

From the 1830s onwards, emigration from Scotland surged, with millions boarding ships to start new lives – in Canada, the USA, Australia, New Zealand, and India.

As well as building new lives for themselves, they created lasting impacts on the places they settled.

As an MP remarked in 1888:

“In British settlements, from Canada to Ceylon, from Dunedin to Bombay, for every Englishman that you meet who has worked himself up to wealth from small beginnings without external aid, you find ten Scotchmen.”

The Scots reputation for self-reliance often made them central figures in the development of countries across the British Empire – and Canada, with climate and landscapes similar to the Highlands, became a new Scots homeland.

Scots were heavily involved in key industries – the fur trade, farming, paper, steel, timber, and metalworks.

By 1920, 25% of Canada’s business leaders were men who’d been born in Scotland.

And Scots took leading roles in creating Canada’s education system, banks, and legal system.

Glasgow born John A MacDonald became the country’s first Prime Minister in 1867.

He was central to the development of the Transatlantic Canadian Pacific Railway, which linked Canada’s growing economic centre to locations across its vast territory.

But from the start, development also had a darker side...

Early Scots settlers formed links with indigenous communities – and learnt vital skills from them which enabled them to survive the winters.

But as settlers spread they began to interfere with traditional ways of life – particularly the bison-hunting cultures of the prairies.

When settlers fenced off land, conflicts increased, with indigenous people seen as a problem which the government needed to solve.

John A. Macdonald masterminded the Indian Act, under which First Nation children were removed from their parents and brought into white Canadian culture .

All those who emigrated from Scotland had a huge impact on the Canadian development – and on the lives of the territory's indigenous peoples.

Scottish enterprise and culture reshaped the vast expanse of Canada in the image of Scotland – in ways that are still felt today.