

# Ulster & Tennessee

*The Ulster-Scots contribution to the making of 'the Volunteer State'*



**Ulster-Scots  
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Network**

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## Introduction

Nashville and Belfast have been Sister Cities since 1994. Some of the ties which bind Nashville and Belfast together are not difficult to identify.

Nashville, like Belfast, is in origin an Ulster-Scots city. Ulster-Scots have continued to play a significant role in the history of the city. Ulster-Scots language has influenced the speech of Nashville and Tennessee and both cities share a musical heritage which is celebrated annually with the Belfast Nashville Songwriters Festival. This publication seeks to explore more closely the contribution of people of Ulster-Scots descent to the making of Tennessee, 'the Volunteer State'.

Rory Fitzpatrick's account of 'the Scots-Irish epic' was entitled *God's Frontiersmen* (London, 1989). Fitzpatrick observed: 'They cleared the heavily forested land in a crude but effective manner, and they established permanent settlements more rapidly than any other immigrant group'. Fitzpatrick has contended that these Ulster-Scots viewed 'possession of land in the frontier as the key to personal liberty'. Thus, in the last of quarter of the eighteenth century Ulster-Scots dominated the American frontier and began to make the first thrusts through the Appalachians into Western Pennsylvania, Kentucky and Tennessee. Ulster-Scots settlers founded Nashville, Knoxville and Memphis and today about one in five modern Tennesseans are of Ulster-Scots ancestry.

In his book *Born Fighting* (New York, 2004) Senator James Webb credits these Ulster-Scots with a culture that 'shaped the emotional fabric of the nation, defined America's unique form of populist democracy, created a distinctively American musical style, and, through the power of its insistence on personal honor and adamant individualism, has become the definition of "American" that others gravitate toward'. On that basis, Tennessee must be very close to being the quintessential Ulster-Scot state.

## 'Populist democracy'

Tennessee has provided the United States with three Presidents: Andrew Jackson, the 7th President, James Polk, the 11th President, and Andrew Johnson, the 17th President. All three were Ulster-Scots.

Jackson, a giant among US Presidents, was the first to win office through a direct appeal to the mass of voters. Jackson's populism was denounced by his contemporary critics as 'mob rule'. Historians describe this period as 'the Era of Jacksonian Democracy'. Today, Jackson's populism is almost universally accepted as an essential ingredient of modern democracy. More than any virtually any other President, Jackson transformed the office of President and redefined the rules as to how his successors would reach the White House.

Rarely regarded as a successful President, Johnson's contribution to the office should not be overlooked. A tailor by trade, when he was President, Johnson remarked that he still knew how to sew a coat. Never having attended school, he educated himself through hiring a man to read to him while he worked with needle and thread. He studied the US Constitution very closely, learning much of it by heart. Harry Truman, the 33rd President, claimed that Johnson knew the Constitution better than any other President. Johnson's copy of the Constitution was buried with him.

## 'American musical style'

Country music was originally disparagingly dismissed as 'hillbilly music' –after the Ulster-Scots settlers of the Appalachians – but this merely serves to underscore the genre's origins. Ulster-Scots created and still dominate country music, which along with jazz and soul, is one of the few truly indigenous American musical styles. Nashville, Tennessee's state capital, is the undisputed home of the country music industry and it is here that the 'Grand Ole Opry' has provided the ultimate platform for the genre's biggest names since 1925.

The migration of huge numbers of rural Southern whites to the great industrial cities during the Great Depression and the Second World War brought country music into contact with other genres, notably blues and gospel music. Elvis

Presley was (and arguably remains) the unrivalled master of blending diverse musical traditions and producing his own unique contribution to the world of music. Over the past 40 years Dolly Parton has established herself not only as the 'Queen' but the 'Empress' of country music with seven Grammy Awards and 41 Top Ten country albums to her credit. Pam Tillis, who like Parton has Ulster-Scots roots, is another contemporary country artist with over 30 chart hits in her successful career.

### *'Personal honor and adamant individualism'*

A sturdy and often stubborn individualism was a characteristic feature of the early Ulster-Scots settlers in America. This quality is neatly captured in the 'Gadsden flag' - an early example of American revolutionary patriotism. The flag displays a yellow background with a coiled rattlesnake, ready to strike above the motto: 'Don't Tread on Me'. The motto recalls that of the Scottish Order of the Thistle and three present-day Scottish regiments in the British army: '*Nemo me impune lacessit*' which is usually translated as 'No one attacks me with impunity'.

The young Andrew Jackson was advised by his mother: 'Never sue for assault or slander; settle them cases yourself'. Since Jackson fought at least thirteen duels, he would appear to have taken her advice very literally. For James Webb, the power and attractiveness of Ulster-Scots culture stems from its 'insistence on the dignity of the individual' and its 'infectious egalitarianism'.

### *Religion*

Religious conviction was an important element in prompting eighteenth-century Ulster-Scots emigration to the New World. It is therefore not surprising that religion has played an important role in Tennessee life from the days of the earliest pioneers. There are an estimated 10,000 churches in the state and 82% of Tennesseans are Christians. Through the influence

of the Scotch-Irish, Presbyterianism was the first denomination to be established in the state. If Revd Francis Makemie was 'the father of American Presbyterianism', Revd Samuel Doak was 'the first apostle of Presbyterianism in Tennessee'. Doak was the first Presbyterian minister to preach in Tennessee and established the first church west of the Alleghenies before organising Abingdon Presbytery which covered East Tennessee and South West Virginia.

Baptists soon however outnumbered Presbyterians in Tennessee due to the fact that the latter insisted on formally educated ministers. The theological colleges could not meet the demand for new ministers fast enough and as a result the less formal demands of the Baptist church were more easily satisfied. The Great Revival of 1800, spawned in nearby Kentucky, heightened the importance of religion in the state, where two new denominations emerged: the Cumberland Presbyterians and the Disciples of Christ, or Christian church. There is a strong Revivalist tradition in Tennessee. Diarmaid MacCulloch, Professor of the History of the Church at Oxford University, has characterized the Revivalist meeting, pioneered in the Sixmilewater Revival in County Antrim in 1625, exported to Scotland as the Shotts Revival in 1630 and brought to America in the eighteenth century, as the distinctive Ulster-Scots contribution to 'evangelical Protestantism worldwide'. While this study only examines the career of Revd Samuel Doak, other ministers such as Hezekiah Balch, Samuel Carrick and Isaac Anderson are deserving of attention. And of course John Rhea's father, Revd Joseph Rhea, another Presbyterian minister.

### *Education*

Historically, Ulster-Scots have always placed great stress on the value of education. This was a vital component of their Scottish heritage. John Knox, the great sixteenth-century Protestant reformer, believed passionately in the importance of literacy and believed that every parish should have its own school. Children, Knox contended, were born 'ignorant of godliness' and that the goal of education was to prepare children for 'the business of life and the purpose of eternity'.

By the Glorious Revolution of 1688, if not indeed before the National Covenant of 1638, it was the norm for every Lowland parish to have its own school, realizing Knox's vision and giving the Scots a standard of education which was probably the best in Europe. As the pioneer of education in Tennessee, Revd Samuel Doak founded both the first schoolhouse west of the Alleghenies and the Martin Academy which for many years was the principal seat of learning on the frontier.

It is striking how many of the figures considered here have had an interest in education. Samuel Houston, at the age of 19, founded a one-room schoolhouse. James White gave land for the establishment of Blount College and John Rhea was one of the founders of the College, which later became the University of Tennessee. Between 1988 and 1991 Lamar Alexander served as President of the University of Tennessee, and between 1991 and 1993 as Secretary of Education under George Bush Snr.

Dolly Parton's literacy programme, by which one book per month is posted to each enrolled child from the time of their birth until they enter kindergarten, is marvelous testimony to the continuing Ulster-Scots faith in the value of education.

### *'The Volunteer State'*

Tennessee is known as the 'Volunteer State' because of the disproportionately large number of Tennesseans who volunteered in the American Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, the Texas Revolution (not least in the Battle of the Alamo) and especially the American-Mexican War, as well as the huge number of Tennesseans who volunteered for both sides of the Civil War. Tennessee furnished more soldiers for the Confederate Army than any other state, and more soldiers for the Union Army than any other Southern state.

Asked which race made the best soldiers, Robert E. Lee offered an interesting answer: 'The Scotch who came to this country by way of Ireland'. Pressed to explain his answer, 'Master Robert' replied, 'Because they have all the dash of the Irish in taking a position and all the stubbornness of the Scotch in holding it.'

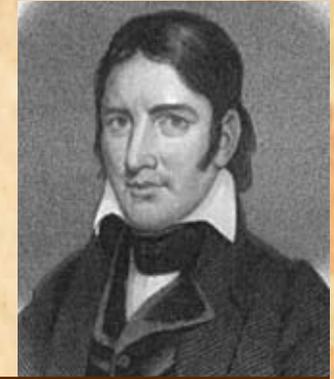
'The warrior ethic', as James Webb has observed, has always been an important element in Scotch-Irish culture. Here two soldiers exemplify this ethic: Nathan Bedford Forrest and Alvin York. Forrest is a Border Reiver name. The Reivers inhabited the Anglo-Scottish Borders between the Scottish Wars of Independence and the Union of the Crowns in 1603. On both sides of the Border they were professional cattle-thieves, merciless racketeers and plunderers. They were murderous pursuers of feuds who – allegedly – held little sacred except their pledged word. However, as light cavalry they were magnificent and their country's vanguard in time of war. In the early seventeenth century many Reiver families were dispatched to hold the outposts of the Plantation in south-west Ulster. The conclusion that Nathan Bedford Forrest's military genius was in his DNA is inescapable. Alvin York was an unassuming corporal born in poor circumstances in Pall Mall, in the Tennessee mountains, who in the Great War was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for his courage during the Meuse-Argonne Offensive in October 1918.



## *Lamar Alexander*

1940 - present

Lamar Alexander, the senior Senator from Tennessee and Conference Chair of the Republican Party, is one of the most influential politicians in the United States. He was born in Maryville and is a seventh generation Tennessean. In 1974, in the middle of the Watergate scandal, he was unsuccessful in his first bid to win the governorship of Tennessee. However, in 1978, wearing a red-checked flannel shirt, he campaigned vigorously to reverse that outcome by walking across Tennessee, travelling some 1,022 miles. He won easily and became the 45th Governor of Tennessee. His red-checked shirt predictably became his trademark and in due course he became the first governor of Tennessee to serve consecutive four-year terms of office (from 1979 to 1987). Between 1988 and 1991 he served as President of the University of Tennessee and between 1991 and 1993 as Secretary of Education under George Bush Snr. Running on a platform of decentralized federal government and shifting more responsibility to the states, he sought the Republican Presidential nomination in both 1996 and 2000. In 2002 he was elected to the Senate, the only Tennessean ever popularly elected both as Governor and as US Senator. He is also a classical and country pianist, the author of seven books and a Presbyterian elder. Senator Alexander is a member of the Scots (and Scotch-Irish) Caucus in Congress.



## *David Crockett*

1786 - 1836

In popular legend this celebrated nineteenth-century American folk hero was known as 'the King of the Wild Frontier'. A frontiersman, soldier and politician, he always referred to himself as David Crockett rather than Davy.

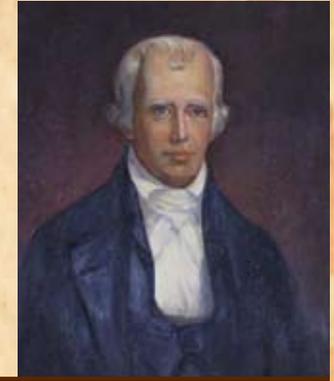
Crockett grew up in East Tennessee where he gained a reputation for hunting and storytelling. Having achieved the rank of colonel in the Tennessee militia, Crockett was elected to the Tennessee state legislature in 1821. In 1827 Crockett was elected to the US House of Representatives for the first time. As a congressman, Crockett vehemently opposed many of the policies of President Jackson, most notably the Indian Removal Act. Crockett's opposition to Jackson's policies led to his defeat in the 1835 elections. The popular image of Crockett as a rough backwoods legislator caught the popular imagination during Crockett's lifetime and continues to hold sway. While electioneering Crockett's speeches were packed with yarns and homespun metaphors, by contrast as a legislator Crockett delivered his speeches in fairly conventional English. Political defeat prompted his departure to Texas where he became active in the rebellion against Mexican rule and famously died defending the Alamo. Crockett told William Travis and Jim Bowie that he had travelled to the Alamo to aid them in their 'noble cause' and to defend 'the liberties' of their 'common country'. Crockett's Ulster forbears hailed from Castlederg in County Tyrone.



## Samuel Doak

1749 - 1830

Doak was the son of County Antrim Presbyterians who emigrated to escape 'the time of the black frost', the severe winter which afflicted Ulster in 1739-40. He has been described as the 'first apostle of Presbyterianism and the pioneer of education in Tennessee'. Doak was the first Presbyterian minister to operate in Tennessee and he established the first church and schoolhouse west of the Alleghenies in 1788. He organised Abingdon Presbytery in 1785 which covered East Tennessee and South West Virginia and within a decade he had established 36 congregations and had a dozen ministers working in the area of its jurisdiction. He also founded the Martin Academy (later Washington College) which for many years was the principal seat of learning on the frontier. On 25 September 1780 Doak preached a fiery sermon to the 'Overmountain Men' mustering at Sycamore Shoals prior to the Battle of King's Mountain (which Thomas Jefferson and others have claimed was the turning point of the American Revolutionary War). His sermon (inspired by Judges 7: 18 & 20) also provided them with their stirring battlecry: 'The Sword of the Lord and Gideon'. Doak was a strong opponent of slavery and the fact that East Tennessee was the most significant Union enclave in the South during the Civil War may have been due to his extraordinary legacy.



## John Donelson

1718 - 1785

In 1775 Richard Henderson, a North Carolina lawyer, acquired most of middle Tennessee and Kentucky in the Transylvania Purchase from the Cherokee. In the spring of 1780 Henderson sent a party under Donelson, a surveyor, explorer and adventurer, to lead thirty families into the interior to settle the area. Donelson's party consisted of a flotilla of thirty canoes, flat boats and dugouts which traversed the Holston, Tennessee, Ohio, and Cumberland Rivers. The fleet carried a large number of women and children. Donelson's family, including his wife Rachel Stockley, their children, and approximately thirty African American slaves were among the pioneers. One of Donelson's children was his thirteen-year-old daughter Rachel, who would become the wife of Andrew Jackson, the 7th President of the United States. Donelson kept a *Journal of a Voyage, intended by God's permission, in the good boat Adventure, from Fort Patrick Henry, on Holston River to the French Salt Springs on Cumberland River*, which was an account of this epic journey and of the hardships they endured. During the four-month voyage, the hardy adventurers experienced Indian attacks, smallpox, hunger, exhaustion, extreme cold, swift currents, and treacherous shoals. On 24 April 1780 Donelson's party reached the end of their thousand mile journey at the Big Salt Lick which became Nashville (named after Francis Nash, the brigadier general killed in the American Revolutionary War) in 1784. The following year Donelson was killed in Kentucky during an Indian raid. The Donelson family emigrated from Gramoney, between Larne and Carrickfergus, in the early part of the eighteenth century.

## *Nathan Bedford Forrest*

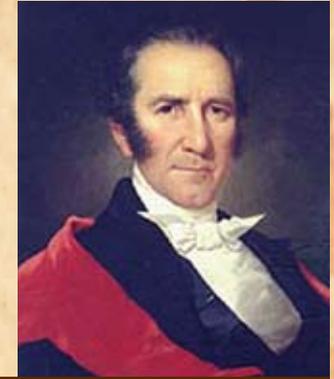
1821 - 1877



Confederate generals of Scots-Irish descent dominated the battlefields of the Civil War and none more so in the estimation of James Webb than the 'unparalleled' Nathan Bedford Forrest who was 'a master of maneuver and improvisation'. An innovative cavalry commander, Forrest was born into a poor family in Chapel Hill, Tennessee. Yet, by the outbreak of the Civil War Forrest was a millionaire and one of the richest men in the South, having amassed a fortune as a planter, real estate investor, and slave trader. He was one of the few commanders in either army to enlist as a private at the beginning of the war and end the conflict as a general. Although lacking formal military education, Forrest was a gifted strategist and tactician. Often erroneously quoted as saying his strategy was to 'git thar fastest with the mostest', he deployed his cavalry as mounted infantry. Horses provided speed and mobility but once he reached the field of battle he usually had his men fight dismounted as infantry. Forrest's successes drove Ulysses S. Grant to fits of anger. Both Jefferson Davis and Robert E. Lee subsequently admitted that the Confederacy had failed to fully utilise Forrest's talents. Shelby Foote, the author of a celebrated three-volume history of the Civil War, considered President Lincoln and Forrest to be the two authentic geniuses of the conflict. On one occasion he famously shared this view with one of Forrest's granddaughters. After a pause, she replied: 'You know, we never thought much of Mr Lincoln in my family'.

## *Samuel Houston*

1793 - 1863



Houston is the only person in United States history to have been the governor of two different states: Tennessee and Texas. And, as President of the Republic of Texas, he is one of a very select group of Americans to have been head of state of an independent country. Born in the Shenandoah Valley in Virginia, young Sam, with his family, moved to Tennessee, following the death of his father in 1807. In 1809, dissatisfied with working as a shop clerk, he absconded and resided for a time with the Cherokees, being adopted into the Cherokee Nation. He returned home and, at the age of 19, founded a one-room schoolhouse. Houston served in the War of 1812 and pursued a successful career in Tennessee politics. A fight with a Congressman, followed by a high profile trial, led to his flight to Texas where he avenged the Alamo by defeating General Santa Anna and the Mexican army at San Jacinto on 21 April 1836. Although a slaveowner and opponent of abolition, Houston refused, because of his unionist convictions, to swear allegiance to the Confederacy when Texas seceded from the Union. To avoid bloodshed, he declined the offer of a Union army to put down the rebellion and instead retired to Huntsville, Texas, where he died before the end of the Civil War. His Ulster roots may be traced back to Ballyboley, near Ballyclare, County Antrim.

## *Andrew Jackson*

1767 - 1845



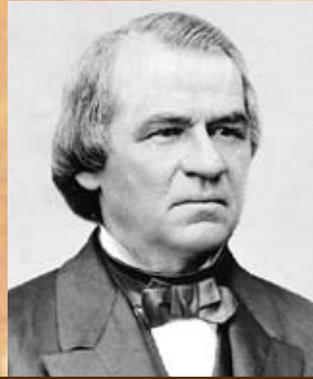
Andrew Jackson, the 7th President of the United States, whose parents hailed from Boneybefore, near Carrickfergus, County Antrim, has many claims to fame. 'Old Hickory' (as Jackson was nicknamed on account of his legendary toughness) was the first President to be elected from west of the Appalachians. Unlike his six predecessors, he was not born to great privilege and was the first President to be born in a log cabin. Nor was he an intellectual like John Adams or Thomas Jefferson, the 2nd and 3rd Presidents respectively, who were among the leading intellectuals of their era. As the founder of the Democratic Party, he was the first President to found a modern political party. After his victory over the British at the Battle of New Orleans (8 January 1815) where he defeated the Duke of Wellington's brother-in-law, he was spoken of as 'a second Washington' but before 1822 he showed little interest in becoming President. He first contested the Presidency in 1824 and secured election in 1828. He was the first President to expand the role and powers of the presidency, so much so that his opponents bitterly denounced him as 'King Andrew I'. In January 1835 Jackson became the first President to be targeted by an assassin. The sixty-seven year-old Jackson, a man of fiery temper, vigorously laid into his would-be assassin with his cane and had to be restrained by his aides.

## *Rachel Donelson Robards Jackson*

1767 - 1828



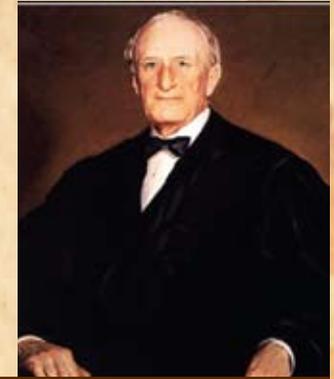
Rachel was the attractive and vivacious daughter of the co-founder of Nashville. Andrew Jackson, the future 7th President, became smitten with her when he stayed in her widowed mother's boarding house in Nashville. At that stage Rachel was unhappily married to Lewis Robards of Kentucky and had recently returned to her mother's home. Efforts at reconciliation failed in early 1790. Later that year Robards sought a divorce decree from the Virginia assembly but the legislature remanded the petition to the courts of the Kentucky district (then a part of Virginia). Presuming Robards had secured a divorce, Jackson married Rachel in 1791. However, because Robards had delayed divorce proceedings until 1792, the court only issued its decree in 1793. Thus, the couple had unwittingly entered into a bigamous marriage. When Andrew and Rachel received news of the court decision, they remarried in 1794. Jackson was completely devoted to Rachel. He fought thirteen duels with those who foolishly impugned Rachel's honour. In 1806 Charles Dickinson paid for his folly with his life. For many years, out of deference to Rachel, Jackson showed no interest in the Presidency. She dreaded the prospect of becoming First Lady. Rachel died of a massive heart attack six weeks after her husband's election to the Presidency. Her body had to be prised from the arms of the devastated President to prepare it for burial. Jackson blamed his opponents for hounding Rachel to death. She was buried in the grounds of their home, The Hermitage, outside Nashville. Jackson never remarried.



## Andrew Johnson

1808 - 1875

In the mid-nineteenth century East Tennessee was a region of subsistence farming where slave owners were few and slaves almost non-existent. Politically, the region opposed secession and represented the largest bloc of pro-Union sentiment in the South. At least 30,000 Tennesseans served in the Union Army. Andrew Johnson, the US Senator from Greeneville in East Tennessee represented this pro-Union sentiment and was the only Southern Senator not to quit the Senate upon secession. He supported President Lincoln throughout the Civil War and was appointed military governor of occupied Tennessee where he proved to be energetic and effective in 'eradicating all pro-Confederate influences in the state' and beginning the transition to Reconstruction. Johnson was Lincoln's running mate in the Presidential election of 1864. On Inauguration Day he drank rather more whisky than was wise to counter the effects of a recent illness. His demeanour embarrassed his colleagues, dismayed onlookers and appalled Northern opinion. His critics unfairly claimed that he was a habitual drunkard. Less than five weeks later he was President. Johnson was the first Vice-President to succeed to the Presidency on the assassination of his predecessor. He was the first President to be impeached but survived by a single vote. Filling the shoes of America's greatest President was a daunting task. Furthermore, Lincoln's assassination poisoned politics. While Johnson sought to continue Lincoln's conciliatory policy towards the South, Northern revulsion at Lincoln's assassination rendered the policy well nigh impossible. Johnson's ancestors were County Antrim Presbyterians who emigrated from Larne around 1750.



## James Clark McReynolds

1862 - 1946

Although born in Kentucky, McReynolds became 'a crusty Tennessee lawyer'. Few ever appreciated the extent to which the crusty exterior carefully concealed a heart of gold. Although he never married, he loved children. He was generous in his charitable giving and left a sizable fortune to charity. McReynolds was admitted to the bar in 1884, practised law in Nashville, and was professor of law at Vanderbilt University, Nashville, prior to his appointment as Assistant Attorney General (1903-07) in the administration of President Theodore Roosevelt. As special counsel to the Attorney General (1907-12) and as Attorney General (1913-14) under President Woodrow Wilson, McReynolds was distinguished for his vigorous enforcement of anti-trust laws. Thus, he was widely regarded as a liberal when Wilson appointed him to the Supreme Court in 1914. Over the next 27 years, however, he became increasingly conservative and was an outspoken member of the majority that prior to 1937 succeeded in striking down many of the social-reform programmes of the New Deal. In 1936, shortly after his election to his second term as President, an exasperated FDR moaned that McReynolds would probably still be on the Supreme Court, when he was 105. However, FDR generously acknowledged why McReynolds thought the way he did. He was a relic of another America in which men and women started out with nothing in pioneer communities and those who worked hard prospered, and did not need help from the government. To expect McReynolds to betray his allegiance to *laissez-faire* was akin to asking him to repudiate his whole life. McReynolds was descended from James and Mary Bell McReynolds, Ulster-Scots emigrants who settled in Pennsylvania before moving on to the Shenandoah Valley in Virginia.

## *Samuel Davis McReynolds*

1872 - 1939



McReynolds was born into a Scotch-Irish family which could trace its lineage back to early eighteenth - century Ulster, leaving Killyman, County Tyrone in 1737. He grew up on a farm near Pikeville, Bledsoe County, Tennessee and went on to attend People's College, Pikeville, and Cumberland University where he studied law, being admitted to the bar in 1893. Initially McReynolds commenced practice in his home town where he served as assistant district attorney of the sixth judicial circuit of Tennessee in 1894 and 1896 before moving to Chattanooga in 1896. Appointed as a judge of the criminal court for the sixth circuit of Tennessee on 16 April 1903, McReynolds served three terms in this role before his election to Congress in February 1923. A Democrat, he sat in the Sixty-eighth and in the eight succeeding Congresses. During the Seventy-second through Seventy-sixth Congresses, he was the chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, a period which marked the apogee of American isolationism and the passage of a series of Neutrality Acts. These banned Americans from selling arms or making loans to belligerents in any future war and banned US citizens from travelling on belligerent passenger vessels. The intention was to avoid the economic and emotional entanglements which, it was alleged, dragged the USA into the Great War. In 1933, he was a delegate to the International Monetary and Economic Conference in London. When he died in Washington D.C. in 1939, FDR paid tribute to his 'exceptional ability, integrity and great capacity for work'. Samuel Davis McReynolds was a distant cousin of James Clark McReynolds.

## *Dolly Parton*

1946 - present



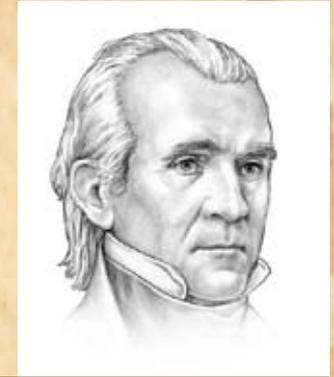
Born in Sevier County, Tennessee, Dolly Rebecca Parton was the fourth of twelve children of 'poor Scotch-Irish sharecroppers'. Her formidable talents have enabled her to emerge from a childhood of grim mountain poverty to become 'the Queen of Country' and a Grammy Award-winning American singer-songwriter, author, actress and philanthropist. She began performing as a child, singing on local radio and television programs in East Tennessee but her breakthrough came when she appeared with Porter Wagoner on his television show in 1967. With 25 'number-one' singles and a record 41 'top-ten' country albums to her credit and a place in the Country Music Hall of Fame, Dolly Parton is the most successful female artist in the history of country music. She is known for her distinctive Tennessee-mountain soprano voice, her sharp sense of humour, flamboyant dress sense and voluptuous figure. Dolly's philanthropic ventures are stunningly impressive in scale and imagination. Her literacy programme, 'Dolly Parton's Imagination Library', is but one example. The programme posts one book per month to each enrolled child from the time of their birth until they enter kindergarten. More than 2.5 million free books are distributed to children annually. Dolly Parton is extremely proud of her Scotch-Irish ancestry and generously acknowledges the 'massive influence' of her roots on her music.



## Mary Patton

1751 - 1836

The American Revolutionary heroine and gunpowder maker Mary Patton (née McKeehan), because she was born in England, may not strictly speaking be an Ulster-Scot but in 1772 she married John Patton who most emphatically was. Nevertheless, the name McKeehan suggests and certainly does not preclude Ulster-Scots ancestry. Her family emigrated to Pennsylvania in the late 1760s. She served an apprenticeship, possibly under her father, David McKeehan, and learned the art of gunpowder making. She and her husband manufactured gunpowder in the Cumberland County region of Pennsylvania. Following the birth of two children, the couple sold their Carlisle powder mill and migrated to the 'Overmountain' region of North Carolina, now East Tennessee. With the help of family friend Andrew Taylor, they established a mill on what became known as Powder Branch, adjacent to the Taylor home. Mary Patton secured her niche in history by providing over five hundred pounds of gunpowder to the 'Overmountain Men' led by Isaac Shelby and William Campbell for the battle of King's Mountain during the Revolutionary War. The family tradition of gunpowder manufacturing survived until after the Civil War. She is buried in Patton-Simmons Cemetery near Sycamore Shoals, Tennessee.



## James Polk

1795 - 1849

A protégé of Andrew Jackson, Polk served as Governor of Tennessee between 1839 and 1841. He secured the Democratic nomination in 1844 and defeated Henry Clay, becoming the 11th President of the United States. During his Presidency he waged the Mexican War (1846-48) and achieved the second-largest expansion of the nation's territory by acquiring the Oregon Territory (the modern states of Washington, Oregon and Idaho) and by purchasing 525,000 square miles of territory in the Southwest and California in 1848. Polk gave reality to the term 'Manifest Destiny', the belief that the United States was destined, even divinely ordained, to expand across the North American continent, from the Atlantic seaboard to the Pacific Ocean. As President, 'Young Hickory' – Jackson was 'Old Hickory' – kept a diary which reveals a man of great integrity weighed down by the burdens of the office. He found dealing with office seekers especially time consuming and very wearing. By the end of his first and only term – he did not seek a second term – he was in poor health and died shortly after leaving office. He was the first US President to be photographed frequently while in office. Historians and political scientists have admired Polk's ability to set an agenda and achieve it. While he just falls outside the top six US Presidents, he is usually ranked between eighth and twelfth on the list of greatest Presidents. Polk's Ulster-Scots ancestors had their origins in Counties Donegal and Londonderry.

## *Elvis Presley*

1935 - 1977



A child of the Great Depression, 'the King' was born in Tupelo, Mississippi. His ancestry was primarily a mixture of Ulster-Scots and Norman French. He may also have had Cherokee and Jewish blood coursing in his veins. At the age of thirteen he moved with his family to Memphis, Tennessee. The influences on his music are at least as varied as his ancestry. He grew up hearing black men and women singing the blues. The influence of gospel and of country music is obvious. Significantly, his three Grammy awards were for his gospel recordings. Presley recorded over 450 original songs and became the biggest selling artist in history. His greatest records were singles rather than albums. In 1973 Presley staged Aloha from Hawaii, the first global live concert via satellite, which was seen by approximately 1.5 billion viewers. It remains the most watched broadcast by an individual entertainer in television history. His impact on popular culture remains immense more than 30 years after his death. Graceland, his home in Memphis, draws nearly 600,000 visitors a year, making it one of the top tourist attractions in the United States. Each August crowds flock there to honour him on the anniversary of his death. Such has been the explosion in the sheer number of Elvis impersonators over recent decades, that one economist (presumably tongue in cheek) has predicted that eventually every third person on the planet will be an Elvis impersonator. Elvis retains a fan base almost unrivalled in numbers and geographical spread. Worth far more dead than he ever was alive, last year the cultural icon earned \$55 million.



## *John Rhea*

1753 - 1832

The son of Revd Joseph Rhea, a Presbyterian minister, John Rhea was born in County Londonderry. In 1753, he emigrated to the New World and settled in eastern Tennessee in 1778, serving in the Patriot army at Battles of King's Mountain and Brandywine. He was a member of the North Carolina House of Commons and a delegate to the State convention that ratified the Federal Constitution in 1789. Originally he aspired to becoming a Presbyterian minister but instead studied law and was admitted to bar in 1789. In 1796 he was a delegate to the constitutional convention of Tennessee and attorney general of Greene County. In 1796 and 1797 he was also a member of the Tennessee House of Representatives. John Rhea was elected to the Eighth Congress and the five succeeding Congresses, serving from 4 March 1803 to 31 March 1815. From the Tenth to the Thirteenth Congress he was chairman of the Committee on Post Office and Post Roads. He was a member of the Committee on Pensions and Revolutionary War Claims during the Fifteenth Congress through to the Seventeenth Congress. He was appointed US commissioner to treat with the Choctaw Nation in 1816. Afterward, he again became a Congressman, serving from 4 March 1817 until 3 March 1823 in the Fifteenth, Sixteenth, and Seventeenth Congresses. Rhea was one of the founders of Blount College, which later became the University of Tennessee.



## James Robertson

1742 - 1814

James Robertson and John Donelson jointly founded Nashville. Like Donelson, Robertson was dispatched to explore and settle the territory in middle Tennessee and Kentucky acquired by Richard Henderson. Robertson set out slightly earlier than Donelson and went overland rather than using the region's rivers. Whereas Donelson had responsibility for bringing out the women and children to the prospective settlement, Robertson was responsible for taking out the domestic animals and the community's goods and equipment. Robertson and Donelson rendezvoused at the Big Salt Lick (which, as we have already noted, became Nashville in 1784). Robertson's party arrived approximately four months ahead of Donelson's and made good use of that time to lay the foundations on which a successful community was built. Robertson was born in Brunswick County in Virginia and was of Ulster-Scots stock. About 1750 his father moved to Wake County in North Carolina. There the young Robertson received very little by way of formal education. In 1759 Robertson accompanied Daniel Boone on his third expedition beyond the Alleghany Mountains. In 1790 President Washington appointed Robertson brigadier-general of the territorial militia. Unlike Donelson, Robertson lived long enough to see Nashville chartered as a city in 1806 and to become the political centre of the state.



## Pam Tillis

1957 - present

Although born in Plant City, Florida, Pamela Yvonne Tillis grew up in Nashville. As the daughter of country legend Mel Tillis, she grew up surrounded by music. The young Pam made her debut on the 'Grand Ole Opry' at the age of 8 and went on to start her music career as a backing vocalist, demo singer, club performer and songwriter. Pam was signed to Warner Brothers Records in 1981, with nine singles and a studio album being released in the 1980s. By 1991, she had signed to Arista Records and in that year she reached Top 5 on the *Billboard* country charts with 'Don't Tell Me What to Do', the first of five singles from her second album, *Put Yourself in My Place*, which was certified gold by the Recording Industry Association of America. Since 1991 Pam has had more than 30 singles in the US *Billboard* country charts, including 'Mi Vida Loca' (My Crazy Life). She has also released ten albums with three platinum and two gold certifications. She has also founded Stellar Cat Records, her own label. Like Dolly Parton, Pam is of Scotch-Irish descent and very proud of it. In 2009 during her concert tour of the British Isles she visited the land of her Ulster-Scots forbears, an experience which she described as 'a personal pilgrimage'. She also has Cherokee ancestry.



## *James White*

1747 - 1821

James White's family had its origins in County Londonderry. A former officer in the Patriot army, he was given a land grant of 1,000 acres for his service and in 1786 built a two-storey log house on the site of the modern city of Knoxville. Two years later he enclosed the house and other buildings with a stockade fence to provide protection from wild animals. In 1791 the city was officially founded and renamed Knoxville after Henry Knox, Secretary of War in President George Washington's cabinet. White represented North Carolina at its convention to ratify the Constitution of the United States and was also a representative to the Tennessee Constitutional Convention in 1796. He was elected to the Senate in the First General Assembly of Tennessee and became the Speaker of that body in 1797. White was a friend of the Cherokee Indians. He negotiated several of their treaties with the settlers and they came to his home in peace and to trade with him. The Cherokees considered him a man of honour and at least on two occasions he tactfully intervened on their behalf and prevented reprisals by settlers. During the War of 1812 he achieved the rank of General. The 'Founder of Knoxville' took a keen interest in the growth and development of the city. He gave land for the First Presbyterian Church and cemetery in Knoxville and also for the establishment of Blount College which would evolve into the University of Tennessee. He died at his home in 1821 and is buried beside his wife Mary Lawson White at First Presbyterian. Knox's 'Fort' was 'recreated' and opened to the public in 1970.



## *Alvin York*

1887 - 1964

'The warrior ethic', as James Webb has observed, has always been an important element in Scotch-Irish culture and no soldier exemplifies this better than Alvin York, an unassuming corporal born in poor circumstances in Pall Mall, in the Tennessee mountains. York has been justly singled out as the greatest common soldier of the First World War. As York came of age he earned a reputation as a deadly accurate shot and a 'hell raiser' who would 'never amount to anything'. In 1914 a close friend of his died in a bar room brawl and, as a result, York experienced a religious conversion. While serving in the 82nd Infantry Division at the Meuse-Argonne Offensive in October 1918, he was a member of a seventeen-man patrol ordered to neutralize a German machine-gun emplacement that was halting his unit's advance. Behind enemy lines the patrol lost half its men but managed to take a handful of prisoners before it was pinned down by extremely heavy rifle and machine-gun fire. Corporal York assumed command and, while the rest of the survivors took up defensive positions and stood guard over the prisoners, York attacked alone and, firing rapidly and with deadly accuracy at the enemy gunners, killed 25 of them, which persuaded the others to surrender. Returning to the American lines, he captured yet more Germans, 132 in all. Promoted to sergeant, he subsequently received the Congressional Medal of Honor. York told his divisional commander in 1919: 'A higher power than man power guided and watched over me and told me what to do'.



# Ulster-Scots Community Network

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68-72 Great Victoria Street Belfast BT2 7BB

T: 028 9043 6710 F: 028 9033 0715 E: [info@ulster-scots.com](mailto:info@ulster-scots.com)