

## ACADEMIA | Letters

### ***NEW ULSTER - Ulster Scots settlement of Nova Scotia***

by Brian McConnell

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If Alexander McNutt had realized his plans in the 1760s the name of Nova Scotia might now be New Ulster. (1) It also might not be part of Canada but of the United States of America.

McNutt is believed to have come from Londonderry, Northern Ireland, and after immigrating to America sometime before 1753 first lived in Virginia and then Londonderry, New Hampshire. He served as a Captain at Fort Cumberland (near Sackville, New Brunswick) from April to November, 1760 and became involved in the colonization of Nova Scotia. (2)

Conflict between France and England over control of Nova Scotia led to the expulsion of upwards of 7,000 Acadians from 1755. The English wished that the previously occupied lands could be taken up and Governor Charles Lawrence of Nova Scotia issued two proclamations encouraging settlement, the first in 1758. (3)

In return for immigrants McNutt was promised Seven Townships in Nova Scotia. He attempted to attract settlers from among Irish Presbyterians or Ulster Scots who had already arrived in North America as well as ones living in Northern Ireland.(4)

Settlers destined for Onslow and Truro, Nova Scotia boarded ship in 1761 in Boston, picking up more persons at the mouth of the Merrimack River in New Hampshire. About 50 families arrived in late May at the mouth of the Salmon River and were given land grants.(5)

In April 1761, McNutt also advertised in Northern Ireland in the Belfast Newsletter and General Advertiser for “industrious farmers and useful mechanics”. Two vessels were hired, the Hopewell and the Nancy, and arrived in Halifax in October with 300 colonists. They wintered there and in the spring proceeded to Londonderry Township where they took up

McNutt's land grants. Another 170 colonists came over from Northern Ireland in 1762 and some of these were sent down the south shore from Halifax to establish the community of New Dublin.

A report dated November 16, 1761 published in the Belfast Newsletter named the settlers and the Counties in Ireland they came from. (6) These included: John Barnhill, Donegal; John Clark, Derry; Daniel Cochrane, Antrim; Joseph Crawford, Donegal; William Henderson, Donegal; John Mahon, Donegal; Anthony McClean, Donegal; Benjamin McNutt, Donegal; John McNutt, Derry; William McNutt, Donegal; William Moore, Donegal; John Morrison, Donegal; Mark Patton, Derry; Andrew Ross, Antrim; Robert Smith, Londonderry; Robert Spencer, Donegal.

McNutt had plans to transport 7,000 to 8,000 persons from the north of Ireland in the summer of 1762. However, the British government reviewed his plan and was concerned that such a large emigration from Ireland of loyal Protestants could be harmful to the mother country. Therefore, it ordered that the Governor of Nova Scotia not grant land to Irish settlers who have been resident in Nova Scotia or another American colony for less than five years. The decision of the British Ministry was expressed as:

“The Lords of the Committee, being of opinion that however desirable an object the settling of Nova Scotia may be yet the migration from Ireland of such great numbers of His Majesty's subjects must be attended with dangerous consequences to that Kingdom, do therefore hereby order that the Lords Commissioners of Trade and Plantations do prepare a draft of an Instruction for His Majesty's Governor or Commander in Chief of Nova Scotia requiring him not to grant lands to, or permit any of His Majesty's subjects from Ireland to become settlers in that province, except such as have been resident either in Nova Scotia or some other of His Majesty's Colonys in America for the space of five years.” (7)

For several years McNutt continued with other proposals for colonization without success. Nevertheless, by 1770 Ulster Scots were living in the communities which they founded at Londonderry Truro, and New Dublin, and also in Granville, New Donegal (Pictou), Halifax and in parts of Hants County.

In the late 1760s McNutt went back to Nova Scotia and lived on McNutt Island. He also lived in Truro as his name appears on the town census for 1771. During the American Revolution his home on McNutt Island was robbed by American privateers and he travelled to Boston to appeal for relief from the Massachusetts Council. Not achieving any immediate success, he went to Philadelphia and petitioned Congress to draw Nova Scotia into the revolution.

The Ulster Scots settlers in Nova Scotia were sympathetic to the American Revolution. (8) However, their numbers were not large enough when compared to the size of the colony and the large British garrison for them to realistically rebel. (9) If however, McNutt had been successful in obtaining British approval several years earlier to transport more Ulster Scots as settlers it could have changed the situation. The British may not have been willing to fight over Nova Scotia. The British War Secretary indicated in the event that neighbouring New Brunswick was attacked from America that it was not defensible and the troops should fall back to Halifax. (10) If this had happened most of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia could have been in rebel control. It is possible to imagine that at the end of the American Revolution the Maritimes joining with the other British colonies to form the United States of America.

After the revolution ended McNutt returned to McNutt Island for several years but moved to Virginia in 1796 when he had experienced financial difficulties and lost his assets in Nova Scotia. He is believed to have died in about 1811.

By 1900, the Town of Londonderry, Nova Scotia was the second largest in Colchester County next to Truro. Iron ore mines were being mined and an iron and steel works was established which was considered the first major one in Eastern Canada. However, mismanagement led to the operating Company, the Steel Company of Canada, being in debt. Then the price of iron dropped and the Company was put into receivership. In 1912 the Steel Plant closed and a Pipe factory that had also previously been successful moved to Quebec to be closer to its markets. (11)

It now seems true that travelling through the province of Nova Scotia the most visible remaining indicator you will see of Ulster Scots influence is on road signs. In the Northwestern part of the

Halifax Regional Municipality you will find off Route 212 the Antrim Road and Milford Road. (12)

## Notes:

1. Raymond, W.O., Ven. Archdeacon, "Colonel Alexander McNutt and the Pre – Loyalist Settlements of Nova Scotia", Royal Society of Canada, 1912
2. Ibid. p. 23
3. Ibid, p. 37

4. See “Historic Colchester”, published by Colchester Historical Society, Nimbus Publishing Limited, Halifax, N.S., 2000, and also “Necessaries...Sufficiencies - Planter Society in Londonderry, Onslow and Truro Townships, 1761-1780”, by Carol Campbell and James F. Smith, Cape Breton University Press, Sydney, N.S., 2011
5. Murphy, J.M., “The Londonderry Heirs”, Black Printing Co. Ltd., Middleton, N.S., 1976
6. “Nova Scotia”, Belfast Newsletter, March 11, 1762, Issue 2564, p. 3
7. Raymond, op.cit.,p. 80
8. Discussed in “A People Highly Favoured of God - The Nova Scotia Yankees and the American Revolution”, by George Rawlyk and Gordon Stewart, Archon Books, Hamden, Conn., 1972
9. Rawlyk, George, “Nova Scotia’s Massachusetts: A Study of Massachusetts - Nova Scotia relations, 1630 -1784”, McGill - Queen’s University Press, Montreal, 1973, pp. 241 - 251
10. Dallison, Robert L., “A Neighbourly War”, Goose Lane Editions, Fredericton, N.B., 2012
11. Matheson, Trueman, “A History of Londonderry, N.S.” by Trueman Matheson, Lancelot Press, 1989, pp. 7 - 70
12. For photographs and further information see McConnell, Brian, “Canada’s Ulster – Scots”, published 2020, ISBN 9798557151054