

THE CRANACHANS

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Dualchas Bràigh Loch Abair.



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DEOCH-SLAINTE FIR-CHRAINEACHAN

Deoch-slàinte fir Bhràigh Loch-Abar:

Daoine sgairteil, reachdmhor, làidir—

Daoine smachdail, beachdmhor, buadhach,

'S iad daonnan uasal 'nàn nàdar—

Daoine glìce, fiosrach, iùmnsaicht,'

'S mòran cliù orr' anns gach àite.

Na-m biodh mo chomas mar mo dhùrachd,

Dh' fhaodainn an cliù 'clur na b' àirde.

IAIN MAC-CURAIG

FORWARD

This pamphlet is designed to preserve and broaden the knowledge of the remarkable Cranachan family that over many generations lived and farmed in the once well populated Glen Roy.

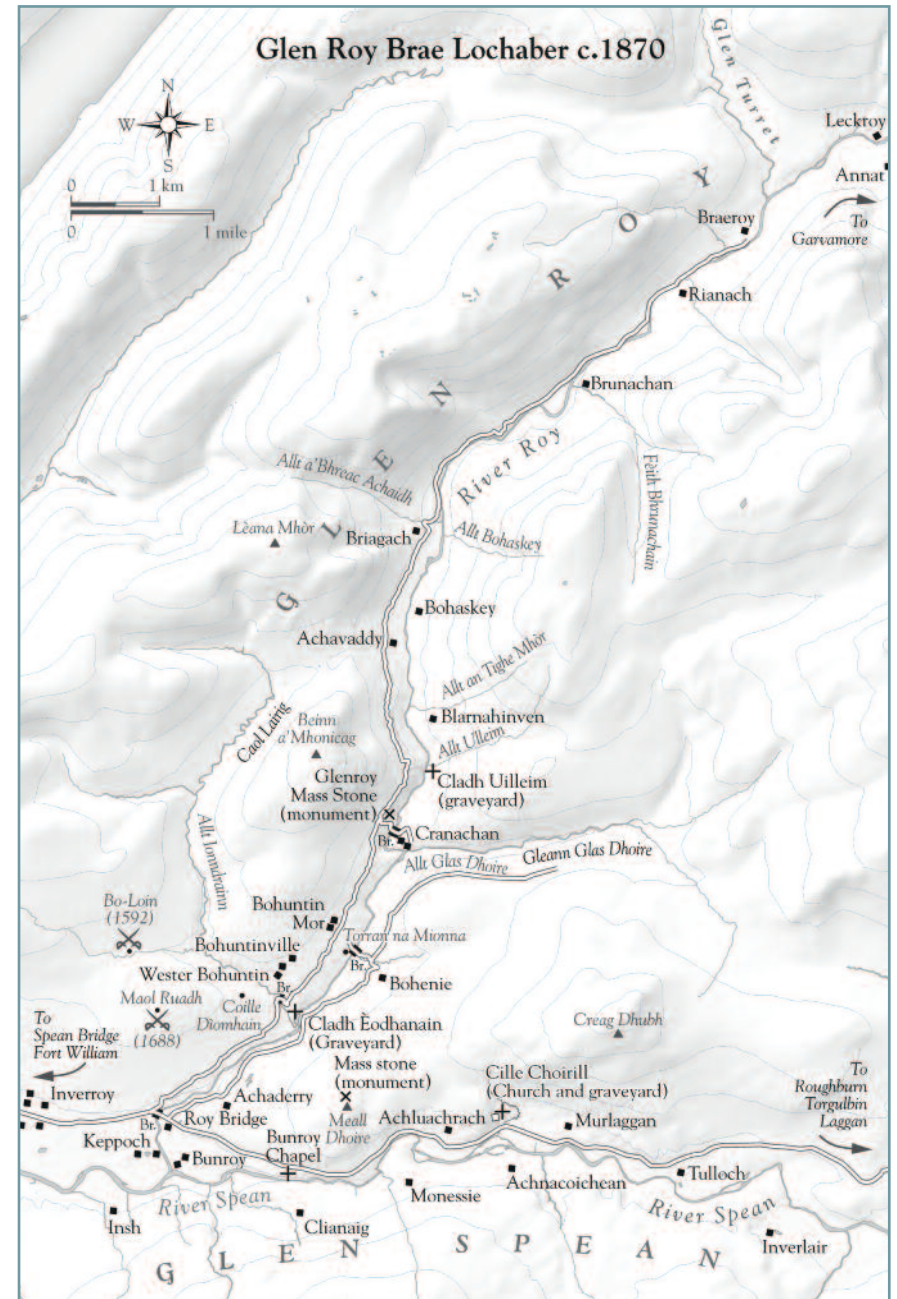
I have pulled together the information remembered and collated over several lifetimes. The three principal information sources were my father Rory MacDonald, Robert Macfarlane and Kenny Mackintosh, helped by comprehensive notes from the late Ann MacDonell. Prof. Ewan Macdonald provided assistance, as did Catherine Gillies in Cape Breton and Alex Gillespie. Interviews were conducted with Ishbel and Sally Campbell from Bohuntin and Tearlach Macfarlane from Glenfinnan. Thank you to them also Jo-Anne MacDonald for editing and Cecilia Campbell for layout and design. And to John Macdonald, Keppoch for the picture of Cranachan Farm and Peter Rose for the photograph of Cille Choirill.

INTRODUCTION

The West Highlands has a lot of history, each clachan and croft has its stories. Many interesting people have come from the glens, more often than not making their names in Glasgow, Canada or Australia rather than in our homeland.

In the middle of the 19c when emigration was at its peak, sheep were replacing cattle on the hills, clan battles had finally petered out and the train had yet to arrive to make travel feasible, there existed a family near Roy Bridge in Lochaber that achieved renown in London, Canada and Australia. This family were known as The Cranachans, named after their tenanted farm in Brae Roy. They were members of the Macdonald of Keppoch clan, living in Lochaber to the east of Fort William. One member, a nun, became Australia's first Saint, others were Catholic priests, another the biggest distiller in Scotland and a family of brothers became famous for their sporting prowess.

In the early 19c the Cranachans lived a way of life that is hard to imagine now, limited schooling at home, Gaelic the only language, children didn't wear shoes even in the snow, porridge oats and potatoes were the staple diet, families were large and close and in Lochaber almost everyone was a Catholic.



BACKGROUND

In 1795 Dr Donald (4th Cranachan) was given the tack (tenancy) of Cranachan and Blarnahinven for 9 years. He practiced medicine in Fort Augustus, near Inverness.

By 1804 Dr Donald was in partnership with his cousins, Alexander and Angus. In 1804 the tack was given to John Mackintosh Senior and over the next few years mention is made of Alexander and Angus as subtenants.

Angus Mòr MacDonald, (Mòr is Gaelic for big) the father of the renowned brothers, was given a formal lease of the two farms in 1824. There would have been no inherited money. He and his wife Isabell would have been as well or poorly off as the other 90% of people in the Highlands. Angus Mòr's first cousin was Long John, who went into business with his cousin, Angus Macdonald from Inch, who had received a licence to distill whisky. With a loan from Iain Bàn a' Gharbhath, Long John bought out Angus Inch, who emigrated.

Another cousin, Flora Macdonald, married Alexander MacKillop also from Roybridge, in Australia, and it was their daughter who we will read about later, Saint Mary MacKillop. Angus Mòr initially lived at Blarnahinven, on the south side of the River Roy, and probably built the original house at Cranachan a mile farther down the river. The oldest son, Angus, was 20 when his father became the legal tenant.

Cranachans originally had a lot of wee crofts — that's what it means, Crìon-Achaidhean. Anything with 'achan' in usually indicates field, as with

Brunachan. Crian-achan is the same as the like of Crianlarich - Crìon Laraich a small site. To make the big farm of Cranachan, there would have been a lot of crofters shifted, whether that be in the Cranachan's time or beforehand we don't know.

The family were farmers, no more than that. From a young age the boys would have risen early to gather the sheep, milk a cow or two, tend pigs, scythe oats or plant and harvest other crops, principally potatoes. There would have been many collie dogs. There is a story of Colin, one of the famous brothers getting so frustrated with his dog that he declared that he would round the sheep up himself. He vaulted the fence and ran around gathering them into the fank.

Their work would have been physically demanding, heaving hay into a loft for ten or twelve hours. walking a dozen miles across steep ground to gather sheep, and rounding up yearling calves. Building work involved lifting huge stones by hand. Cutting and carrying peat to the various houses in the Cranachan township would have been hard work too. As today farmers help each other and these incredibly strong and fit young men would have been in much demand to help out their neighbours in Bohuntin, Bohenie and beyond.

The Keppoch clan lands reached from the west of Badenoch to the lower reaches of the Spean River. The original basis of a clan was an extended family. The Keppochs were descended from the marriage of Alastair Carrach Macdonald to Margaret, a daughter of King Robert 11. Unfortunately Alastair was a fighting man and upset a later king and his lands were forfeited and transferred to the MacIntosh Chief. Thereafter the Keppoch Macdonalds 'held the land by the sword'.

The tacksmen would have been mainly Keppoch MacDonalds. However there were a great number of non Macdonalds who were also clan members. There were 30 families of MacGlasserich Campbells there at the time of the '45. From the 16th century there were, among others, Glencoe, Glengarry and Moidart MacDonalds, Boyles, Burkes, Stewarts, Mackintoshes, Camerons, MacArthurs, MacKillops, Kennedys, MacMasters, MacPhees, MacGillivrays, MacPhersons, MacNabs, Macinneses,

MacTavishes, Beatons and later Rankins, Gows, MacFarlanes and MacGregors.

The relationship with the Mackintosh chiefs ebbed and flowed. In 1688 the Macdonalds of Keppoch men had trounced the Mackintosh men at the Battle of Mulroy in Glen Roy which will not have been forgotten. In 1784 Sir Aeneas Mackintosh came to visit his Lochaber Estates and in his diary of the trip there is a thinly veiled feeling of contempt, even hostility towards his tenants. All leases were up for grabs to the highest bidder; he wanted rid of tacksmen. For the next twenty years rents were increased, sheep barons were granted the lands, the Keppoch chief's widow was removed from Keppoch House and the old tacksmen, including the Cranachans lost their lease. The people were moved into townships of Bohuntin, Bohenie and Inverroy. The Duke of Gordon was doing the same on neighbouring land but with more vigour.

In their early days, especially, the area would have been full of families, but due to evictions by the landowners, the potato blight and cholera epidemic that reached Lochaber in 1846, as well as overcrowding, mass emigration took place for a century from 1790. Some went to Melbourne in Australia and New Zealand but more to Nova Scotia, Canada, especially around Mabou, on the Island of Cape Breton where many who left the Braes settled. Angus Mòr would have said farewell to many cousins heading abroad.

A couple of generations later relationships with the landowner were much improved. The Inverness Courier of the 20th October 1870 reports of a Ball given by The Mackintosh for his Lochaber tenants at the Roy Bridge Drill Hall. 'Dancing was kept going with great spirit until six o'clock in the morning.' The Mackintosh actually singled out the Cranachans as one of his finest, oldest and most valued tenants around this time.

Salmon and deer were forbidden to be poached, or an axe used in the forest: tenants would have lost their lease. That said, there is an absolute certainty that venison and salmon were a welcome addition to the diet of those living in the glen. There is a story of the brothers spearing salmon as they ran up the falls into a pool called the Coighleum. And another

that when the salmon were running in the river, they would go down, strip off, dive in and grab them by the tail. This would have supplemented the porridge, occasional beef and mutton, potatoes, apples, plums, cabbages and eggs. The Cranachans would have eaten relatively well. Perhaps the pudding called cranachan originated here as there was plenty of wild raspberries, oats, cream and whisky. Illegal whisky distilling was widespread at this time and there are still people in the area who remember that 'there were 8 smokes in the Glen'. The smoke coming from the fires heating the hidden stills.

The language would have been Gaelic. But the men of the families would pick up English as they went to Fort William or further afield to sell livestock, or to sign up for the army. There is mention of a school in Bohuntin in 1802. There was definitely a Church of Scotland school at Blairour in Spean Bridge, which welcomed Catholic children but the Catholic families were reluctant to allow their children to go there, for fear of indoctrination. There is mention of a schoolmaster in Bohuntin called Roderick Kennedy at some time. There is no correspondence written by the brothers, so it is not known if they could read or write, although it seems likely they could as their cousin, Fr. Coll, would have been well educated at the seminary and Long John was literate. The Education Act 1872 would have seen establishment of the state schools. Prior to that only those who could afford it were educated by local teachers; quite often just one child in a family.

The 1841 census lists a housekeeper named Margaret Macarthur at Cranachan. She was still there at the 1881 census, aged 70. It is likely that she was the sister of John's (one of the brothers) widow. In 1861 there were two 'servants' in the house and a shepherd and cattleman employed.

The kilt (fèileadh mòr and fèileadh beag) was banned in Scotland in 1746 but was later worn again from 1790 following pressure from The Highland Society of London. The Highland Chiefs, out to impress Queen Victoria, liked to show themselves and their tenants in kilts. Portraits of highlanders at that time, such as Raeburn's portrait of McDonnell of

Glengarry, and the Kenneth Macleay watercolours commissioned by Queen Victoria of her Scottish retainers and clansmen, 'The Highlanders of Scotland,' feature a series of magnificent men wearing kilts. It is unlikely Angus Mòr would have owned a kilt, but his sons were photographed wearing them, possibly paid for by their cousin, Long John, or the Mackintosh chief who would have wanted their kinsmen/tenants to stand out. Travelling photographers would arrive with clothing that could be rented for the photo shoot.

It was said that at the time of the Napoleonic war, around 1810, that a company of a hundred soldiers could be raised from young men in Glen Roy alone. The local regiment of choice was the Gordon Highlanders, mainly because the tenants wanted to keep on the right side of the landowner, and the Duke of Gordon owned the top of the Roy and the land along the River Spean. The Mackintosh Volunteers were based at The Drill Hall in Roy Bridge. This was a territorial unit, and one of the brothers, nicknamed 'the Captain', served with them. It is surprising that none of the Cranachan brothers joined the regular army as at that time a significant proportion of men from the Highlands did.

At the end of 1899, Long John's grandson, Captain Willie Macdonald, raised a Roy Bridge section to join the Lovat Scouts to fight in the Boer War. Soldiers could earn as much in a day in the army as a week at home. From the time of the Great War in 1914, the Cameron Highlanders was the obvious regiment for young men to enlist in.





CRANACHAN HOUSE

What can be seen now is a two storey stone building with a slate roof. It has a large kitchen, a scullery on the south side, a sitting room, two bedrooms upstairs and a box room, along with two rooms with a separate outside door.

A substantial building when it was built around 1820. Facing north, the house has a commanding view across to Bohuntin and the lower half of Glen Roy. Now there is a fine stand of Scots Pine trees around the settlement. To the east side of the building is a significant steading that would have had milk cows down below and hay in the loft.

To the west is a large stone and slated stables for horses. In front of the house are a number of other stone buildings, one for sure was a piggery. There may have been other heather thatched dwelling houses too, judging by the number of people reported living there in the census. To the west is a significant walled garden — the trees in it still bear bitter wild damsons.

Before the council road was built, the track up the glen was along the south of the river rather the north where the road is now, and with the dense population in the area then there would have been much to'ing and fro'ing close to Cranachan. There was a ford across the river, as well as a foot bridge 200 metres up the Roy from where the vehicle bridge foundations are now, which allowed people to get across to Bohuntin. Drowning in the river was not uncommon.



THE CRANACHAN FAMILY

It is said that the family lived at Cranachan for 300 years. We do know that they lived at times in Scotus in Knoydart, Torgulbin at the start of the track through to Corrou and at Garvamore on the old Wade road from Laggan to Fort Augustus. Angus Macdonald, known as the 1st of Cranachan got the tack (lease) of Cranachan in 1701. His son Donald was appointed a 'sheriff' by the Clan Chief Alistair Keppoch in 1744, to help control cattle-lifting. We know John 3rd of Cranachan had the tack in 1774, whereupon it went to a cousin, Ranald Macdonald. Technically the 4th of Cranachan, Dr Donald, then had the lease. The Mackintosh took the lease back in 1804 and gave it to a family member of his own, which was not a success.

In 1824 a nephew of John 3rd, Angus Mòr, got the tenancy, and it remained with his sons the famous Cranachan brothers until the last one, Donald, died in 1908. However Cranachan is still owned and farmed by a Macdonald today.

Angus Mòr of Cranachan, b.1767 d.1833, married in 1803 Isabell Mackintosh. They lived at Blarnahinven at first. Her family came to Lochaber c.1540 as a tocher (dowry) when Keppoch married the daughter of Mackintosh of Mackintosh. They were also as a rule very tall people. It was unusual to find one under 6ft. It was Isabell's father, the tenant of Cranachan, who Angus Mòr and his brother Alexander offered a vast £60 and 30 shillings 'surplus rent', i.e. over and above what was due, before taking over the lease properly from Sir Aeneas Mackintosh in 1824.

Sheep farming must have been an excellent business at the time. Isabell's grandmother was living at Cranachan with stipulations: she was allowed a proper amount of hay for her cow, one fourth of the barn for her peat, sufficient ground for potatoes according to the quantity of dung belonging to her, and the use of a horse for spreading and dunging.

Angus Mòr and his wife Isabell had four daughters and six sons, the first, Angus, born in 1804 and the last, Donald, dying over a century later, in 1908. Mary may have been the only daughter who married. She wed John Cameron and was widowed early. Janet died aged 32. Little is known about Margaret and Isabella.

Five of the 'Cranachan Lads' as they were called then lived together as bachelors, and became renowned for their athletic abilities. They were known to be exceptionally tall and strong. Due to their father's success in gaining the tenancy they also had a substantial and it seems prosperous farming business, which would have been well known. Mother (now Saint) Mary MacKillop visited them in 1873 and talks about five (sic) bachelor brothers. What is little known is there was a sixth brother, the oldest who went awry.

Angus b.6th May 1804, d.1882. His name was on the Cranachan lease but taken off it. Married Ann Kennedy. See note below. Reference to him being at Achavaddy about 1860 and being 'suspect' with financial dealings! 'Married to the post in Mandally's daughter and a worthless woman she was'.

John, b.10th Dec 1810, d.1888. Married Mary MacArthur who died soon afterwards. Saved Archie by breaking the bulls neck. * Described in the Dundee Advertiser 'one time champion athlete of Scotland.'

Archibald, b.18th Mar 1814, d.1892. The strong man amongst them, appears in the Inverness Courier as an expert with the heavy hammer and the caber. He attended the fete in London with his brother Colin and came 3rd in the 20lb hammer. Crippled with arthritis, with two sticks in later years.

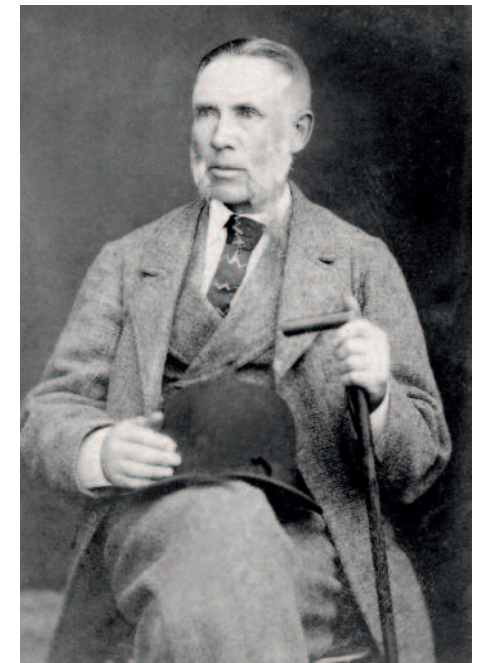
Alexander b.27th Sept 1815 d.1902. Actually called Alistair, said to have been born 'at top of the hills' in the summer sheiling of Fèith Bhrunachain near Cranachan.



Top from left: The Cranachans. Colonel Willie Macdonald, Colin Macdonald, Dr.Donald Macdonald, Donald Macdonald, Jack Macdonald. *Front from left:* Canon MacDougal, Alistair Macdonald, Fr (later Archbishop) Donald Mackintosh.

Colin, Donald and Alistair were three of the 'bachelor brothers', Dr Donald was their cousin who took over the Cranachan lease, Colonel Willie and Jack were grandsons of 'Long John', Canon Mackintosh was later consecrated as Archbishop, and Canon MacDougal was parish priest.

Previous page, left & page 20: A series of studio photographs of the Cranachan brothers.



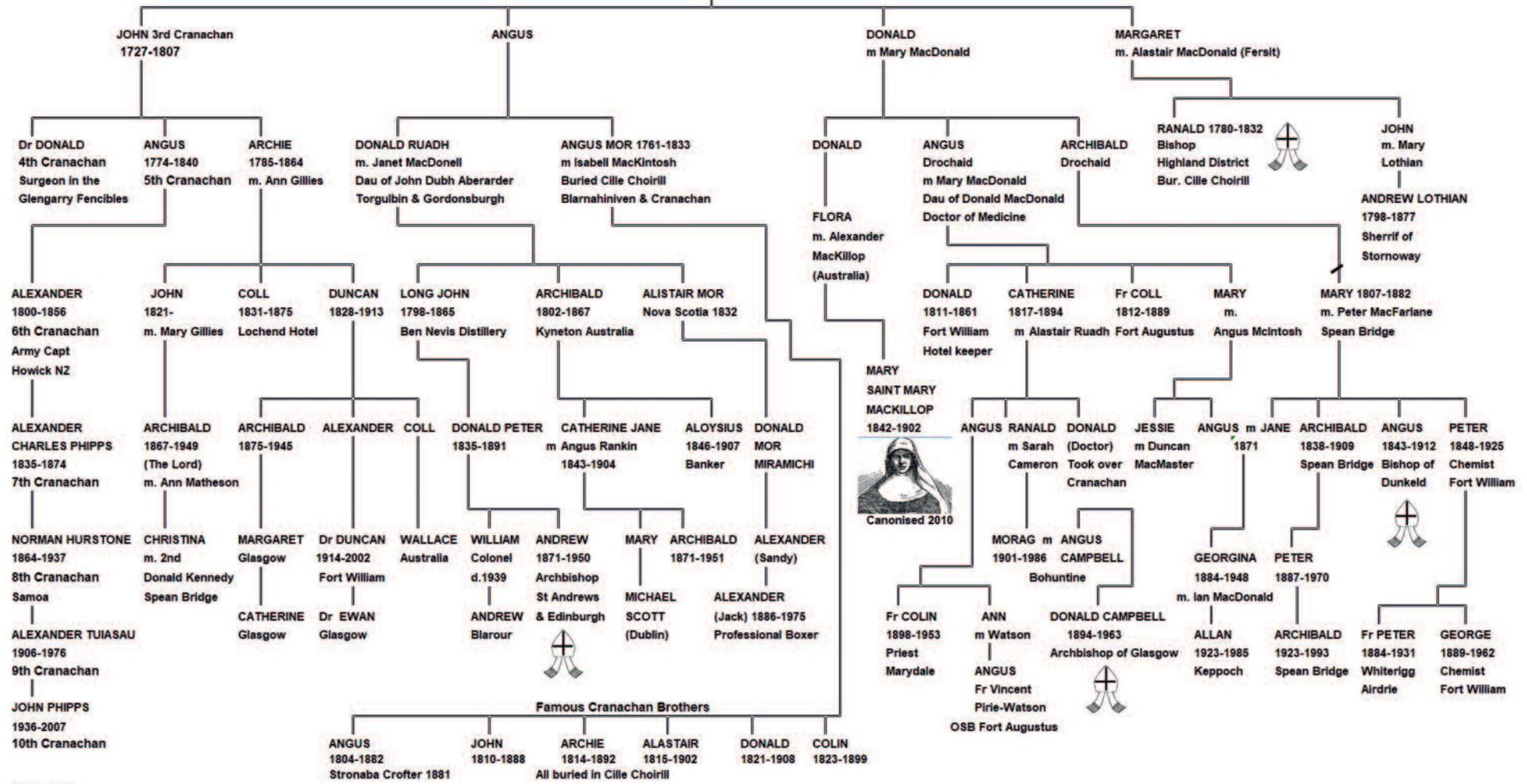


CRANACHANS

SEPT OF THE MACDONNELLS OF KEPPOCH

ANGUS 1st Cranachan
3rd son of Donald 1st Aberarder. Angus
M'Donald of the two penny land of
Crennachan, 30th January 1722

DONALD 2nd CRANACHAN
1750-159 papers includes "Donald McDonald of Krenachan"



Disclaimer:-
Apologies for the many omissions; due to space limitations, concentrations on main family lines and lack of available information.



Donald b.26th April 1821, d.1908. Carried the honorary rank 'The Captain,' MacIntosh Volunteers, a territorial unit. When last of the 'lads' died he was carried the 7 miles from Cranachan to Cille Choirill to join his brothers and their ancestors.

Colin b.30th Jan 1823 d.1899. All round athlete. Attended the Caledonian Athletic Sports attended by Queen Victoria at Crystal Palace in 1849, won the Gold medal for having won the largest number of prizes at the fete. He was a runner, threw the hammer and tossed the caber. The Times of the day stated at the finish that he was 'like a stag from his native hills'. The Edinburgh Evening News on 17th July 1899 reported him as attending the great wool fair at Inverness aged 72, and dying in a hotel.

The brothers attended various highland games. In 1847 at Laggan in the presence of Queen Victoria, Archibald won the shot-put, Colin won



Above: Sketch from the Illustrated London News. Archibald and his brother Colin competed at the Caledonian Athletic Sports attended by Queen Victoria at Crystal Palace in 1849, Colin won the Gold medal for having won the largest number of prizes at the fete. He was a runner, threw the hammer and tossed the caber. The Times of the day stated at the finish that he was 'like a stag from his native hills'

the 16lb hammer and also the hill race-with some ease. At the Highland Society in the same year these two brothers came 1st and 2nd in heavy and 15lb hammer. Archibald won both stone-putts and Colin won the hill race once again. A newspaper report describes him 'coming to the finish almost as fresh as he started.'

John was 37 at the time of these games, but he, too, was remarkable. His wins aren't recorded but an undated clipping from the Dundee Advertiser writes 'it may be mentioned that John Macdonald was at one time champion athlete of Scotland.' The book 'A boyhood in An

Gearasdan' says one of the Cranachans casually arrived at the Northern Meeting, took part with the champions in the heavy events and easily beat them.

While the brothers would have been relatively comfortably off, it is unlikely they could afford to go to London, Cowal and other far off sporting events. It is possible that The Mackintosh sponsored them, or more likely their cousins Long John and his son DP, who were building a thriving whisky business.

Highland Games seem to have become formalized in the Braemar area in the mid 19th century. However, earlier, around 1805 the Glengarry chief founded the short-lived Society of the True Highlanders to showcase what he considered traditional highland sports. One of the challenges of strength was to rip the leg off a dead stirk (a yearling bullock or heifer).

Shinty

Shinty was the game of the time and Brae Lochaber were amongst the best teams. One newspaper clipping reports of a 16 aside match between the Glengarry Clubs and Brae Lochaber played at Laggan, with the Braes winning 28-3. 'The finest player on the field was undoubtedly Donald Macdonald (Cranachan) whose play will long be remembered by the Invergarry folk.'

This Donald is unlikely to be the 5th son as he would have been 60 at the time, but a cousin, Doctor Donald Macdonald, married to Jessie MacNair from Bohenie, who moved to Cranachan and took over when the brothers were old. However there is an earlier undated Kingussie reference: 'the priest was there with the Lochaber players and they had three brothers called Cranachan after the farm where they worked. They had long flowing beards, were beautiful (shinty) players, and as fit as stags.'

Following a match between The Braes and Badenoch there was a dinner in the steading at Keppoch where the players sat along a long table in alternate seats and a piper played walking along the top of the table after the meal was finished.

Strong Men

Lochaber abounded with noted strong men back in the day; why the Cranachans stood out is not clear. In the 17c there was Alastair Mòr, from Bohuntin. He led a gang of 'broken men' who served as hired soldiery, cattle lifters and 'protection men'. He was described in a dispute 'as the tallest man in Scotland and not less celebrated for his brave exploits than his prodigious height.' At a trial he was convicted of rebellion and a variety of other offences and a verdict of death (which he escaped) was approved by the Scottish Privy Council.



'Feats of strength'

Bella, the boys' mother from Bohuntin was a big woman. Other strong men from the Braes about this time were Ian Mòr, Garvamore, Fr Coll who defended the Vatican against a Roman mob and the first cousin of the brothers, Long John. Long John, the distiller, was described by a visitor as 'the tallest man he had ever met and of incomparable physique.' A Canadian cousin, Alex (Jack) MacDonald, Miramichi was a contender for the world heavyweight boxing title in the 1920s.

In 1995 Rory MacDonald wrote an article in Lochaber Life about the strong men and athletes of the area, as well as the Cranachans. These include Charles McLean of Fort William, born in 1874 and A.A Cameron known as 'Cameron of Muccomir', born on Loch Treig side in 1877, who at one time held 16 records at Highland games. Between the wars were the three famous Kennedy brothers from Lochyside who tended to be 1st, 2nd and 3rd in their chosen events. Hector MacGregor from Spean Bridge then Louis Stewart of Corpach and Alan McEachern excelled in recent years.

Men would work a full day cutting peat, scything hay or building walls.

Then perhaps they would play shinty, or race against other youngsters. Outside Inns would be large stones, where the men would challenge each other to heave over a hanging branch or toss a distance; competing strength and endurance was in their blood.

The story goes that Colin Cranachan, one of the brothers, declared that he would bring a red deer stag to the ground. He lay at a pass in the hill and when one came by he threw himself on it. He ended up getting dragged along, clinging to its hind leg. It was said that 'he was never the same man again.'

An article in the Inverness Courier dated 11th January 1855 reports of John driving a horse and cart across the swollen River Roy. Two local boys clung onto the back of the cart, unknown to John. The horse staggered a little which so terrified one boy that he lost his hold and was being washed down the river. His brother swam to his rescue. John happened to look around and see what was happening. He too jumped in, getting washed down the river. A newspaper reported 'Macdonald, nothing daunted by his perilous situation, succeeded in getting hold of one of the boys, while the other, under water, caught hold of one of his legs... of great muscular strength, after much exertion, he got them both to land.'

Over their lifetime the brothers were often in the newspapers, the following incident was reported widely, with a similar article to that of the Dundee Advertiser in New Zealand papers. It must be noted that at that time, 1883, John Macdonald was a 73 year old man.

Extraordinary Feat

A few days ago Mr Archibald MacDonald, one of five (sic) brothers who occupy Cranachan farm, was passing through a field accompanied by a shepherd, when they were chased by a bull. The shepherd escaped, but Mr Macdonald could not run, he having suffered a good deal from rheumatism, and now being obliged to use crutches. The bull approached and began to attack him, he doing his best to keep him at bay with the aid of his crutches. Mr. John

Macdonald, an elder brother, happened to be near by at the time, and having heard the cries ran to the rescue. In his hurry he forgot to bring any instrument with him with which to fell the brute, but it occurred to him that if he caught the bull by the horns he might keep him from doing more mischief till some help arrived. Accordingly, arriving at the spot, he caught the animal by the horns, and with one supreme effort gave a sudden twist to the head, dislocating the neck by his jerk, and in a moment the animal lay helpless at his feet. Fortunately Archibald was not seriously injured. It may be mentioned that John Macdonald was at one time champion athlete of Scotland.

The Glengarry Assault

Dr Donald, the 4th of Cranachan, was a doctor in Fort Augustus and surgeon to the Glengarry Fencibles (as well as tenant of Cranachan). In 1798 he had a violent row with his commanding officer, Alasdair Ranaldson of Glengarry, and a feud commenced. In Fort Augustus on the 30th September 1805, 'Glengarry's following, in his presence, badly beat up the doctor'. On the 23rd June 1807, the Court of Session awarded the victim £2,000 damages, plus legal costs. A massive sum in those days. The doctor was a very handsome man. Glengarry's agent wrote that day that 'the ladies took a great interest for the doctor'.

Boyle the Tailor

The local expression 'As clumsy as Boyle the tailor' comes from the story of Boyle who cut off his own head with his scythe while attempting to spear a salmon in the River Roy below Achavaddy.

Shooting

There exists an account in 1856 by a 16 year old Donald Cameron of a white hare shoot in Glen Roy with muzzle loading guns. Sixty hare were shot within two hours. Those present included Donald, Colin and Alexander Cranachan, Fr Coll, the priest described as a great hunter from his earliest days, and his nephew Angus MacIntosh listed as gamekeeper.



With them was Ranald MacDonell of Keppoch House who had the shooting rights on the land.

Note: The oldest son, Angus, left home before 1837, marrying Ann Kennedy from Mandally 'a most worthless woman'. He returned in 1861 penniless. His brothers pushed for him to be shepherd at Achavaddy and when the tenants of Bohuntin were not happy with Angus describing him as 'a useless article', his brothers insisted on him staying. Thus 'causing Bohuntin v Cranachan physical violence'. He was described as being 'suspect with financial dealings' as he came away with 300 pounds (as seen by the Bohuntin Tenants). He managed to linger until 1873, then he and Ann flitted 'never to come back again'. He was subsequently listed as crofter in Stronaba. Angus was hardly ever referred to, the Cranachans are described as five athletic brothers. His name is on his parents' gravestone in Cille Choirill, but it's not known if he is buried there. Source Stuarts notes/Roderick Kennedy notes.



CATHOLICISM

It is impossible to write about Lochaber, and the Braes in particular without writing about the people's adherence to the Catholic faith. When Catholicism was proscribed in 1560, fierce prosecution prevented Catholics their faith until the 1829 Emancipation Act. Illegal mass services would be held outside. There are two mass stones in Glen Roy, one at Meall Doire, above Achaderry, where Glen Roy opens into Glen Spean, with a carved Latin cross on it. The second is at the top of the track leading from Bohuntin down to Cranachan, known as the Glen Roy or Cranachan Mass Stone, a fragment of a former altar.

Mr. Alexander Mackintosh of Bohuntin states that he had heard it said that only one mass was celebrated at the Cranachan Road Mass Stone and that was done to lay a ghost that had been heard in the burn. He told of Aonghas Mór MacDonald, who happened on one occasion to pass this spot on his way home to Cranachan. Passing near the stone, he heard voices saying: 'We won't let Aonghas Mór pass'; and there were other voices crying: 'We will let Aonghas Mór pass'. Aonghas Mór, coming to the shrewd conclusion that the parties were equally divided and that he presumably had the casting vote, shouted: 'If there are as many with me as are against me, Aonghas Mór will go past'. Thereupon he made his way past the stone with great difficulty and reached home in a state of extreme exhaustion. The latter stone had rolled down the steep brae, and a delightful letter from James Hutton exists of a September day in 1879 when it was replaced on the road where it now sits. Alexander

From top left: Fr Coll Macdonald. Saint Mary Mackillop. Cille Choirill Church.

Mackintosh of Bohuntin (as above paragraph), Archibald, Colin and Donald Cranachan were among those who completed the work. A bottle of 'Long John' was drawn for the ceremony, 'The first bumper being poured over the stone, and after the healths of the Mackintosh and the Gentlemen present, we had a few selfish toasts amongst ourselves.' D.C Macpherson, a native of Bohuntin, a historian and Gaelic scholar engraved the host and chalice on the stone shortly after that time. A small silver cruet as used by a priest was found in the burn nearby.

It is remarkable how the Braes have produced so many clerics; since 1800 these can include Saint Mary MacKillop (through her mother who emigrated to Australia); Archbishop Campbell d.1963 of Glasgow; Archbishop Andrew MacDonald d.1950 of Edinburgh; Archbishop Donald Mackintosh. d.1919 of Glasgow; Bishop Ranald MacDonald d.1832 buried at Cille Choirill; Fr Coll MacDonald d.1889 was another much loved highland priest; Bishop Alexander MacDonald d.1941 from Inverness, Cape Breton, then Victoria, B.C., whose family were from Rianach; and of course our current Bishop Joe Toal.

There was a church at Bunroy, built in 1826 and before that a chapel at Achluachrach that 'fell about the ears of the congregation' in 1813. The current St Margaret's church, Roy Bridge was consecrated in 1929. Two miles east of Roybridge is the pre 15c. church of Cille Choirill (outside back cover). It is in the graveyard here that most of the individuals named in this pamphlet are buried. The church was rebuilt from a ruin largely from funds raised by the people in Inverness County, Cape Breton, in the 1930s. It was reconsecrated by the Canadian Bishop Alexander MacDonald.

Notes on related parties

The distillers. Long John Macdonald, b.1798 d.1865 aged 59, distiller in Fort William, was first cousin of the brothers. He was 'the tallest man I ever beheld... of incomparable physique'. Tasked to assist in the extirpation of a plague of illicit stills. His son Donald Peter, known as DP, inherited aged 21 and built the business up to be the largest malt whisky

company is Scotland with a pier, housing for his workers and the ship 'The Ben Nevis' to supply the distillery. In 1878 he employed 230 people. His sons Jack and William took over the business in 1891. Colonel Willie commanded The Lovat Scouts.

Archbishop Donald Alphonsus Campbell b.1894 d.1963, born in Bohuntin. Went to Blairs College, ordained in 1920. Appointed Bishop of Argyll and the Isles in 1939 then six years later became Archbishop of Glasgow. Shortly after there was a catastrophic fire at St Peter's College Bearsden which needed to be rebuilt along with the need for a large number of churches in his fast growing diocese.

Archbishop Andrew Macdonald O.S.B, b.1871 d.1950, the third son of DP the distiller. For ten years he was Abbot of Fort Augustus Abbey, before being consecrated in 1929 as Archbishop of St Andrews and Edinburgh. He led the Scottish church through the difficult 21 years of the Depression, the war and the difficult post-war years; always ready to speak out on social issues particularly the dangers of atheistic Communism. An obituary described him as 'a great priest... abounding in vitality, wide sympathies and above all vision.'

Fr Coll Macdonald, b.1811 d.1889 born in Leckroy. A late vocation saw him spend five years in Rome, followed by spells in Canna, Knoydart, Fort William and Fort Augustus. During a rebellion in Rome this 'big priest' seized an iron bar to defend St Peter's, being described as fearless and 'wild spoken'. It was in Knoydart that he became renowned when over four years from 1851 there was wholesale evictions, over a thousand people were burnt out of their homes by the wife of MacDonell of Glengarry. Fr Coll exerted himself hugely, providing food, clothing and safe harbour in his garden as well as organising a relief fund for the people. In Fort William he raised the money and built a church and presbytery in Gordon Square in 1868.

Archbishop Donald Aloysius Mackintosh b.1845 d.1919. Born at Bohuntin to Angus Mackintosh and Catherine Grant. Ordained in 1871. Diocesan Inspector of schools, Vicar General of the diocese of Glasgow, Domestic Prelate to the Pope, and Provost of the Cathedral Chapter.

Instrumental in the formulation of the Catholic Education Act of 1908.
Archbishop of Glasgow 1912-1919

Archie MacDonald, Long John's older brother, emigrated to Australia in 1850. Catherine Jane Archie's daughter, married Angus Rankin, also from a Braes family, one of 5 brothers, in 1869, she was 24 and he was 49. They had a sheep station near Tumut in NSW, Australia. One of their children, Archibald, founded his own law firm, chaired many companies, flew his own plane and received a CBE. He died in 1951. His children were Angus, Margaret, Donald and Suzanne Catherine.

Saint Mary MacKillop b.1842 d.1909. Born in Melbourne, Australia to Flora nee MacDonald and her husband Alexander MacKillop. Saint Mary was sanctified in Rome in 2010, Australia's first Saint. Saint Mary founded a teaching order called The Sisters of St. Joseph of the Sacred Heart that expanded across Australia and New Zealand, including running an orphanage and refuge for women in distress. She was even briefly excommunicated by her bishop. Saint Mary's mother emigrated to Australia, her grandfather Donald was from the Braes, a grandson of Donald 2nd of Cranachan. Her father Alexander MacKillop was also from a well established Brae Lochaber family. She wrote to the Sisters in November 1873 of her visit 'to a wild grand glen, the home of five(sic) wonderful and most eccentric Highlanders, all brothers and none married'. And 'the moment I saw John Cranachan in church, I felt I was near one of my own'. She stayed with the distiller D.P Macdonald in Fort William.

Maighster Iain, Fr John MacDonald, his mother was a Cranachan. The priest in the Braes from 1721-1761 when it was illegal to say mass. 'When I entered this spacious country there were few of our persuasion in it (only three families were still catholic), but God has been pleased to make up my weak endeavours & pains for leading them into the way of salvation. I am above thirty years in it in daily motion walking amongst the people and skipping over hills and valleys through heath and wood, mire, puddles of water in pursuit of my purposes, having my food from them sharing of what they had themselves each day & night.' His last pastoral act was to baptize Angus Mór, three days before his death, while

stretched on the sick bed Alistair Mór, Long John's brother, left Scotland in 1832, following his oldest son, Donald, who went to Cape Breton in 1824. His wife Isabel died on the ship.

In 1825 the Great Fire of Miramichi in New Brunswick, consumed 16,000 square kilometres of forest. Donald, a big man, went to the Miramichi and saved enough money to send for his family and buy a farm in Mull River, near Mabou N.S., where they set up a sawmill. The family became known as the Miramichi's. Donald married Catherine MacDonald and they had eleven children. Donald's son Alexander, known as Sandy, married Catherine MacEachen and had 12 children. Two, John A, 7, and Margaret, 5, were killed when their house caught fire on Good Friday, 1900. Sandy was severely burned trying to save them. Sandy's son Alex (Jack) a professional boxer was a contender for the world heavy-weight title. 'I almost got a shot at (world heavyweight champion) Sharkey once. All I had to do was beat one guy, but I couldn't do it'. Alex's brothers, Joe and Dan S., stayed on the farm and ran the mill. Joe's wife, Mary Bell, died young in 1942 and their family of six sons and a daughter were separated. Dan's son, Donald, was the last Miramichi to work the farm.

The role of Inverness County, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia
It is estimated that somewhere between 30,000 to 50,000 people made the perilous crossing to resettle in the wild forests of Cape Breton. Prince Edward Island had already attracted settlers from Moidart, Morar and the Isles but when Michael Mór MacDonald explored the western coast of Cape Breton in 1775, many subsequent immigrants decided that the free land available on the island was far more favourable than the tenant leases of Prince Edward Island. He even wrote the first Gaelic song in Cape Breton at Judique –"O s'alainn an t-aite" (Fair Is the Place) to highlight the beauties of this new land. Inverness County soon became a magnet for many thousands of Highland immigrants. The climate in Cape Breton would have been quite a shock to these newcomers with dense woodlands, harsh winters, heavy snow and thick ice along the coast and

inner waterways. The 'Gloomy Forest' described by the Bard MacLean was a major challenge as the Highlanders learned to wield the axe, build cabins and clear their first fields for crops.

For the Beatons, Camerons, Campbells, MacDonalds, and Rankins of Lochaber, the growing hamlet in the hills of Mabou, Cape Breton, must have reminded them of home and so they settled, preserving their language, Catholic faith, culture and music. It is still home to a lively and thriving community with deep roots both in Scotland and New Scotland.



DEOCH-SLAINTE FIR-CHRAINEACHAN.

Deoch-slàinte fir Bhràigh Loch-Abar:
Daoine sgairteil, reachdmhor, làidir—
Daoine smachdail, beachdmhor, buadhach,
'S iad daonnan uasal 'nàn nàdar—
Daoine glìce, fiosrach, iùnsaicht,'
'S mòran cliù orr' anns gach àite.
Na-m biodh mo chomas mar mo dhùrachd,
Dh' fhaodainn àn cliù 'clur na b'airde.

Iain Mac-Curaig

A TOAST TO THE CRANACHAN MEN

Here's to the Brae Lochaber men.
Vigorous men, robust, strong,
Commanding men, perceptive, talented,
They are always noble by nature,
Wise men, knowledgeable, learned,
Great is their renown in every place,
If my abilities matched my respect
I might raise their fame even higher.

Iain Kennedy

An Duanaire, Donald MacPherson, 1868

