
CHAPTER XI

THE GLENGARRY SETTLEMENTS

THE COMING OF THE FENCIBLE REGIMENT FROM SCOTLAND

*Hearts of Scotland who inherit,
As of old, her martial blood;—
Rouse, once more, the hero spirit
Of her ancient island brood!!*

OVER one hundred and sixty years after Sir William Alexander sent his first shipload of Scottish colonists across the Atlantic, there laboured on the borders of the counties of Perth and Inverness in the Highland mountains of Scotland a devoted missionary of the old Celtic blood, whose name was Macdonell. He was of the same race as the Earl of Stirling, those descendants of the renowned Somerled. He was a practical man as well as a dreamer, and was, no doubt, a poet at heart as all his race are. But unlike Alexander—the poet, courtier, colonist, and psalm-writer—this man was a priest of the Roman Church, whose chief interest was the spiritual welfare of that great mass of Catholic Celts who, since the decay of

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the clan system, were out of place in the Highlands, which were then being turned into sheep-walks and agricultural experiments on a large scale.

Of this great man I will speak at length later. But here his work as a successful coloniser of one of the most important Canadian communities will alone be dealt with. Affected by the distress of his countrymen, who, as he said, had been driven out of their glens to turn the latter into sheep-walks, he was debating what to do to alleviate their condition, when he heard of an emigrant ship which, sailing from Barra, had been wrecked and had put into Greenock, leaving her passengers in a destitute and helpless condition. He at once went to Glasgow in the spring of 1792, and by interest with the University authorities and merchants, strove to get the evicted farmers and shipwrecked people into the local manufactories. For this vocation, however, these poor people were ill-fitted both by inclination, ability, and knowledge. They preferred the wild life of the open, and made splendid soldiers and deer-stalkers. Then they spoke only the Gaelic and were Catholics in religion, so that a double barrier separated them from the factory people of Lowland English-speaking Protestant Glasgow. But the College professors and merchants appreciated his efforts, and in spite of all the difficulties enumerated, in two months he had procured employment for fully six hundred Highlanders.

The faithful and energetic priest became the

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spiritual father of these people, and for a couple of years all went well, though his followers failed to learn English. But soon came the troubles of the French Revolution, and war between England and France and the subsequent decline of trade and labour; and amid the general misery the poor Highlanders lost their employment.

Again the ardent missionary met the crisis. He conceived the daring idea of embodying his idle labourers into a Catholic Corps in His Majesty's service, and setting to work he soon received the Royal assent, and by June, 1795, had embodied the Glengarry Fencible Regiment, the first Catholic Corps raised since the Reformation.

Becoming chaplain of the regiment, with his chief, Macdonell of Glengarry, as colonel, he got the regiment to offer their services where they might be wanted. At first starting in Guernsey, they soon went to Ireland, where they, with the Reay Fencibles, put down the Rebellion of 1798.

Their faithful chaplain was their constant attendant down to the year 1802, when all the Scottish Fencibles were disbanded.

In 1798 there were twenty-six Scottish regiments in the British Army, and the Glengarrys were, no doubt, among the finest of that splendid group of fighting men who made the British soldiers dreaded all over the world. The following list of the officers of the Glengarrys is found in the British Army List of 1798:—

Macdonald of Glengarry,
General of the Brigade.

Col. Donald Macdonald.
Lieut.-Col. Charles McLean.

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Major Alexander Macdonald.
Capt. Archibald McLachlan.
Capt. Donald Macdonald.
Capt. Ranald Macdonell.
Capt. James Macdonald.
Capt. Archibald Macdonell.
Capt. Roderick Macdonald.
Capt. Hugh Beaton.
Capt. Lieut. Alex. Macdonell.
Lieut. John Macdonald.
Lieut. Ronald Macdonald.
Lieut. Archibald McLellan.
Lieut. James Macdonell.
Lieut. James McNab.
Lieut. D. McIntyre.

Lieut. Donald Chisholm.
Lieut. Allan McNab.
Ensign Alexander Macdonell.
Ensign John Macdonald.
Ensign Charles Macdonald.
Ensign Donald Macdonell.
Ensign Donald McLean.
Ensign Archibald Macdonell.
Ensign Alexander Macdonell.
Ensign Andrew Macdonell.
Ensign Francis Livingston.
Adjutant Donald Macdonell.
Quartermaster Alexander Macdonell.
Surgeon Alexander Macdonell.

Could a regiment be any more thoroughly Scottish and Highland than this?

On the disbanding of the Fencibles, the Glengarrys found themselves in as desperate a position as ever. But their resolute chaplain conceived the idea of their emigrating to Canada, and appealed to the British Government for assistance to enable them to do so. The Government, while regretting the great flow of emigrants from Scotland, offered to bear a colony of the regiment to Trinidad. Thanking the minister for his offer, the chaplain replied that his people preferred to go to Upper Canada where their friends were already settled and doing well. The result was that Mr. Addington, the Premier, procured an order with the Sign Manual to the Lieut.-Governor of Upper Canada to grant two hundred acres of land to every one of the Highlanders who should arrive in the province.

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This wholesale emigration alarmed the Scottish landlords of the Western Highlands, and an effort was made to induce the Highlanders to stay at home. They were even offered the waste lands of Cornwall.

At this juncture, however, as in the case of Sir William Alexander, a member of the great rival clan Campbell came to the Reverend Mr. Macdonell's assistance in the person of Major Archibald Campbell, who proposed a plan of making a complete military organisation of all the Scottish Fencible regiments which were disbanded, and of sending them all to Upper Canada and so prevent them going to the United States. This was a feasible and wise scheme, could it have been carried out, but just then Addington resigned, Pitt returned to office, and the war was renewed with France under Napoleon, who was just then rising in power, so the greater part of the Fencibles remained at home or drifted into other units of the army.

At this time also strict regulations were enforced as to vessels carrying emigrants abroad, owing to cruelties said to be practised by owners of vessels in that business. The result of these regulations was that an embargo was laid on all emigrant ships in British harbours. By good fortune the Glengarrys had, the most of them, got away ere this was enforced, and set sail for the New Scotland across the water.

Curiously, at this time their chaplain, who had stayed behind in London to complete his business, was approached by another noted Scottish colonist

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in Canada, Lord Selkirk, whose operations will be dealt with by Dr. Bryce in another volume of this work. Lord Selkirk proposed to join with Macdonell in his colonisation scheme, but announced that his idea was to settle the country between Lakes Huron and Superior with Highlanders, the climate there being similar to that in Scotland and the soil richer and more productive. This offer was refused because the location chosen was beyond the jurisdiction of the Government of Upper Canada, and too remote from other settlements.

The Fencibles arrived in Upper Canada and received their lands according to the despatch from Lord Hobart, Secretary of State for the Colonies, to Lieut.-Governor Hunter, dated March 1, 1803. By this order twelve hundred acres were granted to Mr. Macdonell, and two hundred acres to every family he introduced into the colony.

Of other Scottish immigrations into Glengarry since that date, those of Locheil and the McLeods have been mentioned.

The year 1803 saw other emigrations of Scotsmen, and in the ships that carried the Glengarry Fencibles were other Scottish immigrants into Canada, many of them from Kintail and Glenelg. One old resident of the county, Murdoch McLennan, had released a valuable farm in Kintail rather than separate from his kinsmen and friends who were emigrating. He said that there were eleven hundred persons on the ship, and that they were four months crossing in stormy and wintry weather, especially off Labrador.

The county was divided into settlements:

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Breadalbane of the Campbells and others of North Argyllshire who settled there ; Dunvegan, named by the McLeods, a large number of whom settled in that locality ; Strathglas suggests the Chisholms ; and Uist and Knokdart certain septes of the Macdonalds.

Stormont, the adjacent county, was also settled originally by Scottish United Empire Loyalists, and St. Andrews in that county is a suggestive name.

The early settlers in Glengarry came chiefly from the neighbourhood of the Mohawk River in New York. They selected their land on the shores of the St. Lawrence and Lake St. Francis, and on the borders of the river Raisin as far inland as Williamstown and Martintown. They were joined in 1784 by officers and privates of the 84th Regiment, and of that of Sir William Johnston, from whose Christian name the former place acquired its name.

From the very first the greater proportion of the people were Scottish folk, most of whom had come to the colony in 1783. Such names as those of Grant, Rose, McLean, Murchison, and Bethune are witness to this fact.

Among the officers who settled in the township of Lancaster were Col. Sutherland and Mr. Gunn. In 1786 Capt. John Hay, from Glenbrae in Aberdeenshire, who had come out to Prince Edward Island in 1773 and afterwards joined the 84th Regiment, settled on the border of the river Raisin. His place was named Glen of Hay (Gaelic, Gleana-feair).

Among others who settled in Lancaster were the

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McPhersons from Badenoch. Kenneth, the son of John, was for over thirty years postmaster and general merchant at Lancaster village. His father was John McPherson, who came out and took up lands. Kenneth came out in 1822 as a follower of Cameron of Thora. One of the McPherson family named Murdoch died in his 107th year.

In the Scottish emigration of 1802 there came out Mr. Donald Fraser, who became a merchant at Williamstown. He bought Sir John Johnson's place at Point du lac, and renamed it Fraser's Point. His son, Lieut.-Col. Alexander Fraser, of the Glengarry Militia, was living and over eighty years of age in 1887.

A number of retired officials of the Hudson's Bay Company settled in Glengarry. Among them were the Hon. John McGillivray, whose eldest son, Neil, became heir to the chiefship of that clan and to the ancestral estate in Scotland; Duncan Cameron, father of the late Sir Roderick Cameron, of New York city; Mr. John McDonald, who resided at Gray's Creek; and Mr. Hugh McGillis, of Williamstown.

This is the story of this famous old Canadian community whose history is linked with the martial valour and prowess of 1812. Many of the descendants of the rugged old Highland settlers have drifted west or into other parts of Ontario. But whenever the Scotsman in Canada is spoken of, the Glengarry settlements have a foremost place in the memory and hearts of our people.

Bonnet, plaid, and dirk in han'
The heilan chiel's a fightin' man.