

The tale of a 'proud and feisty' people

Local author Billy Kennedy reviews ***The Other Irish*** (***The Scots-Irish Rascals who Made America***) by Karen F. McCarthy

The Scots-Irish in the United States have an illustrious legacy which should be the envy of other diasporas in North America. After all they were, as President William McKinley said, "the first to proclaim for liberty in the great United States".

Their fearless contribution on the 18th century American frontier in creating a civilisation out of a bleak wilderness is the stuff of classic movies and countless novels, yet still in some quarters the Scots-Irish, whose hardy forebears moved out of Ulster in their tens of thousands, do not get the recognition they fully deserve. This unique inheritance of a restless people who, over several centuries, traversed two continents is illuminatingly and accurately teased out by distinguished journalist Karen F. McCarthy in a new book, titled *The Other Irish* (*The Scots-Irish Rascals who Made America*). This is a book written in straight-forward news feature style, both factual and entertaining as one would expect of a journalist of Karen's standing. As Karen says, the "other Irish rascals" had a litany of names. "In Ireland they're called Ulster-Scots, Ulstermen, Northerners, Ulster Protestants, Presbyterians, Unionists. In America, they were called Irish until the mid-1800s, when the Catholic Irish arrived.

"Given the animosity between the two people, those who had travelled from the north of Ireland changed their name to Scotch-Irish to distinguish themselves from their old foes. When it became widely known that Scotch was a whiskey, they became Scots-Irish."

Karen, seeking to separate them from the narrow politically motivated Irish American (Irish republican) strain, adds: "Call them what you will - they are the little-lauded Other Irish." Indeed, the Ulster-Scots, or the Scots-Irish as they are best known in the United States, were the first set of emigrants from Ireland to seek a new life across the Atlantic and how well they stuck to the task of establishing communities in mountainous wooded regions, and in cities and towns as the western frontier moved to its outer limits.

Karen McCarthy has assiduously followed the picturesque Appalachian pathway that I took over a decade and a half in the research and compilation for my 10 books on the Scots-Irish and, the fascination with a story that can overwhelm but still titillate, jumps out at the reader with a sense of real adventure and deep-rooted cultural identity over the 380 pages of her excellent book.

Her chapter on three frontiersmen and their guns takes source material from my book *Three Men of Destiny*, which charts the lives and achievements of three of the most durable Scots-Irish luminaries - Andrew Jackson, Sam Houston and David (Davy) Crockett.

'The Other Irish' is different in style with *Born Fightin' - How the Scot-Irish Shaped America*, a well-researched, non-academic 2005 book prolifically written by James Webb, Vietnam veteran and Democratic senator for the Shenandoah Valley in the US Senate. Webb's best-selling book was a personal glossary, but the substance of Karen's work has close parallels.

Webb, intensely proud of his Scots-Irish roots, features in Karen's chapters along with another of a kin James E. Webb, a down to earth "good ole boy with a law degree" from North



Ian Crozier, chief executive of the Ulster-Scots Agency is pictured with author and journalist, Karen F. McCarthy

Carolina who rose to become an under-secretary of state in President Franklin D. Roosevelt's 'New Deal' regime of the late 1930s and 1940s.

As Karen McCarthy recounts, the Webbs may have been better educated than the other Scots-Irish families in the rural backcountry of North Carolina and Virginia, but they were still a normal, rural Presbyterian family; church-going, neighbourly, hard working and doggedly self-reliant. All the best characteristics of typical Scots-Irish folk in the south-eastern Appalachian region.

Jim Webb, the author and Vietnam war hero from the mountains of south-west Virginia and a man signed up to the egalitarian principles of Jacksonian Democracy, pioneered by President Andrew Jackson in the early part of the 19th century - "government for the people, by the people" - charged towards Washington in a popular crusade in the early years of the new millennium.

Karen McCarthy writes: "The days of self-reliance were fading. These descendants of the independent Scots-Irish in the Appalachians, who always wanted fairness and never wanted a hand-out began to feel the effects of the same government betrayal that had rallied their ancestors to rebellion on two

occasions."

She recounts Senator Jim Webb's response to President George W. Bush's State of the Union address in January 2006: "President Andrew Jackson established an important principle of American-style democracy - that we should measure the health of our society in apex not at its base.

"Not with the numbers that come out from bankers in Wall Street, but with the living conditions that exist in Main Street. We must recapture that spirit today."

Surely, an interesting modern analogy from the inspirational leadership of the seventh President of the United States Andrew Jackson, whose humble parents Andrew and Elizabeth left Boneybefore outside Carrickfergus for America in 1765, just 18 months before he was born in the wild and rugged Waxhaws region of the Carolinas. Jackson, one of 17 American Presidents with Ulster blood in his veins, is the archetypal Scots-Irish hero - victorious US army commander at the Battle of New Orleans in January 1815 and President over two terms 1828-36.

Sam Houston, whose family were also of East Antrim stock, took inspiration from Jacksonian Democracy to vie for freedom and liberty in

'Nothing like those Kennedys'

The following is an excerpt from an article first published in The Huffington Post (the influential American political blog) by writer and journalist, **Court Stroud**

After reading *The Other Irish: The Scots-Irish Rascals Who Made America*, a wonderfully entertaining and highly informative book of historical non fiction by journalist Karen McCarthy, I finally understand. My grandmother's anger when asked how we were related to America's royal family is one tiny element in a conflict that's been raging at least since the Roman Empire, perhaps longer. McCarthy takes the reader on a sweeping journey, which begins in Europe with the origins of the ancient antagonism between the Gaelic tribe Dál Riata and the marauding Picts, continues with the settlement of Scots in Northern Ireland during the Plantation of Ulster and then moves to the Siege of Derry, a showdown in 1688 between the deposed Catholic King James II of England and his usurper, the Protestant King William of Orange. William rescued the Presbyterian inhabitants of the ancient walled city from a gruelling siege, and afterwards, Northern Irish Protestants became known as "Billy boys".

Even though she's writing about events that happened 300 years ago, the author's agility as a storyteller makes each moment come alive via concrete descriptions and human-interest stories. Rare is the writer who can not only recite historical facts, but also make them vibrant and flesh-coloured. McCarthy is indeed one such gifted writer.

To read the article in its entirety visit http://www.huffingtonpost.com/court-stroud/the-other-irish_b_2158816.html

the great Lone Star state of Texas. Along with another Tennessean Davy Crockett and a host of luminaries before and since, Jackson and Houston, Karen McCarthy asserts, are numbered among the Scots-Irish "rascals" who made America.

Rebellious, independent and fervently religious, those thousands of folk with grand dreams sailed from Ulster's harbours through the 1700s. They tamed the American South, pitching fearlessly for independence and the creation of a nation that was to become foremost in the world.

Karen McCarthy's expertly researched and insightful documentary on a proud and feisty people certainly holds a place with the best in historical literary works on the Scots-Irish (Ulster-Scots).

* *The Other Irish* (*The Scots-Irish Rascals Who Made America*) by Karen McCarthy. Published by Sterling Publishing Company, New York (2011)

* Billy Kennedy is the author of the Scots-Irish Chronicles (10 volumes). Published by Ambassador Publications (South Carolina) 1995-2008.

The Other Irish by Karen McCarthy is available from the following websites: Amazon, Waterstones and iTunes.