They Came From Tiree

by
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CHAPTER SEVEN
THE ONTARIO SETTLEMENTS

The Emigrant Communities

After their arrival in Montreal or Quebec many of the Tiree emigrants of the famine years made their way by water and land to Brock Township. This location is now in present day Ontario County in the Province of Ontario, somewhat west of the village of Manilla. A number of people from Tiree had settled there along the 7th Concession in the 1820s and 1830s, probably encouraged by the lifting of the Passenger Vessel Act in 1827. The nucleus of this group was several families of MacFadyens from Salum, whose relations, in-laws, and neighbors settled there with them. In Brock the recent emigrants were reunited with family and friends from home, who gave them an introduction to this strange new land of Upper Canada, and no doubt helped them get started with their new life in many different ways. There was, of course, much to learn about the new environment into which they had been so rudely injected. Lush forests covered the land, and the deep soil was nothing like they had worked with at home. It would be necessary in some instances to plant different crops, with different rotations, if one was to use the land efficiently. They had to learn how to cope with quite different insects, and combat plant diseases unknown on Tiree. It would be a completely new way of life, and, if they were to survive, the Tiree emigrants would have to make revolutionary adjustments in their life in a very short period of time.

While a few of the newcomers did take up land in Brock, most used it as a temporary stopping place, because most of the good arable land was already occupied. Until land to the west was surveyed and opened for settlement, however, they worked as laborers in public works projects, such as road-building, or on the farms of the district. For some this stay was only over the winter, but others remained in Brock for several years before moving on to the west.

There was one group of Tiree emigrants, who did not stop in Brock Township. These people, who ultimately settled near Priceville in Grey County, came to Canada in the late 1840s or 1850s. They went directly down the waterway to present day Hamilton, and then made their way through the bush to the Fergus area. There, unprepared for the harsh Canadian winter, many met their deaths. The survivors moved on the next spring to the concessions along the Durham road in Glenelg, Artemesia, Osprey, and Egremont townships, near Priceville.

A secondary migration took place from Brock, when the Queen's Bush was opened for settlement in Grey and Bruce Counties. One of the settlements was in Osprey Township of Grey County and the concessions immediately north and south. This community on the Blue Mountain Plateau, whose topography reminded many Highlanders of Scotland, had as its center McIntryres' Corners. This hamlet, which was named after two brothers from Tiree, later had a church, cemetery, school, tavern, post office, smithy, and a general store.

Another settlement to the west, which drew many from those who had first stopped in Brock was in Bruce County in the two neighboring townships of Bruce and Kincardine. Many Tiree families settled along ' the tenth of Kincardine', and most used the little village of Tiverton as the center of their social and commercial activity. Other than the incentive of free land in western Ontario many were glad to leave Brock, since a cholera epidemic had raged throughout that district. This may well have been brought into the area by the recent Tiree arrivals, whose emigrant ships had nurtured this disease.

Many different ways were found to transport families, stock, and their goods west from Brock Township. Many families sent one of their younger, stronger members to scout the newly opened land, file claims, and then return to guide them to the new location. Most took the long, long overland route, and some even made two trips to bring up cattle. These journeys had the hazards of rivers, which had to be crossed, and swamps that had to be negotiated. One family told of making the journey by sleigh by way of the lower end of Lake Simcoe, Orangeville, and the town of Durham. At Durham they were detained by a storm for three days, sleeping on the floor of a shanty. At Kincardine, the town, the sleigh was left behind and the remaining ten miles was made by foot through four to five inches of snow, each one of the party carrying some of the household goods. Others shortened the trek through the roadless bush by going first down the waterway to Stoney Point, near present day Hamilton, before taking to the bush in their way to their new home.

Carving Homes Out of the Wilderness

The land the Tiree settlers found in Ontario was vastly different from the treeless island of their former home. It was heavily forested, and they first had to clear a space for a temporary shelter of brush and poles of light wood. The first order of business was to clear more land for potatoes and a bit of grain to see them through the first winter. The first crops were sown among stumps of the felled trees, but the land was wonderfully fertile. They could put a hill of potatoes around a stump and obtain a full pail of potatoes off this one hill. These were white as snow, and much improved from what they had worked so hard to raise on Tiree. More than one family existed on potatoes and a bit of salt for the first few years. Ridding the land of trees seemed a never-ending task, and huge fires burned all the time to dispose of the plentiful wood. It was not uncommon to take three to four years to get four or five acres cleared. The pine stumps made wonderful fences, however, and were very effective since they did not rot. Much of this work was a communal affair, and all had to help to raise the log cabins of the settlement. Many combined to clear the land for the first crops, because they were very used to working together. The first winters caused many problems, because these people from the Hebrides were not used to the extremes of temperature they encountered in Upper Canada, nor had they ever had to deal with such a large amount of snow. Few had been able to clear enough land for their cattle to find feed, and most of the poor creatures had to browse the trees like the deer to survive, although some of the settlers felled trees to help the cattle feed. In one instance the cattle could not get their cud up from just eating the browse from the trees, and straw mattresses had to be opened up to free the cattle of this difficulty. In certain times of the year fish and wildfowl were plentiful, and were a welcome addition to an otherwise simple, uninteresting diet. Stories have been told of people knocking pigeons off tree branches with clubs and then dressing them and packing them in barrels for future consumption. Wild animals were another problem for the settlers, and one that they had not had to deal with in their homeland. Tales were told of driving bears from their fields with nothing more than a pitchfork, and the howling of wolves unnerved them when first heard. The Tiree pioneers were no strangers to hardships, however, and did cope more easily with the harsh conditions of the new land than those that had come from more comfortable circumstances.

The conditions under which the Tiree emigrants struggled did not improve in a steady progression year by year. The summer of 1859 in the Bruce settlement was very dry, and some of the wheat in the field ripened without coming out of socket. This made this crop much smaller and of inferior quality. It was could have been a starving time once again, since few had any hard cash to purchase flour or cornmeal. The municipal council came to their relief by borrowing money to supply such needs. Work was provided for the needy in building roads and bridges in the township, which up to now had been no more than trails through the bush. In this manner those in need could earn money for the relief supplies. This was known as " the year of destitution, or " the famine year", and while no one actually starved, it is believed that the some of the old and infirm did die from lack of adequate nourishment.

The work of the women of the family was as hard or harder than that of the men. Until the men found time to dig wells, all water had to be hauled from the nearest creek by hand. Soap was homemade, and every bit of grease was collected for this purpose. The heavy clothing that all the family members wore was made of heavy material, which made it only that more difficult to wash. All sewing was done by hand, most often in the evenings when candlelight was the only illumination.

Knitting was also a constant occupation of the women and girls, and the knitting needles were never put away, even during the summer months. Most homes had spinning wheels, and many of these treasured possessions had come with the emigrants from Tiree. Many families later came to have looms, and these were in use up until the last years of the nineteenth century. Cooking was done on wood stoves, which also provided some of the heat in the early cabins, along with the fireplaces. In the early days, before mechanical reapers appeared, the women worked to bind the sheaves of grain, which the men cut with a cradle. Early on the grain was thrashed with a flail, but often this, too, was a communal affair.

The women held 'bees' for paring apples, shucking corn, making rugs or quilts of rags, carding wool, and fulling cloth. This last was raising the nap on homespun woolen cloth, which had been produced during the year. It was a traditional activity of the Hebrides, called *a luadh*, in which the cloth is wetted and then pounded on a board in a rhythmic fashion by a group of women, who sing a special song to go along with this procedure. There might be two or three tables in such a *luadh*, where fifteen or twenty women sang the same song. This came naturally to the Tiree islanders, who traditionally sang a song for all types of work, such as thrashing, milking, or pulling at the oars.

Spring, of course, always brought renewed hope to the pioneers, and the tapping of the maple trees for their sap occupied much of everybody's time. Happy times were spent boiling down the maple sap into the finished product, and this was a special time for the children, who looked forward to getting to sample some of the maple taffy.

The women of Tiree had long had to cope with childbirth and illness on their own, and several had expertise in this direction. Upon coming to Canada they were quick to find out the herbs and roots native to the region, which had curative powers, and were not loath to follow the lead of the Indians living near the settlements. A paste made from nettles was used in Osprey Township to combat boils, and urine was used as a disinfectant in all the Tiree emigrant communities. Urine had also long been used on Tiree for skin complaints and this carried over to Canada.

Superstition had always played an important role on Tiree and this, too, was part of the Canadian scene. Ghosts were generally believed in, as were signs derived from dreams. Dogs were credited with knowing when a death had occurred in a distant location. The seventh son of a seventh son was known to have 'second sight', and some believed he could cure excema or scrofula, the swelling of the glands of the neck, by touch.

The custom of the *Cailleach,* or the Old Wife, which had thrived on Tiree, was transferred to Canada. The man that cut the last corn at harvest was awarded with a female figure made out of it. In ancient times this presaged *'gort a bhaile'*, or famine of the farm, in the shape of an old woman, whom had to be fed until the next harvest, and was treated with fear. In later days much amusement accompanied the passing of this doll made of a few corn blades to a neighbor, who had not yet finished his harvest, when you had completed this task. He, in turn, worked diligently to be able to pass it on to another. The person, who ended up with the *Cailleach*, had to keep her for that year and be the butt of much jocularity, but there was always a hint of an ill fortune attached to the Old Wife.

The celebration of Christmas had never been much of a Scottish custom, and this was also true in the Ontario settlements of the Tiree emigrants. New Year's Day, however, was a great occasion, and celebrated in a very lively manner. Although the work was long and hard in the first years of the Ontario settlements, time was found for fun and entertainment. The *ceilidh*, which had been so much a part of the Tiree was transplanted to Canada, and was the format in which the oral culture of the island was maintained across the Atlantic. It was often a community activity, such as after a barn raising, or a logging 'bee', where young and old would dance to the pipes or gather around to tell the stories of the past. Genealogy was a favorite subject in the community and was discussed at any *ceilidh,* which was not surprising since so many were related to one another. Feats of strength were often featured at such gatherings, with the lifting of barrels or the tossing of sacks as part of the competition. At other times a *ceilidh* was nothing more of a visit to a neighbor or relative's home to hear the pipes played, to listen to the familiar tales of a gifted story-teller, or to hear the new composition of the bards among the little community. The Canadian settlements of the Tiree emigrants did not lack for poets, who continued the Gaelic traditions of home. John Maclean, one of the bards from Balephuil, whose departure from Tiree inspired *Manitoba*, one of the best known works of nineteenth century Tiree, continued to regale his neighbors in the Brandon Hills of Manitoba with traditional Gaelic songs, as well as songs of his own composition. So did Donald MacDougall in

this same district of Western Canada. The song of a Mackinnon bard in praise of the Massey-Harris reaper was song over a wide area in Canada. It was typical in that its subject matter reflected one of the aspects of modern day life. The Gaelic *ceilidh* lasted at least until the last decade of the nineteenth century, if not beyond. In time it came to be more of a family affair, however, with the elders doing their 'specialty', whether a song, a bit of poetry, or the playing of some musical instrument. Then the children were called upon, and no one could plead that they were not ready to do their part. Today, of course, the term *ceilidh* covers any sort of get-together.

So many of the Tiree emigrants had not only the same surname, but the same Christian name as well, that they had to be distinguished from one another in the traditional manner of their former home. Patronymics, nicknames, and by-names were common. There would be 'Red Hector', 'Black Dan', 'Big Laughie', 'Callum's Archie' to name but a few.[1]

Gaelic was the language of all the Tiree households, and those emigrants that had gone to the Gaelic charity school at home could read and write it as well. There were other emigrants, of course, that did not speak Gaelic, some from other areas of Scotland and English-speaking regions. Neighborliness was the order of the day, however, and that transcended any linguistic or racial differences. As long as the emigrants and their children were alive Gaelic was the language spoken at home, although English was picked up by most. English was taught in the schools that came to be quickly established, but we may be certain that Gaelic remained the language of the schoolyard. The superintendent of schools reported in 1856 that it was often necessary to transact the business of the school board in Gaelic, as none of the board spoke any other language.

There is every reason to believe that Gaelic was the dominant language in Bruce County. As late as 1930 church services in Ripley were first held in Gaelic and in English second. Even so, Gaelic in Bruce County did not have the life span it did in more isolated Highland areas, such as Glengarry and some settlements in Nova Scotia. Although there was only little contact with large English speaking groups in the early years, the building of roads and railways sometime later provided important links to the outside world, and did much to bring English into use as a medium of commerce. Gaelic, however, continued to play a major role in Bruce County for 75 years, but by World War I it was on decline.

Religious affairs had played a prominent role in Tiree and the emigrants of mid-century took the Sabbath and church life very seriously. At first the preachers had to conduct services in school houses, farmhouses, or in the open air, but very rapidly all denominations erected churches of logs. Later, of course, frame and even brick churches rose in their place.

Many of the Tiree emigrants were members of the Congregational or Independent Church, which had broken off from the established Presbyterian church of Scotland. The firm footing the Independent Church was able to establish on Tiree was part of the evangelical movement that swept much of the region in the first part of the 19th century. This was fueled in part by the resentment of the establishment for the unfeeling treatment it had offered the crofters and cottars of the Hebrides. The Reverend Archibald Farquharson of Cornaigbeg of Tiree, who was the minister of the Congregational Church, was much loved and had a large following. He, at one time considered going to Canada, but sent a deputy instead. The Brock Gaelic Mission was a part of this Congregational or Independent Church, whose first minister was a Rev. Neil MacKinnon. He was Tiree born, but was ordained in Canada, and became an important link between the various emigrant communities in Ontario. He preached in Brock for many years, before going to Osprey Township in 1853. After three years in the latter location he became the minister of the Congregational Church in Kincardine, which was located 'on the tenth' in the heart of that settlement.[2] He died in 1875, but was succeeded by another Gaelic-speaking minister.

The Baptist Church was also very active among the settlements of the Tiree emigrants. It, like the Congregational Church, had a strong evangelical flavor, and also had a large following on Tiree in the 1840s. It leader on Tiree was Duncan MacDougall of Mull, who first came to Tiree as its Gaelic charity schoolmaster. The Baptists continued to thrive in the Ontario settlements, often only

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[1] This custom is common on Tiree today. When visiting my father's third cousin, Donald Maclean, in 1982, I found that he was known as Donald Ardbeg (Ardbeg being his home) to distinguish from all the other islanders of the same name. GDL

[2] Peter Lamont, this writer's great-great grandfather, gave up a portion of his property for this church.

with lay leaders. Allan Maclean was a Baptist lay preacher at McIntyres' Corners, who first conducted services in his log home, until a log church could be erected. The Bruce community had a Gaelic-speaking Baptist minister, who led the singing of Gaelic hymns and conducted baptisms in nearby Lake Huron. Their first church in Tiverton in was built of logs in 1856-57. It was replaced in 1867 by a fine brick church, which was in use until 1944.

The Presbyterians were also present in the Tiree emigrant communities, particularly in Brock Township, but in Grey and Bruce Counties the Congregationalists and Baptists were the dominant sects during the early years. The Presbyterians of the Bruce settlements first erected a log church in Sinclair's Corner in 1857, believing it was to become the community center since it boasted a grist and sawmill, as well as two stores and a post office. They later sold this structure and property and built a church in Tiverton in 1862.

The Methodists were also active in the Bruce settlements, building a log church in 1855 that was in use until 1867. This was replaced by a fine brick structure in the latter year.

The emigrant communities were interested in providing schooling for their children, and did so as early as possible. U.S.S. No. 3 was built on the Bruce-Kincardine Township boundary, after Win. Gunn, the local superintendent of schools, was asked to submit a plan for the school sections of the two townships in 1855. A lively debate over union school sections ensued, in which the argument swirled around whom was to pay the most for its upkeep, those in Bruce or those in Kincardine. The majority did favor union school sections, however, and a log structure was erected in 1857. U.S.S. No 3 included losts 6 through 15 on Concessions 10, 11, and 12 of Kincardine Township and the same lots on Concession 1, 2, and 3 of Bruce Township.[3]

There are no details of this particular school, but the first schools were no more than crude buildings with unplastered walls and small inadequate windows. A box stove provided heat, which did not reach the far corners of the room. Those fortunate students who had seats sat on a plank supported by wooden blocks. Some of the planks were stationed against the walls to give a back-rest, but small children sat for long hours with their legs unable to reach the floor. Attendance at times was so large that some pupils had to stand around the room. There were no blackboards in the very early schools, but later large boards painted black were supplied. All the children used a slate and pencils, and the screech of the pencils enabled bored children to annoy both the teacher and their fellow pupils. Each child had a small wet cloth to wipe his or her slate, but spit and a sleeve worked just as well and probably faster. A bell was used to call the students to class and a strap or hickory stick was used liberally to enforce discipline. These early schools were far from comfortable. Flies bedeviled the pupils, and the cold and even lack of water made for inattention.

Classes were composed of children of all ages, and even a few adults who had missed out on learning to read and write when young. Children did not go to school until they were old enough to make their way through the bush, and so started their education at a later date than currently. Most of the older children were required to help with the farming during the busiest times, and only went to school in the winter months. Thus it was that many were still being educated in their late teens and even early twenties. Such a wide disparity of ages in the classroom led to unruliness at times, and there was a large turnover of teachers. Teachers were paid a small salary once a year. Those from outside the district boarded at homes in the area.

Written examinations were not in use. Instead the pupils were examined orally at the end of the year by their teacher in the presence of the parents invited to attend the school. During this process the children were lined up across the front of the room and questioned in the various subjects they had been taught. Geography contests and spelling bees were also held to add some interest to the proceedings. Examinations lasted the entire day, with mothers serving a hearty lunch at noon, before the business was resumed during the afternoon hours.

The only town of any size in the Bruce settlement was Kincardine, which was a busy port at the mouth of the Penetangore River on Lake Huron in the southwest corner of the township. This was ten miles from the core of this community on 'the tenth of Kincardine', however, and was a long journey for any horse-drawn vehicle, such as a wagon, buggy, or sleigh. The settlers in the north end of the township used Tiverton, a much smaller village to the northeast, for shopping or communal activities. It was in Tiverton that they meet their neighbors on a Saturday, exchanging gossip while

[3] See Appendix VII for the names of the individual householders of these lots at this time.

they did their shopping. It was in here that they attended church. In its early days Tiverton only consisted of a blacksmith shop, a post office, a couple of stores, and a few scattered homes. Later it could boast of a hotel and even a bar. There were few recreations, but fairs and games were held in Tiverton, and it was here that the Oddfellows established their fraternal lodge. Dances were also held in this tiny village, but these were considered sinful by many in the area, particularly the Scottish Presbyterians. The only dancing they would countenance was the traditional Highland dancing of their ancestors.

The people of the Tiree emigrant communities called themselves 'Scotch', and would have found it an affectation to be referred to as Scots, as the intelligentsia insisted was the proper terminology. When, and if, they entered the political arena of Upper Canada, they found it dominated by the privileged, who had a virtual monopoly on the controls of power. At the top was the Lieutenant-Governor, appointed by the Crown, who often was one of Wellington's general officers. He was buttressed by Anglican bishops, businessmen, and minor aristocrats, who formed the Family Compact and ruled in their own behalf . They awarded lucrative posts to their own kind, and saw that no profits escaped them. Trade favored the merchants, who played their game, and land grants went to members in good standing within the Compact. The Scotch, who correctly identified them as the Canadian counterparts of their Scottish oppressors, voted overwhelmingly Liberal in their politics and remained a solid core of this bloc for many years.

By the mid 1870s the government began to offer homesteads of 160 acres free in the Canadian West to those who prepared a certain amount of land for cultivation, acquired stock, and constructed buildings. To many on Tiree, who would have to wait another ten years to gain security of tenure, this proved irresistible and sparked a new wave of emigration from the island. By this time the farms of Ontario were proving to be too small to provide for the growing number of people in the original settlements, and many decided to go west as well. Others gave in to the lure of the booming lumber towns of Michigan and the fast growing city of Detroit.

The settlement of Bruce County now performed the same function for the new emigrants from Tiree that Brock Township had done for the emigrants of mid century. It became common for the new emigrants of this period to leave Tiree after the harvest was in, spend the winter with friends or relations in Bruce, and go west in the spring to stake a claim. Often they were accompanied by the descendants of the original settlers, who also opted to go west at this time as well. A common route for those homesteaders to Manitoba was to go by boat to the head of the Great Lakes, and then travel overland by rail to Fargo, North Dakota. From Fargo they went up the Red River by boat to Winnipeg. A horse and wagon was necessary for those continuing on to the Brandon Hills from Winnipeg. There were others who moved even farther west to settle in the Wapella-Red Jacket district of Saskatchewan.

The land in the Canadian West was again much different from the dense forests the Ontario settlers had first experienced. Instead the few trees were light stands of willows and poplars, often fringing the shallow, alkaline sloughs common to the region. Lumber was far from plentiful, and most of the early homes of the homesteaders were the sod houses of the prairie dweller. The plow had to deal with tough roots of grass, and it was no easy task to plough and cultivate enough acreage to meet the homestead requirements. The hot dry summers produced conditions conducive to prairie fires, which could cause much devastation. Winter conditions were like nothing anybody on Tiree had ever seen, and were far harsher than experienced in Ontario. Temperatures could fall to 60 degrees below zero, and blizzards could isolate farms for days on end. The size of the western homesteads, the greater dispersion of the settlements, and the longer winters, made it difficult for the homesteaders of Manitoba and Saskatchewan to enjoy the communal life that was common in Ontario. Yet determination overcame the distances involved in getting together, and the western settlers made great efforts to visit each other in the old fashion.

The regions settled by emigrants from Tiree had many things in common, and a salient feature of all was their sense of kinship, be it of blood or just their common origin. They have passed on to their descendants a sense of identity with that small remote island in the Inner Hebrides from which they sprang. It is not as strong today as it was with earlier generations, but it is still a powerful force among those, who, when asked about the origin of their Scottish ancestors, proudly say, "They Came From Tiree".