



## Ulster-Scots and the United States Presidents

  
**Ulster-Scots Agency**  
Tha Boord o Ulstèr-Scotch

**Seventeen of the 44 American Presidents are generally accepted as being of Ulster-Scots ancestry. Some have more direct Ulster links than others, but the connection to 18th and 19th century emigrants from the north of Ireland is tangible.**



**ANDREW JACKSON**

*Democrat 1829-37*

This seventh American President and founder of the Democratic Party in the United States was born in a frontier log cabin in the Waxhaws region of North Carolina in March, 1767. His parents Andrew and Elizabeth Jackson left their home at Boneybefore near Carrickfergus, Co Antrim 18 months earlier, sailing from the port of Larne. The Jacksons had moved from Wigtonshire to Ulster in the 17th century Scottish Plantation. Andrew, who trained as a lawyer in North Carolina, helped draft the constitution for Tennessee, which set up as the 16th state of the Union in 1796. As an army general, he was the victorious United States commander at the Battle of New Orleans in January, 1815. He is widely considered by historians to be one of the foremost American Presidents. Like his parents, Jackson was a Presbyterian and his wife Rachel was also of Ulster lineage.



**JAMES KNOX POLK**

*Democrat 1845-49*

The 11th American President, James Knox Polk was born in 1795 near Charlotte in North Carolina. His Scottish-born great-grandfather Robert Bruce Polk (Pollok), of Lifford in East Donegal, arrived in the American colonies about 1680, settling in Maryland with descendants moving on to North Carolina. James Knox Polk was Governor of Tennessee

Content supplied by B. Kennedy.

DISCLAIMER: the views expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the policy of the publisher.

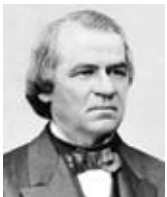
before becoming US President and he and his wife Sarah are buried in Nashville. Both were Presbyterians. Polk served seven terms in the US Congress and was Speaker of the House. A great uncle Thomas Polk signed, with other Scots-Irish (Ulster-Scots) citizens in North Carolina, the Mecklenburg Declaration of May, 1775, a very significant document which preceded the Declaration of Independence of July 4, 1776.



### **JAMES BUCHANAN**

*Democrat 1857-61*

Born 1791 in a log cabin in Franklin County, Pennsylvania, 15th American President James Buchanan was also a Presbyterian. The Buchanan family, parents James and Elizabeth Speer Buchanan and some of their 11 children, lived at Deroran near Omagh, Co Tyrone and left Londonderry for America in 1783. Buchanan, a lawyer, was the only bachelor President and his niece Harriet Lane was First Lady in the White House. He spent 42 years in public life as a Democratic state Assembly man, US Congress member, US minister to Russia, Secretary of State, minister to Britain and President. Buchanan once said: "My Ulster blood is my most priceless heritage".



### **ANDREW JOHNSON**

*Democrat 1865-69*

The 17th American President was born in a log cabin at Raleigh, North Carolina in 1808. His Presbyterian namesake and grandfather from Mounthill outside Larne, Co Antrim arrived in America about 1750. Johnson worked as a tailor for many years. He was Mayor of Greeneville in East Tennessee, a town largely inhabited by Scots-Irish settlers, and became Governor of Tennessee and Vice-President to Abraham Lincoln before assuming the Presidency

on Lincoln's assassination in 1865. Johnson's mother Mary 'Polly' McDonough was of Ulster stock, as was his wife Eliza McCordle, the only daughter of a Co Tyrone-born boot maker. Although of Ulster Presbyterian roots, Johnson was a Methodist.



### **ULYSSES SIMPSON GRANT**

*Republican 1869-77*

Born 1822 in Point Pleasant, Ohio, the 18th American President, also of Presbyterian stock, successfully commanded the Union Army in the American Civil War. His mother Hannah Simpson was descended from the Simpson family of Dergenagh situated between Dungannon and Ballygawley in Co Tyrone. His great-grandfather John Simpson left Ulster for America in 1760. President Grant, a Methodist, admitted he was more of a soldier and a farmer than a politician. In July 1878, Grant travelled to Ulster to receive the freedom of Londonderry and he also stopped off at the Simpson family homestead near Ballygawley.



### **CHESTER ALAN ARTHUR**

*Republican 1881-85*

The 21st American President was born at Fairfield, Vermont in 1830. Arthur's grandfather and his father, Baptist pastor the Rev William Arthur, emigrated to Dunham, Quebec, Canada from Dreen near Cullybackey, Co Antrim in 1801, and the family settled in the neighbouring American state of Vermont. Arthur, a graduate of Princeton College and a lawyer who later became a teacher, was an officer in the New York state militia during the Civil War. He was Vice-President for six months to President James A. Garfield, becoming President on Garfield's assassination in September, 1881.



### **GROVER CLEVELAND**

*Democrat 1885-89 and 1893-97*

The 22nd and 24th President was born 1837 in Caldwell, New Jersey. His maternal grandfather Abner Neal left Co Antrim in the late 18th century. Grover was the son of a Presbyterian minister the Rev Richard Falley Cleveland, who ministered in Connecticut, New York and New Jersey. His mother Ann Neal Cleveland was the daughter of a Baltimore book publisher. Grover Cleveland, a lawyer, was Mayor of Buffalo, New York and Governor of New York before rising to the Presidency. He served two terms in the White House, winning the first and third elections (1884 and 1892) and losing the second (1888) to Benjamin Harrison.



### **BENJAMIN HARRISON**

*Republican 1889-93*

The 23rd American President was born in 1833 at North Bend, Ohio. Harrison, grandson of the ninth President William Henry Harrison, was related to Ulster emigrants James Irwin and William McDowell. His mother Elizabeth Irwin Harrison was born and raised in Mercersburg, Pennsylvania, a strong Scots-Irish settlement, and his father was a member of the US House of Representatives. President Harrison was a devout Presbyterian and he chartered a career as a lawyer and brigadier-general soldier in the Civil War. Harrison served in the US Senate for six years (1881-87).



### **WILLIAM MCKINLEY**

*Republican 1897-1901*

Born 1843 in Niles, Ohio. A Presbyterian, he was great grandson of James McKinley, who emigrated to America from Conagher near Ballymoney, Co Antrim about 1743. The Presbyterian McKinleys were originally from Perthshire, Scotland. McKinley's grandparents fought in the Revolutionary War and the family was involved in iron manufacturing. William McKinley, the 25th US President, was a US Representative for 12 years and Governor of Ohio for four. He was assassinated at Buffalo, New York on September 6, 1901. President McKinley was a Methodist. He was intensely proud that the Scots-Irish were the first to proclaim for liberty in the United States



### **THEODORE ROOSEVELT**

*Republican 1901-09*

Born 1858 in New York City, the 26th President Roosevelt, who wrote admiringly of the courage and exploits of the Scots-Irish on the American frontier, is believed to have Presbyterian ancestors on his maternal side from Larne, Co Antrim. Folklore in East Antrim link him to the Irvines of Carneac near Larne and the Bullochs from the same area. Roosevelt was a distinguished US cavalry officer in the Spanish-American War and New York Governor and politician before becoming President in 1901. He described the Scots-Irish as "a stern, verile, bold and hardy people who formed the kernel of that American stock who were the pioneers of our people in the march westwards".



### WOODROW WILSON

*Democrat 1913-21*

The 28th President and one of the most highly-rated occupants of the White House was born in 1856 at Staunton, Virginia. He was grandson of James Wilson, who emigrated to North Carolina from Dergelt near Strabane, Co Tyrone in 1807. His father, the Rev Dr Joseph Ruffles Wilson, was a Presbyterian minister and his maternal grandfather was the Rev Thomas Ruggles, from Paisley in Scotland. Woodrow was a lecturer at Princeton College before becoming President and he played a leading role in negotiating the peace at the end of the First World War. A strong Calvinist, Woodrow Wilson was very proud of his Ulster-Scots heritage. He said: "My father's father was born in the north of Ireland. I myself am happy there runs in my veins a very considerable strain of Irish blood, and a Scottish conscience". Woodrow Wilson visited Ireland in 1899, including Belfast, during his period as a Princeton professor.



### HARRY TRUMAN

*Democrat 1949-53*

The 33rd President was born 1884 at Lamar, Missouri. His maternal grandfather, Solomon Young was of Scots-Irish settler stock and moved from Kentucky to Kansas City, Missouri in 1840. President Truman, who also had English and German ancestry, was a popular straight-talking American President after the Second World War. He had been a US Senator for 10 years from 1935. Truman was a Baptist, but attended the Presbyterian church as a youth.



### RICHARD MILLHOUSE NIXON

*Republican 1969-74*

The 37th President was born in 1913 at Yorba Linda, California and had Ulster connections on two sides of his family. His Nixon Presbyterian ancestors left Co Antrim for America around 1753, while the Millhouses came from Carrickfergus and Ballymoney, also in Co Antrim. Richard Nixon, himself, was a Quaker and his wife Thelma Catherine "Pat" Ryan had Irish Catholic family connections. Nixon, a lawyer, served as Vice-President during the two Presidential terms of Dwight D. Eisenhower.



### JAMES EARL CARTER

*Democrat 1977-81*

The 39th President was born 1924 in Plains, Georgia. Scots-Irish settler Andrew Cowan, believed to come from Co Antrim, was President Carter's ancestor. Cowan, a Presbyterian, was in 1772 one of the first residents of at Boonesborough, a frontier buffer zone in the South Carolina Piedmont region. Jimmy Carter, who also has English ancestry, is a Baptist.



### GEORGE BUSH

*Republican 1989-93*

The 41st President was born 1924 at Milton, Massachusetts. The Bush family come mainly of English stock, but an ancestor on George Bush's mother's side was William Gault, who was born in Ulster (very probably Co Antrim!) and with his wife Margaret were first settlers of Tennessee, living in Blount County in 1796, the year Tennessee became a state. The Gaults were identified by the Bush family as being first families of Tennessee in the research

carried out by the East Tennessee Historical Society. George Bush is an Episcopalian.



**WILLIAM JEFFERSON CLINTON**  
*Democrat - 1993-2001*

Born 1946 in Hope, Hempstead County, Arkansas. 42nd President Bill Clinton claims to be a relative of Lucas Cassidy, who left Co Fermanagh for America around 1750. President Clinton is a Baptist. During his eight-year period as President, Bill Clinton made three visits to Northern Ireland to publicly express his full support for the peace process in the Province



**GEORGE W. BUSH**  
*Republican 2001-09*

Born 1946 in Texas. President Bush, son of President George Walker Bush, is descended on his father's maternal side from the late 18th century East Tennessee settler William Gault, who was born in the north of Ireland (very probably Co Antrim). Like Bill Clinton, President George W. Bush expressed a strong interest in the affairs of Northern Ireland.

## VICE-PRESIDENT



**JOHN C. CALHOUN**  
*Democrat 1825-32*

Son of a Co Donegal Presbyterian father Patrick Calhoun and mother Margaret Caldwell, who was Virginia-born of Co Antrim emigrant parents, this South Carolina statesman was Vice-President to President John Quincy Adams and President Andrew Jackson. Calhoun, a Covenanting Presbyterian, was the leading South Carolina politician of the early 19th century and was Secretary of State for War under President James Monroe

Historical research for this leaflet was carried out by BILLY KENNEDY, author of the Scots-Irish Chronicles (10 volumes), 1995 – 2009.



**Ulster-Scots Agency**  
Tha Boord o Ulstèr-Scotch

For further information:

**Main office:**

The Ulster-Scots Agency  
68-72 Great Victoria Street  
Belfast  
BT2 7BB  
Northern Ireland

T: +44 (0)28 9023 1113  
F: +44 (0)28 9023 1898  
E: [info@ulsterscotsagency.org.uk](mailto:info@ulsterscotsagency.org.uk)

Tha Bord o Ulster-Scotch  
68-72 Muckle Victoria Raa  
Bilfawst  
BT2 7BB  
Norlin Airlann

**Regional office:**

The Ulster-Scots Agency  
The Moffatt Building  
The Diamond  
Raphoe  
Co Donegal

T: +353 7 4917 3876  
F: +353 7 4917 3985  
E: [info@ulsterscotsagency.org.uk](mailto:info@ulsterscotsagency.org.uk)

Tha Boord o Ulstèr-Scotch  
Tha Moffatt Haw  
The Diamond  
Raphoe  
Co Donegal

Visit us online at: [www.ulsterscotsagency.com](http://www.ulsterscotsagency.com)