THE AMERICAN IRISH

A HISTORY
STUDIES IN MODERN HISTORY
General editors: John Morrill and David Cannadine

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As many as seven million Irish men, women and children have crossed the Atlantic for North America since the foundation of the first English colonies there in the early seventeenth century. Almost five million of them went to the United States between 1820 and 1920 alone. This vast movement of people was of great historical significance on both sides of the Atlantic. It played a fundamental role in the shaping of modern Ireland, and it determined in no small measure the economic, political and cultural development of the United States, where some 45 million people today (one-sixth of the population) claim some degree of Irish ancestry. The mass migration of the Irish has been the subject of intensive scholarly inquiry by historians on both sides of the Atlantic, resulting in a vast and varied literature on discrete aspects of the subject. But the last general histories of the American Irish were published in the 1960s, and there is a compelling need for a new synthesis. This book is designed to fill the gap.

The book is the product of a decade’s reading, research and teaching in two very different fields, modern Irish history and the history of the United States. Studying the great Irish migration to North America has allowed me to bring these two fields together. As a work of synthesis, the book draws heavily on the scholarship of the historians mentioned in the bibliography and endnotes. Like every scholar working in the field today, I owe my biggest intellectual debt to Kerby Miller’s monumental *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America* (1985), which remains by far the best account of the causes, course and consequences of Irish emigration to North America. Building on the insights of a generation of scholars working on both sides of the Atlantic, the current volume attempts to reach a wider and less specialized audience of students and general readers.

Most of this book was written at the University of Texas at Austin, where I spent five very pleasant years as an assistant professor. I would like to acknowledge here the assistance, criticism and advice I received from my friends, students and colleagues in Austin, especially Marian Barber, Jason Bell, Dave Bowman, Theresa Case, Leilah Danielson, Alison Frazier, Michael Hall, Neil Kamil, Hal Langfur, Roger Louis, Martha Newman, Gunther Peck, Michael Stoff and Kim Wilson. Special thanks go to Bob Olwell, Jim
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David Cannadine deserves a particular note of gratitude. My first attempt to combine the histories of Ireland and the United States took the form of a doctoral dissertation at Columbia University, in which I examined the Molly Maguire conflict in nineteenth-century Ireland and Pennsylvania. Shortly after that work was completed, Professor Cannadine invited me to apply the transatlantic approach I had adopted in my study of the Molly Maguires to the history of the American Irish more generally by contributing a volume to the Longman series ‘Studies in Modern History’. The result is the current book.

My own intellectual biography made the opportunity to write a book of this sort quite compelling. Like most Irishmen of my generation, I come from a sizeable family of which several members have emigrated. Members of the family today are to be found not only in Ireland but also in England, Canada, New Zealand and the United States. My own emigrant itinerary has taken me from Dublin to London to Edinburgh to Philadelphia to New York City to Austin, Texas and, finally, to Boston. Most of my friends from early adulthood have also left Ireland, and live now in Australia, the United States or England. But, if my itinerary was not untypical of my generation, it was distinctive in at least one respect. Along the way I picked up a degree in modern history at Edinburgh University, spent a year studying American history
as an undergraduate at the University of Pennsylvania, and then completed a
doctorate in American history at Columbia. Throughout this educational
journey, I tried to combine a knowledge of Irish history with an expertise in
that of the United States. For both personal and intellectual reasons, then,
this has been an ideal book for me to write.

The best thing that happened to me along my journey was meeting
Rosanna Crocitto. New York City was the perfect place for immigrants from
Italy and Ireland to meet, fall in love and get married. The book is dedicated
to our son, Michelino, for reasons he will appreciate.

The next one will be for Owen, who has only recently joined us.
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Ireland: county, provincial and political boundaries
Patterns of settlement in colonial America. Predominantly:
- English
- African-American
- Scotch-Irish
- German
- Dutch
- Highland Scots
- French

Patterns of settlement in colonial America
‘Whether we may wish it or not, one half of Ireland is here.’
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INTRODUCTION

History, in some fundamental sense, is about change over time. The best way to introduce a general subject to new readers is to write a narrative history that incorporates rigorous analysis into a clear chronological framework. In its initial conception, this book was arranged thematically, with each chapter examining a central topic in Irish-American history (migration, settlement, labour, religion, politics and nationalism) for the full period, 1700 to 2000. This approach was useful in providing an analytical framework to guide my research, but it quickly became clear that it would yield a book more suitable for experts and specialists than for students and general readers. The history of the great Irish migration to North America falls naturally into six sequential periods — colonial, pre-famine, famine, post-famine, early twentieth-century and late twentieth-century — and these six periods provide the chronological structure of this book.

While any account of the American Irish must place the period 1820 to 1920 at its heart, this is not to say that previous or subsequent periods were unimportant. Far from it. What will hopefully distinguish this book from previous histories, indeed, is the attention it pays to both the eighteenth and the twentieth century. The latter period, in particular, is only beginning to undergo the sustained historical investigation it deserves. Twentieth-century Irish-American political history has been studied in depth, but the social, cultural and even religious history of this period are still in their infancy compared to the rich body of historical literature that has been produced on the nineteenth century. One thing that is new about the current book is the sustained attention it gives to the period since 1900, where the object of study is not just immigration but the multi-generational ethnic group. A second principal innovation of the book is that it incorporates eighteenth-century emigrants from Ulster into the larger story of Irish transatlantic history. Before the arrival of Catholic Irish immigrants in massive numbers from the 1830s onward, Irish America was fundamentally Protestant in composition and character. Throughout the previous century, the typical Irish immigrant in America had been a Presbyterian from the northern province of Ulster, rather than a Catholic peasant from Munster or Connacht.
 Nonetheless, most histories of the American Irish concentrate on the nineteenth-century migration at the expense of the Protestant migration from Ulster that preceded it. For most Americans today, the term ‘Irish Americans’ refers to descendants of Catholic refugees from the Great Famine of the 1840s, the one event from Irish history that almost everybody knows something about. The Great Famine, indeed, is part of American (and not just Irish-American) historical memory. In the 1990s several states mandated or recommended (not without controversy) that it be included on their high school history curricula, usually as one option in a required component called ‘Holocaust Studies’. The contribution of the Catholic Irish to the labour movement is also quite well known, and Irish involvement in American politics from Tammany Hall to the Kennedys is justly celebrated. But what about the other Irish Americans, the Protestants who preceded the Catholic Irish by more than a century and who, mainly as a result of this priority, claim roughly the same number of descendants (some 22 million) in the United States today?

The great Presbyterian migration out of Ulster to North America between 1700 and 1850 has typically been segregated from the mainstream of both Irish and Irish-American history. Yet it cries out for understanding within an integrated context of transatlantic history. This book represents one modest step in that direction. Its starting point is geographical: it takes as its subject all Irish men and women who migrated from the island of Ireland to the present-day United States, rather than limiting the inquiry to particular groups of Irish people defined according to region, religion or culture. In broad transatlantic perspective, the Presbyterian emigrants of the eighteenth century and the Catholic Irish of the nineteenth have a great deal in common and are part of the same general story.

Why, then, is John F. Kennedy rather than Andrew Jackson considered the first Irish president of the United States? Jackson's parents emigrated from Carrickfergus, County Antrim in 1765, and settled in South Carolina, where he was born two years later; Kennedy's great-grandfather left County Wexford during the Great Famine, more than a century before the famous presidential election of 1960. Jackson was surely, in some basic sense, more directly Irish than that wealthy and urbane third-generation American, John F. Kennedy. But Jackson and the other Ulster-origin presidents of the United States have never been considered Irish in America, nor in Ireland (except perhaps in Ulster itself). The exclusion of these so-called ‘Scotch-Irish’ from authentic Irishness, and their consequent inclusion as true Americans, depended on definitions of national, ethnic and racial identity on both sides.
of the Atlantic, in which religion predictably occupied a central place. Not only did Catholic nationalists in both Ireland and America exclude Protestants from their definition of Irishness, Protestant Irish Americans from the 1830s onwards eagerly embraced the term ‘Scotch-Irish’ as a way of distinguishing themselves from the incoming waves of Catholic Irish immigrants. A further cause of the separation of ‘Scotch-Irish’ and Catholic Irish immigrants, of course, was the relative concentration of the former in the American South and the latter in the Northeast, Midwest, and West.

The ‘Scotch-Irish’ fade into the background of the story told in these pages after the early nineteenth century, having occupied center stage up to that point. Not only did Irish America cease to be Protestant and become predominantly Catholic in the early nineteenth century, as part of the same process the Ulster Irish began to fade from the historical record. To the extent that they became American they also became, if not quite invisible, increasingly difficult to distinguish from the native-born Protestant population. There is surely an important history of the post-1830s Ulster Irish in America to be written, and there is doubtless plenty of untapped source material available; but historians thus far have chosen not to pursue this subject. Hence the ‘Scotch-Irish’ make only an occasional appearance in this book after the opening chapters. Because the ‘Scotch-Irish’ ceased to be Irish (in their own estimation as well as that of others) in the early nineteenth century, the story of the American Irish thereafter is largely if not exclusively a Catholic one.

The term ‘American Irish’, as used here and throughout the book, refers to people of Irish origin, regardless of religion or regional background, living within the borders of the present-day United States. A comprehensive history of the Irish in North America as a whole would clearly require more attention to the Canadian Irish than is given in these pages. As a work of synthesis, this book depends heavily on the existing historiography, and as yet very little work has been done explicitly comparing the Irish in the United States and Canada. The need for sustained empirical research in this regard is manifest, a need extending beyond North America to the global Irish Diaspora. But for the present, the best that can be offered here is an account of the single most important site of Irish immigration, the United States. A note on usage might also be helpful at this point. In accordance with standard practice, the term ‘Scotch-Irish’ is hyphenated throughout this book; the terms ‘Irish American’ and ‘American Irish’, without a hyphen, are used as nouns (e.g., ‘James Michael Curley was an Irish American’ or ‘the American Irish were concentrated in the Northeast and Midwest’); and the
The American Irish

term 'Irish-American' is used as an adjective (e.g. ‘Curley was an Irish-American politician’ or ‘Irish-American settlement patterns’).

The story of the great Irish migration to America makes sense only if it is examined in terms of two intersecting national histories, Irish and American, overlapping in time but divided by the Atlantic Ocean. This book, therefore, is more than a history of a single American ethnic group; it tells the story of that group in terms of the simultaneous historical development of Ireland and the United States. Each chapter begins with a detailed account of the conditions in Ireland that were giving rise to mass transatlantic emigration and is followed by an account of the Irish in America arranged in terms of such key themes as labour, race, religion, politics and nationalism. Far from treating the ethnic group as somehow self-contained, the work that follows examines the history of the Irish in the United States in light of their intersection and involvement with the dominant themes in American national development as a whole: mass transatlantic migration, ethnic and religious pluralism, racial and nativist ideologies, religious liberty and strife, the Civil War and its causes and effects, the labour movement and the industrial revolution, urban and party politics, and the social history of ordinary men and women.

It is axiomatic of recent American immigration history that national and ethnic identities are malleable, unstable and constructed, rather than fixed, essential and unchanging. They are contested rather than consensual, fought over rather than agreed upon in advance. Senses of collective identity change with history; they do not stand outside historical time. The case of the Irish on both sides of the Atlantic is no exception. A persistent theme throughout this work is the changing meaning of Irishness, in both Ireland and America. Who laid claim to being Irish at different times in history and why? Who was included and excluded from the fold? Which social classes had more power in determining the meaning and limits of ethnic and national identity, and how did they exercise this power?

The historiography on the American Irish, both Protestant and Catholic, is vast, varied, and uneven. I have incorporated into my narrative some of the principal current debates among historians working in the field. Thus, Chapter 1 takes a critical look at the so-called ‘Celtic Thesis’, a controversial theory on the ethnic origins of the US population in 1790, when the first federal census was taken. Chapter 2 examines the recent debate on the racial status of Irish Americans in the antebellum era, the story of 'how the Irish became white'. In Chapter 3, the controversial topic is how to interpret the origins and consequences of the Irish Famine. Chapter 4 takes a look
at historians' debates on the position of women in the mass migration of the late nineteenth century, as well as examining various theories of Irish-American nationalism. Finally, Chapter 5 considers the arguments put forward by historians and political scientists on the uniquely Irish form of urban machine politics epitomized by Tammany Hall. No such controversy presents itself for consideration in Chapter 6, testifying to the relative underdevelopment of the historiography on the period since the Second World War.

After many years of teaching the history of the American Irish to undergraduates in the United States, I am convinced that they are attracted rather than repelled by these excursions into what scholars call historiography (the interpretation of history by historians). Readers are invited to pursue the various debates through the endnotes, but I have refrained from burdening the main body of the text with the names of specific authors, deciding instead simply to sketch the general positions in each debate. By the same token, I have kept demographic statistics to the liberal minimum inevitable in any undertaking such as this one, aware that a profusion of facts and figures might quickly make the text unreadable. For some readers, there will still be too many statistics, and for others too few; but, by the standards of the field, what is presented here is history with a fairly broad stroke.

While this book takes as its subject the history of the American Irish, it is intended not just for students of that topic but for anybody with an interest in American immigration and ethnicity. The principal themes of the book — migration and settlement, work and politics, gender and culture, race and ethnicity, religion and nationalism — are relevant not just to the American Irish but to the Germans, Chinese, Italians, Mexicans, and people of all other backgrounds who migrated to the United States. The history that unfolds in the following pages, in other words, is at once uniquely Irish and distinctively American. The story of the American Irish, like that of any ethnic group in America, is ultimately a story about the United States as a whole.
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While popular legend holds that mass emigration from Ireland commenced with the Great Famine of the 1840s, the Irish migration to America actually began in the seventeenth century and assumed the character of a mass movement as early as 1720. An estimated 50,000 to 100,000 people, three-quarters of them Catholics, left Ireland for the American colonies in the seventeenth century, and as many as 100,000 Catholic Irish may have come to America in the century after 1700. Virtually no evidence has survived on these Catholic settlers, however. Mainly young, single, rootless males, they seem to have blended into the general population rather than establishing themselves as a separate ethnic group in America. A great deal more is known about the remaining Irish immigrants of the eighteenth century, some 250,000 to 400,000 Protestants who crossed the Atlantic for the American colonies, about three-quarters of them Presbyterians from the northern province of Ulster.

The volume of emigration in the eighteenth century may appear insignificant compared to the period 1820–1920, when almost five million people left Ireland for North America. But the population of Ulster in 1750 was only half a million, and the population of Ireland as a whole was just under 2.5 million (compared to 8.5 million on the eve of the Great Famine a century later). The demographic impact of the eighteenth-century migration was therefore considerable, with the 500,000 or so emigrants making up one-fifth of Ireland's population at mid-century, and the 250,000–300,000 Presbyterians accounting for half the total population of Ulster at this time.

The impact of Irish migration on the history of the American colonies was also very important. People of Irish origin accounted for an estimated 14 to 17 per cent of the white population of the United States in 1790, the
dominant presence being those of Ulster Presbyterian origin, who made up about 10 per cent. The verdict of one historian that ‘emigration from Ulster was as much a feature of American history in the eighteenth century as Irish Catholic emigration in the next century and had a much greater effect on the development of the country’, may be something of an exaggeration; but it underlines the need to expand the definition of ‘Irish-American’ history to include the distinctive migration of the eighteenth century. Over three-quarters of Ireland’s transatlantic emigrants in the eighteenth century were Protestants, at a time when Protestants accounted for at most one-third of the Irish population. Irish America before the 1830s was decidedly Protestant in composition, and that must be the starting point for any history of the American Irish.3

ULSTER

Before turning to the Presbyterian migration of the eighteenth century, it is necessary to say a few words about the smaller but still significant emigration from Ireland to the American and Caribbean colonies in the seventeenth century. This emigration was sporadic and uncoordinated, consisting largely of young, single males. Very little is known about it. Most of the migrants were Catholics, and they came to the American colonies as soldiers, sailors, convicts and especially as indentured servants. Thousands of Irish political and military prisoners were sold into involuntary servitude in the West Indies after the British soldier and political leader, Oliver Cromwell, led a military conquest of Ireland in 1649–50. An estimated 12,000 Irish were living in the Caribbean by the 1660s. The white population of Barbados at that time was about one-fifth Irish, and as much as one-third of the free population of the neighbouring Leeward Islands was Irish a decade later. The Cromwellian deportees are sometimes referred to as ‘slaves’ in the historiography, but they were more properly prisoners or servants. To be classified as slaves in a sense recognizable to the modern reader, their status would have had to become hereditary. One reason why this never happened is that many, perhaps most, of these people died of disease or overwork within a few years of arrival, without wives or offspring. So, too, did most Africans, at least at first. But by the late seventeenth century African slaves were living longer and were less expensive than they had been, so that hereditary black slavery replaced servitude as the chief source of bound labour for the American colonies, especially on plantations producing staple crops.4
Bondage rather than freedom was the norm for most poor people, black or white, in the seventeenth-century Atlantic world. One form of servitude or another was the typical condition for members of the lower orders of society. Among the new inhabitants of the Americas in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, there were two principal categories of the ‘unfree’: slaves and servants. The first of these forms of bound labour never applied to the Irish; and by the late seventeenth century it had been defined in racially exclusive terms, applying only to people of African origin. While thousands of Irishmen came to the West Indies involuntarily as prisoners, most Irish settlers in the seventeenth-century Americas came as servants. In exchange for passage to America, these servants typically signed contracts (indentures) pledging their labour for a fixed term, usually three or four years. On arrival in the colonies, captains offered their cargoes of indentured servants for sale.

Irish indentured servants in the seventeenth century included large numbers of artisans (skilled workers) with trades considered useful in the colonies. They did not come from the lowest ranks of the rural poor, who generally did not leave the country in this period. Irish servants began to move to Virginia and Maryland in significant numbers from the 1620s onward, on ships returning to the two Chesapeake colonies after delivering their cargoes of tobacco and West Indian sugar to Irish ports. By the end of the century, Virginia and Maryland (along with South Carolina) had passed laws restricting the entry of ‘papists’. But these measures reflected the new availability of African labour and the general distrust of Catholics rather than a reaction against an inundation of Irish labour, for Irish Catholic emigration never reached a significant scale in the seventeenth century.

While Protestant emigration had also been insignificant before 1700, for more than a century thereafter Presbyterians from the province of Ulster made up the great bulk of the transatlantic migration from Ireland. To grasp the nature of the Irish experience in colonial America, it is necessary first to understand how Ulster came to have such a large Presbyterian population, what life was like for the Presbyterians who settled there, and how and why they left Ireland for the American colonies in such large numbers.

Presbyterians had come to Ulster from Scotland throughout the seventeenth century as part of a concerted campaign of ‘plantation’ designed to secure British rule in Ireland. These ‘Ulster Scots’, as they are still sometimes called, were intended to form a loyal, Protestant bulwark between the native Irish and their English rulers. Scotland, of course, was much closer to Ulster than England was. The migrants came overwhelmingly from the Scottish Lowlands, where most of them paid their rent by performing a specified
amount of labour and services for their landlord. Their goal in coming to Ulster was to secure land, ideally in the form of individual homesteads where they could set up as tenant farmers (i.e. renting their own farms from landlords, rather than working on landlords' estates).  

Religion was also of some importance in fuelling the migration from the Scottish Lowlands, though it was not nearly as significant as the desire for land. As Presbyterians, the lowland Scots stood on the extreme wing of the Protestant Reformation. They were alienated not just from the Roman Catholic Church, but from the established Anglican Church as well. They endured religious persecution several times in the seventeenth century, especially under Charles II (1660–83) and James II (1683–90), and must have hoped that emigration to Ulster would provide a haven in which they could practice their religion without interference. Because the migration took place when both Presbyterian zealotry and the persecution of dissenters were at their peak, religion would become a defining theme in the subsequent history of the Ulster Scots on both sides of the Atlantic.

The Scottish plantations of Ulster began in 1608 and lasted, with some interruptions, until the end of the seventeenth century. Enticed by the availability of rental land confiscated from the native Catholic population, between 30,000 and 40,000 Scots, most of them Presbyterians, left lowland Scotland for Ulster between 1608 and 1618. By 1640 about 100,000 Scots had settled in Ulster. The migration from Scotland was disrupted by the outbreak of civil war in England in 1640, but resumed after the Cromwellian settlement in 1652, increased in volume after the accession of Charles II in 1660, and reached flood tide after William of Orange defeated the Catholic followers of James II at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690. An estimated 50,000 Scots settled in Ulster between 1690 and 1697 alone. By 1700, Scottish Presbyterians dominated the eastern half of Ulster (counties Ulster, Down and Antrim), and were present in substantial numbers in Derry, Tyrone and east Donegal. While Presbyterian tenant farmers were clearly better off than the dispossessed Catholic population below them, they were nonetheless subordinate to the Anglican (or 'Ascendancy') class above them, who owned the bulk of the land and belonged to the established Church.

Just over two million people lived in Ireland in 1715, about 600,000 of them in the province of Ulster, where roughly one-third of the population were Anglicans, a little over one-third were Catholics and slightly under one-third were Presbyterians of Scottish origin. Thereafter, the number of Ulster Scots grew rapidly through natural increase, so that Presbyterians soon formed the largest Protestant denomination in Ulster. They remained sternly
aloof from the surrounding population, in sharp distinction from British planters elsewhere in Ireland, such as the Cromwellian planters of Munster who quickly intermarried and were ultimately absorbed into the local population. In Ulster, the Scottish planters retained a separate group identity grounded in the religion they had taken with them from their homelands, a religion that remained largely immune from the transformations occurring in eighteenth-century Scotland, where Presbyterianism evolved into a hierarchical and often dogmatic established church. Ulster Presbyterianism, by contrast, remained more egalitarian in its structure and was dependent entirely for its financial support on individual congregations or presbyteries. This looser, more fluid structure arguably made the Ulster version of Presbyterianism more friendly to revivalist evangelical movements of the type that would characterize eighteenth-century America. Signs of evangelicalism and communal conversions were evident in Ulster itself as early as the seventeenth century, though American-style individualist evangelicalism, based on a conversion experience and personal salvation, does not seem to have become common in Ulster until the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

The religious system developed by Ulster Presbyterians was highly organized and comprehensive. Each congregation governed its affairs through a body known as the kirk session, composed of the minister and the lay elders. Groups of congregations were arranged into presbyteries (composed again of ministers and elders), and from 1691 there was a General Synod. The individual kirks enforced a remarkable degree of religious and moral discipline. Elders inquired into and scrutinized the behaviour of their neighbours, and reported transgressions to the kirk sessions, which could summon the accused for examination and impose public penances, excommunication and ostracism. Moral offenses as well as theological ones were subject to punishment. To modern sensibilities, this system of church government may appear harsh and unattractive, but by prevailing standards it was also very democratic; ministers were chosen by their congregations (usually from the ranks of tenant farmers) and the laity played a very active role in church affairs. Precisely because the kirks expressed the will of the whole community, they were expected to investigate such matters as dishonesty in business, quarrelling with neighbours or outbidding a fellow Presbyterian who had a prior claim to a piece of land. In this way, Presbyterianism permeated every aspect of social existence, providing a considerable degree of communal cohesion. Not surprisingly, this communal character was also evident in the Presbyterian migration to America, with families, congregations and entire communities emigrating together whenever possible.
One final, very important aspect of Ulster Scots society requires clarification before turning to examine their great migration to America: How did people make a living? The Ulster Scots were neither as rich as the Anglican elite nor as poor as the Catholic majority. Only a very small minority belonged to the landowning class, which was dominated by Anglicans, many of them absentees who rarely visited Ireland. The great majority of Ulster Presbyterians in the eighteenth century rented land and cultivated the soil. Only the largest of these tenant farmers were engaged exclusively in farming. The remainder practiced some combination of agriculture and linen production, whether as virtually landless labourers, as precarious smallholders, or (in the case of a prosperous minority) as farmer-craftsmen who purchased yarn from local merchants and employed poor farmers and journeymen (apprentices) to weave it. In the strongholds of Presbyterian settlement (especially counties Antrim, Derry and Down), these independent farmer-craftsmen lived on relatively large holdings, practicing a mixture of tillage (raising crops) and pasture (tending animals) and producing linen cloth for direct sale on the market. They were the bulwark of Ulster Scots society.

At the opposite end of the social scale were the smallholders and cottier-weavers. Smallholders rented a few acres of land, drawing from it whatever sustenance they could, and meeting financial obligations like rents and tithes (dues owed to the established church) by spinning yarn or weaving linen. More precarious still than the smallholders were the cottier-weavers. In Irish history, the term *cottier* is roughly equivalent to the Scottish *cotter*, with the word *cottage* as the root in each case. Just as in Scotland, Irish cottiers were landless labourers who received a small plot of land and a cottage (more accurately a cabin), in return for a specified number of days’ work performed for their landlord. Cottier tenancy was essentially a type of wage labour, the ‘wage’ taking the form of housing and access to land. Contracts were usually annual, and the plot of land in question might be two acres or less. In most parts of Catholic Ireland, cottiers subsisted by growing enough potatoes to feed their families, and in some cases raising a pig or a few chickens. While their landlords sold their products for profit, the cottiers themselves typically had little or no involvement in the wider capitalist marketplace. In Ulster, besides growing food for subsistence, they usually spun yarn or wove linen cloth as part of their labour contract, hence the term ‘cottier-weaver’.

There is also some evidence among the poorest of the Ulster Scots of joint rather than individual tenancies. In much of seventeenth and eighteenth-century Scotland and Catholic Ireland, communities held their land in common rather than in separate family plots. In Scotland and in Scottish
Ulster this system was known as *runrig*; in Catholic Ulster and elsewhere in Ireland it was known as *rundale*. Under this system, land held in common was typically divided into an area called the infield, used for crop cultivation; a larger area, called the outfield, used for pasture, cultivation or both; and a mountain or hillside, held in common for the grazing of animals. In the infield, each family held its land in numerous small strips, graded according to quality and arranged to give equal access to pasture and water. The essence of this system was the division of land in terms of the common good rather than individual profit. It had been widely practiced in lowland Scotland at the time of the Ulster plantation, and was still common in more isolated parts of Ireland in the late eighteenth century, despite concerted efforts by the British government to eradicate it. The Ulster Scots seem to have practiced rundale on only a very limited scale, however, settling on isolated family farms instead. But they did retain the traditional infield-outfield system, adapting it to the needs of individual farmers rather than the community as a whole. And the poorest of them seem to have practiced much the same forms of partible inheritance as the Catholic Irish, dividing the land equally among their children rather than consolidating it in the hands of a single heir.\(^{14}\)

Women contributed as much as men to the maintenance of the domestic economy. They spun yarn, assisted in linen weaving, made clothing, cultivated, prepared and cooked food, managed most aspects of the household, and bore and raised children. They also worked in the fields, with the extent of their outdoor labour being closely related to the family's social standing. Yet women are virtually absent from the historiography on the Ulster Scots. They were not granted tracts of land or tenancies; they did not bring lawsuits, nor were suits brought against them; they did not attend school or university, and they could not become ministers. As a result, very little information about them has survived in the historical record. There is probably more information available about women than historians have yet exploited, especially in the records of kirk sessions and in deeds, wills and other public documents dealing with property and dower rights (property brought to the marriage by the bride). Archaeological work in both Ireland and Scotland may also yield important data. Pending this research, these women (whether in Scotland, Ireland or the American colonial backcountry) appear in the historiography as subordinate helpmates to men, playing an indispensable role in the household economy.\(^{15}\)

This, then, was the world out of which the Ulster Presbyterian migration of the eighteenth century emerged. The migrants were descendants of Scots who had come to Ulster mainly in the seventeenth century, but what sort of