

# The Story of the American Scottish Foundation

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“ On Friday the 17th of January, The American Scottish Foundation will celebrate its 25th Burns Night Gala Celebration. In this post we discuss the history and story behind the foundation and its founders Lord and Lady Malcolm Douglas-Hamilton. ”

## The American Scottish Foundation

The American Scottish Foundation (ASF) was created in New York City in 1956, by Lord Malcolm Douglas-Hamilton. The ASF's mission is "to strengthen the bond between the United States and Scotland to support the future of Scottish American diaspora, and its legacy. This is achieved through maintaining a strong presence within the American-Scots community, with the hosting of events which celebrate American-Scots culture; and engaging with Scottish institutions, namely, Scotland the Brand and Visit Scotland". Through these initiatives, the ASF is recognised as the leading organisation in the United States for enhancing Scottish American relations.



## Lord Malcolm Douglas-Hamilton

Our story begins with Lord Malcolm Douglas-Hamilton, the founder of the American Scottish Foundation, who was a Scottish nobleman and politician. Douglas-Hamilton served with the Royal Air Force from 1929 to 1932, before going on to work within civilian aviation. He married his first wife in 1931, the Honourable Pamela Bowes-Lyon; the cousin of Queen Elizabeth, The Queen Mother. On the outbreak of the Second World War, he re-joined the Royal Air Force and participated in a mission which he helped to deliver pro-Franco nationalists into Spain. He was appointed an OBE in 1943 and awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross in 1944; before becoming Commander of RAF Winkleigh on the 29th of March 1944.

Following the war, Douglas-Hamilton served as a Member of Parliament for [Inverness](#) from 1950-1954. He married for the second time in 1953 to an American woman named Lady Natalie Malcolm Douglas-Hamilton, born Natalie Scarritt Wales. Following the wedding, the couple lived in both England and Scotland for a few years before moving to the United States. Upon emigrating, Douglas-Hamilton was extremely active in building relations between Scotland and Americans of Scottish descent. He considered the United States to be his adopted country, and, with the help of his wife, created the ASF in New York City, in 1956. Through the ASF, Douglas-Hamilton was able to further his activities in strengthening the bond between Scotland and the United States to support the future of Scottish American diaspora, and its legacy.

“ Did you know that [New York City](#) has its own tartan? ”

Lord Malcolm Douglas-Hamilton continued to pursue his passion for aviation whilst in the United States and by the early 1960s, he had started his own chartered flying company with his son Niall. This allowed Douglas-Hamilton and his son to explore remote parts of the globe. On one such trip to Cameroon in 1964, Douglas-Hamilton was flying over a jungle region with his son Niall and another passenger when their plane went missing. After an extensive manhunt, his body found within the jungle. His son Niall and the other passenger who was on board at the time were never found.

Douglas-Hamilton's legacy lives on through the ASF which he created over 64 years ago. The ASF continues to organise multiple events throughout the year celebrating American-Scots culture, through which the relationship between the United States and Scotland continues to grow.



ASF Founder Lord Malcolm Douglas-Hamilton

## Lady Malcolm Douglas-Hamilton

Lady Malcolm Douglas-Hamilton, born Natalie Scarritt Wales, was the second wife of Lord Malcolm Douglas with whom she helped to create the ASF. She was born in Cohasset, Massachusetts, in 1909; but grew up in Boston and New York. Her career began in 1939, on the outbreak of WWII when she learned of the struggles facing the UK in the early years of the war. Upon hearing of the UK's plight, Lady Malcolm travelled to Washington D.C. to ask the British Ambassador, Lord Lothian, what she and ordinary Americans could do to help in the war effort. She learned of the Merchant Navy's need for woolen balaclavas and contacted several woolen mills, asking them to supply several tons of wool at 'no cost' as she cheerfully noted 'I have no money'. With the wool supplied Lady Malcolm founded the organisation Bundles for Britain, which at its peak had 975 branches and nearly one million contributors. For the war effort, Bundles for Britain knitted helmets, sweaters, gloves; rolling bandages and packing medicines; whilst also creating clothing drives, blood drives, and collections for tinned food across the country. Additionally, Lady Malcolm contacted Buckingham Palace to ask for something that could be auctioned in a nationwide raffle. In return, she was gifted a red, white and blue cigarette case made up of rubies, sapphires and diamonds; and a piece of shrapnel from a bomb that had struck Buckingham palace, from Queen Elizabeth, The Queen Mother.

“ Following the success of Bundles for Britain, Lady Malcolm created 'Barkers for Britain' which encouraged dog owners to buy memberships to the organisation and in return owners received a special tag for their dog to wear. President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Scottish terrier, Fala, was he first dog to be awarded with a tag. ”

After the war, Lady Malcolm remained in contact with the Queen, who years later as The Queen Mother, became the Royal Patron of the ASF. She was made honorary Commander of the British Empire in 1946, so becoming the first non-British recipient of this prestigious title.

Lady Malcolm met Lord Malcolm Douglas-Hamilton in 1951 whilst giving a speech at the House of Commons. The couple later married and lived in Scotland and England before emigrating to the United States. It was here that they established the ASF in New York City in 1956. Through this organisation, they aimed to strengthen the historic ties between the United States and Scotland in all areas: educational, cultural, social, genealogical, philanthropic, scientific and economic. The couple worked together on the ASF until Lord Malcolm's tragic death in 1964.

Following her husband's death, Lady Malcolm continued the work of the ASF and organized the first 'Scotland Week' in New York City in the early 1970s. This festival was a celebration of all things Scottish, with Lady Malcolm gaining permission to adorn the lampposts on Fifth Avenue with American and Scottish flags, whilst many shops displayed shop fronts with Scottish motifs. There was also a two-day American and Scottish conference between American economists and professors; alongside several concerts, pipe bands, and parties throughout the week. Lady Malcolm then went onto create the Scottish Ball and The Wallace Awards which are now both prestigious events in the American-Scottish Calendar.

Lady Malcolm opened the first Scotland House in the mid-1970s. This had been a dream of her late husband's, and served as a gathering place for American Scots, visiting Scots, students, and people seeking their Scottish roots – a place for all. The first house was located on 124 East 39th Street by New York City Mayor Abraham Beame and was an instant success. The Scotland House held lectures, movies, seminars, ceilidhs, dances, and teas were held in a comfortable atmosphere, with a large Scottish-American library and Scottish products on sale. A later house was on Fifth Avenue, before the current house situated at 10 East 39th St.

Lady Malcolm retired from the foundation in 1989 to Stillwater, New Jersey. After a busy and fulfilling life, Lady Malcolm Douglas Hamilton sadly passed away on the 14th of January 2013, at the age of 103.



Lady Malcolm Douglas-Hamilton

“ The American Scottish Foundation continues the work of Lord and Lady Malcolm Douglas-Hamilton to this day, strengthening the bond between the United States and Scotland. This bond helps to ensure future of Scottish American diaspora, and its legacy; through shared culture and tradition. ”