The Scots of Pre-Confederation Canada

According to the 2016 Census of Canada, of the 36 million people living in Canada, approximately 4.8 million people listed themselves as being of Scottish descent1. The Scots immigrated to Canada as it was a place to finally become financially prosperous, and to start a new and better life. There was a multitude of factors that made the Scots emigrate from their homeland of Scotland to Canada. Of these many factors, there were two monumental forces that both encouraged and forced Scots to leave. The Union of 1707, and the Highland Clearances of the mid to late 18th century, provided more than enough reasons for Scottish born persons to make the long journey to Canada. In addition to the driving forces behind emigration in Scotland, there was also incentive to venture west. Within modern day eastern Canada, there was the chance to increase one’s societal standing through the purchase of a land parcel, as well as the chance to become a prosperous farmer in a new world, something that was nearly impossible in Scotland 2.

During the journey across the Atlantic, many Scots often travelled in cramped conditions. Below deck, sleeping births were incredibly small, measuring “6 ft by 18 inches, with the allowance of 56 gallons water and 2 barrels bulk of stowage…” (Campey, 167). Despite these cramped conditions, which created an ideal place for sickness to take hold, Scottish immigrant ships were rarely the scene of major outbreaks 3. This was due largely to the help provided to any passengers that may have fallen ill, and the rigorous cleaning routine the crew upheld 4. As for keeping morale high, many crews did what they could to keep their passengers in good spirits 5. Of the multitude of passenger ships that went from Scotland to Canada, many, if not all, kept ship manifests, including a comprehensive list of passengers. One of these ships, “The Ann,” was a ship of Scottish Loyalists that made its way to Canada. Although it is difficult to read, the manifest depicts a list of Scottish citizens, and what appears to be the marital status and number of children of each passenger6. This was common place in many manifests, as they would keep track of the passengers and their dependents while on board the ship. These lists would also categorize passengers by the towns and regions they emigrated from, as well as their occupation. It can be assumed that by keeping track of these aspects of daily life allowed for passengers to be easily placed with people of similar backgrounds and occupations.

Before the Union of 1707, the Scots were permitted only to venture to continental Europe. This was largely attributed to the fact that Scotland was in no way a part of England 7. As James A. Roy states in *The Scot and Canada,* a Scot, “was an alien in the eyes of the English law,” (James A. Roy, p 51). As such, the Scots were denied access to English colonies, such as Canada. However, once the Union of 1707 was enacted, Scottish voyageurs were able to journey to English colonies and settlements, as they were no longer considered aliens in the eyes of English law. There was one caveat after the Union of 1707 came into legislation. Any Scotsmen that journeyed to an English colony were to do so as a member of Imperial England 8, effectively destroying any independence Scotland had established after centuries of being on its own.

It wasn’t until the mid 18th century that another event of immense impact occurred. The Highland clearances were the result of landlords realizing it was more profitable to farm sheep than it was to house tenants on their land 9. This swift change came after economic conditions began crumbling, resulting in landlords forcibly evicting tenants 10. It was also common practice for landlords to send gangs to torch the homes of tenants that refused to leave, leaving no option but to flee 11. As a result of this economic shift, up to 15,000 Highlanders were forced to emigrate to Canada between 1745 and 1815 12.

In conjunction with the Highland Clearances, many Scotsmen left the country due to an economic clump. Job shortages and an ever-increasing population culminated to create a high unemployment rate, which then drove Scots to find other means of making ends meet. To do so, many left the country, primarily to go to Britain or North America 13. For many, the fear of unemployment or of losing their homes to sheep farming was enough to convince them to pack what belongings they could, and sail for a New Scotland, where they could achieve financial stability.

Long before Lord Selkirk helped Highlanders settle in P.E.I, William Alexander attempted to settle Scots in Nova Scotia. In order to do so, Alexander had to generate interest in the area, and did so by selling noble titles 14. By purchasing a 6,400- hectare parcel of uncleared and uncut land, and later clearing it, a Scot would be granted the title of Baronet of Nova Scotia15. When presented with the chance to increase their societal stance. By 1629, seventy Scottish nobles made their way from their homeland to Nova Scotia16. Unfortunately for the new nobles, the harsh winters proved difficult during the first three years in the settlement. It wasn’t until 1632 that the prospects of having a successful crop were within reach. However, these hopes were dashed, as the French gained control of Nova Scotia due to terms of a peace treaty. As a result, a vast number of Alexander’s noblemen decided that returning to Scotland was more favourable than being under French rule 17. While William Alexander’s attempt at bringing Scots to Nova Scotia ended up being nothing more than a meaningless and expensive trip across the world for a majority of his settlers, some good did come of it. Alexander’s attempt brought the thought of living in a New Scotland into focus, which later encouraged large groups of Scots to emigrate well over a century afterwards.

While the occurrences in Scotland were driving forces in Scottish emigration to Canada, there were several initiatives that were underway in Canada to encourage the Scots to settle. In the early years of the 19th century, Thomas Douglas, Lord Selkirk, purchased multiple townships in Prince Edward Island. These townships then became home to an initial group of 800 Highlanders, and several hundred more the following year 18. Due to clever design and organization, Selkirk’s settlements created interdependence between the Scots, as smaller communities became interdependent on each other 19. In addition to settling so many Scottish clans so close to each other, Lord Selkirk also provided any materials and information that may have been required to help settlers with their farms 20. By providing his settlers with the necessary provisions and choosing to help his fellow Scots instead of profiting off of them, Selkirk created some of the most successful settlements in the Canadas.

Although Scottish immigration to Canada has taken place over hundreds of years, a vast majority of immigrants did not make their way to the Canadas until the mid 19th century. At this time, the Highland Clearances that had begun in the late 18th century were driving even larger numbers of Scots out of their homes and onto boats bound for Canada 21. In addition to Highlanders that were forcibly sent to Canada, many Lowlanders chose to emigrate to the Canadas, largely due to the chance to, “…improve one’s living standards,” (John Gray Centre).

After completing their voyage to the Canadas, many Scotsmen settled in the already flourishing settlements of Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia. As observed in the 1861 Census of Nova Scotia, the Scottish population formed a majority of the minorities present in the municipalities. Of the population of Nov Scotia in 1860, which was 330,857 22, Scots made up the largest group of minorities at 45%. Within this percentage, almost 70 percent of these Scots were located in Pictou, where the ship Hector docked in 1773 23, Victoria, Inverness, and Cape Breton 24.

Once Scottish citizens settled in the Canadas, they proved themselves to be invaluable to their adopted country. As early 1760, Scots had proven themselves to be invaluable in the fur trade 25. Their next large-scale contribution to the Canadas came in 1817, when the Bank of Montreal was opened, becoming the first bank in Canada26. In addition to increasing the Canadas economic power, the Scots also placed great emphasis on furthering one’s education, through the usage of universities. Some of the most prestigious universities in modern day Canada were established by Scots. Dalhousie university, in Halifax, Nova Scotia, was founded in 1818. George Ramsay, the 9th Earl of Dalhousie, believed higher education should be available to more than just members of the Church of England 27. As a result, Dalhousie was created with the idea that all could attend, “regardless of religion, nationality or social class,” (Thorburn, 2017). regardless of McGill university in Montreal, Quebec, was founded in 1821 by James McGill posthumously, as he directed the money in his estate be used to establish a university 28. Another example of Scottish Canadians contributing to their new home was the founding of yet another university. St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, Nova Scotia, was founded in1853, and fully recognized as a university by 1866, by Colin Francis MacKinnon 29

Although many Scottish Canadians did not choose to come to the Canadas on their own free will, they proved to be resilient and make the most of their new-found home. Be it by inciting change in the education system, or by clearing woodlands to raise a profitable farm, the Scottish Canadians of the 18th and 19th centuries found a new and better life in the Canadas.

Bibliography:

Bumsted, J.M. “Scottish Canadians.” The Canadian Encyclopedia. 2018. <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/scots>

Campey, Lucille H. “What About the “Coffin” Ships? in *An Unstoppable Force: the Scottish Exodus to Canada.* Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2008.

Census Office, Nova Scotia. *Census of Nova Scotia, taken March 30, 1861, under the Act of Provincial Parliament - - Chap. XIV- - XXII VIC. 1862.* Internet Archive. Last modified March 2012. <https://archive.org/stream/18619818611862eng#page/n125>

Roy, James A. “II. The Scot in Canada,” in *The Scot and Canada.* Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1947.

Shaw, Matthew. “Introduction,” “Scottish Settlements,” “ Scottish Enterprise,” and “The Birth of Banking,” in *Great Scots!: How the Scots Created Canada*. (Winnipeg: Heartland Associates, 2003.)

Thorburn, Mike. “The University Founders: The Scotsmen that Shaped Canada’s Higher Education.” Scotland.org. 2017. <https://www.scotland.org/features/the-university-founders-the-scotsmen-that-shaped-canadas-higher-education>

Unknown. “Canadian Passenger Lists (National Institute).” Family Search. 2015. [https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Canada\_Passenger\_Lists\_(National\_Institute)](https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Canada_Passenger_Lists_%28National_Institute%29)

Unknown. “A Brief History of Emigration and Immigration in Scotland: Research Guide 2.” Accessed 25 November 2018. <https://www.johngraycentre.org/about/archives/brief-history-emigration-immigration-scotland-research-guide-2/>

1. Bumsted, J.M. “Scottish Canadians.” The Canadian Encyclopedia. 2018. <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/scots>

2. Shaw, Matthew. “Scottish Settlements,” in *Great Scots!: How the Scots Created Canada*. (Winnipeg: Heartland Associates, 2003.) 124.

3. Campey, Lucille H. “What About the “Coffin” Ships? in *An Unstoppable Force: the Scottish Exodus to Canada.* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2008.) 166.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Unknown. “Canadian Passenger Lists (National Institute).” Family Search. 2015. [https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Canada\_Passenger\_Lists\_(National\_Institute)](https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Canada_Passenger_Lists_%28National_Institute%29)

7. Roy, James A. “II. The Scot in Canada,” in *The Scot and Canada.* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1947.) 51.

8. Ibid, 81.

9*.* Shaw, Matthew. “Introduction,” in *Great Scots!: How the Scots Created Canada*. (Winnipeg: Heartland Associates, 2003.) 12-13.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13Unknown. “A Brief History of Emigration and Immigration in Scotland: Research Guide 2.” Accessed 25 November 2018. <https://www.johngraycentre.org/about/archives/brief-history-emigration-immigration-scotland-research-guide-2/>

14. Shaw, Matthew. “Scottish Settlements,” in *Great Scots!: How the Scots Created Canada*. (Winnipeg: Heartland Associates, 2003.) 123-124.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid.

18. Shaw, Matthew. “Scottish Settlements,” in *Great Scots!: How the Scots Created Canada*. (Winnipeg: Heartland Associates, 2003.) 129.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.

21. Unknown. “A Brief History of Emigration and Immigration in Scotland: Research Guide 2.” Accessed 25 November 2018. <https://www.johngraycentre.org/about/archives/brief-history-emigration-immigration-scotland-research-guide-2/>

22. Census Office, Nova Scotia. *Census of Nova Scotia, taken March 30, 1861, under the Act of Provincial Parliament - - Chap. XIV- - XXII VIC. 1862.* Internet Archive. Last modified March 2012. <https://archive.org/stream/18619818611862eng#page/n125> 11

23. Bumsted, J.M. “Scottish Canadians.” The Canadian Encyclopedia. 2018. <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/scots>

24. Census Office, Nova Scotia. *Census of Nova Scotia, taken March 30, 1861, under the Act of Provincial Parliament - - Chap. XIV- - XXII VIC. 1862.* Internet Archive. Last modified March 2012. <https://archive.org/stream/18619818611862eng#page/n125> 11

25. Shaw, Matthew. “Scottish Enterprise,” in *Great Scots!: How the Scots Created Canada*. (Winnipeg: Heartland Associates, 2003.) 138.

26. Shaw, Matthew. “The Birth of Banking,” in *Great Scots!: How the Scots Created Canada*. (Winnipeg: Heartland Associates, 2003.) 148.

27. Thorburn, Mike. “The University Founders: The Scotsmen that Shaped Canada’s Higher Education.” Scotland.org. 2017. <https://www.scotland.org/features/the-university-founders-the-scotsmen-that-shaped-canadas-higher-education>

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid.