

REVIEW: SCOTS IN THE USA

Richard Blaustein

Jenni Calder, **Scots In The USA**. Edinburgh: Luath Press, 2006, 192 pp, pb, £8.99, ISBN 1-905222-06-8.

This highly readable survey of the history of Scots in the United States covers a great deal of territory: 'The impact of North America on life and work in Scotland has been immense, from the early eighteenth century when the union of the Scottish and English parliaments legalised trade between Scotland and the American colonies, to the present day.' (p.3). Chapter One, 'I Should Like To Be An American,' deals with the early colonial period. In the seventeenth century, Royalists and Covenanters were transported to the American colonies, where many were sold into indentured servitude. Emigration from Scotland to the American colonies increased during the eighteenth century prior to the American Revolution. Innovations in farming and the weaving industry encouraged emigration from Scotland to America. (pp.14-15). Scots fought on both sides of the American Revolution; many Scottish Loyalists chose to resettle in British North America, present-day Canada, rather than remain in the United States.

Emigration from Scotland to the US continued during the nineteenth century, largely prompted by lack of economic opportunity at home. Calder graphically describes the wretched conditions aboard emigrant ships before the advent of steamships. (pp.20-21) In Chapter 2, 'Take Courage and Come to this Country,' Calder documents the establishment of Scottish settlement in the American colonies, particularly in New Jersey, North and South Carolina, and Georgia. Slave labour was part of the colonial economy from the earliest time

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of settlement. Many Highlanders settled in the Cape Fear district of North Carolina; Gaelic was spoken in this region into the twentieth century (p.43).

Chapter Three, 'The Most Plentiful Country in the World,' gives more details concerning pre-revolutionary settlements in the American colonies, particularly New York. Calder provides more details regarding Glasgow's pre-eminent role in the tobacco trade: 'The work was done increasingly by slaves, although indentured labour was vital, especially in the early years. Without slave labour Glasgow's extraordinary success would not have been possible' (p.54). Some American settlers resented the primacy of Scots in the tobacco trade (pp.57-58). The outbreak of the American Revolution disrupted the commercial ties between Glasgow and the colonies (p.58).

In Chapter Four, 'American In My Principles,' Calder notes the impact of Scottish intellectuals upon the leaders of the American Revolution: 'Scottish thinkers and teachers helped to shape their thoughts and their language' (p.68). Though Scottish intellectuals influenced the American Revolution, nonetheless many Scots were Loyalists. 'In Britain, as in the colonies, there were outbursts of anti-Scottish invective' (p.71). Nevertheless, a number of the signatories of the Declaration of Independence were of Scottish or Ulster Scots descent. Calder provides an illuminating portrait of Colonel Patrick Ferguson, who fell at the fateful battle of King's Mountain, a decisive Revolutionary victor. (p.84). Scottish emigration to the new American republic resumed during the remaining years of the eighteenth century, prompted by the belief that America was indeed a land of freedom and opportunity (p.86).

In Chapter 5, 'Ideas of Living More Comfortably,' Calder comments: 'The relationship between Scotland and the new republic would never regain quite the same closeness it had before 1775' (p.88). The frontier expanded westward during the latter years of the eighteenth century. Calder discusses the careers of early nineteenth century leaders with Scottish roots including Andrew Jackson and Alexander McGillivray, who was elected chief of the Creek Nation in 1783 (p.94). Though some Scottish commentators were put off by the crudity and materialism of American life, others continued to look upon America as the great land of opportunity (pp.100-101). In Chapter 6, 'Within The Reach of All,' Calder gives further details regarding Scottish settlers in nineteenth century America. Though some Scots achieved spectacular success, most aspired to modest comfort and affluence: 'This was space which invited ordinary people to build new lives and communities. It also offered possibilities for breaking out of the limits of narrow thinking as well as breaking from poverty and oppression. It was space for experiment' (p.114).

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Calder briefly describes Robert Owen's experimental New Harmony community in Indiana, strongly influenced by David Dale's model community in New Lanark (pp.114-17). In this chapter, Calder also briefly discusses John Ross, chief of the Cherokee nation, and frontiersmen Sam Houston and Davy Crockett. Scots took part in the development of Western cattle ranching and the California gold rush (pp.132-137).

Chapter 7, 'The Lure of the West,' examines root causes of the American Civil War, tensions between free and slaves states. Scots were involved in both sides of the Civil War (pp.141-43). Two US presidents with Scottish roots succeeded Abraham Lincoln: Andrew Johnson and Ulysses S. Grant (p.144). Southerners with Scottish roots established the Ku Klux Klan in 1865, which Thomas Dixon glorified in his 1904 novel **The Clansman**, filled with Scottish references and allusions. Scottish romanticism suffuses the symbolism of Southern resistance to Northern domination: 'The Confederate flag incorporates the saltire' (p.146). The rest of this chapter deals with the role of Scots in post-Civil War westward expansion and the subjugation of the western Native American Tribes (pp.148-152). Calder provides a colourful summary of Robert Louis Stevenson's account of his visit to the American West on an immigrant train (pp.155-58). This chapter ends with a description of the life and work of Scottish-born conservationist John Muir.

Chapter 8, 'Muscle and Brain,' begins with a description of Andrew Carnegie returning to his home town of Dunfermline in 1881. The son of a weaver who emigrated to Pittsburgh, Carnegie worked his way up from a railroad telegrapher to a steel magnate and one of America's wealthiest men. Carnegie gave millions in the US and Britain, but nonetheless became embroiled in violent labour disputes, particularly the Homestead strike of 1892. In his latter years, Carnegie lived the life of a laird in Scotland. The infamous Pinkerton Agency, notorious strike-breakers, was also founded by a Scottish immigrant. Calder sees a deep paradox in the life and career of Allan Pinkerton, an active abolitionist who became a strike-breaker in his latter years: 'Pinkerton took huge risks as a political radical in Scotland and an abolitionist in the US, yet helped crush the attempts of labour to win fairer treatment' (p.178). This chapter also briefly recounts the successes of other Scottish immigrants in late nineteenth century America: 'As the nineteenth century came to an end, returning sojourners continued to spread the news of employment possibilities and encourage others to go' (p.185). Scots continued to migrate to the US in the twentieth century.

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Chapter 9, 'Fire On The Mountain,' deals with the celebration of Scottishness in the US. Scottish organisations in the American colonies date back to the establishment of the Scots Charitable Society in Boston in 1657. St. Andrew's Societies were established in various American cities in the eighteenth century. The nineteenth century witnessed the founding of Burns Clubs and Burns Night Suppers. Sir Walter Scott's novels were extremely popular in the US: 'Books from Scotland kept the home country vivid in the hearts and minds of exiles and helped create an image of a valiant little nation, which bred a distinctive race of rugged and enterprising people who held their own against tremendous odds' (p.198). The novels of the Kailyard writes, J.M. Barrie, Samuel Crockett and Ian Maclaren, were extremely popular in late nineteenth century America.

Calder offers a sketchy discussion of Scottish influences on American folk and country music. 'Lord MacDonal'd's Reel,' the source of the American fiddle tune 'Leather Breeches,' is misnamed 'Lord MacDonal'd's Lament' (p.202). The wearing of tartan as a symbol of Scottish identity predates the American Revolution. The cult of tartan flourished on both sides of the Atlantic during the nineteenth century. A new wave of enthusiasm for tartan has continued since the 1950s. Highland Games have flourished in the US: 'Around 300 Highland games take place in North America every year. Although about half are located in the Southern states, they are also found in the north and west' (p.206).

America has strongly influenced twentieth century Scottish popular culture (p.212). Scots do not go to the US to find their roots: 'They go – and in the twenty-first century they still go – in search of a new life, a different experience, images nurtured over the past hundred years by song and screen rather than by emigration agents and letters from the New World' (p.215). A welcome addition to the literature dealing with connections between Scotland and the United States, this book is highly recommended.

June 2006