

## The People Called Scotch-Irish

The Scotch-Irish families that are part of our Hannah families' early American heritage are typical of the Scotch-Irish in colonial America. The Hannahs, Gibsons, Burnsidés, McClures, Walkers, and Mayes all originated in Scotland, emigrated to North Ireland, emigrated again to America in the 1700s, and settled in the Valley of Virginia before moving on west and south. These are the ancestors of whom we write.

While the English were settling the eastern seaboard, the Scotch-Irish, along with Germans and some others, were settling the new frontiers. These Scots from Ireland were known as a hardy people, well able to stand the rigors of frontier life, hard working and willing to fight to protect their families from the dangers of the frontier including the Indians. When American independence was declared in 1776, the Scotch-Irish were among the first to step up to fight the British. After all, one of the reasons the Scotch-Irish emigrated was the religious and economic persecution they experienced at the hands of the English.

The term Scotch-Irish actually originated in America and is applied to those people who emigrated from Scotland to North Ireland (Ulster) in the 1600s, living there for three or four generations before again emigrating, this time to America or to other British colonies. They were for the most part lowland Scots, from that part of Scotland south of Glasgow and Edinburgh including those living around the border of Scotland and England. They began to go to Ireland in the very early 1600s when King James VI managed to take a large part of Ulster from the native Irish and began what is known as the "plantations", giving land to both English and Scottish lords who in turn found people who were willing to move there.

During the period in which the mostly Protestant Scotch-Irish lived in Ireland they kept their Scottish culture and customs and didn't mix freely with the native Irish, who were mostly Catholic. They maintained their language, music and their own religion, mainly Presbyterian.

Driven out of North Ireland by discriminatory laws against their religion and by bad economic conditions, these Presbyterian families often decided to try their luck in America. They boarded a ship, perhaps at Newry or Belfast in Northern Ireland and headed across the stormy Atlantic. Such a passage took from six weeks to four months, depending on the weather they encountered. Miserably crowded conditions below deck were the norm, and passengers often had to bring their own rations. If the voyage was long there would undoubtedly be malnutrition. With primitive sanitation fevers and sicknesses of various kinds often devastated the passengers. See Chapter 1 for a story of one such passage.

In those days people often emigrated in groups. Sometimes it would be a family or a group of neighbors. In a few cases the entire congregation of a church emigrated together. Sometimes a single family member would go first and find a place to settle in the new land, then other members of his family -- brothers, uncles, and cousins, and perhaps neighbors -- would join him. The Scotch-Irish were no exception to this pattern.

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Many Scotch-Irish followed a standard migration pattern in the early 1700s, typically arriving in the New World at Newcastle in Delaware or at Philadelphia. They then moved on west a little way to Lancaster and Chester counties in Pennsylvania where they perhaps stayed for a year or two looking for opportunities. When the land in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia opened up, many were eager to move there. The trail up the Shenandoah River into the Valley of Virginia from southern Pennsylvania was newly opened in the early 1700s and this is the path taken by our Scotch-Irish ancestors. It was not a wagon trail as shown in the movies of the old west with fully loaded wagons moving all the household goods. It was simply a path good for horse or mule, probably following an Indian hunting trail. So, in the beginning everything in the way of household goods, tools, seed and food had to be carried on the backs of the animals or people.

In the 1730s the colony of Virginia granted large blocks of land in the Shenandoah Valley to two men named Benjamin Borden and William Beverly. These men were then to sell the land relatively cheaply to settlers to populate the area. The two tracts of land, tens of thousands of acres, were called the Borden Tract and Beverly Manor and were located about where Staunton, Virginia is today and extended south down the Valley of the Shenandoah and into the headwaters of the James River. Settlers, mostly Scotch-Irish and German families, moved in quickly, cleared and planted the land and built their log cabins. There is evidence to indicate that many of the settlers lived on the land for several years before actually buying it. By 1745 there were enough people that it was necessary to form the county of Augusta, so that local records could be kept, local courts could be held, and disputes settled.

Some of our ancestors took advantage of the cheap land almost immediately. The Walkers, one of our ancestral families, were among the earliest to arrive in the Shenandoah Valley. One Walker family settled just north of Staunton, Virginia and lived there for over 160 years. We believe we are descended from this family through Mary Walker who died about 1820. Other Walkers settled in 1736 in what is now Rockbridge county in the Borden Tract. Some of their descendants live there still, 260 years later. One man who bought land from Benjamin Borden was Arthur McClure, possibly our ancestor, who bought 153 1/2 acres in April 1751<sup>5</sup>. An early map of Beverly Manor shows the owners of the individual plots of land which ranged in size up to three hundred acres or more. Among the many people occupying these tracts of land were the Gibson and McClure families, again possibly our ancestors, but no proven connection has been made. No Hannahs were listed in either Beverly or Borden tracts, but Joseph Hannah occupied land just outside of the Beverly Tract. He purchased some of his land from the Colony of Virginia and some privately. (see chapter 4)

Some early settlers recorded their entrance into the colony of Virginia, thereby assuring their "headright" to land, 100 acres to the head of the family and 50 acres for each family member. The following entries, proving headrights, appear in old Orange County records (the Shenandoah Valley was in Orange County until 1745): James McClure 1740, Abel Gibson 1746, John Walker 1735.<sup>6</sup> All three surnames are part of the Hannah family ancestry.

Once these families were settled, they soon applied for and received grants for additional land from the colony of Virginia and later, after the Revolutionary War, from

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the State of Virginia. The process for obtaining land was fairly simple - identify the land, have it surveyed by the official surveyors and pay a price of so much per acre. The grant was then approved and the patent acknowledging ownership was issued. The early land grant records in Virginia have survived and are available through the Virginia State Library in Richmond, Virginia. Sometimes, of course, settlers simply bought land from other people and these land records are available in the county where the transaction took place.

Land was relatively cheap, and over the years some of the settlers acquired large tracts. One Walker family had 1500 acres on Walker Creek in Rockbridge County; another had a large plantation north of Staunton, Virginia. The Hannahs had hundreds of acres along Naked Creek and the South River near the border of what is now Augusta and Rockingham Counties, Virginia and later along the Greenbrier and Elk Rivers in what is now Pocahontas County, West Virginia. The McClures also had considerable land along the Greenbrier River in northern Greenbrier County, West Virginia. These were large farms raising livestock as well as grain and they supported large families. Also, the early 1700s to the mid 1800s was the time of slavery in the Americas and this was the Colony or State of Virginia; so some of our families had slaves to help them work these large plantations. Because of this, may we humbly offer our sincere apology to people everywhere for our ancestors' participation in this terrible practice.

The contribution of the Scotch-Irish to the settlement and development of the western parts of the original colonies of Pennsylvania, Virginia, and North and South Carolina is well known and much has been written about them.

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