



A Message from the President and CEO

Family history often begins with a place, an anchor that sparks a connection to the past. For millions of Americans, that place is Scotland, a country whose story is woven deeply into the fabric of the United States.

Today, an estimated 25 million Americans claim Scottish ancestry. From the seventeenth century onward, Scots crossed the Atlantic in significant numbers seeking opportunity, stability, religious freedom, or simply survival. Some immigrants came as merchants, artisans, and farmers determined to build new lives. Others arrived due to the upheavals of war and empire, including Scottish prisoners of war who were unwillingly transported to North America in the 1650s. Over time, descendants of these Scots spread throughout the colonies and then the nation, shaping communities, institutions, and families that remain part of the American story.

Yet the fascination with Scottish ancestry extends beyond numbers alone. Part of its enduring appeal lies in Scotland's traditions of identity and memory. Names, places, clans, and family stories carry deep historical resonance. Even those with only a passing knowledge of genealogy may recognize a Scottish surname in their family tree or recall a tradition passed down through generations. These fragments of memory, sometimes no more than a name or a distant place, often spark a deeper pursuit of family history.

That journey from memory to evidence is one of the most rewarding aspects of genealogical research. Scottish research illustrates this particularly well. Scotland possesses one of the richest documentary traditions in Europe. Sources such as parish registers, statutory civil registrations, and detailed census returns allow genealogists to trace families across generations with remarkable clarity. These records reveal lives shaped by events both local and global, from the political upheavals of seventeenth-century Britain to the migrations that carried Scots throughout the Atlantic world. When paired with American sources such as passenger lists, colonial records, land deeds, and family papers, these materials provide powerful opportunities to reconnect



people with the places and circumstances from which their ancestors came.

At American Ancestors, these discoveries are supported by the extraordinary resources of the Brim-DeForest Library and the R. Stanton Avery Special Collections, among the most important family history research collections in the country. Our holdings include rare genealogies, heraldic works, migration studies, and specialized research guides relating to Scotland and the broader British Isles. Combined with our digital resources and the expertise of our research staff, these collections help bring the documentary record of Scotland within reach for members and researchers around the world.

Scottish genealogy reminds us that family history rarely stops at national borders. It moves across oceans and generations, linking individual lives to the wider currents of history. Family history, at its best, does more than trace lineage. It restores individuals to the historical record and reminds us that the great events of the past were lived by real people whose lives continue through their descendants. Sometimes the path to understanding who we are today begins with discovering where our ancestors once stood. For millions of families, that place is Scotland.

Warmest regards,

Ryan J. Woods, President & CEO

American Ancestors Scottish Research Tour participants in Edinburgh, July 2023.