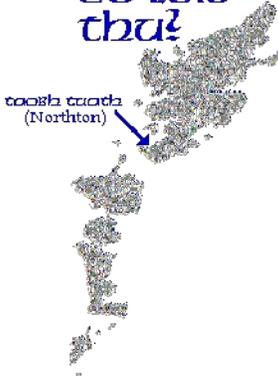


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From The Outer Hebrides to Prince Edward Island & Wallace, Nova Scotia

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In 1772 the first organised emigration from the Hebrides to Canada took place, not on the Hector to Pictou in Nova Scotia as is usually assumed, but on the Alexander to Prince Edward Island. In 1771 MacDonal of Glenalladale on the western mainland of Scotland had bought part of Lot 36 on the Island, around the area of the later Tracadie and Scotchfort, with the intention of removing there with as many of his tenants as would leave Scotland with him. To this extent the emigration followed the standard pattern of a tacksman trying to set up a new clan system in the New World, as was being tried in the Carolinas. But there was a difference in the Glenalladale settlement, and the reason for it was to be found on the Island of South Uist.

Colin MacDonald, tacksman of Boisdale, which comprised most of the south end of South Uist, was a Protestant, and decided to force his tenants to renounce their Roman Catholic faith by refusing to grant renewals of their leases unless they changed to his religious beliefs. This they refused to do, and the scheme was set for an ugly confrontation, which could easily spread to other estates where a similar difference existed between tacksman or proprietor and tenant. The Roman Catholic hierarchy in Scotland had no wish to see their members forced to change, and started to exert pressure on Boisdale. The most effective pressure available to them was economic, as this was the period where the value of the kelp industry - processing of seaweed - was at its peak. Kelp-gathering and burning was a very labour intensive process, and Boisdale required to keep his tenants as a labour pool. So the Church hierarchy started to arrange for the Boisdale tenants to accompany Glenalladale to Prince Edward Island, which would have left Boisdale in great economic difficulties, without a labour force.

Arrangements were made for the thirty-six families most under threat to join the mainland emigrants on the Alexander, but eventually Boisdale had to back down, and withdraw his threats of eviction. Nonetheless, sixteen families from Boisdale still showed an intention to leave, though by the time the Alexander sailed, only eleven families from South Uist were on board, and another five families from the neighbouring island of Barra had to be taken on board to make up numbers.

The heads of the Boisdale families are recorded as Duncan MacInnes, Charles MacKinnon, John MacIntyre, Angus MacCormaig, Donald MacDonald, Donald MacIntosh, Angus MacKinnon, John MacMillan, John Cumming and Angus MacDonald, together with John MacDonald from Stonybrig in the Middle District of South Uist. The five Barra families were those of Neil MacIntyre, Roderick MacIntyre, Angus MacIntyre, John MacMillan and Angus MacNeil.

There were of course no records being kept in South Uist or Barra at that time which would allow us to identify the emigrants, but it is sometimes possible to detect a naming pattern in families remaining there which would suggest relationship to one of these families.

It is strange that the story of the Glenalladale settlers has been so much overshadowed by that of the settlers who came to Pictou, Nova Scotia, on the Hector in the following year, who are generally reckoned the first Highland settlement in the

area. Perhaps it is because of their privations that the Hector settlers are better remembered, for their settlement had none of the preparation carried out by Glenalladale - they were merely set ashore and left to make the best of it.

Glenalladale, on the other hand, had provided supplies to take his settlers through the difficult early years, and had offered leases of three thousand years' duration. Nonetheless his attempt to build a new clan system failed, like those further south. His own tenants from Glenalladale had the strongest ties to bind them to his land, but the South Uist families had no such ties, and soon moved off to free land further along the coast to the east, in the area of Savage Harbour. Like all new settlers, they had their problems with unfamiliar land and climate, but the reports reaching South Uist from them must have been good, for there was a steady flow of settlers, leaving South Uist to join their relatives on Prince Edward Island.

The surnames of the South Uist people were similar to those on the mainland parts of the Clanranald estates, so it is not in general easy to identify them but there are two surnames in South Uist which we have found to be diagnostic - Steele and O'Henley. The first of these are claimed to have been MacLeans who took the name Steele from the captain of the ship which took them to Uist, and the latter have clearly an Irish origin, though they have been in South Uist for centuries.

Where these names are found among MacDonald, MacIsaacs and MacEachans, we can be fairly sure that we have a South Uist community, and a search of the 1880 Historical Atlas of PEI shows such names concentrated in Lots 7 & 8 (West Cape) , 35,36 & 37 (Tracadie to Savage Harbour) 42 & 43 (Cable Head) and 55 (Launching).

Emigration to Canada, and the PEI in particular, increased after the closure of the new USA to British emigrants after the American War of Independence, and the outflow of emigrants from the Islands began to cause the same worries to the landlords of estates as had proved successful in the case of Boisdale - too few workers meant reduced profits from kelp. They persuaded the British Government to pass the Ships' Passenger Act in 1803, ostensibly to increase the standards on emigrant vessels but in reality to put the cost of the passage beyond the means of all but the most affluent would-be emigrants.

It is doubtful whether the Act caused a great diminution in the numbers of persons leaving the Scottish Islands. Timber merchants had ships crossing the Atlantic to Britain and returning ostensibly empty, and it was easy for them to pick up unofficial passengers in the remote sea-lochs of the Hebrides. The main effect of the Act was to drive the trade "underground" and it is for this reason that so few passenger lists survive for the ships taking emigrants to Canada in this period - it was in nobody's interest to keep a record of an illicit trade.

Lord Selkirk's settlements in PEI brought over hundreds of families from Skye as well as further families from South Uist. A few Lewis and Harris families seem to have come over also, but Prince Edward Island was never their preferred destination.

The largest Lewis settlement of the period was along the Gulf Shore of Nova Scotia, the south shore of the Northumberland Strait, between Cape John and Pugwash. This settlement seems to have been virtually forgotten on this side of the Atlantic, and I can still remember the thrill my wife and I had finding tombstones such as that in the MacDonald cemetery "to the Memory of Donald MacIvor, born Isle of Lewis, Scotland in 1800, emigrated to this country in 1811, died October 7th 1872, aged 72", or "Donald MacLeod, native of the Isle of Lewis, emigrated to Nova Scotia AD 1811,

departed this life on 12th January 1838 in the 87th year of his age.

An even greater surprise was at Fox Harbour - "Rachel MacKay wife of Roderick Morrison, died Nov.12th 1879 age 94. Native of Harris, Inverness, Scotland" and "Angus Morrison Senr. Native of Harris, Inverness-shire. Feb 8, 1798 - July 30, 1885" - until then I had no idea that any Harris families had come that way. Munros, MacAulays, Morrisons, MacIvers and Nicolsons are in Fox Harbour also, and along the coast in Malagash a group of MacKenzies, "from Lochs Parish, Lewis".

When discussing the Gulf Shore, we cannot omit Pictou itself, the centre of immigration for this part of Nova Scotia. There were no doubt Island families who settled in this area also, but we have not come across them in any number. The bulk of the settlers appear to have been from Sutherland and other parts of mainland Scotland, following on the arrival of the Hector. Chris and I were very much impressed by the Hector Museum there, and the replica of the ship itself - to see it is to realise, far better than any words can convey, how small the emigrants ships were, and how cramped their accommodation

The grouping of names along the Gulf Shore suggests that the bulk of these emigrants were still of tacksman class, but the days of the attempts to renew the clan system were gone. The tacksmen had lost their place in Island society forever, and what we are seeing now appears to be the younger sons of tacksmen quitting the Scottish Islands for economic necessity. Their family source of income had gone, and they were leaving their homes while they still had the cash to pay for their passage.

Very different was the next wave of emigrants, many of whom had become penniless in Scotland, and were forced to leave by landlords and factors wishing to clear their lands of encumbering tenants. The difference lay in the collapse of the kelp trade at the end of the Napoleonic Wars. No longer was a captive labour force required, and the tenantry ceased to be an economic advantage to their landlords. Many of the tenants saw the danger approaching, and emigrated while they still had the cash, but others lingered on in the hope of better days to come at home, and it was these who were the subject of the Clearances in the Scottish Islands.

By this time, the preferred area for settlement had changed to Cape Breton, and this will be the subject of our next article.

From the Outer Hebrides to Prince Edward Island and Wallace, Nova Scotia

Questions:

1. In 1772, what was the first organized emigration from the Hebrides to Canada?
2. What did Colin MacDonald, the tacksmen of Boisdale, try to force his tenants to do? What happened when his attempts failed?
3. Who were the heads of the Boisdale families, as recorded? Are any of those surnames found in Boisdale, Cape Breton?
4. How did they surmise that these names were in fact right when no records were being kept?
5. Compare the landing of the Hector and the Glenalladale emigrants?
6. What was the Ship Passengers Act of 1803?
7. Profile the Lewis settlements as stated in the article.