



Article by **Betty MacDougall (1993)**

Emigration series Part I: 'The Economy' of 1819

There was only a little sporadic emigration from Coll in the late 18th. century, mainly from the tacksman class, for instance, the MacLean family from Griseabull. One branch went to America, another settled in Danzig.

The early 19th. century revealed more anxiety amongst the ordinary folk to improve their lot in the New World but emigration was not an easy option at this time. There was no help available by way of assisted passage and people had to rely on the advice of various agencies that were organising shipping, not always in the best interests of the emigrants. One such was Charles MacLean who farmed Gallanach for a time and factored the Coll Estate for his kinsman. As agent for the Hudson Bay Company, he advertised in the Inverness Journal in 1811 with a glowing account of the prospective colony at Hudson Bay and Red River. He later admitted that he had no notion where the colony would be and had advertised as a routine matter without any investigation. As factor, he had a hard hand on the Coll people.

Major Simon Fraser of the Lovat family was for some time engaged in taking passengers to Canada. He organised the sailing of the ship Economy of Aberdeen from Tobermory to Pictou, Nova Scotia in 1819. John MacLean from Tيرة, family bard to MacLean of Coll, agreed to pay £23/12/- for passage of himself, wife and three children and also assigned to Fraser 380 Gaelic song books, so it is obvious that a family had to raise a goodly amount of capital to afford the expense of the trip.

No shipping list for the Economy has yet been found but it was recorded that 285 people embarked and 4 children were born in the course of the voyage. No deaths occurred.

The known Collachs were a young man of 21, Archibald MacKenzie who was probably financed by his father Neil, a prosperous farmer in the west end of Coll. There was a John MacKinnon from Griseabull with his wife and two children. From the same place was Lachlan Johnston whose wife Sarah/Marion was sister to MacKinnon. This brave lady gave birth to her third child Duncan two days after sailing. Lachlan's father and uncle with their families were also on board, three Johnston families altogether.

Young MacKenzie parted with his father on 27th. July and the ship left Tobermory on the 4th. August. He reported that there was a party of Colonsay people on board, very godly in their ways but a mocking opposer of them was 'a violent man Kennedy from Coll!'

There was an old lady living in Sorasdal at the beginning of this century who used to recount her memories of this event. Her own uncle, another MacKinnon was one of the emigrants. There were plenty of people living in Coll at this time and being well aware of the coming of the emigrant ship with Collachs on board, a great crowd gathered on Beinn Griseabull to light a bonfire to their departing friends. Apparently, the ship's captain was well aware of the intense interest in Coll and sailed his ship as close to the shore as was safe. Ann MacKinnon, a girl of 9 at this time was on the hill with her parents and her mother was holding her infant son in her arms. Later the report came from Canada that Ann's uncle had been able to pick out his sister with the baby at her shoulder. Another account mentions a piper playing a lament.

The early days in the New World were not easy. John MacLean the bard penned one of his most poignant poems about An Coille Ghruamach - The Gloomy Forest, lamenting on the hardship of lumberwork in clearing ground for cultivation. However, by dint of hard work and perseverance, they all prospered in their new homes. Archibald MacKenzie had been well schooled in the S.P.C.K. school in Coll, taught by Ebenezer Davidson and was able to take up a teaching post at Greenhill, Pictou. Later he worked as a lawyer's clerk in Charlotte town. John MacKinnon bought his first farm at Seafoam, River John, in October, 1820, at auction, £105 for 100 acres. A descendant still owns this farm. One of the Johnston family had a boat-building yard at River John. When Lachlan Johnston bought his farm, his name was wrongly spelled on the deed, without the 't'. It was easier to change the name than the deed and so it remained although some descendants did revert to the Johnston spelling.

The following advertisement appeared in the Acadian Recorder of Nova Scotia in Oct. 16th. 1819.

... the passengers in the ship Economy of Aberdeen from Tobermory to Pictou, desire in this public manner to express their gratitude to captain James Fraser, the master, for the kind treatment they received from him during the passage, which consisted of five weeks. Two hundred and eighty-five souls embarked at Tobermory, and were landed in good health and spirits, together with four children born upon the passage.
Pictou, October 4, 1819.

Sources: "Clarsach na Coilla", ed. Hector MacDougall, 1928. Family papers.



The ship sails