

Article by **Betty MacDougall (1994)****The Skelton & the John Dunscombe emigration series: Part 2**

## THE SKELTON.

On the 19th. June 1820, the ship *Skelton* sailed from Leith taking a number of emigrants to Tasmania. The ship was a three-master with one and a half decks, the greatest height between decks being only five feet five inches. She was 86 feet long and 26 feet wide. There were 81 passengers and a crew of 18, and a substantial amount of cargo.

As recounted in the Coll Magazine of 1989, one of the passengers was Major Donald Macleod of Talisker in Skye. He had married Catherine, daughter of Alexander MacLean of Coll and because of financial difficulties, stayed for a period with his wife and family in the new castle at Breacacha. In fact, a son, Hugh Lawrence was born there in 1818. His father-in-law, MacLean of Coll, wrote to the Colonial Secretary to the effect that he was prepared to advance Talisker any sum of money necessary to cover the cost of his passage and establish him in the new country.

The voyage took over 5 months, reaching Hobart on 27th. November, 1820. Another son was born to the MacLeods when off the coast of Spain. The family settled at Launceston in Tasmania and named their property Talisker. They had 13 children.

The passenger list included two Campbell cousins, Donald, son of Murdoch who had purchased the Caolas estate in Coll, and Colin, son of Murdoch's brother Neil of Suiniapol in Mull. Also listed was a Flora MacLean whose father was tacksman of Arileod, married to a daughter of the Crossapol family.

That entire Arileod family emigrated to Tasmania 13 years later, Donald Campbell and Flora MacLean married and settled at Evandale, Tasmania where they reared a family of 8 sons. In the 1860's they removed to Hawkes Bay in the South Island, New Zealand. There the sons were joined at their sheep station by a cousin, Allan MacLean of the Crossapol family.

Colin prospered and returned to Scotland. When his Campbell cousins became bankrupt he bought the two ends of Coll from them, Caolas and Cornaig. This was the Colin who gave refuge in his east end property to the families evicted from the centre of the island in 1861. Most of the Suinapol family pioneered in Australia and settled there in well established positions. One of the daughters, Flora, married Donald MacLean of the Arileod family who came out to Australia later.

Also mentioned in the passenger list was a Roderick MacDonald, his wife and 10 children. According to the Coll records this family lived at Lagmhor near Freaslan but only 8 children are recorded. No further information has come to hand as to their subsequent history.

## THE JOHN DUNSCOMBE.

Two of Flora MacLean's brothers, Hugh and Neil, had taken up the seafaring life and each secured his Master's Certificate. Hugh traded for some years in Australian waters, was convinced of the excellent opportunities there and bought land in Tasmania. On returning to Scotland, he persuaded his parents to venture with him and so a unique episode in emigration took place - an entire family, fully equipped with provisions, household effects, seeds and tools, with timber and fittings for a new house, uprooted themselves to pioneer in a new land.

The sailor sons bought a small schooner, the *John Dunscombe*, of 88 tons. Their eventual voyage started September 16th. 1832 from Greenock and a favourable passage was made. The first port of call was St. Helena for a supply of fresh water. They also visited Tristan da Cunha and then on to Cape Town on December, 15th. On his way home from Australia to gather his family, Hugh MacLean had noticed there was a great dearth of coal in the Cape so he used all available space in his ship for this cargo which he sold for a good price and replaced it with a cargo of wine that would be very much in demand in Australia.

The Customs Records in the State Archives of Hobart, list the *John Dunscombe* as arriving from Greenock, 10th. February, 1833.

Master: Hugh MacLean

Crew: Neil MacLean (brother to Hugh), John McMillan, Hugh McCormick, Angus McFadden, Daniel MacLean (probably Hugh's brother Donald) and Henry Button.

Passengers: Allan and Hannah MacLean (the parents) with Malcolm, Jessie, Mary, Catherine, Liliias and Ann. As Tasmania was a convict colony, controls were strict so this list should be accurate.

A house was built at Talisker and the family set to work their land. All their ventures turned out well but despite the splendid climate, Tasmania was not a pleasant place to live in. It was said that with being in a convict settlement, the door was never opened after dark without a shotgun in hand. It was not long before the family removed to a more pleasing environment on the mainland of Australia, in the Melbourne area. Hugh and Neil continued their careers in shipping with many exciting adventures including a spell of captivity when captured by Maoris in New Zealand.

The subsequent history of all the family is well recorded and many descendants have returned to visit Coll, the land of their roots.