

## Scots in Canada

**A wee look at oor ain fowk in that other great Commonwealth country.**

The first real attempt to form a Scottish colony in Canada began in the early 17th century when Sir William Alexander (later Earl of Stirling) encouraged King James VI & I to authorise the setting up of a New Scotland (Nova Scotia) across the Atlantic. This was to become Scotland's answer to the already flourishing New England in North America.

In 1621, Sir William obtained a grant of considerable territory, embracing what are now New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and the Gaspé Peninsula. To further encourage settlement on the lands, a new Order of nobility was instituted, namely Baronets of Nova Scotia, a title which could be bought by anyone with sufficient funds.

To qualify, each applicant was obliged to pay 3,000 marks for the title, and further to equip and send six men to the new colony, presumably with their wives and children. In return, the baronet received 16,000 acres of land.

Between 1625 and 1707, some three hundred such titles had been bought, but the scheme eventually failed to excite colonists. Moreover, fierce resistance from French settlers already established on much of the land confronted those who did take up the offer to emigrate. Thus, the idea was finally scrapped when King Charles I surrendered the territory to France in 1632. It was not until the late 19th century that large numbers of Scots began to settle in Nova Scotia and other parts of Canada.

Scottish soldiers played an important part in the conflict between Britain and France in North America. Several Highland regiments were raised; some of which served in that area. The Fraser's Highlanders (78th) was at the forefront in the Battle of Quebec (1759). The regiment was disbanded after the battle, with many of the soldiers being offered lands there and at Prince Edward Island. Indeed, some of the early settlements in North America were founded by soldiers who had fought in the Seven Years' War, and in the later American War of Independence. Such a class of people not only made ideal settlers, but also had a high degree of military knowledge to call in times of trouble.

Loyalists who served in the Royal Highland Emigrants Regiment (84th) were allocated lands around Colchester Bay, Nova Scotia, in 1784. A

private soldier could expect about one hundred acres, while a field officer might obtain a grant of a thousand acres. Other loyal Highlanders were given lands in what is now known as Glengarry County, Ontario.

The colonisation process was greatly enhanced due to the changing economy in the Scottish Highlands, the result of the demise of the old clan system. Radical new assertions by clan chiefs and landowners in the management of their estates did not cater for the ever-increasing population within the straths and glens. Something had to yield under such pressure and, predictably, those at the lower end of the social pecking order were obliged to seek new horizons, either voluntary or - as in the time of the 'Clearances' -- by forcible eviction. The problem was greatly aggravated by crop failures, resulting in famine, all of which gave a sense of urgency to the sad state of affairs.

A gradual increase in migration from the Highlands to Canada took place during the latter part of the 18th century. Emigrants usually went in organised groups, led by prominent lairds or tacksmen, who foresaw only ever-diminishing prospects in their native glens. Excessive rents,

demanding by clan chiefs, became a prime inducement to leave.

Many from the West Highlands and Islands settled in Glengarry County, which eventually became almost exclusively a Gaelic-speaking colony. However, among the

first settlers were the loyalist Highlanders, refugees from the newly-established United States of America, who had earlier (circa 1773) come to New York from the West Highlands, and in particular from Glengarry estates in Inverness-shire, traditional lands of the MacDonells (*Clann Domhnuill Ghlinn garadh*). It was they who gave Glengarry County its name.

In 1793, one Kenneth MacLeod and his son Alexander chartered a vessel that carried natives, mostly from Glenelg, Glen Moriston, Knoydart and Strathglass across the Atlantic. Some forty families are said to have been involved. Kenneth MacLeod himself had been the tacksmen who farmed Killismore (*Caolasmor* ?) in Glenelg; this group settled in Glengarry County. The MacLeods of Glenelg had strong family ties with the MacDonells. Indeed, Kenneth MacLeod was a second cousin of the Glengarry chief.

Letters written by Scots to relatives at home encouraged others to emigrate. However, first impressions of prospects in Canada were not always favourable. **(Continued Page 9).**



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Nevertheless, it appears that most migrants eventually made a success of their lives. Initial tasks invariably meant clearing forested land; whilst other sites frequently required considerable drainage work. But families often joined forces with their neighbours for much of the heavy work, and a strong sense of community prevailed in most places. In a Census of 1852 in Glengarry County, the most numerous clan name was, not surprisingly, MacDonell or MacDonald, who numbered 3,328: next came the MacMillans (545); MacDougalls (541); Macraes (456); MacLeods (437); Grants (415); Camerons (399); MacGills (359); Kennedy (333); and MacLennans (322). The remaining clan names, collectively, amounted to a further 1,918.

In 1791, Canada had been divided into two parts, each with its own government; Upper Canada was primarily an English-speaking population, while Lower Canada was mainly of French origin. In 1840 both territories were united, and twenty years later, the provinces of Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia federated to become the new Dominion of Canada. Later still, with the opening up of the country by railways, British Columbia joined the Dominion. Today, with the recognition of Alberta, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Prince Edward Island and in 1949, Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada has ten provinces, along with other Northern Territories.

During the late 19th century, those Scots who emigrated to Canada under the then crofters' colonising scheme (sponsored by the Canadian High Commissioner) were mostly settled around Killarney, in Manitoba and at Saltcoats, in the Northwest Territories. One such settler wrote home from Saltcoats: *"I would not leave this country unless I am dragged from it by ropes!"*

### **Canada Today**

Today, people of Scottish descent or heritage living in Canada, represent the third-largest ethnic group in that country and among the first to settle there. Scots have made a large impact on Canadian culture since colonial times. According to the 2001 Census of Canada, the number of Canadians claiming full or partial Scottish descent is 5,219,851, or 15.10% of the nation's total population, however this is said to be a major underestimation! The Scotch-Irish is a similar ethnic group. They descended from Lowland Scots and Northern English people via Ulster and who observe many of the same traditions as Scots.

**The Flag of Nova Scotia**, shown in the previous page, is respectfully copied from Wikipedia.

**Calum Curamach.**