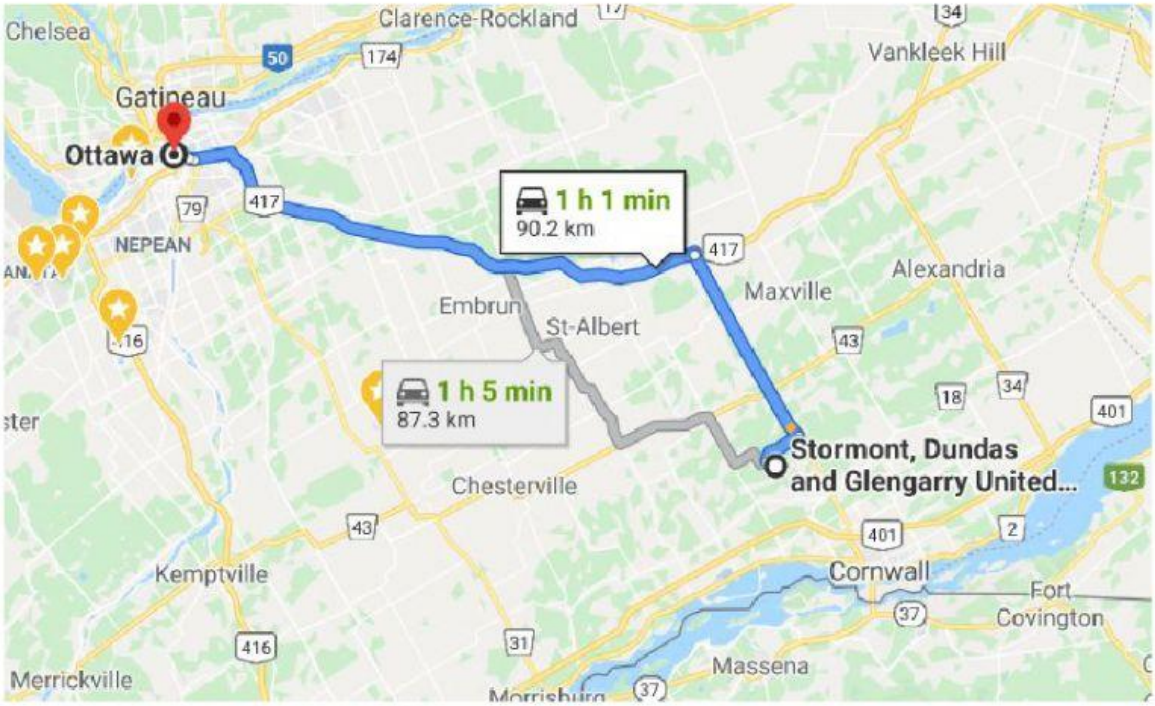
The Scottish in Glengarry County

The Origins of Glengarry County

In addition to coming from France, the pioneers came from a number of different countries. Scotland is a country in the northern part of the United Kingdom in Europe. Around the 1780's, settlers of Scottish origin started coming to an area in eastern Ontario not far from Ottawa. This area is known as Glengarry County, and today it is about a 60 minute drive from downtown Ottawa.



The Distance from Ottawa to Glengarry County today

The Scottish settlers from Glengarry County came from two different places. One group came from the United States and the other from Scotland.



Loyalists Fleeing the United States around 1783.

After 1783, the United States had won its war independence with Great Britain. People who had fought for the British were called Loyalists. After the American Revolution these people fled their homes in the United States. A group of Loyalists of Scottish origin started to settle just across the St. Lawrence River near the modern city of Cornwall. At around the same time, Scottish Farmers started to leave Scotland as there was not enough land. The British government offered them land in this area so they were the second group that moved here. As both these groups were of Scottish origin it was not surprising that they named this area after a place in Scotland. This is how it came to be known as Glengarry County.

Working Together

The settlers from Scotland had a lot to learn about living in their new country. The First Nations people help them build canoes out of birchbark. The new settlers needed these for transportation and for fishing. Also the farmers from Scotland did not know how to turn the dense woodlands into farms. The Scottish Loyalists showed them how to do this.

Challenges face by the Settlers in Glengarry County

Life was very hard for the new settlers and many challenges came from the environment. To make fields ready to farm, trees had to be cut down with axes by hand while heavy rocks and boulders had to be removed. This was hard, backbreaking work.



Settlers Clearing the Land

These Scottish settlers had to be resourceful. At first, they could not buy things from stores. They had to make what they needed, and they used materials in the environment to do this. For example, they used rocks to build fireplaces and wood to build furniture, wagons and homes.

Settlers had to grow their own food. They learned from the Mohawks how to grow local crops, such as corn, beans, squash and pumpkins. They also grew their own crops such as cabbage, cucumbers and wheat. In the early years it was hard to get enough to eat and people were often very hungry.

Winter was very hard for the new settlers. Those from Scotland were not used to the cold temperatures in Canada. They needed to burn wood all day long to warm their houses. To wash dishes or drink, ice and snow had to be melted on the fire. For light, they burnt candles that they made from tallow or animal fat.

Another challenge for the early settlers in Glengarry County was loneliness. People were far from home and neighbours, and there were no means of communications, not even mail at first. Eventually people made friends and developed links with other local communities.

Daily Life of Women and Girls

Like the First Nations and French communities in early Canada, women and men had different roles although everyone worked very hard.

Girls learned by watching the women. Women and girls tended to work around the house. For example, they cooked and baked. They also collected eggs and milked cows. They spent considerable time preparing wool which could be made into cloth, blankets, mittens and socks. In the autumn, women and girls would help harvest the crops.

Daily Life of Men and Boys

Men and boys mostly worked outside the home. Boys too learned from helping and watching the adults. They cut down trees for building and heating. They hunted, fished and trapped. They planted crops in the spring and harvested them in the fall. They looked after the animals, such as pigs, sheep and cows. As there was no refrigeration, the men smoked or salted meat in large barrels to preserve it for the long winters.

Community Life

Settlers brought their culture with them. They played Scottish music on the violin and bagpipes and performed traditional dances. The elders told folk tales from the old country. Many settlers spoke a language called Gaelic. Churches were important social centres and these Scottish settlers built them as soon as they were able.

Today residents of Glengarry County are still proud of their Scottish roots. For example, every August, the Glengarry Highland Games are held in Maxville, Ontario. These feature traditional Scottish sports, dance, bagpipe and drum competitions. Today, the Glengarry games are the largest Highland games event outside Scotland.



Bagpipes and the Caber Toss at the Glengarry Highland Games today

Questions about the Scottish in Glengarry County

Directions: Select the best answer

1.From which two countries did the first pioneers in Glengarry County come?

2.About how far is Glengarry County from Ottawa?

3. Who were the Loyalists?

4. Why did people from Scotland come to Glengarry County around 1780?

5. Who taught people from Scotland how to prepare farm fields in Glengarry County?

6. Who taught the people from Scotland how to crow corn, beans and pumpkins?

7. Why was winter hard for the Scottish pioneers?

8. What was **not** a usual role of women and girls in Glengarry County?

9. What was **not** a usual role of men and boys in Glengarry County?

10. What language did many settlers in Glengarry County speak?