The Scots-Irish in the Foothills and Mountains of Greenville County

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The Anglo-Saxon invasion of Celtic Britain, beginning in the 5th century A.D., expelled most of the British Celts from the area that became known as England. In what became the Lowlands of Scotland, the Celtic tribes survived but came under the strong influence of Anglo-Saxon nationality and culture. To the north, the Scottish Highlands remained almost entirely Celtic, with little Anglo-Saxon influence.

Early in the seventeenth century, Lowland Scots found themselves caught between England to the south and Celtic Highlanders to the north. In addition, they had lived on infertile, over-farmed land for centuries. About the same time, the English solution to frequent rebellion in Ireland was to promote the settlement in Ireland of English and Scottish Protestants. This process of settlement, or "plantation," was to begin in the northeastern Irish province of Ulster, where most of the land had been confiscated following a recent rebellion. To the Lowland Scots, large and bountiful tenant farms in Ulster, just a short distance across the Irish Sea, were most appealing. Life, however, for these transplanted Scots was not ideal in Ulster. Because they were Presbyterians, they refused to swear allegiance to the Anglican Church, which was the established Church in Ireland. They disliked tithing to a church they did not support. Also, as dissenters, they were prevented from voting, bearing arms, or serving in the military under the English Penal Laws. They could not be married, baptized or buried with the assistance of any minister who was not ordained by the state church.

By the early eighteenth century, some of the restrictive laws had loosened, but the Ulster Scots were still bitter. Now, when rents came due on many of the farms they lived on, the cost was double, or more.

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This was known as rack-renting. Even those few Ulster Scots who had managed to purchase some property found themselves unable to pay the king's exorbitant taxes. They began to look toward the American colonies. Those in arrears for taxes or rents were forced to sail for the colonies as indentured servants of the Crown. Family members who had already ventured to North America sent back glowing reports about the fruitful new land. Mass migration from Ulster began in 1717, and occurred in five other periods during the century. These mass exoduses occurred when economic pressures were greatest in Northern Ireland.

Early Scots-Irish (as they were called in the colonies) pioneers preferred to settle in the western part of Pennsylvania. They found the Quakers there more to their liking than Catholics in Maryland or Anglicans in Virginia. By 1730, they had made their way into the lush Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, the westernmost region of the British colonies. Here they enjoyed religious freedom because they were ignored by Tidewater Virginians.

Many of these settlers soon found Virginia too crowded for their liking and continued to move south, in the mid-eighteenth century, into the virtually unpopulated frontier of the Piedmont country of North Carolina and South Carolina.

The first Scots-Irish Presbyterian emigrants to this part of upper South Carolina came to lower Greenville County. In 1785, the Peden and Nesbitt families established the Fairview Presbyterian Church in the Fountain Inn area. It is the oldest Presbyterian church in Greenville County.

Scots-Irish settlers in the mountainous upper Greenville County were without Presbyterian ministers to provide pastoral leadership. Presbyterian ministers were required to be seminary educated. There were not enough trained individuals from Scottish educational institutions coming to the American colonies to minister to the growing numbers of Scots-Irish emigrants on the frontier. Many became Baptists or Methodists.

The Calvinist backgrounds of the early Baptist and Methodist churches in the mountainous upper part of the county made the transition easier for them. Intermarriage with settlers from the northern areas of England also added to the transition.

Most Scots-Irish and many northern English emigrants came to America to escape the heavy, negative influence of the Anglican Church on their lives. They longed to live in a less-controlled religious environment. While Methodists assigned ministers to congregations, each Baptist church was free to choose its own minister.

Many of the Scots-Irish shared another deep conviction with their borderline England brothers: that a man has a God-given, inalienable right to make his own spirits, for medicinal purposes, for social interaction, and in many cases for economic survival. Even some preachers in the mountainous Dark Corner area had their own copper stills for producing small batches of the needed spirits for medicinal purposes.

Moonshine tainted the area in some minds, but there were also numerous efforts to bring learning to this remote, sometimes lawless, area. The Dark Corner has produced outstanding ministers of the Gospel who strongly supported educational excellence. Among these were:

The Reverend Alex D. Bowers, who was lovingly known as "The Gospel hero of the hills," Bowers devoted most of his life to untiring pastoral work in 23 mountain churches, including six in which he was instrumental in founding. He was a compassionate, courageous Bible preacher, who always took a firm stand in opposition to moonshine making. He was loyal and faithful to the causes of Christian education, benevolences, and home and foreign missions, which were sponsored by the local association and the Baptist State Convention. He died 20 days before his 83rd birthday in 1909. Though his body had become too frail to easily stand, his last sermons were delivered with deep-seated compassion while sitting in a chair.

The Reverend Thomas J. Earle, born in 1824, earned degrees from Mercer University in Macon, Georgia. He was eagerly sought as a pastor and educator immediately following his doctorate designation, and pastored 12 churches (some concurrently as a circuit rider). He served as pastor of Gowensville Baptist Church from 1856 to his death in 1889 (32 years), and opened his well-known Gowensville Seminary there in 1858, which was the foremost educational institution in the area. It closed the year after his death. He was also instrumental in the founding of the North Greenville Baptist Association and served as first moderator.

The Reverend J. Dean Crain was born in a remote log cabin in the Dark Corner in 1881, and was destined to become a driving force in pastoral ministry and Christian education throughout his life. He was educated at North Greenville Baptist Academy and Furman University. He pastored numerous churches, including Pendleton Street Baptist in Greenville, for a number of years and was principal of North Greenville Academy. He served as vice president of the Southern Baptist Convention and in numerous State Convention posts. He was vice chairman of trustees for Furman University for many years. J. Dean Crain wrote the first book on the Dark Corner, *A Mountain Boy's Life Story*, at age 33.

The Reverend James A. Howard was born into a moonshine-making family in 1894, and his first paying job, at age 17, was hauling the illicit liquid in a wagon down Glassy Mountain. Little did he know that his future would be distinctly different. He not only would have a call to ministry, but his father would later become an unpaid Constable and be killed in a distillery raid near Hogback Mountain.

"Preacher Jim," as he was later called, graduated from Fruitland Bible Institute, Furman University, and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He pastored churches in South Carolina, Texas and Oklahoma, and served as trustee for Limestone College and Southwestern Baptist Seminary.

Jim returned to his native South Carolina in 1940 and became Superintendent of Evangelism for the South Carolina Baptist Convention, a post he held until his retirement in 1961. Following his retirement, he did pastoral supply, evangelistic outreach, spent a great deal of time in research of his native Dark Corner, and doing speaking engagements. In 1978, a number of other researchers encouraged him to write a history of the Dark Corner from his wealth of knowledge of the area. In 1980, he published *Dark Corner Heritage*. It has been reprinted three times.

In the final chapter of his *Dark Corner Heritage*, Jim Howard passed the mantle of Dark Corner historian to a young man who had become known as the Squire of the Dark Corner, Dean Campbell. Dean had earned the title from the late Jim McAllister, columnist for the Greenville News, for his one-man efforts to tell the full story of the sinister, mountainous area. A photographer and writer, in addition to being a researcher, Dean published his *Eyes to the Hills—A Photographic Odyssey of the Dark Corner* in 1994, as his personal testimony to the area.

Even when the Dark Corner is dark, the light of the Creator fills each soul with a living heritage and a loving promise. That heritage includes many Scots-Irish from the Lowlands of Scotland and from Ulster.

Sources

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Author's Note

There is ample evidence of the primacy of Scots Irish among the early settlers in northern Greenville County. Sixteen of the first 29 families to settle on the four rivers of the area were Scots-Irish families from the Lowlands of Scotland and from Ulster.

The earliest settlers on the North Pacolet River were the families of Jackson, Earle, Hannon, and Page.

The earliest on the South Pacolet River were the families of McDowell, McMillen, McClure, and Dickson.

The earliest families on the North and Middle Tyger Rivers were Moore, Barry, Jordan, Caldwell, Nesbitt, Vernon, Prince, Ballenger, Wood, Wingo, Bowman, Chapman, Foster, Pedan, Collins, Nichols, Wakefield, Miller, Snoddy, Anderson, and Richardson.