

# Researching Ulster Scots Ancestors

## *Class 1: A Brief History of Northern Ireland and the Scots Irish Migration to America*

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The study of Irish family history and the history of Ireland are intrinsically linked. If we want to understand modern Northern Ireland today, we must take a step back into history to learn the root causes that led to partition, sectarian violence, and migration out of Ulster. Studying the migration paths and settlement patterns of our ancestors can serve as clues for learning more about our Irish roots.

### Objectives

1. Brief overview of the history of Northern Ireland from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.
2. Emigration from Ulster Province to North America and settlement in North America, 1717-1890.
3. Summary of some published and online immigration sources.

### 17<sup>th</sup> Century Ireland: Revolt, Confiscation, and Plantation

Timeline of key events leading to Ulster Plantation:

- Nine Years War, 1593-1603 - Referred to as Tyrone's Rebellion, was fought by the Gaelic Lords, Hugh O'Neill of Tyrone, and Hugh Roe O'Donnell of Tyr Connell (Donegal) against English Rule.
- The Battle of Kinsale, 1601 - Although the Gaelic Lords were successful in defeating the English in the early years of the war, their defeat at the Battle of Kinsale in 1601 ended the rebellion.
- The Flight of the Earls, 1607 - After the defeat at Kinsale, the Earls (Gaelic Lords) were granted full pardons and kept their lands and titles albeit with significantly less authority. Despite this, by 1607, the Irish Earls no longer wishing to live under English fled to Europe in September 1607.
- Confiscation of lands began in 1610 - start of the Ulster Plantation (see below).
- Rebellion of 1641 - Resentment by the Irish toward British Protestants grew over the loss of their lands. Led by Catholic gentry and military, many towns in Ulster were captured by rebels. In November 1641 at Portadown, County Armagh, Irish Catholic rebels, likely under the command of Toole McCann, killed about 100 British Protestant settlers by forcing them off the bridge into the River Bann, and shooting those who tried to swim to safety.

Read the depositions: <https://1641.tcd.ie/>



## Plantation of Ulster

After the Flight of the Earls, King James I confiscated their lands and the plans for plantation began.

By 1610 plantation of English and Scottish settlers had started. Plantation occurred in six counties in Ulster Province:

- Armagh
- Cavan
- Coleraine (renamed Londonderry) –  
planted by the London Companies not  
from Scotland
- Donegal
- Fermanagh
- Tyrone

Read more at *The Great Parchment Book* website: <http://www.greatparchmentbook.org/>

Who were the Planters?

- Undertakers:
  - Brought over English and Scottish tenants
  - Acquired most of land in Ulster
  - Could not rent to Irish tenants
- Soldiers (Servitors and Adventurers):
  - Allowed to rent to Irish Catholics
  - Acquired 13% of land
- Irish loyal to the crown:
  - Could rent to Irish tenants
- Institutions:
  - Trinity College and Church of Ireland

The counties of Antrim, Down, and Monaghan were privately planted. Nearly 300,000 acres in the four baronies of Northern Antrim were granted to Randal MacDonnell, later the Earl of Antrim. County Down was settled by Scots James Hamilton and Hugh Montgomery and others. Monaghan was privately planted by the English in 1590-91 with much of the lands still in Irish hands until the mid-17th century.

## 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century Ireland: Penal Laws, Test Act, and Rebellion

Timeline of key events:

- Penal Laws, 1695-1778, were a series of laws passed to force Catholics and Protestant dissenters to accept the Establish Church of Ireland
- Test Act 1704 barred Presbyterians from holding public office unless they professed faith to Church of Ireland

- 1798 Rebellion - United Irishmen were Protestant dissenters who joined Catholics to rebel against British rule; many Ulster Scots actively participated
- Act of Union 1800 abolished Irish Parliament and United the Kingdom of Great Britain and Kingdom of Ireland
- Large waves of emigration to North America begins

## 20th Century Ireland: Home Rule, Civil War, and Partition

Timeline of key events leading to the partition of Ireland:

- Home Rule movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century was a campaign by the Irish for self-government
- Government Act of 1920 brought about the partition of Ireland
- Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921 established the Irish Free State (Republic of Ireland) and allowed Northern Ireland to opt out

## Emigration to North America

### PUSH FACTORS

- Economic
  - Rack-renting.
  - Drought/famine.
- Religious persecution.
- Political refugees:
  - 1798 rebellion
  - 1922 Irish Civil War

### PULL FACTORS

- Economic:
  - Land
  - Business
- Religious tolerance.
- Chain migration – follow one’s family and friends.

## 1718 Migration from the Bann Valley to New England

One of the earliest known mass migrations from Ireland to New England began in 1718, hundreds of people departed Ireland often traveling in groups and led by ministers.

- Arrival 1717-1718
- Travelling from:
  - Bann (River) Valley- Areas along the county borders of Antrim and Londonderry
  - Foyle (River) Valley – Parts of Donegal, Londonderry, and Tyrone
  - City of Londonderry
- Motivations:
  - Bad harvests/drought
  - Rack renting
- Settlements:
  - Massachusetts



- Boston
- Worcester, Sutton (Led by Rev. Edward Fitzgerald)
- Dracut, Lowell, Coleraine
- Maine: Casco Bay area
- New Hampshire: Derry, Londonderry, Windham
- Connecticut: Voluntown, New London

*Read more about the 1718 migration:*

[https://www.ancestryireland.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/The\\_1718\\_Migration.pdf](https://www.ancestryireland.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/The_1718_Migration.pdf)

<https://www.ria.ie/news/dictionary-irish-biography/tercentenary-1718-migration-ulster>

### **Migration beyond New England 1725-1775**

- Ports of entry:
  - Philadelphia
  - Newcastle
- Motivations
  - Drought, rack rents
  - Famine 1740-41
  - Evictions by Marquis of Donegal (County Antrim)
- Initially S.E. Pennsylvania; by 1740s moving into Shenandoah Valley, VA and the Carolinas

### **Migration into the 19<sup>th</sup> century**

- By 1820 over 200,000 came to North America
- 1820-1890
  - Over 1.3 million left Ireland
  - Includes Irish Catholics and Protestants including many Presbyterians
- Motivations
  - 1798 Rebellion and United Irishmen
  - Agrarian violence and reform
  - Great Famine, 1845-1852

### **Migration from Ulster to Canada**

- Loyalists to Canada: Scots Irish from the U.S
- Nova Scotia: 1760s in Colchester County
  - Encouraged by Alexander McNutt to increase Protestant settlement following the Acadian expulsion
  - Settled in Colchester County: Truro, Onslow, Londonderry
  - Nearly 500 families settled in these townships and surrounding area
  - Common surnames: McCurdy, Morrison, Blair, McNutt



- Eastern Townships of Quebec
- Upper Canada particularly after 1798 Rebellion and War of 1812
  - Settled: Toronto, Prescott, Coburg, Kingston
  - 1820 - families arrive from Ards Peninsula, Co. Down to Amherst Island
  - Loyal to Great Britain; formed Orange Lodges

## Records of Emigration

**Passenger Lists:** Look for other records first as these can be rare for the time period many of our ancestors came to America. Instead, tighten up your ancestor's timeline close to arrival and try to find evidence of your ancestor leaving Ireland or arriving in America using other records. Consider how they fit into other mass migrations and consult secondary sources.

Mitchell, Brian, *Irish Passenger Lists, 1847-1871. Lists of Passengers Sailing from Londonderry to America on Ships of the J. & J. Cooke Line and the McCorkell Line* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 2001).

U.S. and Canada, Passenger and Immigration Lists Index, 1500s-1900s (compiled by William Filby); Index of published passenger lists, naturalizations, and other records. Available on Ancestry.com

Find first-hand accounts of Northern Irish immigrants at Dippam: <http://www.dippam.ac.uk/>

## Suggested Reading and Other Resources\*

Bardon, Jonathan A *History of Ulster*, updated ed. (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 2001).

Bardon, Jonathan *The Plantation of Ulster: The British Colonization of the North of Ireland in the 17th Century*, (Dublin: Gill Books, 2013)

Punch, Terrence, *Erin's Sons: Irish Arrivals in Atlantic Canada, 1761-1853*, 3 vols. (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 2008).

Roulston, William J., *Researching Scots-Irish Ancestors, The Essential Genealogical Guide to Early Modern Ulster, 1600-1800*, 2nd ed. (Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation, 2018).

Young, William, *Fighters of Derry: Their Deeds and Descendants, Being a Chronicle of Events in Ireland during the Revolutionary Period, 1688-91*, (Belfast: Books Ulster, 2016).

**\*Find a more complete list in the Suggested Reading and Resources Handout on the course page.**