

The Scots-Irish in America: Origins & Migrations

Rhonda R. McClure, Senior Genealogist, rmcclure@nehgs.org

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.

Who Are the Scots-Irish?

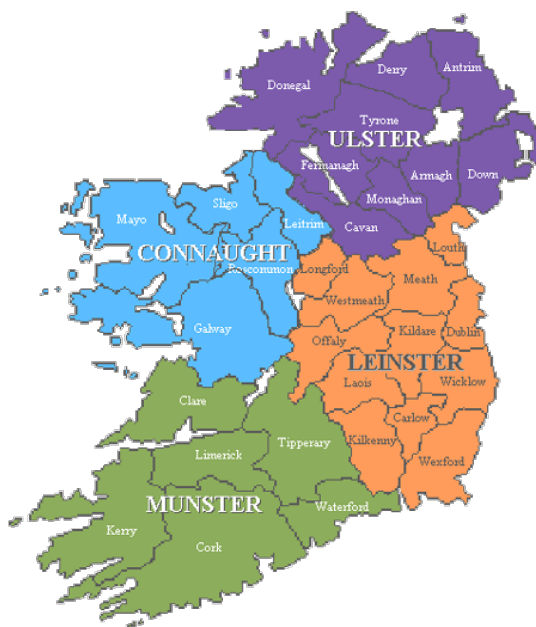
The terms *Scots-Irish*, *Scotch-Irish*, and *Ulster-Scots* are all three variant names for the same group of people. Unlike the Scots who themselves migrated from Scotland to America, the Scots-Irish are those who left Scotland to settle within the confines of the province of Ulster in Ireland. Many of them came during the 17th century (see below) when the plantation schemes began in an effort to plant loyal English and Scottish individuals within Ulster to help the British monarchy in controlling the Irish.

These individuals may have remained in Ulster for a couple of generations before themselves turning their sights on North America. Beginning in the early 18th century the numbers of those immigrating to North America, especially the American Colonies began to increase.

Before examining their migrations though, it is important to understand from whence they came.

Pre-17th Century:

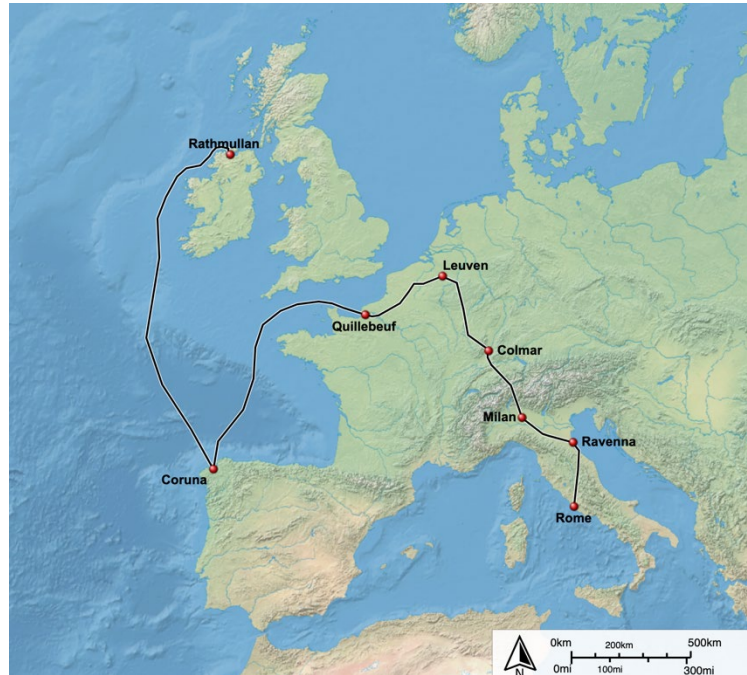
Hostilities between England and Ireland trace back centuries. The Anglo-Norman invasion of the 12th Century marked the beginning of a complete reorganizing of Ireland that would continue into the 20th Century—including the ultimate separation of Ireland into Northern Ireland, which remained part of the United Kingdom, and the Republic of Ireland (*Poblact na hÉireann*), a country standing on its own. Ireland for centuries consisted of four provinces: Ulster, Connaught, Leinster, and Munster.



17th 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.



Flight of the Earls (jkan997, [CC BY-SA 3.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/), via Wikimedia Commons)

- 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

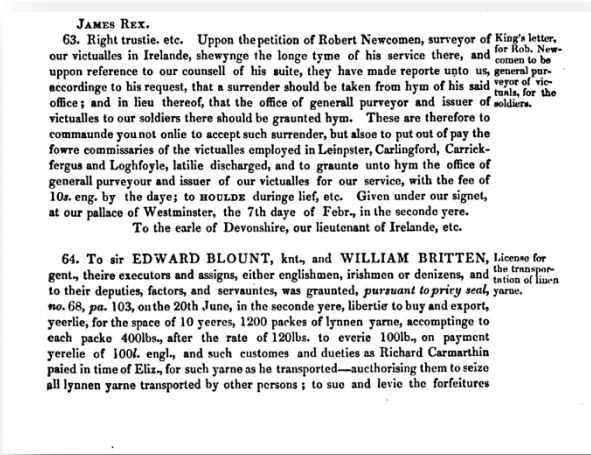
After the Flight of the Earls, lands granted by James I (also known as James VI of Scotland) came from the “escheated” counties of Amagh, Cavan, Coleraine (later renamed Londonderry), Donegal, Fermanagh, and Tyrone. Within these counties, nine precincts were set aside for Scottish grantees:

- County Armagh: Fews
- County Cavan: Clankee, Tyllyhunco
- County Donegal: Boylagh and Bannagh, Portlough

- County Fermanagh: Knockninny, Magheraboy

- County Tyrone: Strabane, Mountjoy

Among so many other valuable treasures that were housed Public Record Office of the Four Courts Building in Dublin that were destroyed when the compound exploded on 30 June 1922, the original Irish patent rolls, which recorded grants of land, pardons issued, and other things, were destroyed. Fortunately, a published version of the *Calendar of the Patent Rolls of the Reign of James I* had been prepared under the direction of the Irish Record Commission prior to 1830 and was printed before the Commission closed. This calendar was reprinted in 1966 by the Irish Manuscripts Commission in 1966. The volume edited by John Caillard Erck and published in 1846 is available on [Google Books](#).



Patent Rolls of James I, 1604

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.

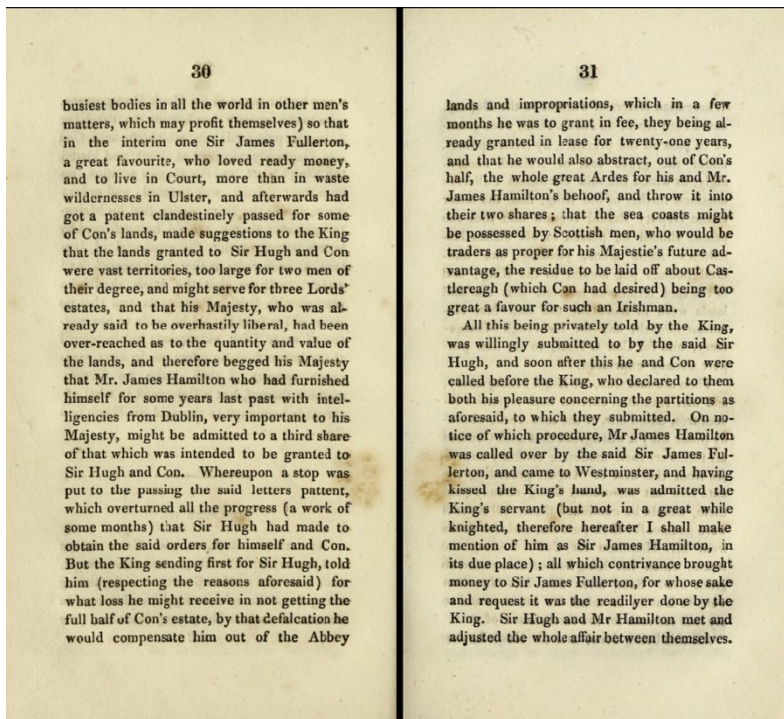
Though often not discussed in great detail, James Hamilton and Hugh Montgomery in County Down were among two of the planters. They had finagled much of their lands by helping Irish chieftain Con O'Neill escape after things turned deadly when the chieftain sent his servants to reclaim wine taken by the English as penalty for not having paid taxes. After an English soldier was killed, O'Neill was arrested and accused of "levying war against the queen." Montgomery was brought in to help

O'Neill escape—having been promised one-third of O'Neill's holdings. Hamilton was brought in to seek a pardon for O'Neill, and likewise was promised one-third of O'Neill's lands. King James I ratified their holdings with the proviso that "these lands should be planted with British Protestants and that no grant should be made to any person of mere Irish extraction." This was the very definition of an "undertaker" (see above).

With their new land holdings, Montgomery and Hamilton returned to Scotland—specifically the Scottish lowlands—and began to recruit settlers. With their success, many Scots from the southwest of Scotland began making their way into Counties Antrim and Down. According to Ron Chepesiuk's *The Scotch-Irish, From the North of Ireland to the Making of America*, "within ten years of the first settlement, an estimated eight thousand settlers resided in the two counties. They became the beachhead by which thousands of Scottish settlers made their way to the north of Ireland during the seventeenth century."

With the success of their settlements, there are many individuals who will find that their Scots-Irish immigrants trace back to the holdings of Hamilton and Montgomery and presently published volumes of the manuscripts of both men are now available digitally online through the National Library of Scotland:

- The Hamilton Manuscripts - <https://digital.nls.uk/histories-of-scottish-families/archive/95557473>



Pages from the published Montgomery Manuscript detailing part of the O'Neill story (National Library of Scotland)

- The Montgomery Manuscripts - <https://digital.nls.uk/histories-of-scottish-families/archive/94811202>

18th and 19th Century Ireland: Penal Laws, Test Act, and Rebellion

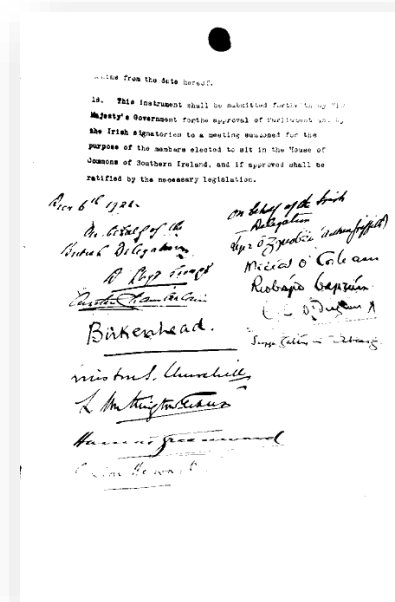
Timeline of key events:

- 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 was against British rule in Ireland. The Society of United Irishmen, who were a republican revolutionary group influenced by the recent American and French revolutions. The original members were Presbyterians who were angry at their being denied any power in the now Anglican-run Ireland. As a result, there were also Catholics who joined as both were denied many liberties due to their faiths not conforming to the state-supported Anglican denomination. While not a long rebellion, it remains an important event in Irish history and saw modern Irish nationalism develop during the centenary events in 1898.
- 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 19th and 20th 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 (extortionately high rent)
 - 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. This migration was the result of the ongoing issues with the Test Act of 1704 which continued to deny Presbyterians all the rights of those who were members of the Church of Ireland (the state supported church)

- 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
 - Religious persecution
- 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://ulsterhistoricalfoundation.com/portfolio/1718-migration>

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

Migration beyond New England 1725-1775

- Motivations
 - Religious persecutions
 - Drought, rack rents
 - Famine 1740-41
 - Advertisements, letters, & testimonials published in the *Belfast News Letter* and the *Londonderry Journal*
 - Evictions by Marquis of Donegal (County Antrim)
- Initially S.E. Pennsylvania; by 1740s moving into Shenandoah Valley, VA and the Carolinas
 - Linen Trade – the first linen exports to the British overseas territories was permitted in 1705. Eventually flax seed was produced in America and shipped to Belfast, while passengers were brought aboard the now empty ship and taken back to America
 - Money, tools, seed, and land offered in South Carolina (1730 and 1760)
 - Evictions by Marquis of Donegal (County Antrim)

Migration into the 19th 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

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Online Resources

- Ask About Ireland www.askaboutireland.ie
- Discovery Ulster-Scots, Immigration to America <https://discoverulsterscots.com/emigration-influence/america>
- Discovery Ulster-Scots, The Plantation of Ulster <https://discoverulsterscots.com/history-culture/plantation-ulster-1610-1630>
- FamilySearch www.familysearch.org
- FindMyPast www.findmypast.com
- Irish Emigration Database <https://www.dippam.ac.uk/ied>
- JohnGrenham.com www.johngrenham.com
- Maine Ulster Scots Project <https://www.maineulsterscots.com/>
- PRONI – eCatalogue www.nidirect.gov.uk/services/search-ecatalogue
- PRONI – Landed Estate Records Guide www.nidirect.gov.uk/publications/family-tree-landed-estate-records
- *The Hamilton Manuscripts* digital.nls.uk/histories-of-scottish-families/archive/95557473
- *The Montgomery Manuscripts* digital.nls.uk/histories-of-scottish-families/archive/94811202
- Ulster Historical Foundation <https://ulsterhistoricalfoundation.com/>