



There are distinct differences between the terms and identities of Scots, Irish and “Scotch-Irish.”

Let’s first clarify some terminology: Since not long after Burns wrote in 1787 that “the appellation of a Scotch Bard is by far my highest pride,” Scotch has been a term applied to a product, not people. In today’s most common usage, the people are called *Scottish* (adjective) or *Scots* (noun); their language is *Scots*; they have *Scottish* traditions; and enjoy *Scotch* whisky (spelled with no e).

So, if your family roots go back to Scotland, you are Scottish, or a Scot. However, if your roots go back to Ireland, you *might* be *Irish* if there’s no Scottish ancestry or “*Scotch-Irish*.” According to Philip D. Smith in his 1984 *Tartan and Me!*, “Scotch-Irish” is a term “still used by many in North America with the mistaken belief that they are descendants of a blend of some Scots and some Irish. In most cases this is not so.” Most are Scots (or Scottish). The term “Scotch-Irish”

wasn’t widely used until the 1800s, almost exclusively in North America and for mostly anti-Irish reasons.

The history of what became the “Scotch-Irish” people goes back to at least the late 1500s. Queen Elizabeth I had forfeited the titles of the earls of Ulster who were in revolt against the crown and gave their lands to thousands of Protestant Scottish immigrants who were “planted” in the northern region of Ireland. After several generations, between 1720 and 1775, some 300,000 of these transplanted Protestant Scots entered the American colonies. Having long lived in Ireland, they understandably called themselves “Irish.”

That changed a century later as the Roman Catholic “real” Irish, fleeing the great potato famine, began arriving in America. To distance themselves from these later arrivals, the descendants of the earlier influx of Scots from Ireland began to call themselves “Scotch-Irish.” According to Smith, the preferred term today is “Ulster Scots.”