

THE MACDONELLS OF LEEK, COLLACHIE AND
ABERCHALDER

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The existence, from the very beginning, in the eastern portion of what is now Ontario, of a compact body of Scottish Catholics, is a fact of major importance in the history of the Catholic Church in Canada. The impression is very general that this settlement owed its origin, and the County of Glengarry its name, to the regiment of Glengarry Fencibles, brought directly from Scotland and settled there, in 1803, by Bishop Macdonell. This is, however, erroneous. The proclamation dividing the Province of Upper Canada into counties and naming one of them "Glengarry," was published in 1792, eleven years before the arrival of the Fencibles.¹ Incidentally, it may be mentioned that Glengarry, as established in 1792, was much larger than the present county, extending from the St. Lawrence to the Ottawa and from the Provincial boundary to a line connecting the two rivers, drawn a little east of Cornwall. The original Scottish Catholic settlers, to whom the county owes its name, came, not from Scotland direct, but as Loyalist refugees, during the Revolutionary War, from the Mohawk Valley, in the Colony of New York, where they had been settled under the aegis of Sir William Johnson, Bart. The exact location of their settlement is unknown, but it must have been quite near Johnstown, the County Town of Tryon (now Montgomery) County, and in the immediate vicinity of Johnson Hall, Sir William's baronial residence. They had come out from Scotland and settled there in 1773, hoping, in the new world, to be afforded an opportunity of repairing the disasters that had overtaken them in the old. They had, however, been but two years in New York when, on the outbreak of the Revolution, they felt bound, for conscience sake, to abandon their new homes, as they had so recently abandoned their ancestral ones and, once again, to carve out homes for themselves, this time in the wilderness that is now Ontario.

Much has been written of Bishop Macdonell and the Glengarry Fencibles, but very little of this earlier settlement. Yet an accurate acquaintance with it and particularly with the personalities and family relationships of the leaders, is fundamental to the understanding of the whole later history of Glengarry and of the Macdonells in Canada.

In Lee's *History of the County of Inverness* the following passage occurs:

In 1773 a newspaper informs us that three gentlemen of the name of Macdonell, with

¹ *Documents relating to the Constitutional History of Canada, 1791-1818*, edited by Arthur G. Doughty and Duncan A. McArthur (Ottawa: 1914), p. 78.

their families and 400 Highlanders from Glengarry, Glenmoriston, Glenurquhart and Strathglass, embarked for America, having obtained a grant of land in Albany.²

The three gentlemen referred to were three brothers, John Macdonell of Leek, Allan Macdonell of Collachie and Alexander Macdonell of Aberchalder. With them were a brother-in-law, Ranald Macdonell of Ardnabee,³ and a first cousin, John Macdonell of Scotus,⁴ better known as "Spanish John," whose memoirs were, some years ago, expanded into a novel, by the late William McLennan.⁵ These five

² *A History of the County of Inverness (Mainland)*, by J. Cameron Lee LL.D., F.S.A. Scot. (William Blackwood & Sons, Edinburgh and London: MDCCXCVII), p. 249.

³ Ardnabee was an uncle of John Fraser of the Kilbockie family, who was afterwards Chief Justice of the Montreal District, and a grand uncle of Simon Fraser, to whom we are indebted for the possession of British Columbia. Simon Fraser married a grand daughter of John Macdonell of Leek, one of the three brothers.

⁴ Also spelt "Scottos" and "Scothouse."

⁵ *Spanish John*, by William McLennan (Harper Brothers, New York and London; 1898). See also a personal narrative of the stirring events in which he had taken part, written by Spanish John, and published in the *Canadian Magazine* in 1825. A copy is preserved in the Library of the Department of Education, Toronto. This has recently been republished. See *Spanish John, Being a Narrative of the Early Life of Colonel John McDonell of Scottos written by himself*: Printed for The Royal Celtic Society (William Blackwood & Sons, Ltd., Edinburgh and London; 1931). See also an account of Spanish John and his family by Rev. A. G. Morice, O.M.I., in the September and December numbers of *The Canadian Historical Review* for 1929. Spanish John was the Father of Miles Macdonell, the founder (under Lord Selkirk) and first governor of what is now Manitoba. Miles married a daughter of Allan Macdonell of Collachie, his second cousin, having first obtained from the ecclesiastical authorities the necessary dispensation. Rev. A. G. Morice quotes a letter from Spanish John to his eldest son John, dated February 27th, 1802, in which he refers to Rev. Roderick Macdonell as "your granduncle, which" Father Morice naturally adds "settles the degree of relationship of the two old men, clerical and lay." It is not possible, however, to see how Father Roderick could have been the uncle of Spanish John. The priest was unquestionably a brother of Allan Macdonell of Collachie and therefore an uncle (but not a grand uncle) of Miles' wife. Spanish John was a first cousin of Collachie, and therefore of Father Roderick. He could not possibly have been his nephew, for all of the children of Father Roderick's brothers and sisters are well known. The only explanation that the present writer can suggest is that the priest was, in the family, given the title "grand uncle"

men had all been out in "the forty-five" and Leek had been wounded at Culloden. All had distinguished careers, and many hundreds of descendants of each still live in Canada and elsewhere. It is, however, with the three brothers, organizers of the expedition, that we are here more particularly concerned. Some of their descendants have played a not unimportant part in the history of Canada and I have therefore thought it worth while to give, in some detail, an account of the Leek family and of its origin. I have deemed this to be the more desirable as serious errors regarding their identity and genealogy have heretofore been current.

It will be recalled that the Clan Donald, though always theoretically one clan, was in fact, in later times, divided into five, the Macdonalds of Clanranald, Sleat and Glencoe and the Macdonells of Glengarry and Keppoch,⁶ each under its own chief and with its own arms and tartan. Included in each of these clans were cadet families, "gentlemen of the clan," usually more or less closely related to the chief. Such were the Macdonells of Leek, in the Glengarry clan, a clan always Catholic to a man. The Leek family are said to have been well known for generations in the Highlands, for their strength and warlike disposition.⁷ They had held the property called Leek for more than a century, as tacksmen or leaseholders, under the successive Glengarry chiefs; and at the date of their emigration, the tack had still nearly a hundred years to run. The Glengarry Estate, it may be mentioned, covered more than 100,000 acres. Upon the application of a descendant of Collachie's the descent of the Leek family from Donald, seventh Chief of Glengarry, who died in 1645, at the age of 102, was some years ago, admitted by the Lyon King-at-arms.⁸

Donald's second son, John Og, received in 1661, from his nephew, Lord Macdonell and Aros, a tack of the lands of Leek and the property had been in the

instead of "cousin," just as the children of a first cousin of the present writer have always called him "uncle."

⁶ *The Clan Donald*, by the Rev. A. Macdonald, Minister of Killcarnow, and the Rev. A. Macdonald, Minister of Killarity, in three volumes; (Inverness, The Northern Counties Publishing Co., Ltd.; 1800-1904) Vol. II, *passim*; *The Clans of the Scottish Highlands*, by James Logan, F.S.A. Scot.: in two volumes (London, Ackerman & Co.: 1845) Parts I, II, XI, XII and XVI; *A History of the Highlands and of the Highland Clans*, by James Brown, LL.P. (Glasgow, A. Fullerton & Co.: 1838), pp. LXXI and 8, 10, 11, 18; *The Clans, Septs and Regiments of the Scottish Highlands*, by Frank Adams, F.R.S.S., F.S.A. Scot. (Edinburgh and London, W. & A. K. Johnston, Ltd.: 1908) pp. 62-70, 364-366, 400; plates 42-48.

⁷ *A History of the Macdonalds and Lords of the Isles*, by Alexander Mackenzie, F.S.A. Scot. (Inverness, A. and W. MacKenzie: 1881).

⁸ Extract of Matriculation of the Arms of James Arthur Edward Macdonell, Esq. (Collachie), on 20th August, 1912, by Lyon King-at-Arms.

family eversince. This John Og is referred to, in 1679, as one ofseveral Catholics in Abertarff,hunted down by the Episcopal Church, which was then established in Scotland.⁹ In the early part ofthe eighteenth century theholder ofthe tack was John, father ofthe "three gentlemen" and also ofnine daughters, all ofwhom married Macdonells.¹⁰ One was the wife ofArdnabee and came over with herhusband, and at least one other emigrated, then or later, and has left numerous descendants in Canada.

Some account ofthe places that gave their names to the three branches ofa family so widely known in Canada cannot be otherwise than interesting. All three properties are situated close together,at the northerly end ofLoch Oich, on what was formerly the Glengarry Estate, in Invernesshire, and are still known by their ancient designations. Leek is on the west side of the Caledonian Canal, in the Ardoch District,about fourmiles above Fort Augustus. Collachie or Cullochy, as it was originally spelt, is nearly opposite Leek, on the east side ofthe Canal, in the District ofAberchalder. Aberchalder,which has given its name to the, District, is a little to the south ofCollachie, on Loch Oich, at the mouth ofa small stream known as the Calder. The word Leek (from the Gaelic "Leach"), means a flagstone. Cullochy is made up of"Cul"at the back of and "lock,"the lake. Aberchalder comes from "Aber"the mouth, and "chalder" ofthe calder. Calder is a corruption ofCoille Dur; "Dur"an obsolete Gaelic term for water, and "Coille," ofthe wood. The Calder burn runs through a wood for almost its entire length. It was at Aberchalder that the Highland Army halted for the night ofAugust 28th, 1745, and was joined by 400 ofthe Glengarry Macdonells.¹¹ The chief source ofthe errors that have been current regarding the Leek family has been an ambitious work, in three volumes, entitled "The Clan Donald."¹² The pedigrees there given for Leek, Collachie and Aberchalder are hopelessly astray. The Leek tree starts, correctly, with John Og,¹³

⁹ *The Clan Donald*, Vol. III, p. 847.

¹⁰ In a memorandum found among the private papers of the late William McLennan, it is stated that John Macdonell ofCrowlin, Spanish John's father, was married to "a daughter ofJohn Macdonell ofLeek." This lady must have been an aunt ofthe three brothers, a fact confirming the statement that Spanish John was their first cousin. Ifthe name ofthe lady's father is given correctly as "John" there must have been three generations ofJohn Macdonells ofLeek. The reason why Spanish John's father was ofCrowlin and not ofScotus, was that he was a younger son and did not, therefore, inherit the Scotus property, but obtained a tack ofthe property called Crowlin.

¹¹ *Place Names in Glengarry and Glenquoich and their Origin*, by Edward C. EM (London, Swann Sonnenschein & Co., Ltd.: 1898), pp. 57, 60, 75, 104 and map.

¹² *The Clan Donald*. See note ante.

¹³ *The Clan Donald*, Vol. III, pp. 311, 347.

but the subsequent links are not reconcilable with the known facts. It is said that Angus, the holder of the tack, who died before 1750, left seven sons, John, Allan, Ranald, Archibald, Alexander, Donald and Roderick. It is, however, quite evident from the context, that five of these seven, namely, Archibald, Allan, Roderick, Ranald and Alexander, are the sons, not of any Angus of Leek, but of John of Leek, the oldest of the three brothers. Hence the Rev. Ewan J. Macdonald's mention of the Rev. Roderick Macdonell as the "seventh son of Angus of Leek,"¹⁴ whereas he was in fact the third son of John of Leek. This confusion seems to have originated in "The History of the Macdonalds and Lords of the Isles"¹⁵ and to have been thence imported into "Glengarry in Canada"¹⁶ and Chadwick's "Ontario Families,"¹⁷ and finally into "The Clan Donald." John, said by "The Clan Donald" to have been the oldest son of Angus and to have been the fifth of Leek, is there identified with a gallant officer, who was the father of a distinguished son. This John was an officer in Fraser's Highlanders and was with Wolfe at the taking of Quebec. His son was Col. George Macdonell, the hero of Chateauguay. John of Fraser's Highlanders could not, however, have been the head of the family or the holder of the tack. He had been away from Scotland continuously since 1745 and was, moreover, a much younger man, as he did not die until 1813, whereas John, the brother of Allan and Alexander, was born about 1707 and died in 1779.

There is a well established tradition among their descendants in Canada to the effect that both John Macdonell of Leek and his father, the older John Macdonell of Leek, were tacksmen of Leek and that the children of the former, even those born before 1745, were born at Leek. This is confirmed by the entry of John Macdonell, brother of Collachie and Aberchalder, on the various United Empire

¹⁴ "Father Roderick Macdonell, Missionary at St. Regis and the Glengarry Catholics." by Ewan J. Macdonald. Paper read at the Thirteenth Annual Meeting of the American Catholic Historical Association, Dec. 29th, 1982: *The Catholic Historical Review*, October 1983, p. 271.

¹⁵ Mackenzie, op. cit.

¹⁶ *Sketches Illustrating the Early Settlement and History of Glen Parry in Canada*, by J. A. Macdonell of Greenfield (Montreal, Wm Foster Brown & Co.: 1895), p. 179.

¹⁷ *Ontario Families, Genealogies of United Empire Loyalists and other Pioneer Families of Upper Canada*, by Edward Marion Chadwick, Barrister-at-Law (Toronto, Ralph Smith & Co.: 1894), Vol. I, p. 10. The author states that Isabella, daughter of the John of Leek of Fraser's Highlanders (the only daughter he mentions), married Lieut. (afterwards Col. the Hon.) Neil McLean and was the mother of Chief Justice Archibald McLean. But the Isabella who married Neil McLean was unquestionably a daughter of John Macdonell of Leek, the brother of Collachie and Aberchalder. The author, in correspondence with the present writer, accepted without reserve the pedigrees set forth in this paper.

Loyalist pension lists as "of Leek."¹⁸ The entry cannot possibly refer to John Macdonell of Fraser's Highlanders, for the latter was then on active service with his regiment.¹⁹ To cite one more proof, it may be mentioned that in the will, dated April 29th, 1761, of Alastair Ruadh Macdonell, Chief of Glengarry from 1754 to 1761, the following paragraph occurs:

I further recommend my said sister [his executrix], immediately after my decease, to seal up my cabinet and take care that the same shall not be opened until the friends of the family meet, and then I direct Angus Macdonell of Greenfield, John Macdonell of Leek and Allan Macdonell of Cullachie, or the survivor of them then present, to see all the political and useless letters among my papers burnt and destroyed, as the preservation of them can answer no purpose.²⁰

As John, of Fraser's Highlanders, was in Canada at the date of the will, and had been there for the two previous years,²¹ the reference in the will to "John Macdonell of Leek" cannot possibly have been intended to apply to him. I was told by my aunt, my father's elder sister, that Col. George Macdonell was a frequent visitor at my grandfather's house and that he was a cousin of my grandmother's, she being a granddaughter of John of Leek, the brother of Collachie and Aberchalder, but I have been unable to ascertain the exact connection between the two. Colonel George's sister married Sir Joseph Radcliffe, Bart., and her grandson, the late Sir George Armytage, Bart., with whom I corresponded for some years, told me that his grandmother always maintained that her father was John Macdonell of Leek and that she had no doubt whatever that her grandfather was another John Macdonell of Leek. This statement, if correct, would seem to eliminate definitely and for all purposes, the "Angus Macdonell of Leek" of The Clan Donald. The latest edition of Burke's Peerage and Baronetage, in the Radcliffe pedigree, describes the lady's father as "the third son of Macdonell of Glengarry,"²² but Sir George Armytage

¹⁸ See, for instance. Public Archives of Canada: *Haldimand Papers*-Series B, Vol. 188, p. 70, and Vol. 65, p. 1.

¹⁹ *The Clan Donald*, Vol. III, p. 348.

²⁰ *Antiquarian Notes*, Second Series, by Charles Fraser MacKintosh (Inverness, A. & W. MacKenzie; 1897), p. 120.

²¹ *The Clan Donald*, Vol. III, p. 348.

²² *Burke's Peerage and Baronetage* for 1935. Burke refers to him as "General Eneas John Macdonell of Leek." John Macdonell of Fraser's Highlanders was certainly never any more than a Captain. When he died in 1813 he was a Captain of Invalids at Berwick. He is nowhere else referred to as "Eneas." Possibly the compilers of Burke may have confused him with some totally different person.

never said that. As the result of our correspondence we both came to the conclusion that, while Colonel George's father was evidently a Leek, it was no longer possible to determine his precise relationship to the three brothers.

In the case of the Collachie and Aberchalder families, "The Clan Donald" gives pedigrees indicating origins distinct from that of Leek. The earlier portions of these may be genuine but if so, they have no connection with the Collachie and Aberchalder families so well known in Canada, for Allan of Collachie and Alexander of Aberchalder, from whom the latter are respectively descended, were unquestionably brothers of John of Leek. There is no room for doubt as to this. Members of the family now living have learned the facts from grandparents and others who were born in the lifetime of the three brothers, and the descendants of all three count each other as connections to this day. If further proof be needed, positive documentary evidence will be found among the Haldimand Papers. In a letter from Major Gray to Governor Haldimand dated May 12th, 1777,²³ John and Alexander are referred to as brothers, and in a memorial to Governor Haldimand dated February 23rd, 1780, Alexander refers to Allan as his brother.²⁴ The confusion was, no doubt, due to an attempt to connect former tenants of the Collachie and Aberchalder properties with the tenants in 1773, the progenitors of the Collachie and Aberchalder families of Canada. It was, at that time, customary in Scotland to attach the name of the place or holding to the name of the incoming tacksman or tenant, on entry and during tenancy or possession, the name ceasing to be associated with him upon the termination of his tenancy. A different custom, however, prevailed among tacksmen, particularly those of the name of Macdonell, who came to Canada. With them and their descendants to the present day, the names of their last holdings in Scotland continue to be associated and serve a useful purpose in distinguishing them from others of their clan, as well as in perpetuating the remembrance of their last home in the Highlands.

As regards the Collachie property, we have proof positive of a break in the tenancy early in the eighteenth century. In 1738 Glengarry wadsetted the place to his kinsman Macdonell of Lochgarry,²⁵ and as the essential feature of the Scottish wadset or mortgage was that the mortgagee held the land and took the profits, as interest until the debt was repaid, Collachie must have been vacant at the time. Moreover, on August 2nd, 1758, young Glengarry writes to his agent that after the rebellion (1745) "every tenant took possession of what farm he pleased," and that in 1746 "Mrs. McDonell of Lochgarry, being destitute of all support, having a numerous family of young children, came from Badenoch, took possession of Cullachy, and there lived until she followed her husband abroad. . ." and he adds: - "The lands of Cullachy was only set till lately from year to year,

²³ Haldimand Papers – Series B., Vol. 158, p. 82. (24) Ibid., p. 351.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 351.

²⁵ MacKintosh, op. cit., p. 128.

the tenants were frequently removed. . ."²⁶

Some years ago I corresponded with the Rev. Archibald McDonald, one of the joint authors of "The Clan Donald," with reference to the errors in the pedigrees of the Leek, Collachie and Aberchalder families given in his book. For some time he stoutly maintained that he was right. Eventually, however, he wrote me a letter, dated July 21st, 1909, from which I quote the following paragraph:

I have been for the last two years going through a Charter Chest belonging to an old family in this district and have been making transcripts of old documents in some of which there is considerable light upon the generations in which you are interested. These papers confirm the genealogy contained in the statements you sent me and which I am now forwarding to Sir Geo. Armytage at your request. They at the same time shake the genealogy of the Leek family contained in the "Clan Donald" which was drawn up on insufficient evidence.

On February 18th, 1910, he wrote even more specifically to Sir George Armytage, saying as follows:

When Mr. Scott's papers were in my hands I had also the documents to which I have been referring. I remember distinctly testing Mr. Scott's Genealogy by these Chisholm records and finding his tree confirmed in every particular where it differed from the pedigree given in the "Clan Donald."

Leek, the oldest of the three brothers, married Jean Chisholm, niece of Roderick "The Chisholm," Chief of the Clan, and great granddaughter of Sir Ewan Cameron of Lochiel, who played so important a part in the stirring events of the last half of the seventeenth century. Sir Ewan, or "Evandhu," as he was called in the Highlands, died in 1719, at the age of ninety. His fourth daughter, Janet, married, in 1698, John Grant, 6th Laird of Glenmoriston.²⁷ One of their daughters married Alexander Chisholm of Muckerach, younger brother of Roderick, "The Chisholm," and was the mother of Jean, Lady Glenmoriston, Jean's grandmother, died at the age of eighty, having, at the time of her death, no fewer than two hundred living descendants. Her coffin was carried by sons, grandsons, great grandsons and great great grandsons, a circumstance probably unique.²⁸

Connected with Jean's father, Alexander Chisholm of Muckerach, there is an interesting and well authenticated story, which his numerous descendants in

²⁶ MacKintosh, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

²⁷ The Grants of Glenmoriston formed a Clan separate from the Grants of Grant. They usually acted with the Macdonells of Glengarry, rather than with their namesakes of Grant. The chieftainship and the estates had been in the same family for four centuries until about twenty-five years ago, when the chief emigrated to British Columbia.

²⁸ See obituary in the *Scotts Magazine* for 1759.

Canada and elsewhere may recall with satisfaction and pride. His brother Roderick, chief of the clan and inheritor of the estates, took part in the rising of 1715. The Chisholms, under their young chief, distinguished themselves at Sheriffmuir, but the rebellion was soon put down and Roderick Chisholm was attainted and his estates sequestered. By the adroit intervention and management of prudent and influential friends the confiscated estates were conveyed, through several persons, to Alexander. The latter thus became absolute owner of the properties and there was nothing, save his integrity and loyalty to his brother, to prevent his keeping and handing them down to his descendants. He, however, after holding them from 1719 till 1742, conveyed them to his nephew Alexander, the eldest son of Roderick. It was well that the conveyance was made to Alexander rather than to Roderick himself, for three years later, on the landing of Prince Charles Edward, the attachment of Roderick to the Stuarts could not be restrained, and he, with his clan, took the field and fought at Culloden, where the Chisholms suffered severely. As Roderick had no estates, he had nothing to forfeit and he was eventually left undisturbed; but part of the castle of Erchless was destroyed and the whole of Strathglass was ravaged by the Duke of Cumberland's soldiers. Alexander Chisholm, the son of Roderick, to whom the estates had been conveyed, executed, in the year 1777, an entail of them, limited to the heirs male of his body, whom failing, to the heirs male of his uncle, Alexander Chisholm of Muckerach; and when, in 1858, the direct line died out, the estates passed under the entail to James Sutherland Chisholm, then a resident of Montreal, the great grandson of the latter. Thus was Alexander's probity rewarded in his descendants.²⁹

Allan Macdonell of Collachie married a daughter of "The MacNab" and Alexander Macdonell of Aberchalder's wife was a daughter of Alexander Macdonell of Killichoriat.

Leek's eldest son, Angus, died unmarried, before the family left Scotland. His second son, Archibald, married Ann Fraser of Ballindown and, later, emigrated with his family to New York, where he engaged in business, meeting with great success. In New York, he formed the acquaintance of Sir William Johnson and, at the latter's suggestion, made proposals to his father and uncles that ultimately led to their organizing the emigration referred to in the paragraph quoted earlier in this paper. The party was composed of the five gentlemen already mentioned, their respective families, their priest, the Rev. John McKenna,³⁰ and more than four

²⁹ *The Genealogy of Jacob Farran Pringle, and his wife Isabella Fraser Pringle* (Standard Print, Cornwall: 1892), p. 34.

³⁰ "The Reverend John McKenna, Loyalist Chaplain," by the Rev. Edward Kelly: *The Canadian Catholic Historical Association, Report 1933-84*, p. 81.

hundred Highlanders, making a total of some six hundred Souls.³¹ They sailed in the Pearl, a frigate of the Royal Navy, placed at their disposal for the purpose, and landed at New York, in the Autumn of 1773.³²

The arrival of so considerable a party of Scottish gentry, with their followers, was looked on as somewhat of an event, and it was celebrated by a banquet tendered to the strangers by the Mayor and Corporation of New York. The hosts, however, considered that it would be unbecoming to ask any mere merchant to dine with gentlemen and so Archibald, the eldest son of the family, at whose suggestion they had come, was not bidden to the feast!³³

The party proceeded without delay to Albany and the leaders at once entered into communication with Sir William Johnson, with a view to arranging place and terms of settlement. Allan of Collachie was the spokesman of the party, as appears from the following letter from him to Sir William:

"Albany, 14th Novr. 1773

Sir.

The Letter you did me the honour to write me I received this afternoon and in consequence thereof my friends & I met this evening & considered of the contents have accordingly committed our observations to writing & is here enclosed we hope they will be agreeable to you as we have a great desire of settling under your wing and in which we may have a mutual interest, you have large estates to make & we some influence over people tho' at a distance that may be of consequence in Subsequent years. If the Situation & Quality of the land is attracting we will settle as to the few hundred acres you are ready to dispose off if other matters are agreed upon the farm also.

I have the honour to be
Sir

Your Most Ob't & most
humble Servant
Allan MacDonell"

Endorsed:

"Allan MacDonell Letter & Observation
To The Hon'ble

Sir William Johnson Barn't."³⁴

The following is the enclosed "observation."

"The lands of Kingsborow and May fields may be of very great extent I own And consequently may remove Settlers to a great Distance from Market Saw or Grist Mills

³¹ Family tradition, confirmed by *A Memoir of Lieutenant-Colonel John MacDonell, of Glengarry House, the First Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Upper Canada*, by Brig. General E. A. Cruikshank. LL.D.. F.R.S.C., F.R.H.S. (Reprinted from the Ontario Historical Society's "Papers and Records," Vol. XXII, 1925

³² Do. do.

³³ Family tradition.

³⁴ N.Y. State Archives. Sir William Johnson MSS., Vol. XXII, No. 153.

Articles of the greatest Importance to New Beginners and of which Sir William is so well convinced that it requires no explanation.

Customs and Carriages was a Nuisance in the Mother Country And the cause of removing thence many of its Inhabitants and the latest of them do not incline to be the first introducers of it by compact in the New World.

Sir William will please remember that £6., and not £6.3 was the Conversation And Offer at Johnson Hall. The 18,000 Acres adjoining to Schoherry appears to be the Cheapest but as we know nothing of the soil & Situation we will refer saying anything upon the head.

The 13,000 Acres adjoining to Lord Adam Gordon's we shall be glad to know at what its Sett in fee simple or if any advantages of saw or Grist Mills fish or Fowl attend it.

The lands in the neighborhood of the Sisquehanna in the same way as you have taken no notice of the fee simple sett of it. What makes it more necessary for us to know of the Sisquehanna is that four men Vizt. Murdoch MacPherson Hugh Fraser John Cameron. & Alexr. MacDonell were when at York recommended to some proprietors in that part in consequence of which they went there and at the time we did ourselves the honour of waiting on you they returned & reported to the people the most flattering encouragement, And indeed such as I do not chuse to commit to paper. And went immediately to York to expedite writings as the most effectual method to Support their Allegations.

The people here are still in a fluctuating Situation but we believe they will adhere to us if Sir William gives the encouragement their Sobriety & Industry will Merit. The principle of which is a years Maintinance to each family that will Settle upon his estate: for which they would become bound to pay him. If their endeavours are found worthy of a Cow and Horse or the Value its Hoped they will be indulged in it upon giving security for Principal & Interest. We have a double motive for requesting the last the peoples Interest & Intention of frestering the designs laid of Inveigling them from us. It would be agreeable to us that there be room or Scouth in our Vicinity in order that such-of our friends & Countrymen as will incline to follow our fate may sit, down in our Neighborhood we have reason to hope that severals of them will appear on this Continent if fortune does not frown upon us or force us to lay an Interdict on their intentions.

Should Any of us calling ourselves Gentlemen incline to remove after a few years expence And toil in clearing lands &c. it is hoped Sir William will agree to Accept of their Plantation at the Appreciation or estimation of honest men Mutually chose.³⁵

Terms were eventually arranged and the party settled on a portion of Sir William Johnson's vast estates, in what was then called Tryon County, in the Mohawk Valley, in the Province of New York, about thirty miles from Albany. The name of the County was, in 1784, changed to Montgomery, after the American General who was killed at the siege of Quebec in December, 1775.

The time at my disposal will not permit of my following the fortunes of the members of the family through the revolutionary period or describing their ultimate settlement in Canada and the public services subsequently performed by many of them in the country of their adoption. It will, however, be of interest to mention, that they and their Highland tribesmen, without exception, cast in their

³⁵ Ibid. It should be remembered that the mother tongue of these people was, not English, but Gaelic.

lot with the British and that, when in January 1776 General Schuyler selected six hostages to hold for the good behaviour of Sir John Johnson and his followers, certainly five of them and probably all six, were members of the family. The five that we are sure of were Leek, Collachie, Aberchalder, Leek's son Ranald and Aberchalder's son Hugh. The sixth was almost certainly Leek's son Archibald. They were confined as prisoners of war in the jail at Lancaster, Pennsylvania. In the following June, General Schuyler, by his attempt to arrest Sir John Johnson, put an end to the arrangement and the hostages, thus released from their parole, all eventually escaped and found their way to Canada. The first to escape were Leek, Aberchalder and the latter's son Hugh, who proceeded at once to the Mohawk, where they collected about fifty of their own clansmen and fifty Germans, whom they led to Montreal, arriving there on May 10th, 1777. Major Gray, in reporting their arrival to the Governor, stated that the men were anxious to enlist but that the Highlanders "are so attached to their chiefs (ie. Leek and Aberchalder), that they can't think of parting with them"³⁶ They had their desire, for they were enrolled in the King's Royal Regiment of New York and assigned to a company of which Aberchalder was put in command. Collachie escaped only two years later, reaching Quebec in August, 1779.³⁷ Archibald, whether or not he was one of the six hostages, was imprisoned and escaped in the summer of 1779.³⁸ Ranald, the last of the six, was confined during three years, at various places, escaping from the jail at Reading, Pennsylvania, and reaching the British army at Philadelphia, whence he made his way to New York and finally to Canada.³⁹

There is another matter to which I wish to refer, before bringing this paper to a close. John Gilmary Shea suggests⁴⁰ that the attitude of these Highlanders towards the revolution was due to the effect on them of the bigotry of their American neighbours, and he adds: "Thus did anti-Catholic bigotry deprive New York of industrious, thrifty settlers and send to swell the ranks of the British Army, men who longed to avenge the defeat of Culloden."⁴¹ This remark shows, as it appears to me, a singular lack of appreciation of the character and point of view of these Highlanders. Doubtless the bigotry of their neighbours and particularly

³⁶ Public Archives of Canada: Halidimand Papers-Series B. Vol. 158, p. 32; *Ibid.*, Vol. 181, p. 67; State Papers, Series Q., Vol. 13, p. 164; *Journals of the Provincial Congress etc. of the State of New York, 1775 to 1777*, Vol. 2, p. 474.

³⁷ Halidimand Papers, Vol. 214-1, p. 199.

³⁸ Halidimand Papers, Vol. 158, pp. 72-73; Vol. 159, p. 22.

³⁹ Public Record Office, London: Audit Office Claims, American Loyalists, Vol. 27, p. 210; Vol. 100, No. 1573; and Vol. 27, p. 311.

⁴⁰ John Gilmary Shea, *History of the Catholic Church in the United States*, Vol. II, p. 142, quoted by Rev. Ewan J. Macdonald, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

⁴¹ Shea, *op. cit.*

"the outburst of bigotry in New York excited by the Quebec Act"⁴² would not have tended to attract them towards the cause of the revolting colonies. But bigotry was nothing new to them. They were quite accustomed to it. For more than two centuries they and their ancestors had suffered bitter persecution for conscience sake. There can be little doubt therefore, that it was not the bigotry of the Americans that determined their stand. Had there been no bigotry the result would have been the same. They would, it is true, have welcomed an opportunity of avenging Culloden, but only in the service of the Stuarts. They were essentially monarchists and, once the Stuart cause had failed, they were as ready to fight for King George as they had been to fight for King James. They were, moreover, proud aristocrats. The remark of the wife of Collachie, in a letter to her son Alexander, congratulating him on his having, at the age of fifteen, enlisted as a private in the Royal Highland Emigrant Regiment, is characteristic. "Never forget" she wrote "that every drop of blood in your veins is that of a Highland gentleman."⁴³ To such people a republican revolt against the King could under no conceivable circumstances have successfully appealed.

⁴² Shea, *op. cit.*

⁴³ J. A. Macdonell, *op. cit.*, p. 115.