

SCOTTISH GENEALOGY CHEAT SHEET

BY AMANDA EPPERSON

6 Keys to Scottish Genealogy Research

1 Watch for place-name spelling variations. Most Scottish records are in English, but many place names continue to have Gaelic and Scots influence. As a result, these places may have had their names Anglicized throughout the centuries. Turn to Scottish gazetteers to help you. Also watch for specific patterns that might indicate how place names changed. For example, the final G in a Gaelic word sounds like an English K, so you may see those letters used interchangeably.

2 Learn Your Mcs and Macs. Scots often use *Mc* and *Mac* in surnames to indicate “son of.” Some are associated with the father’s given name; others are associated with his occupation. MacChorraig (MacCormack in English) means “son of Cormac.” Mac an tSaoir (MacIntyre or any of its spelling variants in English) was the son of the carpenter. The feminine version of Mac was *Nc* or *N’*, an abbreviation of *nighean mhic* (“daughter of Mac”). The spellings were used interchangeably, so someone might appear in one record as McPherson and in another as MacPherson.

3 Look for Scots-Irish and Irish immigrants. Your Scottish ancestors may not have come straight to the United States. Rather, many Scottish immigrated to the Irish province of Ulster before coming to America.



These individuals were known as the Scots-Irish (or Ulster Scots), and you may need different resources to research them than you do to research Scots or Scottish-American ancestors.

4 Seek civil registration, census and parish records. Scottish civil registrations are informative and begin in 1855. Decennial censuses started listing people by name in 1841. Church of Scotland parish records are your primary source for earlier ancestry. Some parishes kept separate volumes or sections for each record type: baptisms, marriages and deaths. Other parishes mixed up the entries, so a marriage record for one couple might be followed by the baptisms of several children of the parish. Parishes that merged sometimes kept separate books for each constituent parish, while others combined them. Watch for these inconsistencies and be flexible in your search.

5 Research the whole neighborhood. Looking at the other pages in your ancestor’s enumeration district will give you a feel for his neighborhood, plus the opportunity to find members of his network. As you dive into census records, be sure to search more broadly so you can explore your ancestor’s community and discover those important to his life. These individuals may have served as godparents for his children, or traveled with him to the New World.

6 Celebrate your heritage. Once you’ve determined your Scottish ancestry, be sure to take advantage of the many opportunities to celebrate your Scottish heritage in the United States. Scottish heritage societies across the country host festivals such as the Highland Games, which feature traditional Scottish sports, music and food. You can also take part in a Burns Night (January 25) supper, or join a parade on National Tartan Day (April 6).

Q I’ve traced my ancestry to Scotland. How can I find out if I have a tartan?

A All Scots can claim a tartan based on factors such as a clan or the place an ancestor worked or lived. Your task is figuring out which one best fits you. Start with the Scottish Register of Tartans <www.tartanregister.gov.uk>, where you can search tartans by surname. But don’t be surprised if you don’t find anything. “Only about 20 percent of Scottish surnames have a clan/family connection,” says researcher Keith Lumsden.

Though people associate tartans with clans, there are actually nine other types: district, regimental, royal, chief, hunting, dress, trade, mourning and corporate. If you can’t claim a clan tartan, you can wear the district tartan for the area where your ancestor was born, married or did business—pretty much any connection will do. Or you can don the regimental “Black Watch,” the official government plaid that’s considered universal. Other tartan types are variations of these categories—for example, “hunting” tartans use subdued shades for camouflage and “dress” tartans are brighter—so a family or district could have multiple tartans.





Highs and Lows

The two best-known Scottish cultural regions are the Highlands and the Lowlands, with the Highland Boundary Fault running between.

The **Highlands** are the mountainous northern and western regions of Scotland. Here, Gaelic remained the primary language amongst the people (known as the Gàidhealtachd) long after it left other parts of Scotland. Because of the Highlands' terrain and climate, farmland wasn't very productive, and the entire area was less attractive to industrial development. Still, the Highlands were the more populous of the two regions until the 19th century.

The **Lowlands** to the south and east generally have less extreme changes in elevation. As Gaelic retreated from the Lowlands, speaking Scots and English became more common. Due to better farmland in most of the Lowlands, agricultural output here was superior to that of the Highlands. Because the Lowlands were closer to the major cities of Glasgow and Edinburgh, they attracted more migrants during the Industrial Revolution.

Scotland is part of the United Kingdom, although it has its own legal system and Parliament.

SCOTTISH ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISIONS	
Name	Notes
burgh	town or municipality; the four largest burghs in each county were called cities for administrative purposes
civil parish	most local unit of government
county (or shire)	historical basic unit of civil government, though it has no current administrative use; there were 34 across Scotland, but these have largely been replaced by council areas
presbytery	collection of Church of Scotland parishes, comparable to a diocese; the Church currently has 43 presbyteries
enumeration district	unit used for censuses
parish	jurisdictional unit of the Church of Scotland run by a kirk session; responsible for recording all births, marriages and deaths until civil registration began in 1855
registration district	unit used for civil registration; based mainly on civil parish boundaries

HISTORICAL SHIRES OF SCOTLAND (MIDDLE AGES–1890)	
Aberdeenshire	Kincardineshire
Argyllshire	Kinross-shire
Ayrshire	Kirkcudbrightshire
Banffshire	Lanarkshire
Berwickshire	Linlithgowshire
Bute	Nairnshire
Caithness	Orkney
Clackmannanshire	Peeblesshire
Cromartyshire	Perthshire
Dumfriesshire	Renfrewshire
Dunbartonshire	Ross-shire
Edinburghshire	Roxburghshire
Elginshire	Selkirkshire
Fife	Shetland
Forfarshire	Stirlingshire
Haddingtonshire	Sutherland
Inverness-shire	Wigtownshire

HISTORICAL TIMELINE

122	Romans begin building Hadrian's Wall, which eventually forms the boundary between Roman Britain and native-ruled lands.
c. 300–500	Gaelic-speakers from Ireland, called the Scotti, settle in Scotland.
c. 397	Saint Ninian, the first bishop of Galloway, establishes a church at Whithorn. The region becomes Christianized in the centuries that follow.
c. 563	Saint Columba establishes a monastery on Iona.
793	Viking raids in Scotland begin.
843	Kenneth MacAlpine, a Scotti, takes the Pictland throne.
1066	The French Normans invade Britain.
1297	As part of the Wars of Scottish Independence, William Wallace and Scots defeat the English at the Battle of Stirling Bridge.
1306	Robert the Bruce is crowned king of Scots.
1320	Scots assert their independence in the Declaration of Arbroath.
1482	Scotland's modern boundaries are solidified.
1569	Scotland becomes a Protestant nation under the leadership of John Knox.
1603	King James VI of Scotland is crowned King James I of England, uniting the two crowns under one monarch.
1611	England establishes the Ulster Plantation in Northern Ireland.
1639–1651	In the Wars of the Three Kingdoms, England is thrown into chaos as parliament and the monarchy wrestle for power.
1690s	Scotland suffers a massive famine, in which 20 percent of the population dies.
1698	Scots attempt to establish a colony at Darien in Panama.

The first purported photo of the legendary Loch Ness monster appeared Dec. 6, 1933, in the *Daily Express*.

1707	In the Treaty of Union, Scotland and England merge to become the new nation-state of Great Britain. This new government has just one parliament, based in London.
1759	Robert Burns, famous Scottish national poet, is born.
1769	Scot James Watt patents the steam engine.
1771	Sir Walter Scott, author, is born.
1776	Scottish philosopher and economist Adam Smith publishes <i>The Wealth of Nations</i> .
1801	Scotland and England become constituent countries of the newly formed United Kingdom.
1886	The Crofters Act ends predatory practices by Highland landlords, helping to stymie the Highland Clearances.
1920s	Economies collapse following World War I.
1926	Scottish engineer John Logie Baird broadcasts the first television signal.
1999	The Scottish Parliament opens.
2014	A referendum on Scottish independence fails to pass a popular vote.
2016	The United Kingdom passes a resolution to leave the European Union over significant objection from Scots and Northern Irish.

In 1457, King James II of Scotland banned the playing of golf and football, as they distracted from archery practice for military purposes.

RECORDS QUICK GUIDE

VITAL RECORDS

Record Type	Description	Contents	Availability
baptismal records	church records of baptisms, kept in old parish/parochial registers (or OPRs)	name of child dates of baptism and (sometimes) birth name of parents (at least the father) residence minister's signature names of witnesses	ScotlandsPeople FamilySearch Ancestry Findmypast
birth registers	civil registration of all births in Scotland, beginning in 1855	name date, time and place of birth names of parents (including mother's maiden name) father's occupation month, year and place of parents' marriage	ScotlandsPeople FamilySearch.org Ancestry Findmypast
burial records	church records of burial ceremonies, kept in old parish/parochial registers (or OPRs)	name of the deceased burial and/or death date	ScotlandsPeople FamilySearch
death registers	civil registration of all deaths in England, beginning in 1855	name, age, gender and occupation of deceased date and cause of death	ScotlandsPeople FamilySearch
marriage registers	civil registration of all marriages in Scotland, beginning in 1855	names, ages and occupations of bride and groom date and location of wedding names of bride's and groom's parents occupations of bride's and groom's fathers bride's maiden name church/chapel/office where the marriage occurred (plus church denomination, if any) identities of two witnesses	ScotlandsPeople FamilySearch Ancestry Findmypast
marriage records	records of wedding ceremonies performed by a church, kept in old parish/parochial registers (or OPRs); including banns, marriage ceremony records and marriage contracts	names of bride and groom places of residence for the bride and groom groom's occupation	ScotlandsPeople FamilySearch Ancestry Findmypast

1890. MARRIAGES in the District of Hurlford (Page 8.) in the County of Ayr

No.	When, Where, and How Married.	Signature of Parties. Bride or Bridegroom, Whether Single or Married, and Date of Marriage (if any).	Age.	Real Residence.	Sexes, Complexion, and Rank or Profession of Father. Name, and Real Residence of Mother.	If a regular Marriage, Signature of officiating Minister and Witnesses. If irregular, Date of Ceremony, Name of Officiating Minister, and Name of Witnesses.	When & Where Registered, and Signature of Registrar.
1099	on the sixth day of June at Hurlford's Hall, Galston Road, Hurlford, Ayr.	(Signed) David Wood.	22	Hurlford.	David Wood, Coal-miner.	(Signed) West Cameron Minister.	1890, June 7th at Hurlford.
110	After Banns according to the Form of the Ecclesiastical Council of Scotland.	(Signed) Elizabeth Hoag Camp.	17	24 Garden Street, Kilmarnock.	James Angus, Coal-miner. Catherine Angus, M.A. Hoag.	(Signed) G. Wood Minister.	at Hurlford.

This Hurlford, Ayr, marriage register entry dates to June 6, 1890.

OTHER GENEALOGICAL RECORDS

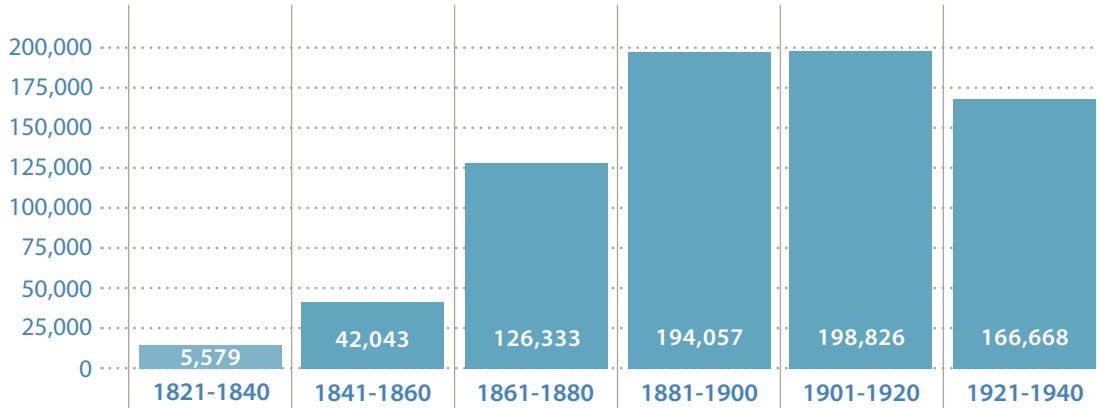
Record Type	Description	Contents	Availability
censuses	taken every 10 years beginning in 1801, with genealogically useful information first appearing in the 1841 census; only census records up to and including 1911 have been released to the public (because of World War II, the government didn't take a census in 1941)	Contents vary by census year, but may include: name of individuals and family groups county or parish of birth age, sometimes rounded down to the nearest multiple of five	ScotlandsPeople (1841–1901) FamilySearch (1841–1891) Ancestry (1841–1901) Findmypast (1841–1901)
cemetery records	information that appears on tombstones; also known as “monumental inscriptions” (or MIs)	birth, marriage and death data cause of death military service information occupation	Find A Grave Findmypast BillionGraves Deceased Online
city directories	collection of a city's businesses and important individuals	names and occupations addresses place descriptions	National Library of Scotland
deeds	records of any legal proceedings, including apprenticeships, business partnerships, marriage contracts, etc. (not just property ownership)	(varies by document)	FamilySearch National Records of Scotland
electoral registers	documentation about which individuals could vote in elections	name occupation household ownership status (e.g., landowner, tenant or lodger)	Ancestry National Records of Scotland local repositories

MUNICIPAL REGISTER OF VOTERS, BURGH OF EDINBURGH, 1912-1913.						15
No. 1. CALTON WARD. City Parish of Edinburgh.				<i>Albert Street—continued.</i>		
Number.	Number in Street.	Christian Name and Surname of each Voter at Full Length.	Occupation.	Place of Abode.	Nature of Qualification.	
409	70	Thomas Beattie Spalding	General dealer	70 Albert street	Tenant	
410	72	Robert Murray Thomson	Laborer	72 Albert street	Tenant	
411	74	James Hogg	Warehouseman	74 Albert street	Tenant	
412	76	Michael Linn	Showcard writer	76 Albert street	Tenant	
413	78	Robert Brown	Carter	78 Albert street	Tenant	
414	78	Allan Smith	Palster	78 Albert street	Tenant	
415	78	William Tough	Towaway servant	78 Albert street	Tenant	
416	78	Alexander Henry Fettes	Stenographer	78 Albert street	Tenant	
417	78	George Allan Blyth	Composer	78 Albert street	Tenant	

Electoral registers, like this 1912-1913 roll from the city of Edinburgh (on Ancestry) provide names, occupations and addresses.

kirk session records	records kept of proceedings before the kirk sessions, courts run by representatives from the Church of Scotland	names of those accused of breaking church laws (e.g., adultery), or of accusers list of communicants names of people receiving poor relief miscellaneous vital records	National Records of Scotland ScotlandsPeople (forthcoming)
military records	documents related to military service; note that after 1707, Scots served in the United Kingdom's armed forces	names ages regiment dates served/conflicts served in	British national archives National War Museum of Scotland
newspapers	news stories from contemporary Scottish/British publications, including obituaries	names relevant news items dates of death	British Newspaper Archive Findmypast National Library of Scotland local libraries

SCOTTISH IMMIGRANTS TO THE UNITED STATES



Source: 1975 Annual Report: Immigration and Naturalization Service (Washington, D.C. 1976)

COMMON SCOTTISH SURNAMES

SURNAME	VARIATIONS	ORIGIN	RANK IN 1901
Anderson	McAndrew, MacAndrew, Gillanders	patronymic/forename ("son of Andrew"); Clan Anderson	8
Brown	Browne, Bron, Bronn, Broun, Bronson	description/nickname ("crooked-mouth"); Clan Broun/Brown	2
Campbell	Cambell, Campbel	description/nickname ("crooked-mouth"); Clan Campbell	5
Fraser	Frazer, Frazier, Fraiser	description/nickname (frasier, French for "strawberry"); Clan Fraser	14
McDonald	MacDonald/Macdonald, Donaldson	patronymic/forename ("son of Donald/Dòmhnall"); Clan Donald	9
Murray	Moray	geography (Moray, also known as Elginshire); Clan Murray	12
Reid	Reed	nickname ("red-haired")	11
Robertson	MacRobert/Macrobert, McRobert	patronymic/forename ("son of Robert"); Clan Robertson	3
Ross	n/a	geography (Ross-shire); Clan Ross	13
Scott	Scot, Scotts, Scutt, Scotter	geography (Scotland); Clan Scott	10
Smith	Smyth, Smithe, Smythe, McGowan/MacGowan	occupation (blacksmith)	1
Stewart	Stuart, Steward	occupation (household guardian); Clan Stewart	7
Thomson	Tompson, Tompson, Tomsen, Tomson, Thomsen, MacTamhais	patronymic/forename (son of Thomas)	6
Wilson	Wilsen, Williams	patronymic/forename ("son of Will/William")	4
Young	Younger, Youngson	nickname ("young" or "younger"); Clan Young	15

19TH-CENTURY TERMS

LAND VALUES	
acre	4,840 square yards
rood	¼ of an acre (1,210 square yards); four roods make one acre
pole (or perch)	¼ ₄₀ of a rood (30.25 square yards); 160 poles make one acre
MONETARY VALUES	
pound sterling* (£)	basic unit currency for the United Kingdom; also called quid
shilling(s)	½ ₂₀ of a pound; 20 shillings equal one pound
pence(d)	½ ₂ of a shilling; 240 pence equal one pound
*Prior to Union in 1707, Scotland used the "pound Scots" as currency.	
OCCUPATIONS	
allekay	footman, lackey
bait-wright	boatbuilder
barboner	weaver
dryster	grain dryer
goodman	farm owner or tenant
man of weir	soldier
scallag	servant of a tacksman
trapper	person who opens and closes gates in a mine

RESOURCES

Websites

**Ainmean-Àite na h-Alba (AAA)—
Gaelic Place-Names of Scotland**

<www.ainmean-aite.scot/gd>

Am Baile Highland History and Culture

<www.ambaile.org.uk>

\$ Ancestry <ancestry.com>

**Association of Scottish Genealogists
and Researchers in Archives**

<www.asgra.co.uk>

\$ British Newspaper Archive

<www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk>

Cyndi's List: Scotland

<www.cyndislist.com/uk/sct>

\$ Deceased Online

<www.deceasedonline.com>

Dictionary of the Scots Language

<www.dsl.ac.uk>

Electric Scotland

<www.electricscotland.com>

**FamilySearch: Scotland
Emigration & Immigration**

<www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Scotland_Emigration_and_Immigration>

\$ Findmypast <www.findmypast.com>

FreeCEN <www.freecen.org.uk>

Gazetteer for Scotland

<www.scottish-places.info>

The GENES Blog

<britishgenes.blogspot.com>

GENUKI Scotland

<www.genuki.org.uk/big/sct>

**Library of Congress: Sources for
Research in Scottish Genealogy**

<www.loc.gov/rr/genealogy/bib_guid/scotland.html>

The National Archives of Britain

<www.nationalarchives.gov.uk>

National Library of Scotland

<www.nls.uk>

National Library of Scotland: Maps

<maps.nls.uk/index.html>

**National Register of
Archives for Scotland**

<www.nrscotland.gov.uk/record-keeping/national-register-of-archives-for-scotland>

National Records of Scotland

<www.nrscotland.gov.uk>

National War Museum

<www.nms.ac.uk/national-war-museum>

Rootschat: Scotland

<www.rootschat.com/forum/scotland>

\$ ScotlandsPeople

<www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk>

ScotlandsPlaces

<www.scotlandsplaces.gov.uk>

Scottish Archive Network

<www.scan.org.uk>

Scottish Archives for Schools

<www.scottisharchivesforschools.org>

The Scottish Diaspora Blog

<thescottishdiaspora.net>

The Scottish Emigration Blog

<scottishemigration.blogspot.com>

**The Scottish Emigration Database
(University of Aberdeen)**

<www.abdn.ac.uk/emigration/index.html>

Scottish Handwriting

<www.scottishhandwriting.com>

The Scottish Register of Tartans

<www.tartanregister.gov.uk>

Statistical Accounts of Scotland

<edina.ac.uk/stat-acc-scot>

Books

***Cargoes of Despair and Hope: Scottish
Emigration to North America 1603–1803***

by Ian Adams and Meredyth Somerville
(John Donald)

***Carolina Scots: An Historical and
Genealogical Study of Over 100 Years
of Emigration*** by Douglas F. Kelly and
Caroline Switzer Kelly (Seventeen Thirty
Nine Publications)

Scotland's
national animal is
the unicorn, which has
been a Scottish heraldic
symbol since the 12th
century.

***Colonists from Scotland: Emigration
to North America, 1707–1783, reprint
edition*** by Ian Charles Cargill Graham
(Clearfield)

***A Dance Called America: The
Scottish Highlands, the United
States and Canada*** by James Hunter
(Mainstream Publishing)

***The Family Tree Scottish Genealogy
Guide*** by Amanda Epperson (Family
Tree Books)

***A Genealogist's Guide to Discovering
Your Scottish Ancestors*** by Linda Jonas
and Paul Milner (Betterway Books)

The Highland Clearances, new edition
by Eric Richards (Birlinn Ltd.)

***The Highland Scots of North Carolina,
1732–1776*** by Duane Meyer
(University of North Carolina Press)

Reunion: A Search for Ancestors
by Ryan Littrell (self-published)

***Scotland and Its First American Colony,
1683–1765*** by Ned C. Landsman
(Princeton University Press)

***Scottish Ancestry: Research Methods
for Family Historians, 2nd edition***
by Sherry Irvine (Ancestry)

Scottish Genealogy, 4th edition
by Bruce Durie (The History Press)

***Scottish Highlanders in Colonial
Georgia: The Recruitment, Emigration,
and Settlement at Darien, 1735–1748,
revised edition*** by Anthony W. Parker
(University of Georgia Press)

***To the Ends of the Earth: Scotland's
Global Diaspora, 1750–2010***
by T.M. Devine (Smithsonian Books)