

# Myth of the Perth 'Scots' Settlement

As might be expected, in the retelling over 200 years, some aspects of the founding of the Perth Military Settlement in 1816 have become mythologized. In particular the immigrant ships *Atlas*, *Baltic Merchant*, *Dorothy* and *Eliza*, which reached Quebec City in 1815, seem to have emerged as Perth's *Mayflower* and their passengers our equivalent of the 'Pilgrim Fathers'.

As part of that tale, Perth has emerged, and is promoted to this day, as a settlement founded and perpetuated by Scots. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century communications age this perception becomes more widely repeated and entrenched than ever; the Wikipedia 'Scottish Canadians' page describes the Perth Settlement as "... of purely Scottish and military origin"<sup>1</sup>. That Perth was ever truly a 'Scots Settlement' deserves challenge, and reference to original source documentation clearly calls the Scots myth into question.

Of the 700<sup>2</sup> immigrants who arrived in Canada from Glasgow, Scotland, aboard the *Atlas*, *Baltic Merchant*, *Dorothy* and *Eliza*, only about 270 ever came to Perth, among them eight families from England, one from Ireland, one from Holland and one whose origin is unknown. The remainder settled in Glengarry, around the Bay of Quinte, at other locations in both Upper and Lower Canada and a few crossed the border into the United States. The vast majority of those who did receive Location Tickets at Perth were indeed Scots; but just 57 families numbering 231 individuals in all.

In the same time period, however, the 'Transaction of Land Grants Made at the Military Depot, Perth'<sup>3</sup> for the 1816-1819 period lists 859 individuals who had completed their 'settlement duties' by 1822; of that total, only about one third were Scots. Those founders actually numbered 370 (43%) Irish, 296 (34%) Scots, 134 (16%) English and 7 (1%) from other countries. Records for the remaining 52 (6%) do not indicate country of origin. The number and proportion of Irish settlers would continue to grow over the following decades maintaining Ireland as the leading contributor to the population of the Perth Settlement.

A variation on the Scots myth is that Perth was a 'Highland' Scots settlement. Records show, however, that among those 231 Scots men, women and children from the *Atlas*, *Baltic Merchant*, *Dorothy* and *Eliza* who reached Perth, only nine were from the Highlands; William McGillvery with a family of seven and a single man named John McLeod who reported their home of origin as Inverness. There could have been a few others, as the origin of another 39 individuals (15 families) is recorded only as 'Scotland', but at least 70% (40 of 57 Scots families) were 'Lowlanders' who gave their origins as; Edinburgh 11, Perthshire 4, Dumfries 6, Glasgow 4, Lanark 3, Ayrshire 3, Banffshire 2 and Dundee 1. Further, the preponderance of Lowlanders demonstrated by those for whom more complete data was recorded, suggests that the proportion of Lowlanders was perhaps as high as 90%.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish\\_Canadian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish_Canadian)

<sup>2</sup> Between 699 and 753, depending upon source document.

<sup>3</sup> National Archives of Canada, MG9, D8-27, Vol. 1, Microfilm Reel #C-4651; as transcribed by Christine Spencer



*The Highland Line*

with wives and 366 children (1,253), and just 239 civilian settlers with 111 wives and 287 children (637). The Scots of the *Atlas*, *Baltic Merchant*, *Dorothy* and *Eliza* represented just 14% of the total.

For some, the ‘*Mayflower*’ myth of those *Atlas*, *Baltic Merchant*, *Dorothy* and *Eliza* Scots, has also come to cloud another important aspect of the settlement’s founding. Even when referring to the Perth Military Settlement, the military element is obscured by the ‘Highlanders’ of the Scotch Line.

Between 1816 and 1819, more than 1,200 discharged British soldiers, from over 80 regiments of infantry, marines, cavalry and artillery, the Royal navy and miscellaneous support units were compensated for services to the Crown with Location Tickets for ‘waste land’ at the Perth Military Settlement. In that mix were English, Irish, Swiss, French, Dutch, Poles, Sicilians, Americans and other nationalities, as well as Scots (Highlanders and Lowlanders).

According to Reverend William Bell, Perth’s first Presbyterian clergyman, when he reached the settlement in June 1817, a year after the first arrivals, the population numbered 1,890. There were 708 soldier-settlers, 179