

## DECENT PEOPLE FROM THE SOUTH

She left from Ullapool, the little brigantine Hector, sometime in the early July of 1773 with a cargo of Highlanders bound for the eastern shores of Canada. Many of them were Camerons and Grants, Frasers and MacKenzies, MacKays, MacLeods and Rosses, from the Ullapool area itself, from Assynt, and from the forfeited estates of the Frasers of Lovat over at Beaully.

Not much is known of the little two-master, except that she was old, small (about 120 feet in length), and on the far side of seaworthy for a transatlantic trip at any time of the year. But she got her anchors aboard that evening - for departure had already been long-delayed - ran out of Loch Broom, and headed west for the sunset.

Nothing is known about her route: though she might well have gone south by Barra Head and then out into the ocean, for the latitude of her destination was well to the south of her point of departure.

But rather a lot is known about her human cargo: for they signalled the first big wave of post-Culloden emigration from the Highlands to the New World.

After the disasters of 1745 and 1746, the Highlands had been 'pacified' with a vengeance. The estates of the principal Jacobite landlords were expropriated (forfeited). There was some talk, even, of transporting the entire Highland population to the colonies, so that the glens could be settled by 'decent people from the south'; precisely the sort of policy that Stalin (among others) was to use against his 'national minorities' during World War Two.

Some southern commentators even proposed that seed-grain and such like be withheld from the turbulent indigents beyond the Highland Line: again the sort of policy that allowed Stalin to murder by starvation ten million Ukrainian farmers as part of his 'improving' agricultural policies of the 1930s.

But in the event the free-market, 18th century style, was allowed to take its course. In 1773, when Johnson and Boswell tottered into Skye on their ponies, they discovered a 'fury of emigration' under way. A year earlier, 16 emigrant ships had sailed from the coasts of Ross and Inverness. Now, they found that ships were ready to sail from Stornoway and Greenock and Lochaber.

They might also have mentioned Ullapool: for the people on the Hector were part of this fury.

Of course, there were already many Scots - Lowland and Highland - in north America. In the 1620s, around the time of the landing of English religious refugees in New England, a New Scotland - a Nova Scotia - was grabbed and named in a commendable spirit of equity by William Alexander. In the middle of the century, Cromwell had Scottish prisoners shipped to New England and Virginia. And by the end of the century, there were Scottish communities in South Carolina and New Jersey. In the early 18th century, 'clansmen' from Skye were being sold and shipped towards the proposed Quaker paradise of Pennsylvania. By the 1730s, there were Scots in nearly all of the 13 American colonies.

In the immediate wake of Culloden, hundreds more were deported overseas. And after Highland soldiers had served in the Seven Years' War with the Fraser Highlanders, and some chose to settle in maritime Canada. In 1772, meanwhile, John MacDonald of

Glenaladale famously took 200 MacEachans, MacKenzies, MacKinnons and Campbells to maritime Canada too. Many other Highlanders settled in the Cape Fear valley in North Carolina. To this river valley, in the same year of 1772, 'a thousand people have arrived from the Scottish islands since the month of November'.

For the 200 emigrants on the Hector, meanwhile - of whom 70 were children - it was to be a terrible trip, sustained by rancid water, barely-edible ships' biscuits, poor oatmeal and badly salted beef. There was an outbreak of smallpox; an invisible terror in the fetid tween-decks that can scarcely now be imagined. Eighteen died, most of them children, and their bodies were consigned to the deep.

Towards the end of August, the Hector by reckoning was over the Grand Banks and nearing harbour, when a storm sprang upon her and sent her half-way back to Scotland. Weeks of hard struggle to regain lost ground were to follow. But not till the middle of September did the Hector fight her way into the foggy Gulf of St Lawrence, and feel her way south towards the port of Pictou on the north shore of Nova Scotia. A trip that might have taken a month or so, had in fact endured for ten hard and hungry weeks.

The months that followed were hard and hungry too, though the Highland emigrants got help from the local Indians, who clearly had strong ideas on how to welcome desperate refugees from another culture and another land.

And in time these newcomers prospered. Within a decade, there was a community of 500 in the district, with more on the way from the old homeland. In deed, if in miniature, they were making of it a New Scotland. Thus was Canada populated, and the Highlands rendered adequately empty for the sheep farmer and the sporting gun of the decades to come.

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