"I Would Cut My Bones for Him": Concepts of Loyalty, Social Change, and Culture in the Scottish Highlands, from the Clans to the American Revolution

Alana Speth
College of William & Mary - Arts & Sciences

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wm.edu/etd
Part of the European History Commons, and the United States History Commons

Recommended Citation
https://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21220/s2-szar-c234

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, & Master Projects at W&M ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations, Theses, and Masters Projects by an authorized administrator of W&M ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@wm.edu.
"I Would Cut My Bones for Him": Concepts of Loyalty, Social Change, and Culture in the Scottish Highlands, from the Clans to the American Revolution

Alana Speth
Nicholson, Pennsylvania

Bachelor of Arts, Smith College, 2008

A Thesis presented to the Graduate Faculty of the College of William and Mary in Candidacy for the Degree of Master of Arts

Department of History

The College of William and Mary
May, 2011
This Thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Alana Speth

Approved by the Committee, April, 2011

Committee Chair
Pullen Professor James Whittenburg, History
The College of William and Mary

Professor LuAnn Homza, History
The College of William and Mary

Assistant Professor Kathrin Levitan, History
The College of William and Mary
The radical and complex changes that unfolded in the Scottish Highlands beginning in the middle of the eighteenth century have often been depicted as an example of mainstream British assimilation. Following the dissolution of the traditional clan system, the region is seen as almost instantly altered, with its inhabitants shifting from being violent opposers of the Crown to staunch British patriots in less than a generation. The important military role of Highlanders in the British Empire is often held up as evidence of this change. I argue that a more multi-faceted examination of the region -- one that accounts for cultural practices, folkways, and class differences, as well as economic and military developments -- reveals continuity of traditional clan thought processes and a far more complicated relationship between Highlanders and their government. Focusing on the role of Highland settlements in the American Colonies during the American Revolution, as well as concurrent experiences in Scotland, I use a combination of written and folkloric sources to hopefully shed light on a distinct group of people thinking about society in ways far different from the newly changed region in which they lived.
Introduction

The Highlands of Scotland in the eighteenth century were a scene of upheaval, violence, and undeniable alterations to life ways. In 1745, large numbers of Highlanders rose in support of the Jacobite cause and rallied with their clans behind Charles Edward Stuart, the Jacobite Pretender to the throne. The ensuing war, the last Jacobite rising known as the Forty Five, is arguably the most studied historical event in eighteenth-century Highland history. The final battle of the war, Culloden, is portrayed as a turning point for the Highlands: the end of clan society and the beginning of drastic and often violent reform movements that quickly culminated in the assimilation of the Highlands into mainstream British society and the British Empire. By the time of the largest waves of Highland emigration to the American colonies, in the early 1770s, Highlanders are often depicted as fully assimilated British subjects. Thus, when faced with the fact that the vast majority of Highlanders were Loyalists in the American Revolution, many historians argue that Loyalism stemmed from integration, overriding the seeming contradiction in the fact that the greatest threat to the British crown thirty years prior to the Revolution became one of the staunchest defenders of the throne in America. A closer examination of the history of the Highlands between the two wars of the Forty Five and the American Revolution reveals numerous flaws in the integration theory and in many ways portrays the opposite—continued cultural separateness—to be more accurate.

The fact that the Highlanders were Loyalists in the American Revolution is not significant in and of itself. Their Loyalism deserves to draw historical attention because
it illuminates the fact that something dramatic unfolded in the previous thirty years with regards to the role of the Highlanders in Great Britain. The question typically asked—why were they Loyalists?—is really more a question of: what happened between 1745 and 1775? Did a major shift in social structure and national identity take place, or did it not? The conclusion reached by most of the handful of historians who have addressed the issue is that the Highlanders were Loyalists because the reform and pacification efforts of the Crown had been successful.\(^1\) Further arguments include statements that the Highlanders were not willing to risk the repercussions of going against the British government again and that they feared a negative outcome, including the possible loss of their land in America. Some historians also capitalize on the fact that not all clans were Jacobites during the Forty Five and assume that the majority of Highlanders in America came from clans historically loyal to the House of Hanover, making their Loyalism in the American Revolution unsurprising.\(^2\) Rather than engaging with the factual inconsistencies of such reasoning, which will become clear in my argument, I will begin by delineating the overarching ways that the Highlands have been portrayed and how my argument counters or revises many of those assumptions.

The tendency is to directly link overwhelming change in the Highlands to total assimilation or integration. In contrast, I argue that, although on the surface Highland

---


society appears to align more with the rest of Great Britain than with the clan system of earlier in the century, scratching just below the surface reveals more of continuity with the clan system. The majority of assessments of the Highlands in the aftermath of the Forty Five, particularly in relation to political loyalties such as their role in the American Revolution, focus on military developments, especially the growing role of Highlanders in the British military, and also on economic changes, particularly those regarding agricultural practices. Military and economic developments are only part of the picture, however. By broadening the scope of examination to include other aspects of Highland life, such as language and cultural elements, the picture of integration becomes complicated and in some ways falls away almost entirely. A close examination of language, for instance, reveals simultaneously the ways that Highland society appeared to be assimilating and the reality of more continuity than change. The changing political role of poets in the region points to adaptation rather than loss of cultural elements, and the attitudes surrounding traditional Highland dress illuminate the differences between perception and reality.

In addition to factoring in relevant cultural elements of Highland life, the politically and economically centered view taken by many scholars is complicated by shifting the focus to include examination of class divisions within the Highlands and within the traditional clan system prior to the Forty Five. The tendency to gloss over differences of status following the dismantling of the clans (and therefore the theoretical end of the authority of clan chiefs) combined with the lack of recognition of differences of experience for the gentry and common people within the clan system earlier in the
century, leads to a binary view of unassimilated, static clans pre-Forty Five and completely integrated Highlanders post-Forty Five, leaving little or no room for middle ground. In reality, class distinctions within the clan system prior to the Forty Five had led many members of the clan gentry to begin integrating with the rest of Great Britain, while the common people remained largely unassimilated into the mainstream. This split in experiences resulted in a clan gentry that had almost fully integrated into British society by the 1770s, while the common people were caught in a gap in time, the forced nature of integration having resulted in a lag before thought processes shifted to meet new lifestyles.

Many of the common Highlanders, though outwardly assimilating, were in reality operating under assumptions grounded in their status within the clan hierarchy. That status was to follow the chief, even if the chief had assimilated to such an extent that he was no longer fulfilling his traditional role. Evidence of this point in the process of assimilation is clear in depictions of Highlanders in Scotland and in America during the latter part of the century. Following the Revolution, a key aspect of carry-over clan thinking is seen through the numerous Loyalist land claims filed with the British government. Land claims and similar attempts at restitution for military service highlight the Highland settlers' self-perceived role in society and continuing ideas that military service should rightfully earn participants a place to live that ensures survival. As ideas about military involvement, restitution, and social placement were shaped by clan practices, Loyalism during the American Revolution was itself a product of this gap in time between the clan system and actual integration. Only in a brief time period
following the Forty Five did such a dichotomy play out. The gentry had indeed
integrated; the common people had not. As members of Great Britain, the clan gentry
declared as Loyalists in the Revolution; as members of the clan hierarchy, common
Highlanders followed their leaders into war, and into Loyalism.

**Historiography**

The depictions of the Scottish Highlands and its people in the historical literature
variously portray a culture rapidly (and forcibly) integrating into mainstream British
society and a people maintaining distinction even as they spread into the Empire.
Curiously, the same group of people is chronicled vastly differently by historians of
America and of Great Britain (and, more confusingly within Great Britain, of England-
focused scholars and Scotland-focused scholars). Scholars of early America, when
mentioning the groups of Highlanders who crossed the Atlantic, nearly always point to
their isolation, strong kinship ties, and social and cultural differences from others in the
colonies. British historians (those who do not concentrate specifically on the Highlands)
often focus on the assimilationist nature of the decades following the quashing of the
final Jacobite uprising. For scholars who specify their research on the Highlands,
accounts frequently veer into portrayals of England as relentlessly attacking a
downtrodden region.

British history's treatment of the Highlands combines auras of victimization and
assimilation in its portrayals of the area. Accounts of the decades following the Forty
Five focus on widespread violence towards the people of the region, poverty, and social
upheaval. The admittedly harsh relationship between the Highlands and the Lowlands and other parts of Great Britain then points toward rapid assimilation as English spreads, pushing out Gaelic, and agricultural reforms alter Highland communities. Clans were replaced by more ordinary nuclear families and communities gave way to more typical town structures surrounded by independent farms. The historiography of the region for the later eighteenth century portrays an embittered, but adapting, people. Emigration, for British historians, arises out of the endemic poverty plaguing the region, but also out of the growing level of assimilation into mainstream British ways. As Highlanders lost the clan system and their warrior attitude (seen to disappear with the disarming after Culloden) and gained English and the ability to practice subsistence agriculture, they theoretically also gained a desire to better themselves and their families by joining the British Empire.

One of the most influential works in this vein of thought is Linda Colley's *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837*. Examining the scope of the Empire and its affects on British peoples and national identity, Colley concludes that the expanding empire of the eighteenth century united the regions of Great Britain and gave the nation a common cause and fresh sense of identity. The diversity of regions and peoples encountered in the Empire, from North America to the Caribbean to India, and the stark differences between those groups' lifestyles and beliefs, served to override the differences within the British nation. Empirical expansion and the array of comparisons with outsiders it brought with it thus simultaneously downplayed internal differences within
Britain and emphasized commonalities. Following this theory, Colley specifically argues that the Scottish Highlands were aided in their integration into the nation by the proliferation of Highlanders in the military forces overseas and the key role that Highland regiments played in the Empire. She concludes that this military role and the assumed appreciation shown for it by Britons generally, created a suitable role within the newly emerging national identity for Highlanders and blurred the distinctions that had so recently set them apart.

Where Colley and scholars who follow similar arguments focus on the significance of the assimilationist tendencies that seemed to pervade eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain in general, other British historians portray the Highland region as victimized and perpetually struggling to persevere in the face of English attacks. Acknowledging the changing sense of unified nationality spreading throughout the country, this latter group of scholars portrays the Highlands as a region focused on survival in the face of persecution. The sense is that England and the Scottish Lowlands were focusing considerable attention on assimilating the region, via the Empire and a variety of other methods, but that the Highlands and the people there remained distinct and drew together in the face of cultural onslaught. Andrew Mackillop argues in his assessment of the role of military involvement in shaping the region, 'More Fruitful than the Soil': Army, Empire, and the Scottish Highlands, 1715-1815, that the place of Highlanders, and even Highland military regiments, in the Empire in the second half of the eighteenth century reinforced separateness and inferiority, rather than aiding a sense

---

4 Colley, 119-121.
of national inclusion. Like many of the accounts that portray the Highlands as a persecuted region, Mackillop's takes on a tone simultaneously victimized and defensive: the Highlanders are a people repeatedly attacked and abused, but they remain an intact and culturally distinct society.5

Like most stories that have produced polarizing assessments, the reality of existence in the Scottish Highlands in the first decades following the 1745 Rising likely falls in the no-man's-land between the camps of scholars. That the region was violently persecuted can be established as nearly indisputable fact, as can the claim that the people of the Highlands did eventually assimilate into Britain. But when did one reality give way to another? And how did the treatment of the area by the Crown affect Highlanders' associations with the rest of the country and the ways they perceived their own place within it? I will argue that the Highlands did assimilate and that Empire did play a significant role in that assimilation, though not as Colley and others maintain. For the Highlanders, the harsh policies handed down beginning in the 1740s initially reinforced a sense of cultural separateness and desired isolation. It was, eventually, partially emigration into the Empire that fueled integration with mainstream Anglo society. But all of this took place later and less radically than the historical record typically argues. By the end of the eighteenth century, and certainly by the early decades of the nineteenth, assimilation was a burgeoning reality; but for the first generation after Culloden, for the generation able to remember clanship and a Highland region undeniably shielded from Anglicization, the sense of national unity sweeping through Great Britain and her Empire

5 Andrew Mackillop, 'More Fruitful than the Soil': Army, Empire, and the Scottish Highlands, 1715-1815, (East Lothian, Scotland: Tuckwell Press, 2000).
had not taken root in the consciousness of a group of people who still considered themselves Celtic.

**Background – Scotland**

On the eve of the Forty Five, clan society in the Scottish Highlands, though declining, was still the central element around which Highland life was organized. Clanship stemmed from the feudalistic system of the Middle Ages and, though originally not confined to the Highlands, had regressed to that region by the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Based on interrelated ideas of kinship, feudalism, and regional association, the clans served political, social, and cultural functions, including regulation of two of the main tenets of Highland life: landholding and protection. The settlement of land in the Highlands was based on kinship connections and individual standing within the clan.\(^6\) Even in the eighteenth century, Highlanders did not work individual farms, but rather practiced communal agriculture on land held by the clan chief and run by tacksmen, representatives of the chiefs who usually were members of the lower clan gentry. Tacksmen were responsible for collecting rent (often not paid in cash), redistributing tribute, controlling landed resources, and organizing the military forces of the clan. In contrast to the mainstream British system of renting individual landholdings to farmers which would be implemented in the Highlands following the Forty Five, the clan system centered on redistribution of resources. Common people, including not only farmers but fishermen and other workers, could exchange food and land resources to the

---

chief for specialized services such as blacksmiths and millers. Additionally, during slow agricultural seasons, commoners could find other work for the chief through their tacksmen, alleviating many of the problems the region later faced regarding poor arability of Highland land.7

Scholars frequently assume that all elements of this system were wiped away following the Forty Five. The last Jacobite uprising in 1745 undeniably serves as a place marker between the old rule of clan society and the overhaul of that society that followed in the wake of the war. Though Jacobitism is often overrepresented as characterizing the Highlands in general in the first half of the eighteenth century, and while the Jacobites are not the focus of this project, attention must be paid to the last rising, the Forty Five, in order to understand the events that followed and how the popular picture of change and assimilation came about.

The Jacobites were adherents to the Stuart throne following the ousting of James VII during the Glorious Revolution of 1688-89. James VII and his descendants lived in exile on the Continent and plotted several attempts in the first half of the eighteenth century to reclaim the throne from the Hanovers who came to power in 1714 following the rule of Queen Anne, the final Stuart monarch.8 Several small invasion attempts were made during the eighteenth century, but only two manifested as actual uprisings that resulted in war, the first in 1715 and the second in 1745.9 The Rising in 1745 was not only the last Jacobite attempt to reclaim the throne for the Stuarts, it was also the most

7 Macinnes, 14-22.
9 Roberts, 8-11, 15-16, 59-64.
serious internal threat to the British state during the eighteenth century, a fact which spurred the British government to take extreme actions against the Highlands, the heart of Jacobite support, in the aftermath of the Forty Five.\textsuperscript{10} The Forty Five attempted to place James Stuart, the son of the ousted James VII, on the throne. James did not actually leave the European Continent during the war, but instead his son, Charles Edward Stuart, traveled to Scotland and rallied the support of the Jacobite clans. In the summer of 1745, Charles Stuart sailed from France to Scotland, landing in the Western Isles on July 23 and immediately beginning his march toward Edinburgh and then into England. Charles Stuart and the Jacobite army reached Edinburgh on September 17, 1745. Although the majority of Jacobite support came from the Highlands, not all Highlanders were Jacobites and several clans sided with the Hanoverian government during the Forty Five. Nevertheless, Charles Stuart and the Jacobite army successfully took control of Edinburgh without significant resistance, held the city for months, and were victorious in their early battles, even briefly marching into England and coming within just over 100 miles of London.\textsuperscript{11}

The arrival in Scotland of the Duke of Cumberland's government troops prompted the retreat of the Jacobite army into the Highlands in February, 1746. This retreat culminated with the Battle of Culloden, the final defeat on April 16, 1746, which quickly turned into a total destruction of the Jacobite troops by more heavily armed government forces.\textsuperscript{12} Driven by the fear that the Forty Five would not be the last rebellion and that a


\textsuperscript{11} Roberts, 73-93, 111-121.

\textsuperscript{12} Michael Hook and Walter Ross, \textit{The 'Forty-Five: The Last Jacobite Rebellion}, (Edinburgh: HMSO,
future Jacobite rising would prove successful, Cumberland's government troops indiscriminately slaughtered the wounded and any stragglers who had not managed to escape the carnage in the days following the battle. The violent aftermath of the war quickly spread throughout the countryside, with government forces burning Highlanders out of their homes, destroying food supplies, committing widespread theft, and burning surviving Jacobites alive.13

The butchery of Culloden and its immediate aftermath undeniably serves as a turning point. It was the end of a clan system that operated largely independent of the British government and the beginning of a long series of measures, initially violent and eventually subtle, to quash the distinct culture of the Highlands and ensure once and for all that they were under Crown control. The results of the actions against the Highlands have often been seen as almost immediately pacifying the region and relatively quickly assimilating a once separate people into the nation, so that by the early 1770s, when Highland emigration to America surged, it outwardly appeared that Highland social and cultural systems had been killed with the Jacobites on the field at Culloden. Closer examination of Highland society in the decades following the Forty Five reveals a much more gradual and complicated alteration of Highland life.

**Cultural Considerations**

Examining language in the Highlands during the decades between the Forty Five and the American Revolution highlights the ways the society appeared to drastically

---

13 Hook and Ross, 111-130, esp. 115-118.
change, providing an understanding of why the assimilationist conclusion appeals to many scholars. Closer examination, however, reveals actual lack of language change for much of the population. The Gaelic language spoken throughout the Highlands was associated by Britons with cultural backwardness and an element of separateness from the rest of the nation. Reform movements to anglicize the Highlands, in part through supplanting Gaelic with English, began in the early eighteenth century, following the 1707 Act of Union, but gained momentum in the aftermath of the Forty Five, when widespread efforts to change the face of the region were pushed by the Crown.¹⁴ The threat of the Jacobites during the Forty Five, as well as the repressive actions taken by the government to suppress the region after the war, drew attention to the Highlands and spurred reform movements headed by the Scottish Lowlands. Language was targeted by Lowland reformers in part because it was considered a mark of backwardness, and in part because Gaelic was associated with Jacobitism while English was associated with loyalty to the House of Hanover. Not only was Gaelic associated with political disloyalty, it was considered the cornerstone of Highland resistance and the foundation of rebellion.¹⁵ English and Lowland reformers believed that spreading standard English into the Highlands would consolidate the nation and neutralize the threat posed by the Highlands.¹⁶

Education was the primary means of forcibly assimilating Highlanders through language. Most language education was undertaken by charity organizations, particularly the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge (SSPCK), which established schools throughout the region.\(^{17}\) The attention paid to the SSPCK and similar organizations, as well as to the schools themselves, has contributed to constructing a picture of Highland assimilation. Not only the presence of the schools and their ostensible goal to anglicize the Highlands by driving out Gaelic with English, but also the facade put forth by the education system, has led many scholars (if they consider language at all) to conclude that it represents an element of integration. In reality, the educational systems were ineffective. Gaelic was completely banned in schools, resulting in a method of teaching only in English to students who only spoke Gaelic. The result was a semi-literate population that could read English text without comprehending the words, while remaining illiterate in the only language they actually spoke, a disparity not completely at odds with the goals of the organization, which aimed as much to assuage British fears of Highlanders as to assimilate the region.\(^{18}\) The ability of the SSPCK and similar organizations to declare Highland children 'literate' in English helped to construct an image of an assimilated Highland region, both during the eighteenth century and in much of today's scholarship.

Not only was educational reform not nearly as successful as it initially appears, but actual language assimilation often occurred much later and resulted in part from people being driven out of the Highlands. In the decades following the Forty Five and its

\(^{17}\) Withers, 120.

\(^{18}\) Withers, 135, 123, and Durkacz, 63.
aftermath, especially the economically devastating agricultural changes that ensued, large numbers of Highlanders left the region, either migrating to the Lowlands in search of work, or emigrating to the Colonies. Migration to the Lowlands seeking employment was often seasonal or temporary, and was also frequently confined to younger generations or male members of society. As a result, English did begin infiltrating the Highlands, though later and much less evenly than is often thought. The predominant argument in the historical scholarship, however, is that assimilation and integration led to emigration into the Empire; examinations of such delayed and uneven spread of the English language demonstrate that migration actually often caused language acquisition, not the other way around.

In 1773, Samuel Johnson, an Englishman, and James Boswell, a Lowland Scot, famously toured the Highlands and Islands of Scotland and published separate, widely popular accounts of their journey. Both Johnson and Boswell wrote richly detailed narratives, mentioning specific people and places and even quoting extensively from Highlanders during their travels. Though such chronicling makes the narratives an invaluable observation on the region during the time, the role of these writings, and their authors, in the literary canon must be acknowledged. Beginning at the end of the eighteenth century, and fueled in part by Johnson's account, writers began mythologizing the Highlands, creating a romantic ideal of an unchanged, idyllic, pastoral people who exemplified the heart of a simpler, agricultural national past as the rest of the country faced the beginnings of what would quickly become rapid and widespread

---

19 Withers, 106-108.
industrialization. Though not as egregious as some of the more purely fictitious accounts from the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Johnson and Boswell's narratives must be viewed through a lens that accounts for the presence of a degree of exaggeration and romanticism regarding descriptions of the region and its people.

Even accounting for the literary tone of the time, the observations of Johnson and Boswell regarding the conditions in the Highlands nearly three decades after Culloden and during the time of high emigration to America shed valuable light on the degrees to which change had actually taken hold in the remote areas of the country. That the government had had a pronounced effect on the region was undeniable. Writing of the Crown's efforts to suppress and assimilate the country, Johnson states, "what the Romans did to other nations, was in a great degree done by Cromwell to the Scots; he civilized them by conquest, and introduced by useful violence the arts of peace." Johnson's discussion of Cromwell's presence in the region as a predecessor to eighteenth-century assimilation efforts demonstrates many of the tensions in the issue. The after-effects of Cromwell's violence were still evidenced in the bitter attitudes of the people and even Johnson cannot downplay the negative aspects. At the same time, as an Englishman, he appears appreciative of the small changes in "civilized" roads and limited introduction of English in the town of Inverness. In this instance, the ways the Scottish inhabitants may have viewed changes is outweighed by the positive nature of elements of "civilization".

In the face of such violence and drastic upheaval the region had not remained

---

unchanged. Certainly, the central government was having a profound effect on people's lives in the Highlands. But effect did not necessarily equate to assimilation. Johnson's numerous references to language in the Highlands demonstrate the differences between the intent of the government and the reality. In the parts of the Highlands closer to the Lowland border, where men would have been more likely to seasonally migrate south in search of work and thus acquire English fluency, bilingualism was prevalent. Further into the Highlands, however, entire communities without more than a token rudimentary English-speaker were not uncommon.\textsuperscript{21} Johnson's descriptions of Highland communities in the early 1770s begs the question of how assimilated a people can be if they mostly cannot speak the language of the dominant culture.

Not only did English language reform fail in the decades immediately following the Forty Five, but Gaelic persisted in the Highlands in other ways as well. Even once migration and military involvement had resulted in a portion of the Highland population being bilingual in English and Gaelic, Gaelic was the sole language of religion in the Highlands.\textsuperscript{22} The persistence of Gaelic in religion enabled the preservation of a Gaelic literary vocabulary as well, which contributed to the continuance of significant language-based elements of society such as that of the bardic poets.\textsuperscript{23} Though literacy rates in the eighteenth-century Highlands were low, and literacy rates in Gaelic were extremely low, oral poetic and bardic traditions in Gaelic remained a vital part of Highland culture into the eighteenth century. The role of poetry and songs in Highland society, as well as the

\textsuperscript{21} Johnson, 28-29, 33-34.
\textsuperscript{22} Withers, 54.
position of the poet within the clan system and the ways that position adjusted in the years after the Forty Five, reflect maintenance and adaptation, rather than loss, of elements of the clan system in the mid to late eighteenth century.

The societal role of poets reflected older elements of traditional Gaelic culture in which the poet served an important role within the clan system as a voice for the common people on political issues. As one scholar explains, "Gaelic society traditionally expected its poets to speak out on matters of current concern, simultaneously reflecting, ordering and guiding opinion."\(^24\) Poets reflected public opinion for clan chiefs and also relayed expected political loyalties from the clan gentry to the people. Consequently, oral pieces written in Gaelic may reflect an attitude at odds with what the community is actually practicing. Such was the case during the rising in 1745, when clan poets from both sides of the war made it clear that members of the clans did not all support the side for which they nevertheless turned out to fight.\(^25\) The freedom Highland poets appeared to feel to either openly criticize or praise a leader draws from the Medieval Gaelic practice of an existing compact between rulers and poets in which it was the poet’s duty to reflect in verse the quality of leadership and the reception of a ruler among his subjects.\(^26\) In addition to general reflections on the political climate, Jacobite poets also served an important role in the decades following the Rising. Viewed retrospectively, the defeat of the Jacobites in the Forty-Five heightened the role of poets in Gaelic society because of the need for elegies and memorialization, and also for reviving the psyches of the

\(^{25}\) Gillies, 40.
\(^{26}\) Gillies, 19-22,
Highlanders, rationalizing the defeat, and boosting morale.\textsuperscript{27}

Although numerous Highland songs of known authorship were written down, printed, and even published, many songs were preserved orally, often until the late nineteenth century when they were first transcribed. This large body of oral songs and balladry, overlooked by some historians because of the difficulties of interpretation it presents, is vital to an understanding of the use of songs and poetry as effective vehicles of political propaganda. Folklorist David Buchan's theory regarding interpretation of oral Scottish balladry proves instrumental in understanding the medium as a historical source. Buchan argues that problems of interpretation arise from the tendency to examine oral literature using the same terminology and forms of analysis as those for written literature. He theorizes that oral poetry should be examined with attention paid to the level of agency and artistic license afforded to each oral transmitter, regardless of literacy. Such artistic license resulted in variations of tune and wording for songs and ballads, a flaw for which the genre is often discredited. Despite discrepancies in different versions, the underlying messages remain intact in Scottish oral works, even across broad regions and the passage of time.\textsuperscript{28}

Three modes of song transmission existed in eighteenth-century Scotland: the Anglicized literary broadside or published work, a high literary format with limited circulation; the vernacular broadside, often posted in alehouses and inns and making use of folk tradition; and folk tradition itself, consisting mainly of oral songs and balladry.\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{27} Gillies, 48-49.
\textsuperscript{28} David Buchan, \textit{The Ballad and the Folk}, (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1972), 52-56.
Many of the clan poets who were influential on spreading political sentiments deliberately tailored the formatting of work in more than one way to communicate political opinions across class lines. Poets such as Alexander MacDonald, who wrote pieces for Charles Stuart himself and was clearly capable of high level literary formats, also wrote pieces in the form of balladry and oral songs. These pieces sometimes even took the form of common work chants, such as one by MacDonald that calls for another rising following the defeat in 1745 and refrains "Now Alba's cloth is in the loom / 'twill not be peace when it is ready." The employment of such song styles by poets who could easily have removed themselves from the oral culture of the lower classes underscores the common use of song transmission as political propaganda. Though pieces such as MacDonald's political work chant were written, they were quickly and intentionally circulated orally as a highly effective means of communicating political sentiments through a scantily literate people.

Following the outward destruction of the clan system in the aftermath of the Forty Five, the role of Gaelic poets changed in form somewhat but retained its political implications. In the second half of the eighteenth century, the bardic tradition developed into the local poet tradition, a literate version of a similar social role. The local poets of the Highlands were individuals who built on existing oral ballad and song traditions and incorporated them into a written vernacular tradition, continuing to play the role of a barometer of a community's political reactions and also as the artistic voice of a group.


As the eighteenth century wore on and bilingualism in English as well as slowly increasing literacy rates began to take hold as a result of forced 'improvement' of the region, local poets also functioned as mediators between oral and print cultures, thus carrying significant elements of clan culture into the period of seeming integration. The political tones of poetry from the decades following the Forty Five reflect this continuity of the traditional uses of poetry by Highlanders. The political opinions of poets on the remaining functions of the clan system as well as the assimilationist actions taken by the British government and Lowland reformers also reflects important differences between outward appearance of Highland life and internal reality. Furthermore, the role poetry played as more than a form of entertainment, but as an important venue for the opinions of the people, makes it one of the best sources for discerning how Highlanders viewed their society, rather than how non-Highlanders viewed Highland society. The inherent political nature of traditional Highland songs and poetry is compounded by the fact that as a people, Highlanders, whether in Scotland or the Empire, experienced the lowest literacy rate in Europe, enhancing the value of oral tradition as an expressive medium for their culture.

One of the many functions of poetry within the clan system was the composition of praise poetry for the clan chief when he was in the people's favor. Songs in praise of chiefs and clan gentry were still being composed and circulated in the second half of the eighteenth century, suggesting that the hierarchy of the clan system remained somewhat intact. A poem originally composed in Gaelic and entitled “Song to Lord Glenorchy” by

---

32 Brown, 247.
Donnchadh Ban Mac an T-Saoir is a praise piece that emphasizes the military leadership of Lord Glenorchy and demonstrates that the singer was clearly looking up to members of the gentry as his superiors.

Many friends do surround you...  
who would wish you to triumph  
by fire-power and bullet...  
who would join you in striking  
when you raised aloft your tall ensigns.\textsuperscript{33}

In addition to the continued presence of praise poetry and other evidence that the clan hierarchy had not been dismantled immediately following the Forty Five, some Gaelic songs and poems illustrate deliberate, if subtle, resistance to even the nonviolent forms of assimilation. "Homeland Song," another piece by Mac an T-Saoir written in the later eighteenth century, makes clear that the Highlanders wished to remain separate from not only the rest of Great Britain, but even from the Lowlands of Scotland.

Though now for a while  
we have lived with the Goill [Lowlanders]  
my own country beguiles  
me—I wouldn't deny it...

Though it's hard to gainsay  
what is put in your way,  
still, to visit the Brae  
is my choice, not the Lowlands.\textsuperscript{34}

Regardless of how Highland society appeared on the surface a few decades after the Jacobites had been put down, this poem makes clear that, in the minds of Highlanders,


the region was still very much separate from the rest of the country and the people had no desires to change that situation and integrate more than they were forced to.

The overt political statements in songs of the time point not simply to a lack of desire to assimilate, but to an increased amount of opposition towards the Hanoverian government. A prominent Highland poet, Alexander McDonald, wrote in regard to the government's attempts to pacify the region in the years after the Rising, "he [King George] thought that this would surely make / the Gael less keen and more afraid; / but keener still they did become / and sharper than a razor blade."\(^{35}\) As MacDonald states here, and as is evidenced over and over in the body of Gaelic songs written in the second half of the eighteenth century, the Crown's attempts at assimilating the region not only did not remove a sense of Highland distinctness, it actually served to unify a formerly divided region even more against the government. This is born out bitterly by Duncan Ban Macintyre who wrote during the period of presumed assimilation,

```
There's anger too and misery
in many a man now at this time,
who was in William's camp before
who's now no better that he's won;
and if Prince Charles to us returned
we would arise and follow him,
the scarlet plaids once more be worn
and all the guns be out again.\(^{36}\)
```

Here, Macintyre references William of Orange, the original claimant for the House of Hanover, though not the ruler at that time, and makes clear through his desire for Charles

---


Stuart to return and oust the current government that Highlanders not only have not been won over to support for the British government, but an increasing number of the people desire to fight against that government. Though the songs in question here were composed in Scotland, it would be highly unlikely for immigrants who left that country a few years or months before the start of the American Revolution, and who settled in isolated communities with their countrymen, to have such wildly altered political opinions. Why they did not in fact fight against the Hanovers when given the chance in America is more peculiar in light of the reflected political sympathies remaining in the Highlands themselves.

In a much more straightforward way, a consideration of the changes in Highland dress following the Forty Five further illustrates how the outward image of integration was in reality a thin veneer. Following the 1745 uprising, tartan and traditional styles of Highland dress such as the plaid and kilt were outlawed by the British government under the 1747 Act of Proscription, also known as the Disclothing Act. By the mid eighteenth century, tartan and traditional dress styles had come to be associated by others within Great Britain with the image of the Highlander as a fierce warrior, and also with the political threat posed by the region.37 The Act of Proscription was intended to destroy not only the military associations of tartan, but also the idea that Highlanders were separate from the rest of Great Britain, thus forcibly removing an image of distinction and replacing it with one of assimilation, however superficial.38

The voices of the local poets reflect otherwise, however. A range of songs and poems written in the decades following the Forty Five depict a Highland population that may well have been forced to dress like the rest of Great Britain, but were thinking in distinctly Highland ways. Pointed attacks on the Act of Proscription, safely subversive when composed in Gaelic rather than English, highlight wide gaps between the way Highland society looked and the ways Highlanders continued to think about their society and their place within it. A poem entitled “A Song Against the Highland Disclothing Act” by prominent Highland poet Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair (known in English as Alexander MacDonald) begins with the lament “That the handsome, lovely clothes we boasted / should be exchanged for a ragged cassock!” and goes on to proclaim that simply because the Highlanders have been forced to abandon their traditional clothes and dress like the rest of Great Britain does not mean they abandoned their former political tendencies in favor of the Hanovers. The lack of correlation between clothing and loyalty is evident in the second stanza:

Let me never enjoy wearing a black coat,
or my short coat that is made of tartan,
unless I am ready to have them in tatters
shovelling George home to Hanover.39

In fact, this stanza shows not only that the presence of breeches in the Highlands does not signify loyalty to the Hanovers, but that the symbolism of tartan dress and a willingness to actively oppose King George remain intact in the Highland culture of the late part of the century.

A longer piece entitled “A Song to the Breeches” by Duncan Ban Mac Intyre drives the point home even more clearly. Mac Intyre voices the anger of the Highlanders at the unjustness of the banning of traditional clothing and explicitly addresses the idea of assimilation, writing

And though I'm making use of them [breeches]
I ne'er have taken happily
to the garb that comes unnaturally
to the people to whom I belong.40

For Mac Intyre, and presumably for the community of Highlanders he represents as a local poet, the donning of breeches and other “Lowland” garb is seen as a forced measure of punishment from the central government. It does not extend to ideas within Highland communities that they are any less separate from the rest of the nation than they were under the clan system when they were permitted to wear tartan. In his discussion of clothing, Mac Intyre also depicts an internal political structure of clan influence that remains stronger than that of the central government.

The folk who know are telling us
that he to London has no right,
that his own home's in Hanover,
that he's a stranger over us.41

Not only is Mac Intyre here clearly not identifying as a loyal British subject, but his reference to the “folk who know” indicates that clan gentry still had significant political influence over the people. The forced changes to clothing in the Highlands quite literally made it look like the people were assimilating, but Highlanders' opinions on the issue of

41 Mac Intyre, “A Song to the Breeches,” 219, emphasis mine.
dress point to the fact that attitudes did not change with clothes.

Class

Examining the changes and impacts of the military system and economic status of the Highlands in the years between the Forty Five and mass emigration to America highlights a range of complexities that differ from the outward picture of assimilation. Although many historians have explored the nature of military and economic situations in the Highlands, class differences are often glossed over. The result is that the realities of life in the mid-eighteenth century for the gentry class become a standard set for all of Highland society. By combining the oft-cited military and economic histories of the region with examinations of class distinctions, both during the time of change after the Forty Five, and during the final years of the clan system before the Forty Five, it becomes clear that the upper class and the common people had radically different experiences and understandings of the events unfolding in the wake of the Rising. The common image of integrated Highlanders applies to the upper strata of society. The reality for the common people, however, points to very different thought processes and motivations that demonstrate lingering distinctness from mainstream British society. The diffusion of the military experiences of the upper classes onto the society as a whole has generated ideas of complete assimilation; reexamining military and economic aspects of the region with class distinctions at the forefront complicates the picture and points toward distinct, class-based reasons for Loyalism during the American Revolution.

The role of the British military in integrating Highlanders into mainstream society
after the Forty Five has drawn considerable attention from historians, with particular emphasis on the ways that Highland regiments in the British army aided assimilation of the region. It is generally assumed that Highlanders were heavily recruited for military service because of their 'warlike' tendencies.\(^2\) Contrary to how it is commonly portrayed, recruitment of Highlanders into military regiments in the wake of the Forty Five was not an attempt at integration. As one scholar points out, it was in fact more akin to extermination, with regiments of Highlanders sent overseas as cannon fodder in the hopes that they would never return.\(^3\) The use of Highlanders in the immediate aftermath of the war as front-rank cannon fodder eventually gave way to regular regiments, though they were never trusted enough by the central government to remain in the British Isles and were invariably stationed overseas. Such widespread military involvement and the stationing of Highland regiments throughout the Empire is often suggested to have induced loyalty to the Hanoverian government and a reorienting of Highland identity towards the British nation. In reality, the fact that once the slaughter of Highlanders ended, the role of military recruitment rested largely with former members of the clan gentry may have actually reinforced distinct characteristics of Highland society and the clan system.\(^4\)

Under the clan system, military forces were raised for the chief by the tacksmen, who also controlled land usage and the redistribution of resources. As part of the reform movements following the Forty Five, the Highland agrarian system was redesigned to

\(^2\) Mackillop, 41.
\(^3\) Mackillop, 57-58.
\(^4\) Mackillop, 42.
align more closely with agricultural practices in England and the Lowlands. When land was controlled by the clans, it was worked communally and natural resources as well as military service were traded to the chief via the tacksmen for protection and the redistribution of resources. Reciprocity was key to ensuring the unflinching loyalty of Highlanders within the clan system. Most Highlanders paid the chief for land use in food or other raw materials. During times of dearth, a not-uncommon phenomenon in a country with little arable land, chiefs redistributed food to common people in need. As mediators between the chief and the people, tacksmen were the visible link in this system of reciprocity. Individual tenant farming was forcibly introduced as part of the 'improvement' of the Highlands. Under the new system, the role of the tacksmen as mediator between the people and the chief was far less viable, and the position of the tacksmen was quickly usurped by that of landlords, a new role in the Highland social system.

Though landlords served as middle men between Highland gentry and common people and controlled rents and land access, without the reciprocal relationship from earlier tradition they were able to use remnants of the clan system to manipulate tenants. This was particularly true in their ability to raise military recruits (a service for which they were paid) by playing off of the role of the tacksmen in raising forces for the chief. Though it is clear that common Highlanders were still operating within a concept of society based in the clan system, class differences within the Highlands complicate the

45 Macinnes, 16-18.
47 Mackillop, 58-60.
picture. The clan gentry were far more assimilated into mainstream British society prior to the Forty Five than the common people were even after. Chiefs had had opportunities to interact with and travel to the Lowlands, England, and even the Continent, and since the seventeenth century had been gradually incorporating concepts from the rest of Europe into their knowledge.48 Willing assimilation into Great Britain accelerated after the loss of the first Jacobite rising in 1715 and was well under way by the second in 1745.49 After the Forty Five, the chiefs and clan gentry who had over the previous century become fluent in English, gained an understanding of British law, agriculture, and social structure, and even in many instances been educated abroad, had a much easier time fitting into mainstream Britain.

Class distinctions and tensions between chiefs and their people were not always clear cut, however. Johnson's record of his time in the Highlands and Islands also reveals that people's ways of thinking about the social structure in which they lived distinctly reflected the clan, sometimes with the loyalty to the chief remaining intact. Furthermore, in more remote areas stronger elements of clan control and older Highland traditions had even remained largely intact on the eve of emigration. Throughout the region, for example, Johnson mentions meeting Highlanders who still acknowledged a specific chief.50 In a recorded conversation with a Highland man of clan Maclean, when Johnson questioned the man about his continued loyalty to the chief despite the theoretical

50 Johnson, 49, 54, 119.
breakup of the clans, the man replied "'I would cut my bones for him.'"\textsuperscript{51} This simple statement speaks volumes about how Highlanders conceived of political loyalty just a few years prior to the American Revolution. The Highlander of clan Maclean's willingness to die for his chief demonstrates that he still thought of political loyalties in terms of his position within the clan hierarchy and would permit his decisions regarding political and military matters to be determined by the chief he followed.

For the common people of the Highlands, the easier assimilation of the gentry only led to further confusion and sometimes more upheaval. Though thoughts and ideas about social structure remained influenced by clan society for decades after Culloden, other elements of the clan system, particularly agricultural ones, were heavily impacted by the changing upper class. The ability of landlords to recruit large numbers of Highlanders into the British military exemplifies this breakdown between classes. Landlords served some of the same roles as tacksmen in terms of controlling land, and so were able to influence military activities of their tenants, despite the fact that tenants were not getting the reciprocal protection they were used to.\textsuperscript{52}

Highlanders were keenly aware that the reciprocal system based on communal land tenure was no longer being practiced. The huge surges of emigration to America were driven partly by a lack of ability to support families farming in the Highlands and the ready availability of land in America. A pamphlet printed in 1773, written by an anonymous Highlander and entitled "The Present Conduct of the Chieftains and Proprietors of Lands in the Highlands of Scotland, towards their Clans and People" lays

\textsuperscript{51} Johnson, 127.
\textsuperscript{52} Macinnes, 205, 214, 233 and Mackillop, 154-156.
the blame for the dire conditions of the region and the popularity of emigration on the new landlords and the clan gentry. The author writes, “the people were attached to the persons, families, credit, and interest of their chiefs, and every man looked upon himself as personally concerned to support the reputation of the clan...”

Lamenting the loss of so many people to America, the pamphlet goes on to place the blame for the current situation mainly on the upper classes of the Highlands, rather than solely on exterior forces such as government policies. The author stresses the fact that Highlanders still look to their chiefs “as the first and leading man among them, who was to be respected on account of his family...” It is also clear that there is an element of betrayal among Highlanders regarding the fact that the chiefs had assimilated into Britain. “Our chieftains...have laid down their honours and stripped themselves of those exterior circumstances, which were often valued by many who observed of what consequence they always were to those who did not despise them.”

The fact that clan gentry had aligned themselves more with the Lowlands and England, which were hated by Highlanders, than with the common people they once protected, sparked indignation and anger. Many Highlanders, it is clear, still had an idea of a social structure rooted in clanship and were upset by the fact that their leaders were operating outside the old system.

Another pamphlet addressed to the emigrants out of the Highlands also depicts the social conditions driving people from the region. In “Informations Concerning the

54 A Highlander, 7.
55 A Highlander, 8.
Province of North Carolina, Addressed to Emigrants from the Highlands and Western Islands of Scotland" published in 1773 under the pseudonym Scotus Americanus, the loss of the old system of common land tenure is again lamented. The pamphlet goes on to encourage Highlanders to emigrate to America, specifically to North Carolina because of easily obtainable land and, more importantly, because they could join existing settlements of Highlanders. In addition to encouraging emigration, the pamphlet addresses those opposed to the large numbers of people flocking out of the region, particularly landlords who did not want to lose rents along with tenants. Throughout its detailed description of all that North Carolina has to offer, the pamphlet repeatedly suggests that emigration enables Highlanders to retain the aspects of their culture they wish to and to leave behind only the problematic elements of societal change, such as widespread poverty stemming from forced (and failed) agricultural changes. Such arguments reinforce the idea that common Highlanders were not integrated into Great Britain, nor did they wish to be. Contrary to the assumption that emigration evidenced integration into Britain and the Empire, the pamphlet by Scotus Americanus suggests that emigration was instead an attempt to avoid forced assimilation and retain a sense of Highland separateness.

The idea of culture retention by way of emigration is also evident in Samuel Johnson's account of the region. Discussing emigration, Johnson writes, “they carry with them their language, their opinions, their popular songs...they change nothing but the

---


place of their abode; and of that change they perceive the benefit.”\textsuperscript{59} Johnson even suggests that emigration, particularly in groups as was most common among Highlanders, would increase Highland separateness rather than simply maintain it. This was largely because the Act of Proscription, which outlawed traditional Highland arms, dress, and other cultural elements such as the bagpipes, applied only to the British Isles, not the Empire. Thus, “that dissimilitude of appearance, which was supposed to keep them distinct from the rest of the nation [prior to the Forty Five] might disincline them from coalescing with the Pensylvanians \textit{[sic]}, or people of Connecticut.”\textsuperscript{60} It is apparent that the common people had not assimilated to the rest of the nation in the ways they conceptualized their society and culture, nor did they desire to. It is also evident that class divisions between the integrated gentry and unassimilated tenants caused tensions within Highland society that pushed large numbers of people to the drastic measure of emigration in order to retain their social structure, even if that structure had to cross an ocean and be shifted to account for the loss of the upper strata.

\textbf{Emigration and Pre-War North Carolina}

The earliest wave of Scottish emigration to Carolina, the region which would become the largest concentration of Highlanders in the Empire by the start of the American Revolution, began in the 1730s. Settlement in the northern part of what was then a unified Carolina opened in the early 1730s and grew rapidly. The Cape Fear river region, leading into the Backcountry, was virtually unsettled by whites in 1725; by 1775,
the Cape Fear was the wealthiest area of what had quickly become the fifth most populous mainland colony.\(^{61}\) Though Scots were a continual part of the colony's increasing population in the four decades preceding the Revolution, it was the ten years between the end of the Seven Years War and the start of Revolutionary tensions that witnessed the steepest incline in population growth and in settlement of Scottish Highlanders in the region.

Emigration out of the Highlands picked up in the 1760s and 1770s as the already poor region faced sharp rent increases, agricultural troubles, and a social structure that failed to meet many people's needs. In Bernard Bailyn's *Voyagers to the West: A Passage in the Peopling of America on the Eve of the Revolution*, his statistical compilations from Britain's Register of Emigrants for the period shows that poverty, high rents, and a desire to better themselves (and presumably their families) accounted for the reasons to emigrate for nearly all of those originating in the Highlands, Islands, and "far north."\(^ {62}\) Difficulties in Scotland combined with reports from the Americas enticing settlers; accounts from North Carolina, which already had a settled group of Scots, aimed specifically to recruit fellow countrymen to join the locale. The attraction of North Carolina originated in favorable land grant policies instituted by Governor Johnston which exempted Protestants from taxes (at least temporarily) in exchange for settling in a colony plagued by pirate and Native American attacks.\(^ {63}\) Once Scots had a foothold in the region, their influence in drawing more countrymen to join them was

---

\(^{61}\) Wood, 6.

\(^{62}\) Bailyn, 190-1.

\(^{63}\) Dobson, 110-11.
disproportionately significant in relation to their numbers.\(^6^4\)

The influx of settlers to the colonies from Scotland was significant for both Lowlanders and Highlanders, though the former group tended to dominate the merchant classes and colonial businesses and settled in more established coastal communities. For Highlanders, most of whom came to settle land and farm and who grouped in the 'wilder' backcountry regions, the strength of their numbers stemmed from their group mentality. While only one fifth of English emigrants traveled in family groups, the numbers of Scots traveling as families averaged fifty percent, with those from the Highlands, Islands, and “far north” witnessing as much as eighty percent family emigration.\(^6^5\) Part of the seeming over-representation of Scots in the colonies can be attributed to the very fact that, for each individual successfully enticed to emigrate, a family often accompanied him.

The large numbers of Highlanders emigrating and settling together represented an intricate, layered kinship system. Beyond the standard nuclear family characteristic of the rest of Britain (and American settlers), Highlanders in the colonies continued to recognize a four-generational connection known as derbfine, and beyond that layer, a grouping that Early American historian David Hackett Fischer labels a clan.\(^6^6\) The “clan” of the American backcountry was, of course, different from the traditional clan of the Highlands, and Fischer alludes more to a sense of highly intricate connections and loyalties that supersede ordinary family ties. Nevertheless, such distinctions in Highlander communities in North Carolina are pointed to throughout the historical

\(^{6^4}\) Dobson, 104.


literature. As Bradford J. Wood notes in his account of the Cape Fear region during the Revolutionary era, "the Upper Cape Fear region around Cumberland County...was practically a separate Scottish Highland colony." Other historians point to the isolationist tendencies of Highlanders in America, who maintained, at least initially, their own churches and language and deliberately settled separate from even Lowland Scots. Indeed, as Scots settled in North Carolina, Lowlanders tended to cluster in the Cape Fear River valley, while Highlanders pushed further into the backcountry, dominating Cumberland County and the surrounding area.

The degree of physical and cultural separateness that led Wood to label the Highlanders of North Carolina a "separate Highland colony" was aided by the frequency of Highlanders emigrating not just in family groups, but in larger networks from towns in the Highlands. The remnants of the Highland clan system, technically disempowered and made defunct by the Crown's reform movements, proved one of the strongest influences in Highland emigration. People emigrated and settled with former clan members due to a combination of poor agricultural reform and holdover clan structures and influences of tacksmen. As land rents increased and crops failed, tacksmen, originally members of the lower ranks of clan gentry and power now finding themselves in the position of landlord, made decisions to transport themselves, their families, and large numbers of their tenants, to the Americas. Land in the Highlands was owned by a few members of the gentry (often former clan chieftains) but managed as it always had been by tacksmen. In the

---

68 Meyer, 102-3; Dobson, 154.
69 Dobson, 112.
clan system predating the Forty Five, these tacksmen not only collected rents, they also redistributed resources and raised military and political support. Faced with increased poverty in the decades after the final Rising, many tacksmen decided to emigrate to America, where they could receive land grants of their own. As wealthy members of Highland gentry, tacksmen often funded the transatlantic journeys for many of their tenants, in exchange for repayment with interest once settled in the colonies, or to then let parcels of their land grants to these same farmers with rents now coming directly to them rather than through them to a former chief. Common Highlanders flocked to follow tacksmen to America, no doubt in large part because their voyage was funded, but also because tacksmen exercised a traditional leadership role.70 That leadership role in the new settlements of Highlanders in North Carolina would quickly come into play again as the American Revolution began to unfold.

The American Revolution, Loyalism, and Its Aftermath

Political tensions in colonial North Carolina rapidly intensified in the years leading up to the Revolution. Beginning in 1767, regions of North Carolina that were under-represented in the colonial government began agitating for representation and gave rise to the Regulator Rebellion of the late 1760s and early 1770s, culminating briefly in the 1771 Battle of Alamance.71 Settlers in the former Granville District became increasingly frustrated at difficulties obtaining official titles for tracts of land, as well as

---


the lack of representation for the district in the colonial government. When grievances lodged with Governor Tryon in 1768 failed to bear fruit, the Regulators turned to violence in the early months of 1771. In June of that year, government troops quashed the rebellion at the Battle of Alamance and the movement was put down.72 The movement and brief episode of violence demonstrates the beginnings of what would become Patriot forces during the American Revolution; for the Scottish Highlanders in the colony, it was also the first instance of fighting in support of the British Crown.

Alamance may have been the first pre-Revolutionary battle the Highlanders were involved in, but the Battle of Moore's Creek, in early 1776, served as a stark turning point in the stance of Loyalist Highlanders in North Carolina. The battle took place February 12, 1776, in the backcountry of North Carolina, near the Cape Fear settlements of Scots. Seeking to quell the growing power of the Rebel forces in the colony, the Governor sent out a call for troops. Initial reports anticipated several thousand Loyalist supporters to rise and march in fight against the Patriot army. Interestingly, on the morning the battle took place, only a fraction of the expected Tories reported – the vast majority of them Highlanders. It may never be entirely certain why the Highland settlers continued into battle at the point when non-Highland fighters turned away based on the evidence that Loyalist troops were far outmatched. This decision to follow in war when men of other backgrounds exercised their will in opposition to military instruction may point toward Highland attitudes regarding war. In any case, the outnumbered Crown forces were badly beaten, with many survivors captured and imprisoned and the victorious Patriots gaining

firmer control over the colony. After the defeat, many Highland settlers faded out of active participation in the Revolution.73

Following the Tory defeat at Moore's Creek, many Highlanders in North Carolina found themselves faced with familiar difficulties in the losing hand of war. Those unlucky enough to have been captured during battle faced imprisonment by the newly established patriot colonial government, while their homes and properties were vandalized, goods seized, and families tormented. Loyalist sympathies of many Highlanders and other backcountry people cooled following the defeat. Migrations to join other groups of Highlanders in safer Nova Scotia increased, and substantial numbers relocated to join existing settlements of countrymen there.74

Highlanders in America: Attempts at Revolutionary Reciprocity

Though Highlanders in the eighteenth century left comparatively few written documents (due mainly to the fact that their literacy rates were among the lowest in the Western world), the writings that did surface highlight a strong connection between land and motivation for military activity during the Revolution. Loyalist claims to the British government for lost assets in the colonies were common, but for the Highland settlers there was a strong trend, both during and after the war, for associating military service with “payment” in the form of land grants more so than repaying land previously held. The connections between land, repatriation, and military service and the ways in which

73 Meyer, 157-160.
such perceived connections affected political loyalties during the Revolution become clearer through examining Highlander Loyalist claims and other post-war documents—notably, here, the lengthy pamphlet published by John McAlpine, and letters written by famous Highland lady Flora MacDonald.

In 1788, John McAlpine published an account of his “genuine memoirs” from the time of his emigration to America in 1773 through his service in the army ending in 1779. Focusing on events relating to the war, McAlpine’s narrative points to several important themes in Highland accounts of the time: chiefly, his repeated association between his military service and the expectation of a grant of land and his stance toward the political situation and allegiances, most notable for a lack of strong Loyalist sympathies. Indeed, McAlpine’s account demonstrates the lack of Loyalist rhetoric in writings by Highlanders regarding involvement in the Revolution. Like many of his fellow countrymen, McAlpine strove for political neutrality both before and after his foray with fighting in the war. McAlpine and his family settled with a community of Highlanders in the colony of New York where he was a tenant farmer on the land of a man identified only as Mr. Campbell. When the early phases of conflict reached the settlement, McAlpine agreed to join a regiment under the leadership of Captain Fraser. Like many Highlanders, McAlpine was recruited because his nationality was associated with warrior abilities; curiously, he describes one of the duties he and his fellows were engaged in to be stealing cattle for army provisions, a notorious Highland “skill.”

\[75\] J McAlpine, “Genuine Narratives and Concise Memoirs of some of the most Interesting Exploits and Singular Adventures, of J. McAlpine, A Native Highlander, from the time of his Emigration from Scotland, to America 1773...” 1778, 8-16.
According to McAlpine's account, during the early stages of his military involvement he lodged his first request with the army for a farm in exchange for his service. His tone at this point suggests less a formal request than a reiteration of a mutual understanding: “rendering the King, his cause and army my best services...the commander...should be pleased to grant me some Rebels farm at the conclusion of the war...[and I] would accept it with gratitude.”76 And again, after being convinced to continue military duty against his wishes, McAlpine reasons “having always a view of reward...suitable to my deserts...provisions made for supporting my family in my absence, and...securing me and my successors...property of some valuable portion of crown lands.”77 Later in the account, the tone changes from casual assumption to frustrated injustice, at which point McAlpine expresses his desire to leave military service because what he sees as an understood relationship is not bearing out.78 Shortly thereafter, his willingness to continue military service returns when he believes to have reached an understanding with a General Green “for a certain farm, with all its produce, upon long Island: conform to the conditions specially narrated, in these several articles of agreement...that the most express protection had been granted.”79 The land deal, unfortunately, did not come to fruition, resulting in McAlpine's many attempts at restitution, including the pamphlet in consideration.

McAlpine was not alone in his vain efforts to extract the security he expected from his government. Even far more prominent Scots struggled to understand the attitude

76 McAlpine, 17.
77 McAlpine, 21.
78 McAlpine, 29-31.
79 McAlpine, 41.
of the Crown toward their services and what they considered their right to financial assistance. A letter written by the famous Jacobite heroine Flora MacDonald in 1789 recounted her family's experience during the American Revolution and made clear her expectation that her husband's military service justified "recompence." Flora MacDonald, a native of the Isle of Skye, is renowned for helping Charles Edward Stuart escape following the disastrous Battle of Culloden in 1746. In 1774 she and her husband and children emigrated and settled in North Carolina. Her husband Alan and their son fought in the Battle of Moore's Creek with a battalion of Highlanders and were captured and imprisoned. The family escaped to Nova Scotia and eventually returned to Scotland. At the end of Flora's detailed account of her husband's military service during the war she stresses the fact that they received nothing in exchange for service, closing with the statement, "I may fairly say we both have suffered in our person, family, and interest, as much if not more than any two going under the name of...Loyalists – without the smallest recompence [sic]."

Formal legal claims were filed by numerous Loyalists immediately following the culmination of the war. Such claims filed by Highlander Loyalists demonstrate the themes of reciprocity and political loyalty expressed by McAlpine and Flora MacDonald. Usually beginning with a statement of loyalty and support for the Crown, followed by an account of military service, losses, and sufferings, claimants then suggest that restitution is in order. (For claimants of the upper echelons of North Carolina Highland society,

---

81 Meyer, 32-33.
82 Flora MacDonald, 189.
stress is also placed on successful efforts to influence fellow Highlanders to join Loyalist regiments). The tone of the initial claims is almost always assured of restitution. As these claims apparently go unanswered, claimants re-file their requests, with increasingly confused and desperate wording.

One claimant, an Alexander McLeod who fought initially in North Carolina and resettled his family in Nova Scotia after the war, took his 1782 petition to the government one step further. Failing to receive a response to his claim filed the previous year, McLeod submitted a lengthy petition late in 1782 in which he appealed to high-ranking Highlanders to intercede in government proceedings and rectify the situation. Citing his unfulfilled claim, McLeod writes that “it went very sore with me to drop my just claims” and continues in an increasingly bitter tone addressed to a list of Highland elite, “I might have looked up to my Gracious Sovereign as an injured Officer, and be assured of justice from the Royal Goodness, not would my Benign Sovereign have allowed me pass unoted [sic] in my other ruinous and cruel sufferings in His Service.” McLeod’s inability to understand why he would not be immediately financially recognized for his service is evident. Interestingly, McLeod also appears to expect his Highland superiors to sympathize with and exert influence to rectify the difficulty. His claims reveal not only his own persistent attitudes toward recognition for military service, but also his appeal to men who would formerly have represented the lower-elite in the clan – the men who served as liaisons between chieftains and laypeople three decades earlier.

83 Rassie E. Wicker, ed. Miscellaneous Ancient Records of Moore County, N.C., (Moore County Historical Association, ND), 370-434.
84 Alexander McLeod, [untitled claim] in Rassie E. Wicker, ed., Miscellaneous Ancient Records of Moore County, N.C., (Moore County Historical Association, ND), 397-98.
McAlpine and the others who assumed receipt of land following military service in the war operated under an established system with myriad precedents. Receiving colonial land grants in exchange for fighting to protect the colonies was a common recruitment tool for Highland regiments dating back to the 1730s in what one scholar terms “an informal state subsidy for emigration.”\textsuperscript{85} These unofficial land grant policies are acknowledged by many historians as motivational factors for Highlander loyalism. Digging a bit deeper below the obvious surface layer that any type of financial gain serves as incentives in recruitment, it becomes clear that the complex web of Highland social and cultural norms impacted the situation of Loyalism and land in more varied ways.

Colin Calloway interprets the loyalty of Highlanders to a government they had so recently hated as influenced by both the older clan system of undisputed military leaders, the strong suggestion of land in exchange for service, and a deliberate manipulation on the part of the British government of underlying clan thought processes combined with the recent upheaval of emigration. He argues that the Crown capitalized on the fallout of the forced assimilation efforts and “civilizing” changes directed at the Highlands in the decades following the Forty Five. Agricultural changes ended the traditional system and replaced it with individual family farms, resulting in rampant poverty, landlessness, unemployment, and famine after crops failed and the safety net of clan authority and redistribution were gone. Such a situation resulted in mass emigration, and also left the people of the Highlands vulnerable to government manipulations.

Calloway makes a case that the Crown used the combination of the remaining influence that the clan gentry had over the people and the desperation growing from the new “assimilation” to entice former clan leaders to raise military forces.  

Striving to find a place in their newly re-vamped social system that would retain some of the stature accorded them during clan rule, gentrymen stepped into the opening afforded by such attitudes. “Britain's need for soldiers allowed some Jacobite chiefs to redeem themselves in the eyes of the Hanoverian government by calling out their clansmen as they had in the old days.”

Thus, during first the Seven Years War, and later the American Revolution, the British military was able to work the unique gap generation in the Highlands to their advantage; for a brief span of time in the second half of the eighteenth century, Highland society struggled to find ways to cope with rapid changes while still thinking with respect to older social norms rooted in the clans.

Despite many historians' assertions that emigration to America demonstrated assimilation into mainstream Anglo society and a loss of any remnants of ancient patterns of lifeways, other scholars point to a continuity of distinct traditions following settlement in America. David Hackett Fischer argues extensively that folk culture not only crossed the Atlantic with emigrants, but retained influence over immigrant communities in the Colonies and significantly shaped broader American culture over time. More specifically to the communities of Highlanders, Calloway examines the strong kin-based structure of their settlements – a distinguishing characteristic marking them apart from

---

87 Calloway, 95.
88 Fischer, 4-7, 663-4.
other cultural groups that is contested by no one. In his detailed comparison between Highlanders and Native Americans, Calloway remarks that a strong redistributive system is prevalent in many kin-based societies; in fact, he calls such systems of reciprocity "expected and essential." If socio-economic systems rooted in reciprocity are inherently connected to societies based in elaborate kinship networks, which Highland communities in America still indisputably were, then the potential for that socio-economic system to influence individuals' political decisions in ways that do not align with the social norms of non-kin-based societies of the time is staggeringly high.

Conclusion

The three decades between the end of the Forty Five and the peak of emigration to America present a picture far more complicated than simple integration or non-integration. The common people of the Highlands were caught in a gap between the loss of the upper strata of the clan hierarchy to mainstream assimilation and an actual shifting of their own conceptions of their place within society and their identities as Britons rather than as Highlanders. The combined factors of willing assimilation on the part of the clan gentry and the fact that government reform movements forced elements of change onto the people of the Highlands rapidly created an image of a society that aligned more with the rest of the nation than with the clan tradition of just a few years before. Digging only slightly below the surface, however, reveals thought processes of the common people still grounded in concepts of clan hierarchy. Changes in the upper classes of a society did not

---

89 Calloway, 44.
reflect changes in the society as a whole, just as changing the way a people looked did not change the ways they thought or reached decisions about political loyalty.
Bibliography

Primary Sources:


McAlpine, J. “Genuine Narratives and Concise Memoirs of some of the most Interesting Exploits and Singular Adventures, of J. McAlpine, A Native Highlander, from the time of his Emigration from Scotland, to America 1773…” 1778.


Wicker, Rassie E., ed. Miscellaneous Ancient Records of Moore County, N.C. Moore County Historical Association, ND.

Secondary Sources:


