

The Scottish People of Piedmont North Carolina
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My great-grandmother, Flora Vance Voss Smith, chronicled our family's 400-year Scottish genealogy in a self-published book entitled *The Vance Family of North Carolina*. Great-Grandma Smith and Great-Grandpa Smith loved their Scottish heritage and raised their family on a tobacco farm in Kernersville, North Carolina. Just like their ancestors, my great-grandparents lived off the land: farming, fishing, and raising tobacco and livestock. They experienced incredible hardships, such as two of their children dying in a house fire. The story of the life they built, the family they raised, and the struggles they survived has become the stuff of legend in my family.

Like their Scottish forebears, my great grandparents persevered. Grandma Smith got her nursing degree when she was 54 years old. She raised four children, two who survived. In her sixties, she traveled to Scotland to learn about her family heritage in person. It was from my great grandma that I learned one of our family's Scottish descendants, Zebulon Vance, served as the 37th and 43rd Governor of North Carolina. Grandma Smith personified the lived experience of the Scottish in North Carolina, their work ethic, their commitment to family, and their resilience. My great-grandpa, R.C. Smith, was a master carpenter who taught his son—who taught his son, my dad--the age-old adage “measure twice, cut once” (Bristow-Smith).

Thousands of our Scottish descendants arrived in the 17th century through the ports of Brunswick and Wilmington (Cain, 2006). Scottish immigrants were known for their strong work ethic, their commitment to education, and their deep sense of community. They were also characterized by their economic status, with many being skilled craftsmen or farmers seeking greater opportunities in the New World. North Carolina was touted as “the best poor man's country” by many of the Scottish immigrants who settled in our state (Cain, 2006).

The majority of these Scottish immigrants came from the Lowlands of Scotland, although some also came from the Highlands. They left Scotland for a variety of reasons, including religious persecution, economic hardship, and a desire for a better life. According to the NC Digital Heritage Center, many Scottish communities popped up along the Cape Fear River, including the Argyll Colony of 1739. Eventually, Scottish families put down roots across the entire state of North Carolina, stretching from the coastal east to the central Piedmont to the western mountains. The land was rough and wild, and the settlers had to work hard to clear the land and build homes for themselves. Despite these challenges, the Scottish immigrants were able to thrive in their new home thanks to their strong work ethic and their ability to adapt to their new environment (Fields 2006).

The Scottish immigrants also brought with them their Celtic customs and beliefs, including their strong Presbyterian faith. They built churches and established schools, which helped to spread their values and culture throughout the Piedmont region. Their Gaelic language was spoken at home and in church for over 150 years until English became the primary spoken language in the colonies (Our State 2019).

In the present day, the legacy of the Scottish immigrants can still be seen in the Piedmont region and throughout North Carolina. Scottish immigrants founded many towns and cities in this region including counties such as Scotland County and townships such as Scotland Neck. The Scottish heritage is celebrated through various festivals and events, such as the annual Highland Scottish Games, which attract thousands of visitors each year. We continue to enjoy the age-old lore of Scotland, including the humorous “Jack Tales” (Our State 2019).

My great-grandparents were the living embodiment of Scottish heritage in Piedmont, NC. Their Scottish descendents who arrived in North Carolina in the 16th and 17th centuries played a significant role in the early development of the region we know today as the Piedmont. They brought with them a strong work ethic, a commitment to education, and a deep sense of community. Their legacy continues. Those who came before, like my Great-Grandma Flora Vance Voss Smith and my Great-Grandpa, R.C. Smith, paved the way for many of us who now carry their heritage forward.

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