Scots-Irish Origins, 1600-1800 A.D.

Genealogical gleanings of the Scots-Irish in county Londonderry, Ireland.

Part One – Vital Records of the Scots-Irish from the Parish of Magilligan, County Londonderry, 1600-1800 A.D.

By Bob Forrest, B.A Hons; Economic and Social History (Queen’s University, Belfast). 65 pages + 2 maps

The origin of the Ulster-Scots is a familiar story - some 100,000 Scotsmen were resettled by the British government during the Ulster Plantation of the 17th century. After the turn of the next century the descendants of many of these Scots-Irish emigrated in substantial numbers to America opening up a frontier for European settlement. Over the course of the 18th century the Ulster Scots would become the single most numerous ethnic group to settle in America.

One of the great challenges for generations of family historians has been getting access to Ulster records for perhaps the most critical period in the establishment of their family’s links with Ulster, the period before 1800. People with Scots-Irish origin face a challenging task when they attempt to trace their roots back to Ulster, as there is no comprehensive index of surnames for the 17th or 18th centuries.

The aim of this ground-breaking book is to make available original and unique source material from the archives of Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI), where the majority of records relating to Ulster can be found. It will be especially helpful to people of Scots-Irish descent in attempting to make the link back to Ulster as it focuses on genealogical sources from early modern period, 1600-1800 A.D. The series makes available for the first time information on ordinary people predominantly of Scots-Irish roots (as well as some families of English and Gaelic Irish origin).

This book concentrates on the area of Magilligan in the Roe valley, the most northerly parish in County Londonderry located at the mouth of Lough Foyle. Magilligan has historic links with Ballykelly and Limavady to the west, as well as to the Coleraine liberties in the east and across the Foyle to the Inishowen peninsula in County Donegal. Prominent Scots-Irish families from Magilligan included the Allisons of Drumnaha; the progenitor of the New Hampshire family was Samuel Allison who emigrated in 1718, and a Canadian branch of the family founded Mount Allison University in Nova Scotia. The Reverend Hugh Conn of Maryland, a founding father of the Presbyterian Church in America and a founder of Princeton University was born in Magilligan in 1685.

A comprehensive range of sources are transcribed from the archives of PRONI; including the 1662 subsidy roll, hearth returns (1663), muster roll (1666), 1740 Protestant household’s returns, will indexes, will abstracts from the Thrift and Groves’ manuscripts, 1796 flax returns, Gravestone Inscriptions, vital records of birth, marriages and deaths from surviving pre-1800 church records (transcript of Magilligan parish register of Baptisms, 1748-1764, Marriages 1747-1753, Burials 1747-1776; Ballykelly Presbyterian baptisms, 1699-1710 and marriages 1700-1740), and rentals from the Gage, Bacon and McNeill estates. While the book is primarily aimed at those with Scots-Irish ancestors, its breadth of coverage means that it should be of interest to those researching family history in this area prior to 1800.

VALUABLE SOURCE OF SURNAMES
The book includes hundreds of names of Ulster-Scots helping the reader to pick up the trail of the Scots-Irish living in Ulster during the 17th and 18th centuries. Many of the families listed came from Scotland at the initial phase of the Plantation of Ulster during the reign of James I and survived the vicissitudes of the 17th century including the Irish uprising of 1641. The re-establishment of colonial rule during the period of the Protectorate (1653-1659) saw a major influx of Scottish settlers when something like a second Plantation took place (and this is reflected in the names in the subsidy, hearth and muster rolls listed here from the 1660s). By 1690 the Protestant Presbyterian Synod of Ulster was created, which represented 120 congregations out of a population nearly 150,000 Scots and their descendants. Following the demise of the Stuart kings (following the Williamite Wars and the famous Siege of Derry) the status of the Presbyterian Scots-Irish declined. Political alienation (with the Test Act of 1704) followed by economic hardship contributed to the great Ulster Scots emigrations of the 18th century.

In this book are many names associated with Lowland Scotland who migrated to Ulster during the Plantation and many of whose progeny will have emigrated to the Americas. This volume now brings those Scots-Irish pioneers within the grasp of the researcher. There are approximately 386 different variant surnames that locate name to place including:

Whilst there is no certainty that each of the persons identified in Scots-Irish Origins or their descendants ultimately emigrated to America, undoubtedly many did or possessed kinsmen who did. It is their descendants today who will be forever indebted to Mr. Forrest for making their ancestors origins accessible in this unique volume.