst the people directly descended from the Ulster immigrants of the 18th century. The early Scots-Irish settlers may have immediately assimilated and adapted into the fabric of day-to-day American life, but they left an enduring legacy which is still to the fore in this new Millennium..

The Scots-Irish immigrants were, after all, first Americans, who pioneered new townships on the frontier, after cutting their way through dense forest and across formidable river and mountain barriers.

They were settlers who set the parameters of life in many cities and towns along the western frontier of 18th century America and, with close identification to the home, church and school, they were able to lay the foundations for a civilised society.

It has been said of the Scots-Irish that they are the first to start and the last to quit. The vigour and grit of the people are seen in their pioneering instinct, and these sterling qualities have become deeply engrained into the American psyche.

More than 300 years have elapsed since the first Ulster immigrants landed on American soil and, in that time, the enormous landscape they came to inhabit has changed beyond all recognition, with political, social and cultural perspectives of the population now increasingly diverse in what is a great melting pot of humanity.

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The Scots-Irish diaspora in America has survived over three centuries of growth in this ethnically-diverse society and the contribution it makes to life in the United States of today is very widely acknowledged as being at the heartbeat and soul of the nation.

American Federal Government estimates, as conveyed from the 2000 census figures, reveal that in the United States of the 21st century an estimated 44 million people have Irish blood extraction, in various forms. Of these, 56 per cent are identified as tracing their roots back to the families, mainly of Presbyterian stock, who moved from Ulster through the 18th century.

The term 'Scotch-Irish' is more commonly used in the United States than the 'Scots-Irish' appellation which has been prevalent in Britain to avoid usage of the word 'Scotch' with its obvious identification to an alcoholic spirit. 'Scotch-Irish' was used by the Ulster-Scots in America since 1695, but usually in a figurative way and, through the centuries until the present day, it has been the idiom for language and people.

Regions of the United States where the social and cultural inheritance of the Scots-Irish (Scotch-Irish) has become firmly embedded include eastern, central and western Pennsylvania, New Hampshire, West Virginia, Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, western Virginia, East and Middle Tennessee, North Carolina, the South Carolina Piedmont, Kentucky, West Virginia, North Georgia, Alabama and parts of Texas.

Of these regions, Scots-Irish culture is probably the most intense in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia and East Tennessee, and in western Pennsylvania, which for 200 years has had the highest concentration of Presbyterian churches in the United States.

The extent of Scots-Irish settlement even beyond these states was well illustrated by Ulster folklorist

and historian the Rev W. F. Marshall, when he said: "Ulster's mark is also visible on its place names. There are eighteen towns in the United States named after Belfast. There are seven Derrys, nine Antrims, and sixteen Tyrones. There is a Coleraine in Massachusetts, New Hampshire has a Stewartstown, Hillsborough is in Washington, Illinois, North Dakota and Wisconsin, Maine has Newry, Ohio has Banbridge. In twelve states there are twelve Milfords." Not forgetting Dungannon in western Virginia!

The United States has had a Consulate General in Belfast for 213 years and the office is one of the oldest American diplomatic posts in the world. The first-ever Consul General was Mr James Holmes, appointed on May 20, 1796, and there have been 57 others in the post since.

Towns in the United States and Northern Ireland which are officially twinned include La Grange (Georgia) with Craigavon (Co Armagh); Moorhead (Kentucky) with Ballymena (Co Antrim); Clover (South Carolina) with Larne (Co Antrim) and Drumore (Pennsylvania) with Dromore (Co Down).

Belfast has also had a capital city twinning arrangement with Nashville (same population at 500,000) and Londonderry has also enjoyed close economic and social ties with Boston, and Newry with Pittsburgh.

The rich Scots-Irish inheritance in America is reflected in politics, religion, commerce, industry, education, technological innovation, music, journalism and literature, the arts and entertainment, dialect, mannerisms and general attitudes to life.

Colloquial Scotch-Irish dialect and terminology in the United States, with the very distinctive patterns of pronunciation, enjoys remarkable parallels with speech patterns in Northern Ireland today and there

are other personal characteristics which define people who may live far apart, but who are intrinsically linked in the passage of history.

Mutual interests in culture and historical research in relation to the Scots-Irish diaspora are also maintained through shared programmes and projects at the Ulster-American Folk Park at Omagh, Co Tyrone and at the Museum of American Frontier Culture at Staunton in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. Ulster-Scots culture is also recognised by the numerous Scottish and highland societies that are located in the United States.

Educational exchange between the United States and Northern Ireland is also extensively facilitated, with many young people moving in both directions to obtain the fullest benefits of life and the rich cultural expression of society in the two countries.

The Ulster-American link has indeed been vibrant since the first wooden sailing ships left ports in the north of Ireland for the colonies of the 'New World' in the early 18th century, and it continues to resonate with many people in so many aspects of life in the United States and Northern Ireland.

The personal ambitions and remarkable attainments of the sturdy Scots-Irish (Scotch-Irish) immigrants from Ulster and, their descendants, have become an integral part of the great American dream which still shines brightly with peoples in this land of the free and radiates back across the Atlantic to those who passionately claim the bonds of kinship.

Historical research for this leaflet was carried out by BILLY KENNEDY, author of the Scots-Irish Chronicles (10 volumes), 1995 – 2009.



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