Leaving Tiree
by
Brian Anderson

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I have often wondered how they felt, as their boat pushed off from the shore of Tiree in 1803. Were they thinking about what they were leaving behind? Did tears stain their eyes as they parted from loved ones? I can only imagine the heartache. This had been their home; now they were leaving it for an unknown land. My MacLean family - Allan MacLean, Mary his wife, three children (one more would be born at Kirkcudbrightshire), and Mary MacDonald, Allan's mother in law - made their way from Tiree to Mull, joining other Gaelic speaking families at Tobermory in order to emigrate to the New World.

Allan MacLean of Kenovay, Tiree had approached Thomas Douglas, the 5th Earl of Selkirk, regarding the prospect of joining a group of poor Highlanders and Hebrideans selected by Selkirk to become part of a settlement in Upper Canada. Selkirk, who originally wanted to establish the Upper Canada settle-ment at the Falls of St. Mary (later Sault Ste. Marie) had, after failing to secure the land, opted for a section of land he toured in the Western District of Upper Canada near Lake St. Clair. The settlers were ready to leave Scotland, but before they could sail, word came that Napoleon had ships out in the waters to sink British vessels. So, in his wisdom, Selkirk had the settlers spend about a year at his estate (they were put to work on his island estate of St. Mary's Isle).

Finally, in May of 1804, the emigrants boarded the Oughton, and left for Canada. They would arrive at Montreal in July of 1804 and at Lachine, Quebec, on July 19th 1804. The travelers would then make their way to a point above the Lachine Rapids to board other craft to take them through the great lakes to their destination in Southwestern Ontario. The families finally arrived at the Baldoon Settlement on September 5, 1804. But what they found was not the dry land that Selkirk had seen on his tour. Instead they found themselves in a mosquito infested swamp, flooded by recent rains. And then, the tragedies for the MacLeans (and other Settlers) soon began.

The settlers arrived to discover that not only was the land swampy, and infested with mosquitoes, but they also did not have houses to inhabit. The settlers had to put up tents and shelters to weather the continuous rains. The result was that by November 1804, fourteen settlers had died of Malaria (by the end of 1804 that figure would rise to twenty-two). One of the individuals who died was Mary MacLean's mother, Mary MacDonald. She is referred to in the correspondence between Alexander McDonnell (the appointed manager of Baldoon) and the Earl of Selkirk as "Henrietta McDonald mother in law of Allan McLean." The illness was to become so severe among the settlers that McDonnell had to evacuate them the following year to Sandwich (one family, the McKenzies remained because they were too sick to travel). The malaria outbreak among the settlers must have been so severe that Alex McDonnell in his correspondence with the Earl, indicated that of the men, only my ancestor Allan MacLean was able, or willing to work. Alex must have taken a liking to Allan MacLean, because he is never portrayed in a bad light by McDonnell (who used to complain about the settlers' lack of character, and work ethic –mind you, McDonnell was more interested in McDonnell (and his career), than a Scottish Settlement near the United States).

The settlers finally began to recover and received their allotted land as indentured servants of the Earl. Allan MacLean also received his allotted portion of the land the Earl had acquired from the government. However, Allan MacLean was the only settler who had not been indentured to the Earl, but had made some sort of arrangement with the Earl to pay for the land (as well as for his passage to the Settle-ment). Some of this obviously involved labour. Selkirk's Papers indicate that Allan was working for the Earl. The misery for the MacLeans continued however. The land they were given by the allotment "below Little Bear Creek" was deemed poor land, and another location was sought for the family. It seems even the later land (it is possible that it was the same land and Allan was not able to move) was plagued by misfortune also, as McDonnell in 1812 indicated in his correspondence that the survey had been messed up. As a result of this mistake, new deeds would have to be issued for MacLean, and some of the other settlers.

At this point, everything seemed to have settled down for the settlers, but soon the entire settlement would be thrust into a conflict that would change them forever. The War of 1812 broke out, and the young settlement was a nice target for the American troops who would invade, camp, and loot the settlement (at least twice). Allan MacLean, and the other male settlers, soon joined the Kent Militia, and entered the fray. Sadly, not all the settlers survived the conflict. A short time after the battle of River Raisin at the end of January 1813, Allan MacLean became a "casualty" of the conflict. He was killed on February 1, 1813 (I do not know if it was in an attack, or the result of wounds sustained in an attack).

Mary MacLean must have been heartbroken when she received word that her husband had died. The government, for their part, placed Mary on a pension which gave her a little income during, and after, the conflict. But her woes were not yet over. The Americans were not the only troops who crashed the site of the Baldoon Settlement. The British native allies also took advantage of the amenities of Baldoon. After losing her husband in the conflict, this next atrocity must have ripped her heart right out. The native troops took her young cow, her potatoes, and then in the process burned her two houses. After the conflict was over, Mary would put a claim in for her losses. She would only put a claim in for 19 pounds, 5 shillings. The first level of the claim process would allow her 18 pounds for the losses in 1815. However, something went wrong, and she was still fighting for compensation in 1824.

The Baldoon Settlement basically came to an end by 1818, but Mary MacLean, and her family were still living there until 1826 when they finally moved to a location that would become a large portion of the future town of Wallaceburg.

Leaving Tiree must have been difficult for the MacLeans. The tragedies that followed them must have been incredibly painful! However, it is because of their sacrifice that our family is here today. Their hopes for a new life in Canada have been achieved in their many descendants. It is because they came to Baldoon, that I, their descendant, can imagine how they felt when they left Tiree!

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Brian Anderson was born in Wallaceburg, Ontario, and is pastor of a Baptist Church in his home town. He is married, and has three children. He is a descendant of a number of Scottish families, including the MacLean family of Tiree. His interest in genealogy began at an early age, but really took off with the passing of some of the older generations of his family.