Scots Among the Yankees: 
The Settlement of Craftsbury East Hill

The East Hill migration was an unplanned association that nevertheless created one of the largest ethnic enclaves to be found in Vermont a century ago.

By Bruce P. Shields

Vermont’s ethnic composition during the nineteenth century was predominantly old-line Yankee. Scots were rare. Three substantial groups of Scots did exist, at Barnet, at Ryegate, and on the East Hill, where the towns of Craftsbury, Glover, and Greensboro corner. The Barnet and Ryegate settlements, which predate Vermont statehood, are well documented in the published histories of those towns and in later articles. The origin of the East Hill settlement, partly because it lies in three towns, has never been thoroughly reported.

Vermont, in contrast to many other parts of the United States in the 1800s, had few foreign settlements where a new community retained an Old World identification. Most newcomers to Vermont from 1775 to 1825 came from the older parts of New England rather than from Europe. Elsewhere in the United States individual factories imported European labor or transplanted an entire manufacturing operation to American soil, including transfers from Scotland. The carpet mills at Lowell, Massachusetts (1820s), and at Thompsonville (in the town of Enfield), Connecticut (1840s), came from Paisley and Kilmarnock, respectively, both in Scotland.

Industrial recruiting did bring to Vermont such ethnic communities as the Welsh slate workers of Fair Haven and the Italian and Scots granite workers of Barre, but not the East Hill Scots. The East Hill settlement had no distinct organization. Behind the other Scottish communities, Ryegate and Barnet, were formal joint-stock companies created in Scotland
expressly to finance emigration to the United States. No such company ever existed for East Hill.

The East Hill migration was an unplanned association that nevertheless created one of the largest ethnic enclaves to be found in Vermont a century ago. During thirty-five active years of immigration, some sixty families from a compact area of Scotland came to form a close-knit and related community in Vermont. At the high point of the settlement, as shown by the 1860 federal census, almost 10 percent of the combined population of Greensboro, Craftsbury, and West Glover was of Scots birth. In that same year, by contrast, only three Scots-born individuals (from a combined population of about 5,000) lived in the nearby towns of Hyde Park, Johnson, and Cambridge. In Stowe, a typical mid-nineteenth-century Vermont town, the only Scot in the 1850 census was one Edward Lothian, tailor. Brownington's one Scot was also a tailor. Had the East Hill Scots lived all in one town, the effect would have been similar to that of Barnet. But because of their dispersion among three towns, as well as for some religious and political reasons I discuss below, the distinctively Scottish features of their culture were dissipated rather than reinforced by town government.

The East Hill Scottish settlement was predominantly agricultural. The first Scots settler in East Hill, Robert Trumbull, was one of the first four settlers of Craftsbury. Born at Cambuslang, he enlisted in the Royal Marines about 1774. He jumped ship (literally) at Newport, Rhode Island, in 1779 and joined the Connecticut Volunteers. He retired in 1786 as a veteran on the American side of the Revolution. Trumbull and Ebenezer Crafts were the only Revolutionary pensioners resident in Craftsbury. Congress and state legislatures had promised land to all veterans who continued in service to the conclusion of peace. Possibly a beneficiary of bounty land, Trumbull joined a community of veterans both of the Revolution and of the government side of Shays's Rebellion. All other early settlers of Craftsbury were Yankees from the area of Sturbridge, Massachusetts.

Robert was joined by his brother, Thomas, who dwelled briefly at Wilbraham, Massachusetts. They jointly farmed at East Craftsbury Four Corners, where they built the first frame house in town. The Trumbulls helped organize a Reformed Presbyterian (commonly called Covenanter) church around 1813. This denomination had very strong ties to Scotland. The Trumbulls accumulated capital by a combination of farming and commerce, including the operation of a sawmill and possibly a gristmill on Whetstone Brook. From 1790 to 1820, the Trumbulls were the only Scots in the East Hill area. About 1820 Robert's son John King Trumbull returned to Cambuslang, then a country village east of Paisley in Scotland, to collect a legacy. The Trumbulls maintained strong ties to Scots in the
Barnet and Ryegate communities and Canada and to family in Scotland. The Trumbulls were willing to venture their capital to aid other Scots; they wrote mortgages in Craftsbury and Greensboro for some twenty-five years after 1820, helping nearly a dozen Scots families to buy farms.

Scots migrants overwhelmingly settled in Pennsylvania, Ohio, or other destinations in the American Midwest. The Trumbull family is almost certainly responsible for attracting the East Hill band of migrants to Vermont. In about 1800 John K. Trumbull's cousin Agnes married into the Barnet family of Somers, which (like the Trumbulls) originated in Cambuslang. During his trip to Scotland, John K. Trumbull surely visited relatives, probably including Somers in-laws.

New Scots emigrants appear in the East Hill area almost immediately after John K. Trumbull's journey. According to the History of Greensboro, the first Scots settler in that town was John Patterson in 1821; his town of origin is not stated. In 1825 the first group of Scots immigrants appears: Robert Boyd of Kilmarnock (who came to Greensboro), Alexander Shields of Galston, and William Woodburn of Darvel (both to Glover), all with roots in the Irvine Valley of Ayrshire. The earliest Scots settlers regularly traveled in groups consisting of extended family.

We can only speculate why thirty years passed from 1790 before other Scots joined the Trumbulls. Two general conditions inhibited Scottish immigration during that period. First, in the United States from 1788 to about 1800 a profound recession blocked economic development. Records in the Vermont State Archives demonstrate the issues: bitter petitions for money to build roads and bridges in the towns in the northeast and town meetings dominated by wrangling over the ratio of cash and kind in the payment of taxes. Second, in Britain before 1825 no person who had served an apprenticeship could emigrate without permission of the Crown. Skilled tradesmen therefore could not legally emigrate with their families and household goods, especially if their landlords were reluctant to lose them. Scots become numerous in East Hill soon after the 1825 amendments to the British Statutes of Apprentices. Scots craftsmen had traditionally lived on subsistence farms of less than 5 acres variously called “crofts” or “cotts,” a style of life the new Scots settlers at first emulated. But they rapidly found that a farm of 60 acres or more could be acquired in East Hill for the value of a bare house in Scotland. Availability of land made America very attractive.

The pull of America reinforced a twofold push from Scotland: the industrial and agricultural revolutions. The spread of factories with power looms created unemployment throughout Scotland from 1790 on. During the initial slow increments of the industrial revolution, many self-employed contractors such as weavers, shoemakers, and coopers had enough assets to emigrate when their opportunity for work diminished at home.
Step by step with the industrial revolution, an equally remarkable agricultural revolution was taking place in Scotland. The large landowners who dominated British agriculture began consolidating farms especially rapidly after 1800 to eliminate leaseholds they considered too small to support a family. Displaced peasants (analogous to American sharecroppers) moved into towns, competing there as weavers or lace makers for jobs in small factories or as pieceworkers who worked at home. Simultaneously, therefore, economic pressure squeezed Scots out of handicrafts and off their farms. Sometimes called the Clearances, this rural depopulation is celebrated in melancholy songs such as Robert Burns’s “My Heart Is in the Highlands.”

By 1850 Scotland was the most urbanized country in the world. Rapid social change created political upheaval, marked by the great Reform Bill of 1832. Ensuing social turmoil inflamed the young Karl Marx, who made several tours of Scottish factories at this time. Popular opposition to both the agricultural and mechanical revolutions crystallized about 1840 into the Chartist movement, whose growth was characterized by riots and insurrections. Scots rural artisans were forced at an accelerating pace to choose between a move to a Scottish city to continue in their trade of weaving or a move to America to enable them to own a farm. Those who went to the great city slums became by the end of the nineteenth century the radical or communist backbone of the British Socialist Party. The East Hill Scots all preferred to leave their homeland rather than become proletarians in a city such as Glasgow.

Nowhere in Scotland were the changes greater than in the Irvine Valley of Ayrshire, some 30 miles south of Glasgow, on the estates of the Campbell family of Loudoun, from which many East Hill migrants originated. Vermont may have been attractive because its geography and climate closely resemble Loudoun Parish. The Irvine Water flows in a deep valley among the fertile and rainy (60 inches annually) sandstone hills of eastern Ayrshire, providing many mill sites in the 15 miles from Loudoun Hill to Kilmarnock. An ancient borough (incorporated town), Kilmarnock was a center of trade and education from about the year 1200.

Between Kilmarnock and the watershed at Loudoun Hill lie the villages of Galston, New Milns, and Darvel. Galston was the castle village for the Campbells of Loudoun (closely allied to the Campbells of Argyle), whose estate of more than 100,000 acres reached from the suburbs of Kilmarnock to Loudoun Hill. Loudoun Parish roughly traces the traditional boundaries of the Loudoun estate. The earls of Loudoun and their cadets at Cessnock, just south of Galston, were among the wealthiest families in Scotland. In the 1820s Galston was an important economic center in Scotland.

Three miles east of Galston is New Milns, the market town of the
Loudoun estates. Two miles east of New Milns lies the village of Darvel, its main street dominated by a towering volcanic plug called the Hill of Loudoun. In 1825 Darvel had just begun to grow from a monthly farmers’ market to a bustling manufacturing town. East of Darvel is the parish of Strathaven, on the Avon River in Lanarkshire. On the heights near Loudoun Hill is Stobbieside, site of the battle of Drumclog (1646), a key locale in the Covenantanter martyrology. The religious link between East Hill and Loudoun Parish probably nearly equaled the link of kinship.

The Irvine Valley was a strong center of the Covenantanter wing of the Scots Presbyterian Church. During the “killing times” of the English civil wars, from 1645 to 1688, the earls of Loudoun had led Covenantanter armies, and members of the Loudoun family, along with many of their tenants, were executed by the invading English. The entire upper Irvine Valley constituted a nearly homogeneous social unit, with one laird (landlord), one kirk (the Presbyterian Church), and close kinship. That social unit was a clan—not in the nostalgic sense promoted at Highland Games but as a simple matter of fact—with the family at Loudoun Castle head of the clan. Later in the nineteenth century, the discovery of coal, introduction of railways, and social changes mentioned above eroded the clan relationship in the Irvine Valley as elsewhere in Scotland.

The Campbells of Loudoun were leaders in the “agricultural improvement” movement. As landlords they sought greater income by consolidating fields and siting factories and housing tracts on their lands. Yet linked by blood and church to their tenants and farmers, they resisted such harsh depopulation as resulted in the Highland Clearances. The gradualist “improving” philosophy of the Loudoun family encouraged tenants to “go out” (emigrate) with their families intact. Instead of simply evicting renters and demolishing their cottages, Loudoun estate would detach the old cottage with its kailyard (garden) so that the house could still be inhabited. For instance, in Darvel the farm anciently called Lilyloan contained about 60 acres. When the lands of Lilyloan (now known as Lee-loan) were consolidated with those of Henryton (occupied by kin of the Findlay family of Greensboro), title to the cottage with 1.3 acres of land was granted to the family actually living on Lilyloan at the time. Henryton in time was lumped with the lands of Quarterhouse, Newhouse, and other steadings to create a tract of more than 400 acres, which can profitably be worked as a modern farm. As the land-based rural population of Loudoun Parish declined through the nineteenth century, families had to leave: their choice was Glasgow or America.

Some Irvine Valley Scots who came to East Hill brought enough cash to Vermont to buy their farms; some borrowed funds from family in Scotland; others relied on the friendly aid of kin like the Trumbulls already in Vermont. They hoped simply to recreate their Ayrshire lives in Ver-

mont, with less disruption than they would have experienced by moving to the factories of Darvel, Kilmarnock, or, worst of all, Glasgow. They found at East Hill a Presbyterian church and farms where they could also ply a variety of skilled trades, including weaving (wool and linen), cooperage, fine joinery, housebuilding, shoemaking, and knitting, for a diversified income. Almost all the Scots settlers of East Hill derived from the upper Irvine Valley and adjacent parts of Fenwick, Avondale, and East Kilbride Parishes and were connected to Loudoun Parish.

James Trumbull, elder son of Thomas Trumbull (the first Robert's brother), was referred to both in Craftsbury and Ayr as "Captain." A captain in the Craftsbury militia troop, he was apparently engaged in trade, for which purpose he traveled extensively. He is placed six times between 1828 and 1840 at the Galston home of Robert Shields, whose brother John was forester for Loudoun Castle and whose nephew ran the mains (home farm) for the Loudoun estates. A second brother to Robert Shields was Alexander Shields, who moved to West Glover, Vermont, from Darvel in 1827. James Trumbull may have had commercial dealing with the estates of Loudoun.

The Andersons, five families of them, also came from Darvel and were known tenants of Loudoun. James Anderson's name appears on a Loudoun estate list from 1835. The MacLaren, Boyd, and Smith families came from Kilmarnock. From the Irvine Valley came Barclay, Calderwood, Black, Esden, Kendrick, Macomber, Young, Moodie. Findlay, Shields, Patterson, and Gilmour. From Paisley came John Urie, and from Pollokshaw (7 miles north of Kilmarnock) came the Simpson and perhaps Mitchell and Salmon families. The first wave of families who moved to East Hill were interrelated, though the details are obscure.

Some local Vermont place-names arose from the Scots settlement. The northwest corner of Greensboro and adjacent West Glover, now almost depopulated, was long known as the MacLaren district; Barr Hill,
Gebbie Corner, and Mitchell Hill, all in Greensboro, commemorate Scots settlers. The area from Beach Hill in West Glover along the East Craftsbury road to the village of East Craftsbury is still known as Andersonville.

While their Vermont destination is known, the route by which these Scots entered the United States is uncertain. Naturalization documents do not exist for most because of the Covenant heritage of much of the group. The Covenant Church derived from the Reformation in Scotland. For fifty years during the civil wars, the Long Parliament, and the Restoration, armed forces of the Episcopalian governments both of Scotland and England ravaged the glens of eastern Ayrshire, leaving a legacy of antigovernment feeling. Partly in revulsion to government persecution, Covenanters refused on scriptural authority to take any kind of oath and refused to pledge allegiance to a government not founded on Scripture.\(^\text{14}\)

A confessional church, the Covenanters held to a detailed set of published standards for both faith and social behavior.

Covenant refusal to take oaths complicated their U.S. citizenship. Without oaths, they could not be naturalized in the usual way by swearing allegiance to the U.S. Constitution before a justice.\(^\text{15}\) East Hill Scots who arrived before 1850 simply never made naturalization declarations, and consequently their port of entry cannot be discovered, except by oral tradition. Some Andersons entered via Montreal, as did the Youngs. The Calderwoods landed at New York City and moved to Schenectady, from which place part of the family came to Craftsbury and Greensboro. Alexander Shields, according to tradition, landed first at Albany, New York, took a barge to Vergennes, Vermont, and then traveled by oxcart to Craftsbury. A Gebbie in transit found the situation at Montreal so pleasant that he never joined his relative in Greensboro. Isabelle Anderson's 1853 diary records a protracted voyage from Glasgow to New York.\(^\text{16}\)

A narrative printed in the *History of Greensboro* describes a large party including Simpsons, Mitchells, Barclays, and Smiths landing at Montreal.\(^\text{17}\) Apparently, the choice of migration route was opportunistic, perhaps dictated by what shipping was available from Greenock (dredging of the Clyde to permit navigation directly from Glasgow was not complete until the East Hill migration had ended).

Lack of naturalization led to a civil rights problem for the Covenanters, as found in a petition addressed by the Reverend James Milligan, Covenant minister at Ryegate and Craftsbury, to the Vermont legislature in approximately 1833.\(^\text{18}\) The legislature was perplexed by the case and first tried to postpone action indefinitely. The petition begins by stating that the Covenanters were a people who for 150 years acknowledged no earthly sovereign. Milligan prays relief from taking the oath of loyalty, stating that the right of his parishioners to own property was being questioned.
and that they stood to lose their farms. From his petition it is unclear whether he meant the oath of naturalization or the Vermont Freeman's Oath, but because of his objection to swearing allegiance to a system that recognized slavery, he was doubtless referring to the oath of naturalization. The legislature, deadlocked at the same time in the anti-Masonic controversy, eventually supplied an enigmatic law designed to ease the situation for the Masons and the Covenanters alike.

Because Covenanters refused to take oaths, they also never served in political offices outside their towns. Their relatives who were members of the United Presbyterian Church in Greensboro, however, were not bound by this stricture; John Smith, for instance, represented Greensboro in the General Assembly. Covenanters were also elected to govern district schools: the Reverend John Taylor, the last Covenanter minister in East Craftsbury, was superintendent of the village school. The Freeman's Oath was not made prerequisite for attendance at town meeting until the twentieth century. Covenanters scrupulously obeyed all civil laws and, according to Reverend Milligan, made certain that none of their own people ever became a burden to the town. Orphans and widows were provided succor among the more prosperous members of the community. Covenanters did much of their own road work and, following old provisions of Vermont law, laid taxes upon property of members to support their church. This tax was collected by their own tithingmen up to about 1850. The East Hill folk assimilated slowly to the Yankee ways of the Northeast Kingdom, marrying primarily among themselves for at least two generations, until after World War I.

Their settlement has no special architectural mark. Because they were not the original settlers in the area, they customarily bought existing farmsteads from Yankees who had migrated west. The simple New England gable or Cape house so closely resembles the lowland Scots farmhouse that no distinct architectural signature marks even the buildings the Scots immigrants designed.

Contrary to what we might expect from seemingly rigid religious principles, their Reformed view of learning prompted many Scots to aspire to a higher level of education than did their Yankee neighbors. The first generation attended Dartmouth and Union Colleges, among others. Robert Trumbull Jr. was a college professor. His cousin, son of Reverend Milligan by Robert Trumbull's daughter, in 1840 founded Geneva College in Northwood, Ohio. A number of the East Hill people attended Geneva, both in Northwood and after its move to Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania. A Calderwood went to India as a missionary, and Dunbars who moved to Michigan were also college teachers. With their family connections to Scotland and church connections to Covenanter commu-
nities throughout North America, they maintained a broad worldview. Their cosmopolitan intellectual outlook contrasted with a "clannish" personal style and strict adherence to detailed standards of behavior and belief.²²

Prior to the Civil War, Covenanters worked with the Garrisonite radical abolitionists and supported John Brown's group in Kansas. They strongly advocated educating blacks and pushed for full political and economic emancipation. Despite their horror of oaths, Covenanters served in the Civil War, though apparently because of the demographics few names from the East Hill community are recorded. The Ryegate and Topsham Covenanter churches, however, contributed their share. Following the Civil War, a number of young people from East Hill families taught at the Freedmen's School in Washington, D.C., which became Howard University. They also joined the great westward move following the opening of the railroads, still tending to emigrate in kinship groups.

East Hill women were well educated, possibly because in Scottish law women were accorded more parity with men than in Anglo-Saxon law. By the end of the nineteenth century, the East Hill emphasis on education and sexual equality produced women of great talent. To take just two instances, Margaret Calderwood Shields was one of the first U.S. women to receive a Ph.D. in physics; Mary Jean Simpson was a commander of the Women's Army Corps and later dean at the University of Vermont.

Personal diffidence, aversion to secular politics, and a continuing strong commitment to farming have kept the East Hill people relatively little known inside Vermont. At the same time, members of those families made their marks in church and intellectual affairs throughout the nation. Eventually, some of the social changes they left Scotland to avoid overtook northern Vermont. The Covenant Church in East Craftsbury reorganized as United Presbyterian in 1906, soon after the counterpart church in Scotland reunited with the Kirk of Scotland. Since then consolidation of farms, out-migration, and demographic shifts have diluted the community. A few remain on farms that have been in the family since the 1830s. Correspondence with the Scots cousins died out, but a stay in rural Ayrshire will suggest that much of the culture remains on East Hill.

Notes

² Letter dated 23 January 1926 from Winfield Scott, commissioner of the U.S. Bureau of Pensions, to Penelope Smith, a descendant of Robert Trumbull. Second-generation photocopy in possession of the author. The name in Scotland was Turnbull; while a metathesized '-r' is common in lowland
Scots speech, the name was surely assimilated to that of the famous Connecticut family. Cambusklang is now an urban neighborhood in the city of Paisley.

3 Narrative, no date, written by Anna Green of Cincinnati, Ohio (granddaughter of Robert Trumbull), among the papers of Hannah Babcock of Craftsbury Common.

4 Frederic P. Wells, History of Barnet, Vermont (Burlington: Free Press, 1923), 615.


6 Edward Miller and Frederic P. Wells, History of Ryegate, Vermont (St. Johnsbury, VT.: Caledonian Company, 1913), 49, details efforts of Lord Blantyre to restrain emigration of some valued tenants.


8 Striking visual documentation of what the East Hill settlers were avoiding is to be found in Thomas Annan, Photographs of the Old Closes and Streets of Glasgow, 1868/1877 (New York: Dover, 1977).

9 For general information, see John Strawhorn, The History of Irvine (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1986). See also James Mair, Pictorial History of Galston (Darvel, Scotland: Alloway, 1988).

10 Good information on these villages is currently available in Historical Aspects of New Milns (Newmilns and Greenholm Community Council, 1990) and in James Mair, Pictorial History of Darvel (Darvel, Scotland: Alloway, 1990). A decidedly unsympathetic view of the Covenanters, with a very flattering picture of their tormentor, James Graham of Claverhouse, is given by Sir Walter Scott in Heart of Midlothian. Because of that novel, it was rare to find any work by Scott in a Covenanter home. Burns, though he also lampooned the Covenanters in "Holy Willie," was, as a Kilmarnock poet, much beloved by the East Hill Covenanters. A sentimentally friendly portrait of the people of the Irvine Valley is in John Galt's novel Annals of the Parish, first published in Blackwood's Magazine in 1821, which details many customs still observed by the East Hill Scots some generations later. A current reprint of Galt is Annals of the Parish, illustrated by Charles E. Brock (Edinburgh: James Thin, Mercat Press, 1980).

11 Information from present owners of Lilyloch.

12 Letters written by various hands to Alexander Shields of West Glover, Vermont, between 1827 and 1855. A transcription of these letters by Isabel D. Shields done in the 1960s is in possession of the author; the holographs have been dispersed.

13 Mair, Darvel, 70.

14 The Scots Worthies by John Howie of Lochgoin, first published as Biographia Scotiana in 1775 and reprinted many times since, has numerous short and inflammatory biographies of people killed for their faith by the government forces from 1645 to 1688. Probably every East Hill family owned a copy, which was used in devotions. Most of the families were descended from martyrs listed in this book. For a modern edition, see John Howie, Lives of the Scottish Covenanters (Greenville, S.C.: A Press, 1981).


17 Weber, Greensboro, 37.

18 The holograph petition may be found in the manuscript Vermont state papers, vol. 63, p. 171, located in the Vermont State Archives, Secretary of State's Office, Montpelier.

19 Vermont Constitution, part 2, sec. 66: "Every person of good character, who comes to settle in this State, having first taken an oath or affirmation of allegiance to the same, may purchase, or by other just means acquire, hold and transfer land." Apparently, sharp operators deduced that the Covenanters, never having taken the oaths, could not "acquire, hold and transfer" land and therefore could be dispossessed expeditiously.

20 Reverend Nathan Robinson Johnston, formerly Covenantant pastor at Topsham, Vermont, in his memoir Looking Backward from the Sunset Land (Oakland, Calif., 1898), 176, has a detailed discussion of the rationale behind the prohibition of voting. He explains that the proslavery clauses of the U.S. Constitution make allegiance to it unthinkable but that participation at the town level required no oath.

21 Records of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Craftsbury, 1833–1855. A microfilm copy is deposited in the repository of Vital Records in Middlesex, Vermont.

22 A disciplinary incident previously cited by Herbert C. McAnhur of the University of Vermont in "Craftsbury Session Books," VHS Proceedings 22 (1954): 10–20, involved a young man who not only walked home from St. Johnsbury on the Sabbath but who was distinctly heard to whistle in the process. To this seemingly trivial discipline, contrast a man—no doubt a copperhead—excluded from church for maintaining that slavery was acceptable so long as it continued where it already was practiced.