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Journey to the New World: Highland Scots

At the beginning of the 18th century, Scots began imagining the possibilities awaiting in the New World. After Scotland and England signed the Acts of Union in 1707, the United Kingdom was formed. This Act granted Scots the legal right to migrate to the New World. Attracted by the opportunity for prosperity, the Scottish immigrated in high numbers to America. The Scottish diaspora was divided into three main groups: Lowland Scots, Highland Scots, and Ulster Scots (Lewis). After the Battle of Culloden in 1745, life for the Highlanders in Scotland was difficult because the British began to take control of the Highlander region by destroying the clan system and bringing poverty to the masses. These hardships were a driving force for many Scottish Highlanders when deciding to immigrate to America.

The journey that followed the decision to move to the New World was incredibly strenuous. Before finding a new permanent residence in the Carolinas, the Highland Scots had to first travel by ship across the Atlantic Ocean. Life aboard ships traveling to America was grim. For many people, their month-long voyage across the ocean was spent "below deck--damp, dark, and airless. At times disease rampaged among the tightly housed Highlanders. Ship captains often violated their contracts and failed to supply the food they had promised" (Mobley). Although these conditions were terrible, many more Highlanders would have taken this opportunity if it were not for lack of finances. The aspiration to reach America was so influential that it was exhibited in "popular lyrics of the day and in ballads which proclaimed the glories of the New World"(Meyer 15-16). The first large-scale immigration of the Highland Scots was in 1739 when 350 people from Argyllshire arrived in Wilmington and the Upper Cape Fear Valley (Beach). Since much of the Lower Cape Fear valley was inhabited by Lowland Scots, the

Highlanders decided to travel upstream and settle in the Upper Cape Fear Valley (Johnson). Gabriel Johnston, royal governor of North Carolina in 1739, provided a ten-year tax exemption to the Highlanders who had moved into the region. This exemption gave the Scots, who were primarily farmers, a great advantage because they were already seeking to buy land and plant crops in the New World.

Adjusting to life in North Carolina was not always easy for Scottish settlers. Many Highlanders only spoke Gaelic; however, the language used by the colony's governments and courts was English (Beach). Presbyterian was the most prominent religion of Highlander Scots, but their worship style underwent changes upon moving to the New World. North Carolina's official religion was the Anglican Church of England. Although Highlanders did not attend the Anglican church, they were still taxed to support them, and marriages by a Presbyterian minister were not legal.

Today, the Highlander Scots legacy is still felt throughout much of North Carolina. Relatives from my past resided in the Cape Fear Valley region when it was the hub for many Highlanders moving to the New World. Parts of my genetic history consist of Scottish DNA. My surname, Massey, has roots based in the United Kingdom in parts of England and Scotland (Massey Family Crest, Coat of Arms and Name History). Scottish Highlanders established many Presbyterian churches throughout North Carolina. I was raised in a Presbyterian church, and it has shaped my morals and beliefs, and made me the person I am today. Throughout the years that followed Highlanders settling into North Carolina, their culture changed and intertwined with the surrounding community. Their culture has helped shape North Carolina's culture, community, and diversity for the better.

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