



# CHAPTER ONE

## THE MAKING OF A PAPER SLEUTH

Much of my life has been driven by a fascination with Glengarry County and its history. That fascination extends back to the 1930s and 1940s, when my father, a Presbyterian preacher, made the pilgrimage back to his roots in Glengarry every summer. Starting in my teens, I took notes from the reminiscences of my grandmother, who died in 1942. Over time, this interest evolved into a unique career in historical research, which continues to this day.

At 16 I left home, lied about my age and tried to join the Royal Canadian Air Force. My father must have intervened, as the Air Force sent me back to school. I did succeed in volunteering for the infantry, but my army career was equally undistinguished. I didn't get overseas, and the pinnacle of my military career must have occurred sometime before I got myself busted from sergeant back to private. Having signed up in the hope of fighting the Japanese in 1945, the only action I saw was chasing Japanese fire balloons in a jeep with a Bren gun during weapons training in the mountains of British Columbia.

When the war ended, I asked for a discharge and went back to school. I signed up for some college courses in English and accounting. After a year's study, I had a passing grade in English and a failure in accounting. I left school for a job in Montreal as office gopher with a Dutch export firm. When I discovered that the manager was shafting the owners, I led an office revolt by the three employees, and the offending manager fired me forthwith.

The summer of 1947 was spent working on my uncle's Glengarry farm, contemplating my next move. To stay and help run the family farm was an appealing option, partly because of my new interest in family history. But I also craved adventure, so I joined a two-month harvest excursion in Saskatchewan, stooking grain and driving a team of horses hauling sheaves to the thresher.

Moving on west, I spent two months on a cattle ranch in Alberta, then out to the Pacific coast. I was by now taking a correspondence course on writing. In Vancouver I thought of going to sea and writing

at the same time, in the tradition of Jack London, Joseph Conrad, and Richard Henry Dana.

My timing was bad. There was a seamen's strike in progress, so I had to settle for a coastal towboat, on which I started as a deckhand. So much for writing the next *Moby Dick*.

It was not a glorious or romantic sailing career, but it proved to be the start of a nautical association that would be much longer and richer than I could ever have imagined at the time. I'll come back to my sailing days in Chapter 2.

In one respect, my timing was very good. In Vancouver I met and married Muriel Diver, who had come from Montreal to attend the University of British Columbia. In 1952, we went back to the Glengarry farm.

My true interest lay in family and local history, but that pursuit paid no bills. Not having a university degree, I was in no position to teach. I held a succession of jobs notable more for their variety than their financial yield. Car-top carriers (just as the Korean crisis embargoed supplies of steel to the manufacturer), life insurance (the last refuge of the man who has not utterly given up on the hope of an income) and farming itself (the first step on the road to recovery from expecting to make a living), all were doomed to failure.

Meanwhile, Muriel taught school between raising and caring for our four children. Her contribution to the family finances enabled me to spend time on historical research.

Eventually my interest in family history found a focus in the field of documents and archives. I had begun noting collections of papers in Glengarry that were in private hands, and in many cases in imminent peril of destruction. I was able to take some of these papers to the Public Archives of Canada in nearby Ottawa, keeping copies for myself to use in a column I was writing for *The Glengarry News*.

Then, thanks to the support of Donald Fraser McOuat, I had an opportunity to pioneer in a new job that I helped create, Liaison Officer for the Archives of Ontario. This I found to be remarkable, because I was actually going to be paid to locate and acquire papers!

Moving to Toronto in 1963 was not easy, since our family had long established roots in Glengarry (dating back to 1802), and my lack of success in making a living from the farm of my ancestors was particularly poignant. But in a way, my father's peripatetic career as a minister had helped to ease the separation. After all, only one of his children had been born in Glengarry, and it wasn't me. Besides, I was now in the happy position of being able to convert my hobby to a paying job. I came to terms with the fact that I was not a farmer.

My agenda for this new and untried line of work began without guidelines or direction from the Archives or Civil Service procedures, as there had never been such a position before. I decided, and McOuat agreed, that I would set my own guidelines, following the precepts of any skilled salesman.

I kept in close contact with my Eastern Ontario history buffs and gradually built a network across the Province. I continued to gather family history information in the form of documents, both originals and copies, and combined it with the recording of oral history. Along my career path I unearthed many stories that relate to my Glengarry relatives.

Over the years I have received help from a host of friends. Information for this book too has come from across the continent and abroad.

While every family's history is unique, every family *has* a history. Each is worth knowing, for the knowledge gives depth to the lives of every member of the family and their understanding of why they are where they are in this life.

I have been in the privileged position for much of my life, of seeing how my family history intersects with the history of Ontario, the history of northern and western Canada and even the West Indies! I have related disjointed bits on occasions through the years, no doubt boring some while delighting others. The rest of this chapter places these anecdotes together for the first time, hopefully putting me into my own historical context. Like many Scottish families, mine has spelled its name with joyous inconsistency as MacMillan or McMillan as whim and fashion took it.

An anonymous statement I have kept for years sums up how important this type of history can be for my family and yours:

“We stand to gain a new understanding about ourselves as we learn more about our ancestors and the lives they lived. In today's mobile, often unstable, society, it is important for people to have knowledge of their larger family connections, both here and abroad.”

My father, who died in 1976 at age 91, had his share of faults as well as virtues. He was rigid, unbending, and intolerant of human frailties, but he persevered in his beliefs. He left a prosperous Glengarry farm to become a minister. At 85, he was still preaching the gospel without the aid of notes. For him, the Presbyterian work ethic was real and he could not understand why I was being paid to chase around the country after other peoples' old papers. After my sessions of trying to mine his highly retentive, but selective, memory for nuggets of family history, his regular

comment was, “But Hugh, when are you going to get a real job?” I explained that I was sort of a preacher, travelling around the country persuading people to preserve our history. He never accepted that idea; it was still not a real job in his mind.



The only historical relic that has been saved in our family is the Brown Bess flintlock musket that was carried by my ancestor John Roy McMillan when he served as a yeoman in the Royal Canadian Volunteer Regiment (1797–1802) and later with the Glengarry Militia in the War of 1812–1814. He was in the regimental company of his own brother, Capt Alexander McMillan. It is pure luck that the flintlock musket has survived the housecleaning efforts of my cousins.

There were several John McMillans in the RCV Regiment. Differentiating my relative from the others was made easier by a mix-up in the paperwork that was part of the process of granting crown land.

Capt. Alexander McMillan returned from Scotland to Canada in 1793 with a number of young kinsmen including his brother, John Roy (my great-great-grandfather), and recruited them into the Regiment soon after he arrived. When it was disbanded in 1802, our John Roy would have been in line to receive a grant of 200 acres of land from the Crown. Instead, his grant specified 600 acres in the north end of Lancaster Township, later Lochiel, in Glengarry County. Normally there would only be 2 or 3 items in the file for a lot, but this file has a dozen or more letters and papers attesting to the identity of the three John McMillans. As the land board had mistakenly granted him 600 acres instead of 200, not knowing there were actually three John McMillans being granted land, the other two John McMillans must have been outraged until the error was corrected.

The fortunate result for me as a researcher was that Captain Alexander had to supply an affidavit attesting to the antecedents of the three John McMillans, which provided valuable material for people searching their McMillan family histories. Occasionally bureaucratic mix-ups can yield some advantage.

Thanks to Mary Beaton of Ottawa, the following item was extracted from an article in the *Glengarry News* of September 7, 1894 celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Glenelg settlers:

Died 1870 at Torbolton at 101 years, late of lot 24, 5th con. Lochiel Glengarry, Mary (Grant) McMillan relict of late John McMillan elder of St Columba, emigrated to Canada in 1791 at 22 years of age. 15 children,

8 survive, eldest is now 80 years of age. Leaves 138 grandchildren and 185 great grandchildren.

The obituary helped to prove the authenticity of information I had previously recorded and to correct a mistake. I had assumed that Mary Grant McMillan was part of the United Empire Loyalist migration from the Mohawk Valley of New York, but the information in this obituary reduced my loyalist ancestors from 4 to 3.

My research had already revealed Mary Grant McMillan's link to Cuthbert Grant, Warden of the Plains, and I also discovered a connection with former Nor'Wester Alexander Grant, of Duldreggan Hall at L'Orignal on the Ottawa River.

My father was told by his father that, after her husband John Roy died in 1841, Mary Grant McMillan walked over 100 miles north along the Ottawa River to the Fitzroy Harbour area, to join her oldest daughter Mary, who was married to Captain Alexander McMillan, not the same as mentioned above but possibly her cousin, son of Lt-Col Alexander.

They could have made their trip easier by a trek to L'Orignal and thence upriver by boat. Mary Grant McMillan's late husband's cousin, another Mary McMillan, daughter of Archibald of Murlaggan, was married to Thomas Kains, captain of the Ottawa River steamer *Shannon*, which might have taken the family at least as far as Bytown.

Thomas Kains was a half-pay officer in the Royal Navy. He had been in the party that set fire to the White House in Washington during the War of 1812. Kains was called back to active service as a purser on the *Victory*. I have located portraits of Kains and his wife Mary, as well as his naval uniform, now in the hands of various descendants. They were as far afield as New Jersey and as near as Waterloo, Ontario.

Archibald Kains (1865–1944), a grandson of Mary McMillan and Thomas Kains, retired from banking to spend the last years of his life collecting papers and information about the Kains and McMillan families. In 1942, he journeyed from his home at 9 Rideau Gate, Ottawa, to return to President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in Washington, DC, some sterling silver that his grandfather had looted from the White House in 1813. I am still searching for items Thomas removed from Admiral Horatio Nelson's flagship, *HMS Victory*, when it was a hospital ship during the Crimean War.

The portrait of Thomas's grandson Archibald, who began his banking career at Brantford, shows a handsome figure in a kilt. I located Archibald's letters to Pauline Johnson, the famous Indian poet from Brantford, and the letters are now with the National Archives of Canada.



*Captain Thomas Kains (1790–1855) was a member of the party that set fire to the US Presidential residence during the War of 1812. After being whitewashed to cover the smoke damage from this fire, it became known as the White House. During the Crimean War, Kains was purser aboard HMS Victory. Victory had been Nelson's flagship at Trafalgar, but by Kains's time, it was a hospital ship.  
(Author's collection)*

According to notes from my father, lot 24 on the 14th concession, today the 5th of Lochiel, was the home of John Roy McMillan, and a meeting place for the 1802 emigrants. John Roy probably built a log house around 1802 when he took up his land grant, and built the stone house that still stands today between 1815 and 1820. This fine old stone house is set away from the road on the slope of a hill well back from a small private cemetery by the roadside.

In 1802 John Roy McMillan was just out of the army when his brother Allan and cousin Archibald arrived in Montreal with over 400 kinfolk. John Roy, along with the other two John McMillans, may have been in the forefront of those trying to lure the new arrivals to their area.

I could never find John Roy's headstone in the cemetery that was on his land. Someone had taken some of the stones away. My grandfather's brother John sold the farm early in the 20th century to Henry Vogan who had to rebuild the chimney on the stone house. Having difficulty finding flat stones, he thought of the abandoned cemetery at the road. Sometime I'd like to try to convince the present owners to take the top portion of their chimney down and return the stones to the cemetery.

Father told me during one of my note-taking sessions that a cousin, Lily McMillan, had a wooden leg and went out west in the 1890s, but

he offered no word of explanation about how she lost her leg. At a later note-taking session I asked if she had any nickname. Well, yes. "She was called Klondike Lily!" That answer got my full attention! But the only further information I gleaned was that "she sinned!" My comment was that most of us have sinned, and I asked my father, "So what was her sin?" The question was met with silence.

A dram of single malt in a later session with an elderly cousin succeeded in drawing out an answer. I was told "She was one of those, you know ... madams with the Gold Rush." Elated at this success, I kept up the questioning but no more information came forth. I told this story to an aunt noted for her lack of humour and delusions of grandeur. She was most indignant when I told her I intended to record the story in our family history as an unproved legend. I've spent a lot of time and some money researching Klondike Lily, though so far with no success. There are moments when I think "Klondike Lily" may have been a figment of my imagination — or my father's.

Pierre Berton and a few other Klondike experts claim to have heard of her, but lack details. Dear Aunt Grace did not appreciate my view that it's not every family that turns up a madam in the family record.

Another family anecdote worth recording here is about finding the portrait of Allan McMillan of Glenpean, probably painted in 1802, around the time he came to Canada.

In 1970, I made my first official trip to the west coast for the Archives of Ontario. One of my assignments was to acquire the papers of Archibald McMillan of Murlaggan from his great grandson, Dr John MacMillan in West Vancouver. Dr MacMillan's sister Marjorie, wife of Judge Oscar Orr, had photographs and paintings, while John had the papers and had arranged in his will for the original collections to go to the Public Archives in Ottawa. Marjorie had sent the portrait of Allan McMillan of Glenpean to the Argenteuil County Historical Society's museum, a fine old stone building twenty miles downriver on the Ottawa from Archibald McMillan of Murlaggan's old home. There was no portrait of Archibald, but a fine one of his wife Isabella Gray was with a descendent, Jack Barker of Cowansville, Quebec.

On this same visit in 1970, Judge Oscar Orr saw me eyeing a jagged piece of metal 4 inches long mounted on a pedestal. On inquiring what it was, I was regaled with this explanation:

That is a piece of shrapnel that hit me above my right eye in World War I and lodged in my mouth. Luckily I survived this ordeal, but was left with a tiny open wound above my eye.

This resulted in a strange phenomenon that lasted many years before the wound finally healed. When I used my pipe, smoke issued from my forehead. I dined out for years on the following incident that resulted from this oddity.

The judge continued:

Marjorie and I were riding on a train in England soon after I had sustained this injury. A very stern looking bishop, arrayed in all his regalia, got into our compartment. Being a very proper Englishman he made no chitchat with a colonial soldier. Indeed, he buried his head behind the paper he was reading while I lit up my pipe.

At one point he happened to lower his paper just as a large puff of smoke escaped from my forehead. The paper quickly went back up but he kept taking a peek. Still not a word from the good bishop, but he was seen to be crossing himself as he got off at the next station. No doubt it confirmed his worst suspicions about colonial troops.

Marjorie sent me on my way after dinner with a photograph of Allan's portrait and extensive notes about our family connection. I deposited the photo of the painting in the Archives of Ontario and the notes were added to my growing pile of material intended for this book. Marjorie died soon after this and my notes did not survive a 1972 fire in our home.

In 1990, I went to the Argenteuil museum to compare my photograph of Allan with the original portrait which, much to their embarrassment they were unable to find. Did Marjorie send it to some other museum? Was it stolen? It never did turn up.

In the fall of 1991, I went to the North American Fur Trade Conference at Michilimackinac, Michigan, hoping to garner more information on James McMillan. I stopped at Eureka, Montana, to pick up Doc Smiley, a fur trade history friend. Smiley was the last veterinary surgeon in General George Custer's ill-fated 7th Cavalry, the last US regiment to have horses. When Hitler's Panzer divisions cut through Poland in 1939, the regiment wisely switched to tanks and Doc was out of a job.

I was to meet Doc Smiley at the Elkhorn Bar, where there is a clever replica of an alligator chained to the waterpipe of the men's urinal. It is just dark enough that you don't notice this creature in the swirling water of the trough as you unzip. When you do spot his head with open jaws amidst the foaming water you get a sudden urge to zip up and



leave fast. After a second look at this mean-looking critter you realize you've been had. Many a tourist has arrived at the urinal well into his cups but departed sober.

The bartender couldn't stand my lack of reaction when I came back from the loo and finally asked if I noticed anything unusual, "Not really," I said, "but aren't you afraid that little alligator in your urinal will drown?"

Travelling across the vast open grasslands and mountains of Montana, we stopped at Three Forks in the "Big Sky" country of Madison County with the towering Gallatin Mountains to the east of us. Here we got a great welcome from cousin Catherine McMillan Shirley, whom I had last seen 42 years earlier, in 1949, at a party her father Peter Miles McMillan had organized for expatriate Glengarrians.

Peter Miles McMillan had been a compulsive gambler. I recalled that when his party ended, he drove me 200 miles west to Butte in his big Frazer car (now a collector's item). Here we met my colleague Harry Dixon, who had a contract to sell advance tickets for Seal Brothers circus. At that time, Montana did not welcome paper money, so Peter went to his bank and got out a bag of silver dollars with about fifty for me. We must have stopped at every bar en route to Butte. By the end of the day I had just about doubled my stake by playing the slot machines and Peter had accumulated several bags of coins.

Peter's brother Archie had been given the farm by their father. Peter had received a \$100 gold piece as his patrimony, with which he had headed west to make his fortune. This he did — several times — but lost it just as often through his compulsive gambling.

Gathering even these few stories about family history takes time, patience and luck. The year before she died, my cousin Catherine McMillan Shirley told me a tale which none of the rest of her family had heard.

In 1917 father and mother left Goldfield, 200 miles west, and headed for this area. The trek took all summer, but they were not alone. The slow progress was on account of them driving about 3000 head of sheep. They could make only 15 to 20 miles a day, as the sheep had to graze and find water. Dad must have done well in the short time he had been in the West. He and mother had the two oldest of our family but I was not yet born. Dad had a Model T Ford for Mother and the kids to ride in while he and his French-Canadian shepherders rode horses, driving the sheep with the help of a dozen or more sheep dogs. There is not even one picture to show this strange cavalcade on the move. Dad also had about \$25,000 in silver dollars, which was some fortune in those days.

Within a short time he was near to being broke through his gambling. Luckily for him, Mother had had enough sense to get some money from him beforehand, and she bought an old house, which she named the McMillan Hotel. Mother grubstaked him many times when his incessant gambling would make him broke again.

My grandmother Annie McIntosh McMillan (1860–1942) was a handsome woman, judging by her photograph. She was raised on a prosperous farm in Charlottenburgh Township, Glengarry. All her McIntosh relatives moved to the West Coast just before the First World War. Many of her interesting letters have survived. She told me her great-great-grandfather had been killed at Culloden and the English were still anathema to her. One time she warned me never to marry a Sassenach. Years later, when I learned what the word meant, I did go and marry one. I don't suppose Granny is pleased. I am wondering what my pious grandmother's reaction was to the following portion of a letter she received September 12, 1882 from her cousin Isabella Grant at Cashion's Glen, South Branch, Glengarry:

Dear friend Annie — I am sorry to tell you that I was up to Crawfords last night and the girl has decided not to go from home at present. I think she is expecting a few husking bees and she dont want to loose the fun the next time John goes for a girl he must do as we were telling him he must sleep with her and she will be sure to stay.

Well! And some of us had the idea our elders rarely thought of sex, except of course for the pleasure of creating us. Annie would have been 22 at that time and she married my grandfather two years later. Who was “the girl” and who was “John,” and was Isabella or Annie sleeping with John? We will likely never know, but it does throw a new light on Granny and cousin Isabella. Aunt Grace would not have approved of such a letter being made public, notwithstanding the worthy cause of advancing social history.

Great-uncle John Archie Roy McMillan (1851–1917) is one of my grandfather's five interesting brothers. He remained a bachelor, but judging by his correspondence, had several admiring women available. He must have been an indifferent farmer, a part-time drover, and a gambling land speculator. This is documented in some of his papers I managed to salvage from my housecleaning cousins' bonfire. His business records show him to be the owner of almost a block of land and buildings on Green Avenue between St Catherine and Sherbrooke

streets in Montreal. This must have been too slow a way to get rich, because he sold out before World War I to buy prairie land near Saskatoon. He overextended himself, and a cash flow problem lost the lot, along with his grandfather John Roy's stone house and farm.

John Archie Roy spent his last years with Sandy, another bachelor brother, who owned the farm where Muriel and I lived from 1952 to 1963. He was a skilled cabinetmaker and, according to my father, went to the shanty every winter from around 1870 to 1900, taking a crew of men, horses and supplies by train to Saginaw, Michigan.

The Lochaber emigrants were already familiar with the handling of big timber when they came to Canada in 1802. Their part of the Highlands was heavily timbered and had streams along which logs could be rafted. We preserved the cast iron stove that Sandy took to the shanty and it now rests in the Dunvegan Pioneer Museum. The door casting reads "Copps Bros, Hamilton 1879," a family relic with a story.

John and Sandy Archie Roy M<sup>c</sup>Millan, were look-alike brothers, with lean craggy features, faces clean-shaven except for handlebar mustaches and slicked-back hair parted in the middle. I can remember great-uncle Sandy's frugality, which extended to cutting hard peppermint candies in half. The following excerpts from two unsigned letters to John indicate that two ladies he knew had very dissimilar problems for him to solve:

Dear Friend — I have heard you were talking about coming down the time of the fair be sure and call I will be on 171 St Urbain St, Montreal. The fair is commencing on the 11 ending on the 19 you come down some of those days if you don't feel to high. I haven't been sick since you came down you know what I mean I didn't tell them at home as they would take a fit. I wish I had some of the stuff you were telling me off. I dont think you deceived me in doing anything wrong. J. A. you will burn this letter as soon as you read it. I think of the last night we were together. I was dreaming about it last night.

xxxxxx yours \_\_\_\_\_

There are indications in John's cash books that in the following years he was paying to support an unnamed orphan in Montreal.

Little Jack M<sup>c</sup>Donald, a famous Glengarry fiddler, knew JA, as John Archie Roy M<sup>c</sup>Donald was known, from stopping over at the Dalhousie Hotel on his way to and from Montreal. This would be an overnight stop if he was taking his horse and rig, and he'd get a room for a tune or two on the fiddle. Little Jack, the Glengarry fiddler, said,

“that uncle of yours could stepdance, play the fiddle, and sing Gaelic songs all night long. He was a caution with the ladies, and not feared to spend his money, or pay for his mistakes, as when he got Betsy in a fix.”

The second letter, undated and also unsigned, is circa 1895. It outlines a completely different sort of problem:

John, Why dont you be smart for yourself and others you have a bill against Mrs. M Cameron ... she has that house insured at \$1,000.00 and that is more than she will ever get for it and if you would watch your chance when there is a storm and set that big shed next to the house in a flame. Set it inside and up near the roof and then we will all get our money and she will not loose everything and of course watch the wind is not hie so not to hurt anyone ... or after a rain or towards morning no one in gods world would ever no. Be sure and burn this paper...

For the sake of social history, we can be thankful that my uncle JA did not put his own papers to the torch. There is no indication that he followed her detailed instructions.

Lt-Col Alexander McMillan was the first of our Glenpean line known to have crossed the Atlantic. His presence in America as early as 1773, when he came to New York City on the Pearl, was noted in JLH Neilson's *Quebec Almanac* of 1796, which records the following charming description of Alexander by Col Landemann of the Royal Engineers:

McMillan was a jolly fat Scotchman, with a very plump, round face, sandy hair and a rosy complexion. In the course of the evening, after dinner at McLean's, he treated us to a tune on two Jews harps, performing on both at once, and as he asserted, playing first and second. His Jews harps were great pets, and he kept them in a neat case made for the purpose, well supplied with cotton to protect them from injury. All my efforts to find these Jew's harps have come to naught.

In 1967, I located Donald MacMillan, a great-grandson of Alexander, who owned a trucking firm in East Brunswick, New Jersey. He had carefully preserved his great-grandfather's handmade French-Canadian style armchair. Family legend had it that the chair was made by the St Regis Indians near Cornwall, Ontario, as a token of their regard for his leadership in the successful raid on French Mills, New York, on November 23, 1812. At that time, he was Lieutenant-Colonel of the 2nd Regiment of Glengarry Militia.

Artifacts like this are more likely to survive if they are left with an institution or collector rather than in someone's attic, so I asked Donald to donate the chair to the Nor'Wester & Loyalist Museum in Williamstown, Ontario. When he came up from New Jersey in September 1967 to present the chair at the opening of the museum, the brigade of three fur trade canoes that I had organized arrived from Grand Portage, the old North West Company rendezvous at the head of Lake Superior. Our piper led us ashore. Several with Nor'Wester or Loyalist connections took turns being photographed in the chair.

Lt-Col Alexander McMillan's military career is documented in the Public Archives of Canada, RG 8, C-series, vol. 17, 793. He was appointed to DeLancey's Brigade in 1777, served in the Revolution, was present at the reduction of Savannah and elsewhere. Appointed to the Royal Canadian Volunteer Regiment in 1796, he remained until it was disbanded in 1802. He later served as Lt-Col of the 2nd Regiment, Glengarry Militia. From January 1809, he commanded the flank companies of the 1st and 2nd Glengarry and was appointed to the Militia Pension Board of Upper Canada. He had a son who was a Captain in the Glengarry Fencibles during the War of 1812. This son was probably the Captain Alexander McMillan who married Elizabeth Crites, United Empire Loyalist, and the ancestor of Donald MacMillan in New Jersey.

Captain Alexander McMillan was at the military settlement in Perth, Lanark County, soon after its creation in 1816. He was a half-pay officer from the Glengarry Fencibles with an outstanding record in the War of 1812. He built a stone house there about 1842 and was the first Warden of the district, but he was better known for a duel with a Dr Thom at Perth. Apparently Thom had neglected to invite the less socially favoured wife of McMillan to a year-end levee. This insult led McMillan to challenge Thom. Pistol shots were exchanged but no casualties ensued. Presumably honour was satisfied.

Alexander McMillan received large land grants in Glengarry after the Revolutionary War. He was a founding member of the Highland Society of Canada in 1818. In 1823, the year he died, his nephew James, a former Nor'Wester but by then with the Hudson's Bay Company, came to the village of Williamstown by canoe very much as I was to do 144 years later in a recreated canoe brigade in 1967.

With James McMillan on that 4,000-mile canoe trip were two of his Métis children, Margaret, 8, and Allan, 7, whom he had brought from the Columbia River on the west coast, to be baptized at St Andrew's Church of Scotland in Williamstown.

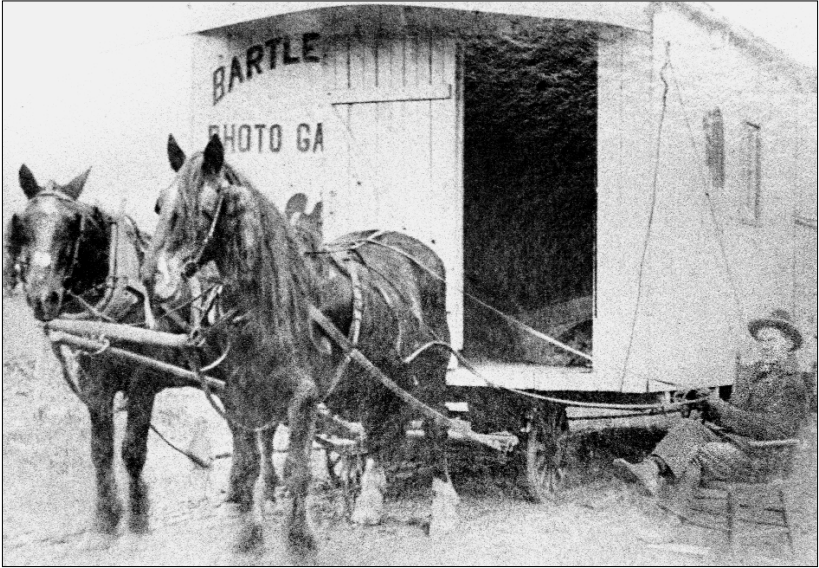
The next record I have found suggests that the little boy, Allan, may have stayed in the east with his grandfather Allan, because he is listed in 1836 as a Nor'Wester apprentice clerk hired to go from Lachine to Red River.

It's interesting how this information came to light. My fur trade history friends often exchange leads. Prof. Jennifer Brown, a fur trade academic at the University of Winnipeg, showed me an unpublished manuscript by a Hudson's Bay Company trader, Henry Conolly, son of William Conolly who was a North West Company partner. Henry died on a steamship en route to Labrador in 1910 with the unedited manuscript of his father's memoirs. Jennifer had this copy on loan from Jim Morrison, another of my researcher friends. It was an exciting moment when I came upon the reference to my McMillan antecedents.

On contacting Jim, I discovered the original copy of the manuscript was part of the Robert Bell papers in the Public Archives. Robert Bell of the Geological Survey of Canada was a renaissance man who carried on a correspondence with everyone from Charles Darwin to a Hudson's Bay Company clerk in the Arctic. It is not surprising that he would have such an item among his papers. Robert Bell's daughter tried to get the memoirs published in New York when she lived there in the 1920s, and Jim Morrison also has plans to edit and publish this important material.

In 1966, I acquired a transcript of the 1801 journal of a canoe voyage from Fort George on the Niagara River to Fort Malden on the Detroit River. The writer was Lt Miles Mc'Donell of the Royal Canadian Volunteer Regiment. He was stationed at Fort George while Alexander McMillan was at Malden. I assume my ancestor John Roy McMillan was also at Malden because he was in his brother's company. Miles Mc'Donell, who was a Glengarry man, was later to become agent to Lord Selkirk at Red River and the first Governor of the Red River Colony. In his diary, he wrote, "We gathered for dinner with my old friends Captains McMillan and McLean. We drank toasts and Alex entertained us." Probably he played his Jew's harps.

In the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, an entry on Col James DeLancey (1746–1804) gives a vivid account of the guerrilla-type tactics of Delancey's Brigade, in which Capt Alexander served for seven years. Delancey's Brigade was a picked force of horsemen drawn from Westchester County to procure supplies for the British Army from the neutral ground between the British and American positions. Gen William Tryon of New York commented, "this troop is truly the elite of the country ... I have much confidence in them for their spirited behaviour."



*Picture of Bartle Bros. photographic studio on wheels in summer, on a sleigh in winter, served Glengarry County late 19th and early 20th century.*



*Malcolm and Hugh MacMillan presenting Brown Bess Musket carried by great, great, great grandfather of the Royal Canadian Volunteer Regiment and the Glengarry militia to Joan P. MacDonald, Director of the NorWester Loyalist Museum, Williamstown, November 2002.*

Because they supplied the British Army and the inhabitants of New York with cattle, they were called the Cowboys and over the next five years they became one of the best known and most feared of the Loyalist units. Also known as the Outlaws of the Bronx, they harassed the enemy throughout the war. Washington was well aware of this activity and sought the capture of Alexander McMillan. I have been unable to learn more about him despite many years of searching.

In 1962, I had the pleasure of meeting Charles McMillan's widow, Grace, at the Cowansville, Quebec, home of her grandson, Jack Barker. Then in her 90s, she had many stories to tell of her late husband, a grandson of Archibald Murlaggan McMillan.

My tapes of several hours of tales about the family were lost in our 1972 housefire, but one of them stays in my memory. About 1890, Charles and Grace McMillan left the Grenville, Quebec, area for the Oregon territory. They established a business there and operated it for about ten years. In 1901, Charles's father Duncan McMillan died. On inheriting the property, Charles sold the business, stashed the proceeds of about \$20,000 in his money belt and headed east with Grace by train through the western states to Chicago, then on to Montreal.

Somewhere in Montana, the train came to a halt in a narrow rock cut. Word spread through the cars that it was being held up by train robbers. It was a certainty they would be searched and all valuables taken. While other passengers were hiding valuables in their shoes and skirts, all places the bandits would be sure to look, Charles took his money belt from under his shirt, handed the large denomination bank notes to Grace, then pitched the belt out the window. Charles kept some money in his pocket along with his watch, and Grace kept a few dollars in her purse. Like most ladies at that time, Grace had her waist-long hair coiled in a large bun on top of her head. Her nimble fingers soon had the banknotes in tight little rolls, which she shoved into the mass of hair atop her head. The bandits took her wedding ring, his watch, and all their available money, at which point Grace burst into tears exclaiming, "But we have no money to get us back to Montreal!" One of the bandits felt sorry for her and tossed her a \$5 gold piece. She was still chuckling sixty years later when she told me the story of how she had fooled those Montana bandits.

Many stories came from my father's memory. Others were handed down through four generations of collective memory, despite the loss of the Gaelic, which would no doubt have improved them.

Alex Willie MacMillan from Lochiel was a well known undertaker in Alexandria whose ancestor came out in the 1802 emigration. He



had a black sense of humour, exemplified by the tales he liked to tell. He once said to me, "The first decision that a Glengarry lad gets to make is choosing his father's coffin." There was some truth to that. Many Highland heads of households fancied themselves as the monarch of their own glen. My father certainly had such leanings.

Alex Willie once stopped my father on the street for a little chitchat. Father asked about Alex Willie's health and his business. Alex Willie's succinct reply was, "Well, Rev JA, it would be tolerably better if you could fix me some funerals real quick."

In the 1930s, Alex Willie and a friend were driving back to Alexandria on a cold winter's day, transporting a corpse seated upright in the back seat of his old touring car. They had to get out and shovel, as the road wasn't ploughed. Another car caught up to them and two men got out to help push them through the worst drifts. It was getting dark, and one of the men noticed the person in the back seat, so he called out to Alex Willie, "What's the matter with your friend in the back seat? Why isn't he out here pushing?" Alex Willie's quick answer was, "Seems he had too much of the grog and fell asleep, but reach in and give him a shake." The stranger's reaction was not recorded.

In 1914, my grandfather Hughie Archie Roy MacMillan died at age 61 from pneumonia, possibly brought on by a lengthy sojourn in a snow bank on a cold winter's night, following a visit to the Quigley Hotel a short distance from the farm.

The ledger kept by the Wildcat Chisholms for their store and hotel has frequent entries for Wee Hughie taking home a jug of high wines, a lethal mix of overproof alcohol and a variety of other ingredients. These entries commence in the 1860s, when he would have been a lad of ten or so. My father explained about all these purchases from the Quigley Hotel. Hughie's mother, Margaret Grant came to this farm in the 1830s as the bride of Archie Roy MacMillan. The farm was located where the stage from L'Orignal on the Ottawa River stopped to change horses before proceeding to Lancaster on the St Lawrence. My great-grandmother served food and drink and would need these spirits for the travellers. Father said she smoked a clay pipe, which she kept on the mantel. One day a traveller picked it up to smoke it. Before she used it next, she broke a piece off the stem. When she died in 1893, she was said to have left \$20,000 in her will, all of it made from the sale of food and drink.

Margaret Grant MacMillan was of Loyalist stock from the South Branch of the Raisin River near Williamstown. From her portrait (lost in our 1972 housefire), she appeared to be a handsome woman. Despite her false teeth, which fit badly in those days, she had fine features with

a sharply chiseled nose and piercing eyes; not someone you would want to cross.

There are mysterious chapters in our family saga that I have yet to pry open.

Father once told me of when his grandfather Archie Roy “dressed up for me in his top hat and tails to show me how he looked when he went to see lawyer McLennan in Cornwall about his uncle Ranald’s estate in the Indies.” When I pressed for more details, Father changed the subject. This is a fragment of an elusive story of ships, money, and poison, first intimated to me by my grandmother when I was 15.

In 1995, while I was visiting my relatives in Grenada, Lynessa Leid mentioned the same story about Ranald saying that he had been poisoned in the West Indies. My grandmother had also told me the same story. I have had records checked, but to no avail. Many such stories have some sort of basis in fact, but with no records they are usually impossible to verify.

In my last note-taking session with father, he told me that in 1906, when he was 21, his father had given him money to go to Illinois and buy a Percheron stud horse, which he brought back by train. With that horse, my father raised enough money to study at McGill University to become a preacher.

Some of these stories as recounted and recorded may not seem terribly significant to a family history, but tell much about the social history of the times. They are worth committing to paper to keep them safe so people yet unborn can better understand why people in the past acted as they did.

A bill dated 1893 shows that it cost \$252.03 to roof my grandfather’s barn with slate. The priest in the Catholic church next to our farm, one Father McMillan was proud of the slate roof on his own house. He thought it the only slate roof around until he was told that Hughie Archie Roy McMillan had put a slate roof on his barn years before. It was around this time that the Orange Lodge people needed a white horse for their July 12th parade, as the one they had used in past years had died. A lodge member suggested, “Why not ask Father McMillan if we can borrow his white horse for the day?” This seemed an unlikely prospect, but ask him they did. He told them he would like to help them, but his parishioners would not be pleased at him aiding this Protestant group. However, he said, he would be away that day and the horse would be in the barn. They got the message, and before daylight on the Glorious 12th, they were leading the horse down the road. At first light

they were shocked to discover that someone had painted the horse green. This was the only recorded instance of an Orange Walk that starred King Billy riding a green horse.

The business records to do with the slate roof were in a wooden chest of documents I found at my uncle's house in 1972, the year he was killed in a car accident. It was while looking after his estate that I was pleasantly surprised to find that my cousins had not destroyed this chest of historically valuable records, a fine collection of 19th-century letters and business papers that has since been deposited with the Glengarry Historical Society. Among the papers is the 1907 Glengarry telephone book consisting of only one page and listing 19 subscribers, my grandfather being one of them. The rules in the phone book are interesting.

You are instructed to:

- Read these rules before and after eating.
- Always hang the receiver on hook with ear down to keep out dust.
- Outsiders will not be permitted to run in and use the telephone a minute.
- 3 minutes is a goodly time to talk business and should also satisfy those socially inclined.

Donald John MacGillivray was a first cousin of my father's and a veteran of the Boer War. Donald's ancestor came from Scotland in 1794 with the Glenelg settlers to Glengarry. Donald John told me about his father courting Isabella, my grandfather's sister. He drove down to Lochiel with his horse and buggy to see her father, Archie Roy, and ask permission to marry her. Archie Roy considered this request and answered, "No, you can't marry Isabella, because she is keeping house for her two brothers, Sandy and John, but you can marry my older daughter Henrietta." Donald claims his father left in a fine rage and headed back for Kirkhill. When he cooled off, he decided, "Well, they are sisters and they look alike — so why not?" He married Henrietta.

Donald John made many fine cedar chests, which he gave to certain select women in Glengarry. The criterion was that they must allow their husbands to have a dram in the house, so my wife Muriel was given a cedar chest many years ago.

Before I joined the Ontario Archives, my own interest in history had been on a personal, family, level but I was intrigued by Alfred Silver,

author of *Red River Story*, and *Where the Ghost Horse Runs*. In his notes, Silver explained how he mined historical sources to create novels, which were based on a mix of historical fact and conjecture. Concerning our western Canadian Métis connections and the early fur trade, Silver's notes also help to explain the connection between the Grants and the McMillans: He wrote:

I wouldn't have been able even to start on this book ... if it hadn't been for an amateur historian named Margaret Arnett MacLeod. Among her many other endeavours, including editing the letters of Letitia Hargrave and contributing to *Women of Red River*, Mrs. MacLeod developed a passionate obsession for researching Cuthbert Grant. When someone asked me for an explanation for Mrs. MacLeod's obsession, since she wasn't a descendent of Grant, nor did she appear to have any other vested interest, the only theory I could come up with was the gap left in her life by the death of her only son.

Lieutenant Alan MacLeod was a World War I flyer and was unusual among recipients of the Victoria Cross in that it wasn't awarded posthumously. He came home to Winnipeg with all his arms and legs intact and died in the influenza epidemic of 1919. Mrs. MacLeod's husband also died before his time. The result of her loneliness was a book entitled *Cuthbert Grant of Granttown*, written in collaboration with a budding young professional historian, because by that time Margaret was unable to read her notes, her vision was too weak.

The book has an interesting mission in it, because Margaret had a romantic concept of Grant, and her collaborator appears to have been rather, well, jealous. Unfortunately there were further editions after Margaret MacLeod's death, allowing her collaborator (we used to shoot collaborators) to insert an introduction asserting that the dotty old half-blind lady's vision of Grant was flawed, because Grant was not, in fact, 'heroic' (whatever that means). One reason given is that Grant, on one occasion at least, drank more than his position of responsibility allowed. Another is that Grant was used by the North West Co and the Hudson's Bay Co for their own ends, while 'heroes, even when young, are not used; they pursue their own objects.' I suppose we will have to eliminate that brandy-sodden Churchill from the list of fit subjects for biography, not to mention that eager young Corsican who was so effectively used by Robespierre and was Josephine de Beauharnais's sugar daddy.



*William MacMillan, a Métis buffalo hunter in the Edmonton area, died in 1903 claiming to be 103 years old. He is seen here with his wife. William's father was James MacMillan of the North West Company, first cousin of my great-grandfather, Hugh Roy MacMillan.  
(Ontario Archives photo no S 7198, reproduced with permission)*

My own sentiments about the collaborator mirror those of Silver. Let us keep Cuthbert Grant as a hero, warts and all. Cuthbert Grant (1793–1854), known as the Warden of the Plains, was the leader of the Métis in 1816 when they killed Governor Semple of the Hudson's Bay Company and twenty of his men in the battle of Seven Oaks near present-day Winnipeg.

Isaac Cowie, a writer on the subject of the Red River, said of Grant:

Under Grant, the Métis of the buffalo hunting brigades were organized as a disciplined force, which repelled every hostile Indian attack so successfully as to win renown as the most skillful and bravest warriors of the Prairies. They protected themselves from overwhelming numbers of Sioux, guarding the agricultural settlers of the Red River Colony from molestation by the bloodthirsty Tigers of the Plains and other warlike tribes.

Over 20 years ago, while tracking down the papers of Cuthbert Grant in Manitoba and North Dakota for the Ontario Archives, I also had a personal interest. My Métis McMillan relations around Red River would have known Cuthbert Grant and may have been on many of his well organized buffalo hunts.

I have referred from time to time in this chapter to articles I lost in a housefire. In 1972, a firebug torched our home in Toronto in the middle of the night. When the 15-year-old arsonist was caught a year after setting his 42nd fire, he told the police it was random chance. He did not know us and could as easily have burned down the house across the street. What attracted him to ours, he claimed, was a huge canoe sitting on a trailer in front of the house.

He poured gasoline over our two cars, then tossed a match on them, but didn't touch the canoe as he claimed it was magical. A passing taxi driver saw the flames outside the darkened house and with great presence of mind, kicked in the front door, shouting "Get out! Your house is on fire!"

We had planned to leave that morning to take the fur trade canoe through the Minesing Swamp, part of the North West Company's alternate route during the War of 1812–14, and be the first to re-enact this trip. The crew, four teenage friends of my sons, were asleep upstairs, ready for the big adventure.

When the fire broke out, they all escaped, but our eldest son Malcolm went back into the house looking for his sister, not knowing that she had picked that night to sleep at a friend's place. My wife rushed back to get Malcolm out, just seconds before the station wagon blew up, spreading the flames into the house. We didn't paddle our canoe on the Minesing that day.

We salvaged much of the contents of the house, storing things with relatives and friends, whence odds and ends continued to resurface in the years that followed. Looking for information recently among some of these papers that my sister-in-law returned to me, I came upon five pages of smoke-blackened notes from interviews with my father in 1970. He recalled that in 1907, when he was 22 years old, his father told him that my great-great-grandmother, Mary Grant, was related to a fur trader, Cuthbert Grant, who was out west and was said to have visited her when he came back from Scotland.

I immediately thought of Alfred Silver's novels that portrayed Cuthbert Grant as a heroic figure, with shortcomings. I was also reminded of the value of keeping track of old or new papers, which has been my lifetime habit.

*(Information in this chapter has been adapted from material I wrote for Lochaber Emigrants to Glengarry, published in 1994 by Natural Heritage, Natural History Inc, and from an article I wrote for the 1998 issue of Glengarry Life, the annual publication of the Glengarry Historical Society.)*