

The Scots from Northern Ireland

Submitted by Blaine Mills, Saint Andrews Society of Maine-Historian. June 20, 2007

The original Scots came from Northern Ireland. The majority coming from County Antrim and the rest came from Counties Derry and Donegal. The Scots were Gaelic speaking people of Celtic origin. Gaelic scholars are uncertain of the origin of the name Scot. Scholars think in the ancient Gaelic Language, Scot could have referred to raiders or robbers. It was probably a slanderous nickname given to the Scots by their neighboring tribes.

The Gaelic spoken in Northern Ireland today is still much closer to the Hebridean Gaelic than the Gaelic spoken in the south of Ireland.

Around the year 498 AD three princes; Fergus, Angus, and Lorne, sons of Erc, King of Dalriada in Northern Ireland, sailed from Antrim to what is now Argyll in southwestern Scotland to start a new life. The land from Lorne in the North to Cowal in the South was divided between Erc's sons, creating rival dynasties in the New Dalriada. The descendants of Fergus, the senior line, Cinel Gabhran, held the area around what is now known as Knapdale and his seat of power was on the Rock of Dunadd.

It appears that the Scots in the New Dalriada lived in peace for a while, but within a half century they were in conflict with the Picts.* For the next 295 years the New Dalriada expanded and contracted like a breathing lung in a deadly contest between the Scots and the Picts. Because of the oral tradition, very little of Gabhran's early family history or genealogy is known. We are told that his descendant, Conal, King of Argyll, granted the Isle of Iona to St. Columba on his arrival from Ireland. Conal was killed in a battle with the Picts in 574 AD. St. Columba was asked by the elders to settle the question of successor. He selected the senior claimant, Aidan MacGabhran.

For the next 269 years Caledonia* was in total turmoil. Caledonia was once homeland to the Picts, but now they were

under siege by the Scots, Britons*, Saxons*, and Vikings*. In 839 AD the rebellious Scots under Alpin, House of Gabhran, were in a pitched battle with a Pictish Army when a great army of Vikings came upon their rear. The Scots were caught in the middle between the Picts and the Vikings. After the Scots had been annihilated, the Vikings and the Picts fell on each other. In the ensuing battle the Picts were totally destroyed. By this time the land of the Picts had diminished greatly. Centuries of fighting on all fronts had taken their toll. The Pictish Warriors were few in numbers, and there had been much inter marriage with the surrounding Scots, Britons, and Saxons. Within a few centuries the Pictish Language would be lost for ever.

In 843 AD Alpin's son, Kenneth, claimed the joint throne of the Scots and the Picts. He inherited the Scottish Throne through his father and the Pictish Throne through his mother. The coronation took place at the old Pictish Capital, Scone, in Perthshire. The oral tradition says that Kenneth murdered seven Earls of Dalriada, kinsmen who might have disputed his claim to the joint throne. The new union of the Scots and Picts was called Alba which would eventually be changed to Scotland.

By the 13th century Scotland was split in half. The highlands were occupied by the Gaelic speaking Scots who were by now about half Norse. Lowland Scotland was occupied by the Saxons, Britons, Danes*, and the late comers, the Normans*. The Normans had already claimed England and Wales, and they now had their eyes on Scotland and Ireland.

For at least 10 centuries few Highland Scots had ever set foot in Lowland Scotland, the home of the hated Sasannachs*. The highland Scots, however, never broke their ties with Northern Ireland. Over the centuries there was frequent travel and correspondence between the two Gaelic speaking peoples.

In the year 1259 Aed O Connor, a young Prince of Connacht, in the West of Ireland, traveled north to Derry to be wed. Aed was a Gael. His father was the clan chief of the O Connors. Soon he would have to take his fathers place and lead his clan against the Normans. Clan O Connor sought other powerful Gaelic clans to ally themselves with and an

important marriage had been arranged between Aed and a daughter of the Lord of the Isles*. When the Scottish Princess arrived by MacDonald galley to Derry she was accompanied by 160 of the very best warriors the Hebrides* had to offer. They were Galloglaich. This was the first recorded mention of the formidable Galloglaich to travel from Scotland to Ireland. It would not be the last. Galloglaich translates out to mean "foreign-youngmen". Over the next 342 years, the Northern Irish depended heavily on these Scottish Mercenaries for assistance against the Normans. At this same time the Normans were recruiting Protestants from England and Lowland Scotland to fight for their cause. These recruits were the so called, "Orange People", and should not be confused with the real Scots from the Highland who fought for the Irish. By 1500 the scale of the war in Ireland had escalated and more mercenaries were recruited from the Hebrides and the Highlands. The Normans (English) called them the, "Redshanks". The Irish Clans, Galloglaich, and Redshanks fought on until the last battle at Kinsale in December of 1601.

With many Scottish families sailing from Northern Ireland, only a few can be traced back to Ulster. There were probably many at the time, but over 1500 years have passed since their voyages between the 4th and 5th centuries, and few if any records survive today.

There is one family that can be traced back 46 or 47 generations to ancient times in Ulster. The descendants of Niall of the Nine Hostages have the oldest genealogy in all Ireland and Scotland. Over the years this family or clan produced a number of septs*; O Neill, MacNeill, MacLachlan, Lamont, MacBean, O Shield, O Quinlan, MacKeown, O Donnelley, O Daly, MacAwley, O Flaherty and probably many others. The Neill Family or Clan and many of their septs use the Red Hand of Ulster in their coats of arms.

The Red Hand of Ulster

The Neills were originally Celtic, but the family may have married into the first Norse* Dynasty who invaded and settled

in the Ulster area. The legend of the Red Hand is certainly Norse in origin.

Several Viking long ships were racing for the Ulster shore. One Viking chief noticed that another long ship was starting to pull ahead of his ship, he cut off his own hand and threw it ashore so that he could claim the right of first choice of the plunder. The Red Hand eventually became the emblem of Ulster.