

NEW ULSTER

THE FORGOTTEN CANADIAN COLONY

In one of the earliest lists of residents in the town of Londonderry, Nova Scotia, no fewer than ten families were counted as from County Donegal.

Three more are listed from County Derry and a further two from Antrim. It was literally an Ulster colony, and its colonial founder hoped one day that the territory would be called New Ulster.

As it was, it stayed as Nova Scotia, but for the Ulster coloniser, Alexander McNutt, it would have to suffice for him to go down in the history books as the man who founded the Ulster Scots settlements of Nova Scotia.

Nova Scotia at the time was a temperamental place. It had only recently changed hands, from the French to the English, and as such the English government was keen on replacing French settlers with British ones. Perfect for this job were the Ulster Scots, who had had settlement experience during the Ulster Plantation, just 150 years earlier.

General Alexander McNutt had long since left his home county of Donegal by the time he had begun convincing people to come with him to Nova Scotia. He originally went to Virginia, but ended up being stationed near modern day Sackville, which introduced him to the area of Nova Scotia. When the chance came up to start a colony there, McNutt jumped at it and championed the cause.

In 1761, after successful land negotiations with the British Government, McNutt placed an advertisement in the Belfast Newsletter calling for 'industrious farmers and useful mechanics' to join the crew of two ships headed for the new Londonderry Township in Nova Scotia. As a reward for their volunteering, each head of the family was to receive 200 acres, with an additional 50 acres to each family member.

It was enough incentive to convince many to go, and the first year saw over 300 people make the journey, with a further group coming the following year to form the community of New Dublin—in all, some 500 Ulstermen would take on McNutt's offer for a life in the new world.

While this small Ulster colony still exists today, the numbers of settlers were nowhere near what William McNutt had dreamed. He'd hoped for some 8000 Ulster protestants to set up the colony, and applied for land grants to prepare for them. But politics back home in Ireland would not allow it—upon further review, the British government became anxious. In response to McNutt's further application regarding the continued migration of Ulster Scots, the privy council wrote that "the migration from Ireland of such great numbers of His Majesty's Subjects must be attended with dangerous consequences." With these words, the Ulster migration to Nova Scotia in the 1760s fizzled and ended.

Alexander McNutt would fare little better. He lost his influence with the English Government just a few years later, after advocating Nova Scotia be the 14th Colony to join the American Revolt against the British Crown. Over the next thirty years he would be in and out of debt, living for many years on McNutt's Island, off the coast of his envisioned Ulster Colony. He is thought to have died in 1811, in Nova Scotia.



A Map of New England and Nova Scotia; with part of Canada, New York and New Britain & the adjacent Islands of New Found Land and Cape Breton c.1758