

REVIEW: SCOTTISH EMIGRATION TO CANADA

Ged Martin

Donald Whyte, **A Dictionary of Scottish Emigrants to Canada Before Confederation**, Volume 1, Toronto Ontario Genealogical Society, 1986, xvi + 443 pp., ISBN 0-920036-09-0.

Donald Whyte, **A Dictionary of Scottish Emigrants to Canada Before Confederation**, Volume 2, Toronto Ontario Genealogical Society, 1995, xvi + 435 pp., ISBN 0-7779-0919-9.

Donald Whyte, **A Dictionary of Scottish Emigrants to Canada Before Confederation**, Volume 3, Toronto: Ontario Genealogical Society, 2002, vi + 137 pp., ISBN 0-7779-2119-7.

When Donald Whyte published the first volume of his major biographical project in 1986, he was quoted as saying 'I will not be tackling anything as big as that again'. Sixteen years later, in 2002, the Ontario Genealogical Society has published a third volume of his **Dictionary of Scottish Emigrants to Canada Before Confederation**. The project had already given us basic data on 23,214 Scots who sailed to British North America before 1867. This supplement adds a further 1,810, bringing the total to just over 25,000 people, and includes supplementary information on entries in the earlier volumes.

A typical brief entry will tell us that Angus Macdonald emigrated sometime before 1824 from Argyll to Quebec (i.e. at that time, Lower Canada), settling in Missisquoi County, that he was married to Mary Andrew and that a daughter, Agnes, was born in 1827. As it happens, Donald Whyte has

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amassed precisely one hundred Angus Macdonalds (or McDonalds and other variants) in his three volumes. Proliferation of common names is a hurdle faced by many ancestor-hunters. Here, at least, there is distinguishing information, including (wherever possible) the name of the ship on which the emigrant sailed, career and residence details, their nicknames and their children. Each entry is economical and staccato, with information attributed by abbreviation to several dozen sources.

Donald Whyte was born in Newtongrange in 1926. He was a founder member of the Scottish Genealogy Society, and is a former President of the Association of Scottish Genealogists. He has also served on West Lothian County Council and is a Justice of the Peace. It is a pleasure to salute his achievement. According to a major authority in the field, Professor J M Bumsted of the University of Manitoba, 185,000 Scots emigrated to Canada before 1870; Donald Whyte takes 1867, the year of Confederation, as his terminal point.

Remarkably, one scholar working without institutional support has chronicled more than one in eight of these elusive and historically ephemeral people. His **Dictionary** is of major value to family historians and academics alike. Stephen J Hornsby used the first volume for an important article, 'Patterns of Scottish Emigration to Canada, 1750-1850' (**Journal of Historical Geography**, volume 18, 1992), to establish a group portrait of the emigration, who went whence and whither. Dr Hornsby calculated that about two-thirds of the entries, relating to over seven thousand people, supplied enough information to identify both the county of departure and the colony of destination. This sample, equal to about four percent of the total Scots emigration to Canada in the period, showed two clearly distinct streams. Lowland emigration was diffuse, with people from every country heading apparently indiscriminately to all parts of British North America. The Highland exodus was dominated by defined channels of emigration to distinct regions. Thus Ross and Cromarty supplied Quebec, Highland areas of Perthshire focused upon Prince Edward Island and so on.

Dr Hornsby attributed this contrast to differences in emigration culture: Lowlanders moved as individuals or in family groups. Highlanders were more involved in community relocation and chain migration. Donald Whyte's careful sifting of source material must certainly have reduced the risk of accidental double-counting, while Dr Hornsby's sample does not contain any distortion towards Lanark or Midlothian origins which might be expected if

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the records had simply registered the fact that emigrants sailed from Greenock or Leith. On the basis of his analysis of Donald Whyte's first volume, Dr Hornsby pointed to the inadequacy of the ethnic classification 'Scots' in the Canadian census, arguing that this over-simplified a complex mixture of local origins on the ground.

This prompts a still larger reflection. Within Scotland itself, a sense of nationality was undoubtedly deep-rooted in 1870. But, barely a generation after the arrival of the railways, the strength of locality was still tenacious. In Benedict Anderson's terms, the national community was very much an 'imagined' one, simply because people in different parts of Scotland had little means of meeting one another. Even the four main cities probably acted as melting pots primarily for their immediate hinterlands. It may have been in the colonies that Scots first encountered each other in numbers and diversity sufficient to compel the triggering of a sense of pan-Scottish identity.

Dr Hornsby's research and these reflections illustrate the potential value for future scholarly debate based upon Donald Whyte's meticulous research. At the age of 76, he insists that Volume 3 is his last offering and that others must carry forward the story into the post-Confederation period. It is to be hoped that there is a Scottish university with the generosity and outward vision to honour his remarkable achievement.

Volume 3 of **A Dictionary of Scottish Emigrants to Canada Before Confederation** is available from the Ontario Genealogical Society, 40 Orchard View Blvd., Suite 102, Toronto Canada M4R 1B9, at US\$21 per copy, including postage to the UK.

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