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THE DANDRIDGE SCOTS-IRISH FESTIVAL

Education and Celebration of Our Scots-Irish Heritage

SINCE BEING CERTIFIED as one of 21 Tennessee State Main Street communities, one of the ways that the Dandridge Community Trust uses its Dandridge Main Street program to promote the preservation of our heritage is through our signature event, the annual Scots-Irish Festival. Held on the last Saturday in September each year, 2010 marks the 4th year of our festival, which recognizes our town's founders and creates an opportunity to learn more about an important part of our history.

The East Tennessee area was heavily settled by Scots-Irish immigrants, and the Town of Dandridge and surrounding areas are no exception. Much study has taken place, and many books have been written about the migration of the Ulster Scots, also known as Scots-Irish or Scotch-Irish, to East Tennessee.

These pioneers of the new frontier established roads, communities, and churches in the early days of this land that still exist today. The Scots-Irish were integral soldiers and leaders in the successful fight for American Independence. They brought their religion, customs, speech, and music from Scotland and Ireland, which still greatly influence this part of the United States. Our festival recognizes the importance of these cultural links and offers the opportunity for all of us to learn more about and better appreciate our roots.

A Little History to Get You Started

In 1603, King James VI of Scotland ascended to the throne of England and became King James I. Besides being noted for the King James translation of the Bible, he unknowingly set into motion a series of events that would affect millions of people on both sides of the Atlantic from that time on.

In 1607, King James I began the Ulster Plantation Project in which he began sending Protestant, English-speaking lowland Scots to settle the Catholic, Gaelic-speaking, northern portion of Ireland, called Ulster. After a few generations, these Scottish settlers, now solidly entrenched in Irish life,

began migrating to America.

The consensus on the Scotch-Irish migration to America appears to be that at least 150,000 people left Ulster, Northern Ireland for North America in the six decades preceding the American Revolution. They were overwhelmingly Presbyterian, were of Scottish ancestry and tradition, and they left primarily for economic reasons. A reasonable estimate is that 12 to 15 percent of the late-18th-century white population in the United States derived from Ulster, although what is most relevant to East Tennessee and nearby regions is the fact that the Scotch-Irish and their descendants were concentrated in the back country. Why is this? One explanation is that the British landowners needed these independent and natural born fighters to explore and tame the wilderness that was then "The West." These settlers came down the "Great Wagon Road," which was a Colonial America improved trail transiting the Great Appalachian Valley from Pennsylvania to North Carolina. "Improved trail" means a path tracing roughly the present day route of Interstate 81 that would barely accommodate wagons, had extremely mountainous and unforgiving terrain, and was full of hostile Native Americans. The truck stops and Cracker Barrels came much later.

The American Revolution

The British landowner's plans for the Scotch-Irish to pave the way for British development worked pretty well until they tried to enforce unpopular British laws and collect taxes from our fiercely independent ancestors. The generations of distrust for Britain culminated in the Scotch-Irish becoming the largest contingent of volunteers to fight for American Independence. One Hessian officer reportedly said, "Call this war by whatever name you may, only call it not an American rebellion; it is nothing more or less than a Scotch Irish Presbyterian rebellion." A British major general testified to the House of Commons that half the rebel

Continental Army was from Ireland. The Scotch-Irish "Overmountain Men," gathering at Sycamore Shoals (present day Elizabethton, Tennessee), formed a militia which won the Battle of Kings Mountain in 1780, resulting in the British abandonment of a southern campaign. Some historians mark this victory as the turning point of the American Revolution. Look at it another way – if not for our Scotch-Irish ancestors, we would all be speaking (the King's) English and driving on the wrong side of the road.

NEXT MONTH:

We take a look at how our Celtic ancestors still influence the region's religion, language and music.



Mark Murray is a board member of the Dandridge Community Trust, Chairman of the Dandridge Scots-Irish Festival's entertainment committee, and an entertainer himself, specializing in traditional Scottish and Irish folk songs.



Each month contributors from the East Tennessee Preservation Alliance (ETPA) write an article

for Everything Knoxville celebrating the rich heritage of our region. ETPA is a regional historic preservation membership-based organization that serves Anderson, Blount, Campbell, Claiborne, Cocke, Grainger, Hamblen, Jefferson, Knox, Loudon, Monroe, Morgan, Roane, Scott, Sevier, and Union counties. Preservation field services in this region are provided by Knox Heritage and are assisted by a Partners in the Field grant from the National Trust for Historic Preservation. For more information, please visit www.knoxheritage.org.