

# FROM THE HEBRIDES TO THE COLONIES

By Harold B. MacLeod

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## INTRODUCTION

This book needs no introduction. It introduces itself. Its prime subject matter is the MacLeods, and what happened to them over the last two to three hundred years. Its contents shine an invaluable focus onto particular parts of Dr. James Hunter's recently published work on the Migrations of the Clan MacLeod all over the world. I strongly recommend the two works being read in tandem.

Harold MacLeod is one of the most knowledgeable Australian Scots, and it is a great pleasure for me to know that, after 34 years of research, he has seen fit to share his wisdom with a wider public. I cannot say enough how deeply I admire him for bringing this book to fruition, when he has already reached that "certain age," which conspires to bring a constraint upon physical energy. But, however, many copies may be printed, his work will always be a resource for those who come after him. All future scholars and descendents interested in the movements and wanderings of the extended family of Clan MacLeod during a defining moment in the Clan's whole history will find themselves deeply indebted to Harold B. MacLeod.

Hold Fast

John MacLeod of MacLeod

25th October 2005

Dunvegan Castle,  
Isle of Skye

## PREAMBLE

Early efforts I had made about my ancestors were largely negated by my mother answering my questions as to who this or that relative was and where they fitted in as far as the family was concerned, with a stock answer of “what do you want to know that for?”, which was typical of those times, and so I had little help from that source, except for a brief knowledge of the immediate family. Years later, after my mother had passed away, I got around to examining the many papers stored in her escritoire and found, to my great surprise, that she had listed many pages of relatives, their relationship to each other and dates of births, marriages and deaths. And this from one who said, “What do you want to know that for?” Years of research followed, using up every spare moment, until I had reasonable histories, origins and lives of a selection of MacLeod families.

Many of the people mentioned herein served with the Police Forces and quite a number with the Railways. A large number volunteered for, and served in both World Wars and later conflicts and, if some of these are not credited with this I can only blame shortage of time. As much of the research and contact with relatives and others took place from 1970 onwards, a lot of water had passed under the bridge since. Continual contact with so many was not possible, so a lot of the people concerned will have married, will have borne children and even grandchildren and some will have passed on. If you are connected, you may have profitable results by bringing your own part up to date.

I make no apologies for mentioning those born out of wedlock because this has been from information given by my interviewees and from birth/marriage certificates. It seems this custom was not different from that of today. One person mentioned was brought up under the impression he was a brother of his mother, and there are no doubt many other interesting facets. There may be quite a number of names incorrectly spelt; this would have been mainly due to misinterpretation of handwriting and, if this has occurred, I offer my apologies. As much research was done before a book was envisaged, I did not always record the origin and trust this omission does not offend.

Harold B. MacLeod

## Chapter 1

### ‘OUR HOME’ IN THE HEBRIDES

#### (RATHAD NAN EILEAN)



The Hebrides, the large group of islands off the west coast of Scotland is amongst the best known and picturesque island groups in the world. Millions of years ago the Scottish Mainland and the Islands were part of what is now Europe, but huge upheavals of the earth's surface and movement of the tectonic plates over at least five million years eventually separated them. Four major Ice Ages, the last of which began in the Pleistocene Period some 600,000 years ago, covered all with blankets of ice hundreds of metres thick and, as they melted, the glaciers carved huge mountains and fiords across Scandinavia and Scotland; when the ice receded, the land gradually rose, to form huge mountains and a rugged landscape evolved, with snow-covered peaks, immense fiords, lochs and many secluded, fertile glens in Scotland and the Isles. It is a land of beauty, of wonderful scenery and

rugged grandeur and lies on an overlapping of two of the earth's surface plates, one part of the land structure being composed mainly of gneiss at least 2000 million years old and showing similarity to the Laurentian Shield of North America, rather than to the rest of Scotland and Europe, whilst the Inner Hebrides are mostly of basalt, a volcanic lava, with an age of only some fifty million years. The island of Islay, at the south of the Inner Isles, demonstrates this, with part of its western lands being of Lower Palaeozoic and unmetamorphic, pre-Cambrian structure, whilst the eastern consists mainly of igneous intrusions on Dalriadic and Moine metamorphic rocks belonging to the Jurassic period. Early habitation by Mesolithic Man was likely, about 4,600 years BC and there are signs of other occupants since, but we are mainly concerned with our background of Gaels from Ireland, Picts of Scotland and the Norse from Scandinavia.

The Hebrides cover a very large area and consist of some 500 of the 589 islands of Scotland, with only some 60 of the 589 currently inhabited, many being rocky, sometimes inaccessible, islets and stacs (rocky islets) which are incapable of supporting man or beast. The whole is divided into two, the Outer and the Inner Isles, the Outer being a fringe of islands on the west, generally referred to as the ‘Long Island’. The outer Hebrides bears the brunt of the Atlantic gales and weather vagaries and consists of the geographically divided island of Lewis/Harris in the north, with Benbecula, North and South Uist, Eriskay and Barra to the south, whilst the Inner Isles embrace the large, wing-shaped island of Skye, Raasay, and to the south of Skye are Mull, Rhum, Eigg, Colonsay and Oronsay (one at low tide), Tiree, Jura and Islay, with numerous other smaller isles being just satellites to both groups. The sea between the Outer Isles and Inner Isles is called The Minch, and this water can be calm one minute and violent the next. Skye, Harris, Lewis, and Raasay feature widely in the history of the MacLeods, but there are many other places with which the Clan is connected – St. Kilda, Glenelg, Barra, Uist, Assynt and lesser isles. There are other islands which are noted for their outstanding geological features – such as the barren, uninhabited isle of Staffa, with its remarkable Fingal’s Cave.

Islesmen will tell a visitor that it is better to traverse the ‘Long Island’ from south to north rather than the reverse, as it is well known that the witches always come to a house ‘tuaithéal’- (from the north). So, from south to north, we have tiny Berneray, Mingulay, Pabbay, Sandray and Vatersay, then the larger island of Barra, home of the MacNeils, a clan which features strongly in the history of the Isles, although a popular anecdote tends to make the name better remembered. It is often quoted that a MacNeil Chief had his trumpeter declare from the battlements of Kisimul Castle each evening “Ye Kings, Princes and Potentates of the earth, be it known unto you that The MacNeil of Barra having consumed his meal, the rest of the world may now eat.” Between Barra and the island of South Uist is romantic Eriskay, which featured in the fascinating story of Bonnie Prince Charlie and this is the island which evoked the beautiful piping tune, the Eriskay Love Lilt.

It was here, on what is now known as Prince’s Beach, the young Charles Stuart landed on 3rd August 1745 to begin his royal crusade and it is thought that when he landed on Eriskay he may have been carrying seeds of the pink *Convolvulus* in his pocket, as that flower grows there, but nowhere else in Scotland! South and North Uist are larger islands and between them is the island of Benbecula (‘Mountain of the Fords’). North of that group is the Island of Lewis/Harris, with the remote islands that form St. Kilda far out to the north-west in the Atlantic, although St. Kilda is not considered part of the Hebrides. There are numerous satellite isles and stacs around the whole.

Religion in the Outer Isles varies from south to north, with Catholicism strongest in the south, Barra being approximately 66% Catholic, Eriskay 100%, and Benbecula, with 50%,

being the buffer between the south and the mainly Protestant north, although those figures will vary with the times. There is no religious friction, however, and the tolerant Catholic of the south will humorously refer to those of the north as being too strict, ‘doing nothing at all on a Sunday and often not even opening their door to a visitor’. Times are changing and so is this strict adherence to the Sabbath in many places.

The island of Lewis embraces Harris, although there is a geographical separation where Loch Seaforth intrudes, leaving just a narrow strip of land, named, of course, Tarbert. The highest point is Clisham at 2622 feet and Harris has twelve or more conical hills which are visible for a considerable distance at sea. In the northern part of Lewis on a lonely eminence overlooking East Loch Roag are the famous standing stones of Callernish, a well-known tourist attraction. Lewis was originally owned by the MacLeods, as was St. Kilda, but was lost to the Fife Adventurers by an Act of 1597. The story of these isles and their changes of ownership is lengthy. In 1825, when James Stewart married the MacKenzie heiress, he bought all of Lewis, except for Stornaway and when he died in 1844 his widow sold it to James Matheson for £ 190,000, thus ending two centuries of MacKenzie occupation. In 1779 Captain Alexander MacLeod bought Harris, Bernera and St. Kilda and in 1834 Harris was sold to the Earl of Dunmore. The Cromartie MacKenzies, through the heiress Mary MacLeod claimed to be the rightful owners of Lewis and, when ousted, built Castle Leod in northern Scotland. William Lever, the multi-millionaire soap manufacturer, bought the Island of Lewis in 1918 and Harris in 1935. He was prepared to spend 25 million dollars of his personal fortune to develop it into a thriving commercial venture, but his plan collapsed when the island crofters preferred the traditional way of living. This was the only setback in his outstanding career.

The visitor will no doubt be confused by the repetition of place names and this will be the case with the islands of Berneray and Pabbay, one set of which lies between North Uist and Harris and another at the far south of Barra. The former are the more populated and better known by those names, the latter being too small for habitation. Pabbay means ‘Priest’s Isle’ and there are at least five islands with that name in the Hebrides. This confusion will occur in other similar instances with other place names.

Sir Walter Scott’s “Lord of the Isles” contains many references which will be quoted later, but he manages to condense the Hebrides and its numerous islands and stacs into one verse:

“.....these seas behold  
Round twice a hundred islands roll’d,  
From Hirt\* that hears their northern roar,  
To the green Islay’s fertile shore.”

\* *Hirta* = *St. Kilda*.