

My Scots by Way of Ireland

By Andrea Hoskins

February 2021

Growing up, I knew I had some Scottish heritage. I had a treasured great-uncle, Colin MacRae Hoskins, named after his mother's grandfather. There was a worn, leather bound book titled "The Clan MacRae" in the bookcase in my parents' room. I pulled it out once in a while to look at the tartans and read about the Highlands. But much more recently, when my Scottish heritage registered almost 30% on my Ancestry DNA results, I knew there had to be more than one great-great-grandfather from Scotland. And my 5% Irish gave me reason to question all those ancestors that had come from Ireland.

Since joining BIGS, I had heard a bit about the Ulster Scots - the families from Scotland that immigrated to the north of Ireland in the early 1600's before moving on to the colonies in the years leading up to the Revolutionary War. The time had come for me to learn more about these Scots and see if some of my "Irish" ancestors were actually Scottish. I would need to track my family lines both back in time to see if I could find them in Scotland, and forward in time to see when they immigrated and where they settled in North America. Determining whether they were Presbyterian or Catholic could also help distinguish Scots from native Irish.

Fortunately, once you've figured out you need it, there is a great deal of information to be found about the Ulster Scots. Ulster is one of four provinces of Ireland - the northern most - visible across the North Channel from Scotland - a distance of about 12 miles. Over the centuries there had been much back and forth between Ireland and Scotland - wars fought, trades



MAP OF THE PROVINCES AND COUNTIES OF IRELAND. THE SIX COUNTIES OF ULSTER THAT EVENTUALLY BECAME NORTHERN IRELAND ARE IN PINK. THE THREE IN GREEN BECAME PART OF THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND. TIES TO ENGLAND, IN TERMS OF RELIGION, POLITICS AND COMMERCE, CREATED BY THE ULSTER PLANTATIONS CERTAINLY HAD AN IMPACT ON THE DRIVE OF THESE NORTHERN COUNTIES TO ALIGN WITH ENGLAND.

made, migrations in both directions. But it wasn't until 1605 that the first of the major "plantations" of Scots and English settlers began to take shape.

In 1603, James VI, King of Scotland, became King James I of England and would reign over Scotland, England and Ireland for the next 22 years. From his predecessor, Elizabeth I, James inherited severe conflicts in Ireland, along with an unstable Scots-England border region. James made plans to insure he had Protestant supporters to help subdue the native Irish and settle the newly acquired territory, as well as to relocate the troublesome border clans to Ireland. The majority of Scots who migrated to the north of Ireland were part of this settlement scheme. The Plantation settlements were restricted to the Province of Ulster and included the counties of Antrim, Down, Armagh, Tyrone, Donegal, Cavan, Fermanagh and Londonderry. More Scots than English chose to make the move - more Presbyterians than Anglicans- by a rate of twenty to one. They came mainly from the Lowlands, with some 200,000 Scots crossing the channel to settle in Ulster during the years 1605-1697.

FYI: "Ulster Scots" is a term primarily used in Ireland and the United Kingdom. "Scots-Irish" is more common in the United States and Canada. The term Scots-Irish came into use in this country to distinguish the Presbyterian Ulster Scots from the later arriving Irish Catholics (mid-1800's). Whatever you call them, they have had a significant and over-sized impact on politics, education, commerce, the military, the arts and literature in this country.

My research revealed that many of my ancestors who came from Ireland were indeed from counties in Ulster Province where Scots had settled. These included Antrim, Londonderry, Tyrone, Down and Armagh. Through baptism and marriage records, I confirmed that they were affiliated with the Presbyterian Church. And, with some effort, I could track most of them back to the lowlands of Scotland and the border region. In the process, I also uncovered a couple lines of English Quaker ancestors in Ulster, once I knew to track them further back.

It is likely that my maternal grandmother's Graham and Moffat ancestors were among the "Border Reivers." They were forcibly relocated to Ireland in an effort to eliminate the marauding, cattle rustling, feuds and unrest in the border region between the lowlands and England. Apparently, one could be hanged for simply having the surname Graham. Even exile to Ireland seemed a better choice. The Grahams and Moffats would spend several generations in County Tyrone.

My Stewart and Crombie ancestors left Glasgow for Ulster. They settled in Londonderry for several generations. My Morehead and Fergus lines left Ayrshire on the western coast of Scotland for County Antrim.

In time, Ulster became the most economically successful part of Ireland and began to rival England. In response, the British rulers took steps to control the economy. They also began to force the Church of England on all the Presbyterian residents. In addition, the subjugated Irish were fighting back. Life in Ulster was becoming more and more challenging for the Scots, and led to yet another migration, this time to the New World.

As I tracked my ancestors to North America, I found that my Moorhead and Fergus lines left Antrim for Pennsylvania. The Grahams and Moffats left County Tyrone for New York, and the Stewart and Crombie lines left Londonderry for Massachusetts. Each family, on arriving, made their way west of the lands already settled. In attempting to understand the historical context, I quickly learned of the Scots-Irish role in pushing the northern borders of the colonies and their indispensable contribution to the Revolutionary War. Some 250,000 Presbyterian Scots-Irish would head to the Colonies in the years leading up to 1776. That meant more than one in ten of the colonists at that time were Scots-Irish. When it came time to fight, about 25% of those that took arms against the King were Scots-Irish.

With the help of Ancestry.com and military pension records, I was able to follow each of my family lines to their participation in the Revolutionary War. Immigrant William Graham served as a Lieutenant in Colonel Hays Regiment of the New York Militia. Samuel Moorhead's son was Captain of Moorhead's Independent Company of Pennsylvania. One of my all-time favorite finds was the discovery of the diary that my 4th great grandfather, Jehiel Stewart, kept in 1775, recording his role in the Siege of Boston and the Battle of Bunker Hill.

My DNA ethnicity results, combined with learning about the history of northern Ireland and the Ulster Scots, pushed me to look more closely at the research I had done on my Irish ancestors. By working both backward and forward from Ireland, I was able to gather a great deal of fascinating new information about my Scots that came by way of Ireland.