IRISH IN COLONIAL AMERICA

The unfolding pages of American history expound the romantic story of a free and democratic nation. But the chapter on the Irish in America often is conspicuous by its absence.

The failure of historians to understand the "Scotch-Irish" myth has caused them to deny a native Irish influence in Colonial America. In 1603, the accession of the Tudor family to the English throne was ended and James IV of Scotland became King of England. He sought a way to ensure Ireland's dependence upon Great Britain and at the same time aid the impoverished Scotch farmer, whose rocky terrain was producing and ever decreasing agricultural output and who was becoming the victim of the 17th Century Enclosure Movement which saw much farmland transposed to pastureland for sheep, which supplied England with wool for her infant textile industry. Thus, evolved the "Plantation of Ulster". Between 1611 and 1641 Irish land was given to Scotch farmers without recompense to the Irish land holder. In 1649, after the "Plantation", Sir William Petty reported to the English Parliament that "the population of Ulster Province to be: native Irish 63,350; English, Scotch and other aliens 40,571; a total of 103,921." This means that Scotch population in Ulster was considerably less than 40,571 and that native Irish population exceeded all others by at least 22,979. American historians tend to call all Irish people, "Scotch-Irish". The remainder of this article, in a small way, will show that the total Scotch population was far too small to be credited with all that the "Scotch-Irish" have been honored with. Of necessity, this means there were native Irish people in Colonial America.

Why would these Irishmen make their homes in America? The reasons were political, economic and religious. In the 17th Century Ireland, a Catholic was forbidden to teach school and a tremendous number of schoolmasters came to the colonies. Mixed marriages were forbidden by civil law. A Catholic could not be a guardian of any child. A Catholic could not inherit property unless he "conformed" to Anglecanizm within six months. If a son "conformed" he was automatically given the title to his father's land. Catholic homes could be searched without warrants. Any horse, an economic necessity of the times, could be taken from a Catholic for only five pounds. No non-anglican could be admitted to the bar or hold commission in the army. In order to hold land an Irishman had "to take to him an English surname." If he refused, he lost his land and consequently his right to vote since the former was required to possess the latter. For this reason many Anglecized their names, McGowan became Smith since "Gow" is the Gaelic of blacksmith; Kirwan became Whitecomb from the Gaelic "Cior bhan", white comb. Some took names of colors, i.e., Green, Black, Brown, White etc. Others adopted names of physical landmarks, i.e., Hill, Field, Glen Brookes etc. This fact apparently was overlooked by many historians because these are the people who have been called "Scotch Irish" or English.

Economically, the Navigation Act of 1666 excluded Ireland from her comparative advantage in international trade because both imports and exports went through Britain before reaching or leaving Ireland. In the latter colonial period many Irishmen who had fought in the unsuccessful Rebellion of 1798 emigrated to America. The influx was so great that in 1801, the Deputy Governor of Pennyslvania, addressing the state legislature said, "It looks as Ireland is to send all its inhabitants hither....the common fear is that if they continue to come they will make themselves masters of the province." The Irish people were coerced to leave their native land and the American colonies were needful of emigrants, an ideal situation for migration, yet unnoticed by the majority of American historians.

Now, a look at the early american scene will reveal the true story. In the