

A Highlander & Loyalist - Alan MacDonald

*By Brian McConnell, UE **

Alan MacDonald was a Highlander who settled in North Carolina in 1774 before the start of the American Revolution and accepted a commission as an Officer in the Royal Highland Emigrants. He was also the husband of Flora MacDonald, the Jacobite heroine who helped save Bonnie Prince Charlie from capture after the Battle of Culloden.

How was it that a Highlander should agree to fight for King George III? In “Scottish Highlanders and the American Revolution” author G. Murray Logan notes:

“The highland emigrants in American were opposed to the American Revolution almost to a man. Considering their record in Scotland, of three revolts in three generations, this may seem surprising. However, the rebellion in Scotland had been a result of positive thinking, their loyalty to the house of Stuart. Although the clan system had been destroyed, the clan spirit still lived, as it does to a lesser degree today. Their leaders, at least, had taken the oath of allegiance to King George, and with a Highlander, an oath is a sacred thing, and binding. The clansmen had little faith in democratic government, the clan system having been essentially feudal. However, in the highlands, the feudalism was combined with paternalism, and comradeship. So the clansmen, as ever, followed their leaders and remained loyal to King George.” (1)



Soldier in Royal Highland Emigrants

The Royal Highland Emigrants was commanded by Allan MacLean, third son of Major Donald MacLean, fifth Laird of Torloisk, Isle of Mull, Scotland. He was a veteran officer of the Scots

Brigade and then the 62nd Regiment of Foot and the Royal Highland Regiment, 114th Foot in North America during the Seven Years War, also known in North America as the French and Indian Wars. (2)

Members of the Royal Highland Emigrants were initially raised from “His Majesty’s Loyal North American Subjects” who were discharged soldiers from the 42nd Regiment, Royal Highland Regiment (Black Watch), 77th Regiment of Foot (Montgomerys Highlanders), and 78th Regiment of Foot (Fraser’s Highlanders). MacLean was given the authority to raise five battalions, however, but only two were raised. The largest groups of Highland settlers in North America were in the Mohawk Valley area of New York and in the Cape Fear region of North Carolina. Allan and Flora McDonald were recruited to raise men in North Carolina. Col. MacLean’s Second in Command, Major John Small, also recruited emigrants from their vessels and in the Atlantic provinces. Ranald MacKinnon was a lieutenant with Montgomerys Highlanders during the French and Indian Wars and a settler on a land grant in Argyle, Nova Scotia who enlisted with the Royal Highland Emigrants.(3)

The First Battalion was concerned with the defence of Canada along the St. Lawrence River and bordering Lake Ontario where an invasion was expected from the south. It saw action when the Americans attacked Quebec City and Col. MacLean and the Highlanders defeated them in a blizzard on January 1, 1776. (4) It also saw service in Forts on the Richelieu River and Lake Champlain area, Montreal, Ontario, and Michigan. The Second Battalion serviced Forts in the Atlantic Provinces and New York. It also had battle experience in the southern states between 1778 - 81 at Battles of Savannah, Charleston, and Eutaw Springs.



Captain Ranald MacKinnon
Royal Highland Emigrants (84th Regiment)

From 1778 onward the headquarters of the Second Battalion was at Fort Edward, Nova Scotia, a fort built in 1750 for defence. It consisted of fortifications, a Blockhouse, Officer's and Soldiers Barracks, Magazine, Stores, Mess Room, Bake House, Workshop, and Parade Ground.



Fort Edward, N.S. about 1755



Fort Edward, N.S. about 1900



Blockhouse, only remaining building at Fort Edward, N.S.

Alan MacDonald was commander of the detachment of the Royal Highland Emigrants at Fort Edward in 1778 when Flora joined him there. They had lived in North Carolina when he was commissioned a Captain on June 14, 1775. (5) He had been Lieut. - Col. Of the North Carolina Militia (Anson Battalion of the Highlands, Cross Creek, North Carolina). When the American Revolution broke out Alan and two of his sons, Alexander and James, and approximately 1000 other Highlanders set off from the Cape Fear area headed for British transports on the coast. At Moore's Creek Bridge, near Wilmington, North Carolina on February 28, 1776 the poorly armed Loyalists were attacked and scattered by a better armed and equipped American army which had cannons. (6)

At the Battle of Moore's Creek Bridge many of the officers among the Highlanders were captured including Alan MacDonald. He was held prisoner for two years until September 1777 when he was freed under a prisoner exchange and permitted to travel to New York. From there he travelled to Quebec and then to Halifax which he reached in August 1778. After Alan was taken prisoner Flora remained in hiding until his release and then she joined him at Fort Edward, Nova Scotia.



Sign for Flora MacDonald on Blockhouse at Fort Edward, N.S.

In October, 1779 Flora left Fort Edward by ship and arrived in London, England where she visited a cousin before going on to Scotland. Alan remained with his regiment in Nova Scotia until the end of the war. In 1784 when the Royal Highland Emigrants, the 84th Regiment, was disbanded at Fort Edward, he was listed as Commander of the 6th Company. He remained in Nova Scotia to receive his share of regimental lands granted to Col. John Small in trust for his officers, men and families of the Second Battalion. The lands were located in Douglas Township, Hants County, a Township created to accommodate the disbanded veterans. (7)

In 1785 Alan MacDonald travelled to London, England and submitted his Loyalist land claim for his losses in North Carolina in consequence of his loyalty to King George III and the British government. (8) The claim indicated these losses:

Loyalist Claim:

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| - Plantation of 475 acres (70 acres cleared and in cultivation with 3 good orchards of Peach, Apple, and other fruits value .. | 300 pounds |
| - Dwelling House with the Barn Keeping House, Kitchen, Stable and Crib for holding the Indian Corn... | 60 |
| - Grist Mill... | 120 |
| - Plantation of 50 acres (30 acres cleared with a good orchard of Peach, Apple and other fruits including farm house, barn and crib... | 110 |
| - Horses taken from both Plantations... | 96 |
| - Services of 5 indentured men servants - 3 years of their time being unexpired... | 150 |
| - Services of 3 women servants... | 45 |
| - Furniture, books and plants plundered by enemy... | 500 |
| Less amount of sundrie articles saved by Mrs. MacDonald of the above | <u>40</u> |
| Total Claim... | 1341 pounds |

Alan MacDonald went to be with Flora on the Isle of Skye in Scotland and did not return to Nova Scotia. They moved to a home at Penduin near Kingsburgh where he was born. Flora died March 4, 1790 and Alan on September 20, 1792.(9)

NOTES

* This article was prepared by Brian McConnell, UE on November 30, 2014. To contact him email brianm564@gmail.com

(1) “Scottish Highlanders and the American Revolution” by G. Murray Logan, McCurdy Printing Co. Ltd., Halifax, N.S., 1976, p. 3

(2) See “Allan Maclean Jacobite General - The Life of an Eighteenth Century Career Soldier”, by Mary Beacock Fryer, Dundurn Press Ltd., Toronto, 1987

(3) For an interesting historical, biographical novel of Ranald MacKinnon see “The Ragoon Sporrán” by Bill Crowell, Sentinel Printing Limited, Yarmouth, N.S., 1992

(4) See “King’s Men - the Soldier Founders of Ontario”, by Mary Beacock Fryer, Dundurn Press Ltd., Toronto, 1980, pp 34 - 62.

(5) “Rawdon and Douglas - Two Loyalist Townships in Nova Scotia”, by John Victor Duncanson, Mika Publishing Co., Belleville, ON, 1989, pp. 308 - 320.

(6) See Moore’s Creek National Battlefield - National Park Service website at <http://www.nps.gov/mocr/index.htm>

(7) For listing of Loyalists taking up land grants, warrants, and escheats arranged by County see “Loyalists and Land Settlement in Nova Scotia” by D.C. Harvey, originally published by Public Archives of Nova Scotia, 1937 and reprint by Global Heritage Press Inc., Campbellville, ON, 2006

(8) “Rawdon and Douglas - Two Loyalist Townships in Nova Scotia”, p. 310.

(9) Alan and Flora had seven children: Alexander (Sandy), Anne, Charles, James, John, Frances (Fanny), and Ranald. Alan’s name was spelled Allan in some records but in this article the former has been used to be consistent with spelling appearing on Plaque to Flora and him on Blockhouse at Fort Edward, Windsor, N.S. See “Flora MacDonald - The Most Loyal Rebel” by Hugh Douglas, published by Alan Sutton Publishing Limited, Bath, U.K., 1993 and “A Woman Nobly Planned - Fact and Myth in the Legacy of Flora MacDonald” by John J. Toffey, published by Carolina Academic Press, Durham, North Carolina, 1997.