

## Chapter 13 - Our People of the Isles of Mull and Colonsay

**Introduction:** While some would call our ancestors Highlanders, they were actually people of the Western Isles. However, the Western Isles are included in the geographic portion of Scotland known as the Highlands, as opposed to the Lowlands. Further the people of the Highlands and the Western Isles were for the most part of the Gaelic or Celtic culture rather than the Anglo-Norman and Anglo-Saxon cultures of the lowlands.

Among the Western Isles there is perhaps no Island more import to our family than Mull. Mull is the home of Duart Castle, the ancient headquarters of Clan MacLean. Mull is the origins of our McKinnon and Currie ancestors, who later migrated to the Isle of Colonsay. Mull has the town of Tobermory which was the nearest town of substance to our ancestors who lived on the Isle of Tiree.

In the summer of 2019, my wife and I traveled to Oban, Scotland. Oban has been called the gateway to the Isles as the Caledonia MacBrayne ferry terminal provides service to the Isles of Mull, Tiree, Colonsay, Islay and a number of smaller islands. We visited a restaurant in Oban that displayed a work of art that illustrated the outlines of all the Inner Hebride Islands.

Professor John Sheets in one of his history articles, mentions that ferry craft would carry people from the Isles of Colonsay in the early 1800s to Oban for departure on trans-Atlantic ships bound for North America. So standing on the now Caledonia MacBrayne quay, I had the experience of the last view our ancestors may have had when they departed for Canada.

Not having an expansive itinerary, we decided to at least visit the Island of Mull and go to Duart Castle and the town of Tobermory. While touring Castle Duart, on the wall of one of the rooms was a map showing Mull and the surrounding islands as these were once the domain of Clan MacLean.

### History of Mull

The Isle of Mull is the second-largest island of the Inner Hebrides (after Skye) and lies off the west coast of Scotland in the council area of Argyll and Bute. It covers 338 square miles. Mull has a coastline of 300 miles, and its climate is moderated by the Gulf Stream. The island has a mountainous core; the highest peak on the island is Ben More, which reaches 3,169 ft. Various peninsulas, which are predominantly moorland, radiate from the center.

The Isle of Mull has probably been inhabited since shortly after the end of the last Ice Age, around 11,000 years ago. This is evidenced by radio carbon dating from a mesolithic hut at Crieth Dubh on the northwest coast of the island. Later, Bronze Age and Iron Age inhabitants built brochs at Dun Nan Gall and An Sean Chaisteal, and a stone circle at Lochbuie along with numerous examples of burial cairns. Two crannogs have been dated to the Iron Age.

In the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D., Irish migrants invaded Mull and the surrounding coast,

## Traces Through World History

establishing the Gaelic kingdom of Dál Riada. The kingdom was divided into a number of regions, each controlled by a kin group, of which the Cenél Loairn controlled Mull and the adjacent mainland to the east.

Dál Riada was a springboard for the Christianization of the mainland; the pivotal point was 563, when St. Columba, an Irish missionary, arrived at the island of Iona just off the southwest point of Mull and founded a monastery from which to start evangelizing the local population.

In the 9<sup>th</sup> century, Viking invasions led to the destruction of Dál Riada and its replacement by the Norse Kingdom of the Isles, which became part of the kingdom of Norway following Norwegian unification around 872. The Kingdom of the Isles was much more extensive than Dál Riada, encompassing also the Outer Hebrides and Skye. The island kingdom became known as the Suðreyjar, meaning southern isles in Old Norse. The former lands of Dál Riada acquired the geographic description "Argyle" (now "Argyll") meaning "of the Galls," or Gaelic coast.

In the late 11<sup>th</sup> century, Magnus Barefoot Olafsson (our 26<sup>th</sup> great grandfather), the Norwegian king, launched a military campaign which in 1098 led the king of Scotland to quitclaim to Magnus all claim of sovereign authority over the territory of the Kingdom of the Isles. However, a coup some 60 years later, led by a Norse-Gael named Somerled (our 24<sup>th</sup> great grandfather), detached the whole of the Suðreyjar from Norway and transformed it into an independent kingdom. After Somerled's death in 1164, nominal Norwegian authority was established, but practical control of the realm was divided between Somerled's sons and the heirs of Somerled's brother-in-law, the Crovan Dynasty. His son Dougall (our 25<sup>th</sup> great grandfather) received the former territory of the Cenél Loairn, now known as Lorn, of which Mull formed part.

Meanwhile, the Crovan dynasty had retained the title "king of the Isles" and control of Lewis, Harris, and the Isle of Man. After a few decades, they acknowledged the English kings as their overlords, so Dougall's heirs (the MacDougalls) complained to Haakon, the Norwegian king, and in 1237 were rewarded by the kingship being split; rule of the Hebrides was transferred to the MacDougall line, and they were made the "kings of the Hebrides". They established the twin castles of Aros (on Mull) and Ardtornish (on the mainland near Oban), which together controlled the Sound of Mull.

Throughout the early 13<sup>th</sup> century, the king of Scots, Alexander II, had aggressively tried to expand his realm into the Suðreyjar, despite Edgar's earlier quitclaim. This led to hostility between Norway and Scotland, which continued under Alexander III. King Haakon IV of Norway died shortly after the indecisive Battle of Largs. In 1266, his more peaceable successor ceded his nominal authority over the Suðreyjar to Alexander III by the Treaty of Perth in return for a very large sum of money. Alexander generally acknowledged the semi-independent authority of Somerled's heirs; the former Suðreyjar had become Scottish crown dependencies rather than parts of Scotland.

Also in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century saw the formation of Clan MacLean with its first chief Gilleain na Tuaighe MacLean (1174 - 1263)(our 25<sup>th</sup> great grandfather).

At the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, a violent dispute arose over the Scottish kingship between

## Traces Through World History

King John Balliol and Robert the Bruce (our 20<sup>th</sup> great grandfather). By then, Somerled's descendants had formed into three families: as well as Dougall's heirs (the MacDougalls), there were also the heirs of his nephew Donald (the MacDonalds) and those of Donald's brother (the MacRory); the MacDougalls backed Balliol, while the MacDonalds and MacRory backed the Bruce. When the Bruce defeated John, he declared the MacDougall lands forfeit and gave them to the MacDonalds and MacRory, with the latter acquiring Lorn (and hence, Mull).

In 1354, though in exile and without control of his ancestral lands, John, the MacDougall heir, quitclaimed any rights he had over Mull to the Lord of the Isles. When Robert's son David II became king, he spent some time in English captivity; after his release, in 1357, he restored MacDougall authority over Lorn, effectively cancelling Robert's grant to the MacRory. The 1354 quitclaim, which seems to have been an attempt to ensure peace in just such an eventuality, took automatic effect, splitting Mull from Lorn and making it subject to the Lordship of the Isles.

John MacDonald (our 20<sup>th</sup> great grandfather) of Islay, the head of the MacDonald family, then married Amy of Garmoran, the heir of the MacRory family, thereby consolidating the remains of Somerled's realm, and transforming it into the Lordship of the Isles. The MacDonalds were then the Lords of the Isles. The prominence of Ian Dubh MacLean during the reigns of Robert II of Scotland and Robert III of Scotland, as well as their own affable behavior and pleasing manners, gained for him the friendship of John, First Lord of the Isles. John MacDonald put much of the lands in Argyll in the custody of the 4<sup>th</sup> Chief of Clan MacLean, Ian Dubh MacLean (our 22<sup>nd</sup> great grandfather). It would be this granting of considerable territory by John of Islay that would result in how Clan MacLean lands are depicted on the *Clan Names Map of Scotland*. That map shows the Clan MacLean ownership to include: (1) all of the Island of Mull except the furthest northwest corner which fell to Clan MacKinnon; (2) most of Morvern north of the Sound of Mull; (3) the Islands of Coll and Tiree; and (4) the northern half of the Island of Jura.

In 1437, the Lordship was substantially expanded when Alexander MacDonald (our 19<sup>th</sup> great grandfather), the Lord of the Isles, inherited the rule of Ross maternally. The expansion led the MacDonalds to move their center of power from Islay to the twin castles of Aros and Ardtornish. Aros was on the Island of Mull near Tobermory while Ardtornish was on the north side of the Sound of Mull in Morvern.

Throughout this time, the descendants of the Cenél Loairn retained their identity; they had become the MacLeans. Now that John MacDonald was exiled, James IV restored the authority of the MacLeans over Mull. An earlier chief of the MacLeans had married the daughter of the first Lord of the Isles and received Duart Castle as the dowry; this now became the stronghold of MacLean control of Mull. The cadet branch of the family constructed a tower house at Moy on the southern side of Mull, while the senior branch retained Duart Castle.

Following the Scottish Reformation, the MacLeans became supporters of Protestantism. By the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, they had become promoters of conventicles (non-conforming religious meetings), opposed to King Charles II's repudiation of the Solemn League and Covenant and supporting acts of civil disobedience. Though personally opposed to persecution of such people, Archibald Campbell, 9<sup>th</sup> Earl of Argyll, was specifically ordered by the Scottish privy council to suppress conventicles within his lands, which included Lorn. The atmosphere of hostility soon

## Traces Through World History

spread to Mull, where opponents of the conventicles felt emboldened, leading to outbreaks of violence between the two religious factions.

In 1678, Campbell was specifically instructed to seize Mull and suppress both the violence and conventicles. It took him until 1680 to gain possession of the whole island. Campbell took charge of Duart Castle and ejected the MacLean leadership from Mull; they moved to Cairnburgh Castle in the Treshnish Islands off the north-west of Mull. Campbell's own position was somewhat undermined when he instigated Argyll's Rising against the reign of James VII. The loyalty of subsequent Campbell leaders ensured the Campbells retained possession of Duart (it was only after the Campbells sold it, and it had spent a century under other owners, that the MacLeans were able to recover it by purchase). Under Campbell pressure, shrieval authority was established under the sheriff of Argyll, which they controlled.

### The Genealogy Trail to Mull and Colonsay, the Search for Mary McKinnon

I started looking into my McLean genealogy back in about 1994. Among my mother's papers was a pedigree chart and a family group sheet filled out in handwriting. A note on the chart said "from Don Hensel's records." The chart indicated that our Great Great Grandmother Mary McKinnon was born about 1830 on the Isle of Colonsay, Scotland and that her parents were Duncan McKinnon of the Isle of Tiree and a Mary Smith (or Patterson).

I met up with Don Hensel (my mother's cousin) in 1996 for the first time. I asked Don how he determined the information that he had written on that pedigree sheet back in the 1970s. He said it was mainly through writing letters to elder members of the family to gather what they knew. This is when Don told me a story of how Mary McKinnon's brother Donald McKinnon was a famous professor of the Gaelic language at Edinburgh University. He also had a sketchy story about how Mary's mother was either a "Smith" or a "Patterson."

I learned from Don and a visit to the Odalen Cemetery that Mary McKinnon died on November 7, 1904. Her gravestone indicated that she was 77 years and 11 months old. Calculating backwards yields that she was born about December 7, 1826. Further, I had obtained a copy of a clipping from the Edinburgh, ND Tribune that said she died at the home of her son Charles McLean.

I started doing research in the Canada census focusing on Bruce County, Ontario where Don and the *Walsh Heritage* books said the family came from. I found the John McLean and Mary McKinnon family in the 1881 Canada census for Bruce County, Ontario. The family was living in Bruce Township (where Underwood is located) where John was a farmer. Mary was entered into the record as "Mary S." Her age was shown as 50 which yields a birth year of 1831. I could not find the family in the 1871 census in Bruce County. But I did find the family living in Minto Township of Wellington County before they moved to Bruce. I found them in both the 1871 and 1861 census in Wellington County. In 1871, Mary's age was shown as 38 which yields a birth year of 1833. In 1861, Mary's age was shown as 32 which yields a birth year of 1829.

In 1998, I obtained a death certificate for Mary McKinnon from North Dakota. There wasn't much there other than the death date and an age of 78 years (yields a birth year of 1826). The parts of the certificate for birth place and parents names were "not stated."

## Traces Through World History

I found Mary in the 1900 U.S. census living in the household of her son Duncan McLean in Park River, ND. The 1900 census provides the month and year of birth. In this census, Mary was shown as being born in November 1827 in Scotland. From that information, I began to search through records in Scotland. Mary's birth was not found in any common indices. But then I searched the 1841 Scotland census for the Island of Colonsay. I found the family of a Duncan McKinnon and Mary McKinnon who had a child (although the census does not indicate what the relationship is) in their home named Mary McKinnon age 14 which yields a birth year of 1827. Further, I came to find out that this is the same family who had a son named Donald who would later be a famous professor of Gaelic language at Edinburgh University. It all seemed to match the family lore and other data I had on Mary McKinnon. So I then searched in the Old Parish Records of the Church of Scotland for Colonsay. Unfortunately, I did not find a birth record that would match up with our Mary McKinnon. However, I found the marriage record for the parents and the other children.

Thinking that I had indeed found the right McKinnon family, I began a search for other family connections. I exchanged e-mails with an Elaine Robinson in January 1999 as she had researched her McKinnon relatives who descend from the siblings of Duncan McKinnon. She had done her own research in the Old Parish Registers and other records for this family.

I found out that a Professor, John W. Sheets, was an authority on the life and times of Professor Donald McKinnon. So I wrote him a letter explaining what I found. He was nice enough to answer but told me that he seriously doubted my conclusions as to our Mary McKinnon being a sister to Donald McKinnon. He reasoned that: (1) our Mary's birth was before the marriage date (7 Feb 1829) of Duncan McKinnon and his wife Mary Currie; (2) he knew of no families in which there were two siblings with the same given name (the census had two Mary McKinnon's in the household); and (3) he had a 1902 letter that supposedly identified Duncan's children and the list didn't include our Mary McKinnon. So I was a little discouraged, but I still believed that I may be right in some way. But I had exhausted most of the research sources available to me so I could positively prove it.

In 2004, I got a call from Don Hensel's wife Beverly and she told me that Don had passed away and asked if I would like to have some of Don's genealogy papers and books. I said yes, and she shipped me a box full. I sorted through the materials and I found a letter dated September 16, 1979 addressed to Don from Clark McLean (1902 - 1988) (son of Duncan McLean/Margaret Gillespie). The following is the story told in this letter:

Many years ago a man by the name of Patterson, he fought in the British Army, he was given a medal in the Battle of Waterloo against Napoleon. He gave it to a daughter of his. This daughter married a McKinnon who had a number of children, one of these boys was a professor in the University of Edinburgh, Scotland. He died in 1913 or 1914 (my note: the famous Professor Donald McKinnon died in December 1914). They had a daughter Mary who was given this medal from her mother. Now this daughter was born in 1830, who in 1850 married a John McLean who was born in 1810.

So I now had in my possession the source of the story that Don had told me earlier. I thought to myself, how could anyone possibly make up such a story considering how far away Park River, ND was from Edinburgh, Scotland at the turn of the century when you most likely

## Traces Through World History

would not have had any knowledge about who was a professor there. After gaining some experience in Scottish research I began to learn that Professor Sheets assumptions were not necessarily true. I discovered that there were lots of Scottish families where children were born prior to the parents formal marriage in the church. The Scottish people had a ancient practice called “hand fasting” in which they had a local non-church ceremony in which they pledged vows to one another. Further it is really not that unusual to find two siblings with the same given name in Scottish families. Then in terms of the 1902 Donald McKinnon letter it needs to be said that Donald McKinnon was only about 10 years old when our Mary McKinnon left Colonsay. Due to distance and time, it may be that our Mary was a long forgotten sister by 1902. Donald McKinnon may have even though she was dead by then.

My Ancestry.DNA autosomnal test show numerous matches to my McLean relatives. The number of matches provided is huge. Some participants provide family tree data that allows you to figure out who your common ancestor is. Further, if the data is available, Ancestry.DNA makes predictions on common ancestors. I have confirmed through further research the common McLean ancestors I have with about 75 of my matches. Among those matches I have confirmed are in reference to the origins of Mary McKinnon. I have one match whose family tree traces to common ancestors: Angus McKinnon/Janet McKinnon. Then I have two matches whose family trees trace to common ancestors: Donald Currie/Anabella Currie. Another two matches have family trees that trace to common ancestors: John Currie and Agnes McKinley (parents of Donald Currie). What is remarkable about this is that Angus McKinnon/Janet McKinnon are the parents of the same Duncan McKinnon of Colonsay whose son is Professor Donald McKinnon. Then Donald Currie/Anabella Currie are the parents of Mary Currie who was the wife of Duncan McKinnon and the mother of Donald McKinnon. So this proves that Mary McKinnon’s parents had to be from the same two families as Duncan McKinnon and Mary Currie. Unfortunately, it does rule out that her parents could be a combination of siblings from these same two families. However, it seems to be that the most likely scenario is that Mary McKinnon’s parents were indeed Duncan McKinnon and Mary Currie.

### Mull Ancestors

There are some sketchy links to ancestors who descend from Clan MacLean. This is through John Dubh MacLean the son of the 12<sup>th</sup> Chief of the Clan, Euchuinn (Hector) Mor MacLean (1497 - 1570). Those Clan MacLean ancestors (described in the previous chapter), for the most part, were born on and lived on the Island of Mull. This line of ancestry is however through our ancestors who lived on the Isle of Tiree.

As proved by a DNA link identified above, our line of ancestry from the Island of Mull starts with Angus McKinnon and his wife Janet McKinnon. My DNA match was to a person with the Ancestry.DNA identification of C.D. that had the surname Dingler. Ancestry.DNA predicted this person to be a 5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> cousin of mine. I confirmed this match to be a 5<sup>th</sup> cousin, once removed. This person was shown as the great great grandson of a Jennie Mabel Trout (1875-1956). Jennie Trout was the daughter of William Henry Trout and Jane Knowles. William Henry Trout was the son of William Trout and Catherine McKinnon. Catherine McKinnon was

## Traces Through World History

born to Angus McKinnon and Janet McKinnon on the Island of Mull on April 2, 1809. This genealogical information was more or less identical to what was sent to me by Elaine Robinson in 1999. So the DNA match confirms that C.D. Dingler and I share common ancestors in Angus McKinnon and Janet McKinnon. There are 18 public member trees posted on Ancestry.com that identify this family. However, I rely mainly on the information supplied to me by Elaine Robinson to describe this family. As she had done original research on this family rather than copying it from other family trees, I believe her information to be the most reliable.

According to Elaine Robinson's information, Angus McKinnon was born about 1781 on the Island of Mull. Although there are some Ancestry public members trees that have him born about 1770 at Ardvergnish on the Isle of Mull. Janet McKinnon was born about 1781 on the Isle of Mull. Records for their family would later be found in the Old Parish Register for the Parish of Kilfinichen. It should be noted that the place name Ardvergnish is located in the Parish of Kilfinichen at the head of Loch Scridon on the Island of Mull about 5 miles east of Kilfinichen.

Angus McKinnon and Janet McKinnon probably married about 1799 on Mull. They were known to have eight children: Sarah (1800); Margaret (1801); Donald (1802); Duncan (1804); Angus (1806); Lachlan (1807); Catherine (1809); and John (1813). As Duncan, Angus, and Lachlan were reportedly born in the Parish of Kilfinichen, it is assumed that this was the place of the McKinnon's residence. The other children were just reportedly born on Mull. The existence of this family on Mull is born out in Jo Currie's book, *Mull, the Island & its People* in which she reports that our ancestors were of "Crofting stock." Crofting is a form of land tenure and small-scale food production particular to the Scottish Highlands and the Western Isles of Scotland. Individual crofts were established on the better land, and a large area of poorer-quality hill ground was shared by all the crofters of the township for grazing of their livestock. So Angus McKinnon was a tenant on the land at best.

Improvements were being made on the Island of Colonsay for attracting some crofters. A crofting district of small farms in Upper and Lower Kilchattan was developed. Also a new church of Scotland chapel was built at Scalasaig. For example, our ancestors were attracted to Colonsay in the 1820s, Catherine, Donald, Duncan, John, Lachlan and Sarah McKinnon (with their elderly parents) moved to Kilchattan from Mull. Margaret and Angus stayed behind on Mull. Margaret married Donald McCormick on January 11, 1832 in Kilfinichen. She raised her family in the vicinity of Kilfinichen and lived there the rest of her life until her death in 1849. Angus married Mary Black on June 29, 1826 in Kilfinichen. According to Professor John Sheets, Angus and Mary with four children left directly from Mull for Ontario, Canada in 1846.

### History of Colonsay

Some sources say Colonsay's name derives from Old Norse and means "Kolbein's island" which is indicative of the era in which the Vikings were dominant in the Western Isles. Other sources say that Colonsay and Oransay Islands are supposedly to have derived their names from St. Columba and St. Oran, respectively. St. Columba founded a monastery on Colonsay for the Culdees prior to his settlement on Iona.

The Islands of Colonsay and Oransay are separated from each other only by a narrow

## Traces Through World History

isthmus only a few hundred yards wide that is only dry when the tide is out. Colonsay is an island in the Inner Hebrides of Scotland, located north of Islay and south of Mull. The ancestral home of Clan Macfie and the Colonsay branch of Clan MacNeil, it has an area of 10,070 acres. It measures 8 miles in length and reaches 3 miles at its widest point.

In prehistoric times, Colonsay was a center of activity. The Mesolithic hunter-gathering population which occupied the area following the most recent ice-age seems to have had the tiny adjacent island of Oronsay at the heart of its way of life - for 1,500 years and more it seems that Oronsay provided a center for seasonal visits, for feasting and - presumably - matchmaking and other social and intellectual exchange. The sea was not a barrier to these people, instead it was a highway and by the beginning of the Bronze Age an important trading route connected the eastern Mediterranean with Scandinavia by way of the Iberian Peninsula, the Irish Sea and the Great Glen. That trading route ran past Colonsay and along the Firth of Lorne, ensuring that this seemingly remote location was never far from events in the wider world.

In fact, whoever controlled Colonsay controlled the entrance to and from the vital Sound of Islay, effectively with a stranglehold upon the entire channel of communications. Thus it was that when the Scotti (Celtic people) came across from Ireland and established an important command center in Colonsay, and St. Columba used Oronsay as a key link in his own supply line back to Derry and the Foyle by way of Islay; from his base in Iona he was able to foray up the Great Glen as far as the kingdom of King Brude, securing the next link in the great trade route.

In due course, the Scandinavians (Vikings) made their way southwards along such trading routes and once again Colonsay's key location was important. Although it would never equate to the great trading centers of York, Dublin or Wexford, Colonsay was a convenient administrative center for the Viking rulers in Man and to this day bears witness to that fact in both placenames and archaeological remains. In the fullness of time, the Vikings were to be eclipsed and the great House of Clan Donald arose in their stead.

It is a curious fact that many present-day MacDonalds associate themselves with Skye, whereas it was Colonsay that provide both the Alpha and the Omega to their period of glory. It is an accepted fact that the first Donald was descended from Somerled, and it was from a base in Colonsay that, in 1156, Somerled provoked Godred, King of Man, to send a fleet against him which he ambushed and defeated in the Sound of Islay. According to Colonsay tradition, Somerled was the direct descendant of Jarl Gilli, who governed the Sudereys (Southern Isles) from Colonsay and who died about 1005; a famous Viking grave in Colonsay may be that of Jarl Gilli. It is undeniable that Colonsay is the ancestral home of all MacDonalds on earth, and in fact it evidently remained dear to the clan throughout their turbulent history. Clan Donald, as Lords of the Isles, appointed Clan MacPhee to govern Colonsay and Oronsay - probably from the early 14<sup>th</sup> century - and also to maintain the Records of the Lordship; their descendants have maintained a close connection with the islands until the present day. For these reason Clan MacPhee is depicted on the *Clan Names Map of Scotland* as owners of Colonsay.

After Sir James MacDonald had to make his escape to Spain in 1615, he left the protection of his sister and the fortunes of the southern clan to the surviving leader, Colkitto MacDonald of Colonsay. Later again, when everything else had been lost to them, King James VII reconfirmed the islands of Colonsay and Oronsay to the representative of Clan Donald by



## Traces Through World History

charter as late as 1687; the sasine to the charter was registered on October 19, 1687, even whilst the enemy was at the gate - William of Orange landed at Torbay on November 5, 1688.

This saw an end to the true monarchy of Scotland, and a virtual end to both MacDonalDs and Catholicism in Colonsay, which fell into the possession of Clan MacNeill of the south, followers of Clan Campbell.

For the first Statistical Account of Scotland (1791-96), Rev. Francis Stewart of the Parish of Jura and Colonsay in Argyll counted "718 Souls" in 134 families living on the 15 farms of Colonsay and Oronsay Islands. He further stated that in the summer of 1791, a considerable proportion of the inhabitants crossed the Atlantic.

There followed two centuries of rapid agricultural and social improvement, accompanied by the removal of much of the original population and indeed most of their successors. From 1737, there was voluntary emigration to North Carolina, interrupted by the American War of Independence - after which came clearances, initially to North Carolina, and then to Pictou and later to Prince Edward Island.

During the 18<sup>th</sup> century the lairds of the island were McNeills. In 1701 Malcolm McNeill of Crear (in Argyll) purchased Colonsay from the 10<sup>th</sup> Earl of Argyll, specifically its "houses, biggings, yards, orchards, mills, multures, mosses, muirs, meadows, woods, fishings, grazings, pasturages, annexis, connexis, outsetts, insetts, parts, pendicles and their universal pertinents whatsoever lying in the Parish..." The Colonsay House was first built by the McNeill family in 1722. A church was built by the McNeills in 1802 that could seat 400. John McNeill purchased the islands from his cousin Archibald in 1805 and quickly used his professional education to improve his new estate. He drained meadows, rotated crops, applied fertilizers, bred black cattle and built roads, bridges, walls, quays and a parish school. McNeill (the Old Laird) created the crofting district of small farms in Upper and Lower Kilchattan.

Ships departed carrying many of the Colonsay families to Prince Edward Island in Canada in 1806 and 1808. Colonsay and John McNeill exported plenty of cattle, oats and potatoes during the Napoleonic wars, yet young men and extended families still followed their friends to Prince Edward Island. Colonsay's population fluctuated from 805 in 1801, down to 786 in 1811, then up to 904 in 1821. The departure of so much of the population, left many of the crofting districts vacant and the Old Laird McNeill worked at recruiting immigrants from the adjacent islands of Islay, Jura, and Mull.

From 1815 or so, the exodus was no longer involuntary - all who could find the means began to flee and their places in Colonsay were filled by refugees from the slightly worse conditions in the nearby Ross of Mull, the property of the even-more ambitious "improver", the Duke of Argyll. This is about the time that Angus and Janet McKinnon migrated from Mull to Colonsay.

By the mid 1830s the Highlands and Islands faced shrinking markets and growing populations.

In Colonsay, the first household census of 1841 recorded 979 residents, or nearly 50 per square mile. For those staying, John McNeill was forever the affectionate "Old Laird" of paternal instincts, Gaelic speech and staunch Presbyterianism. His favorite district of Kilchattan boasted 255 in 43 households while Balnahard struggled with 32 in just 6 houses.

## Traces Through World History

Scotland's Second Statistical Account (1845) applauded the "Old Laird": "Mr McNeill has thus, by judicious, persevering and well-directed efforts, not only brought his estate in a high condition of cultivation and productiveness, but he has likewise much improved the condition of the small crofters, and afforded constant occupation to a numerous and comfortable population." Actually, he had witnessed a decade or more of falling prices for Colonsay's exports and mercifully died on February 24, 1846, the eve of the Potato Famine. That year the islanders received a shipment of American corn, and the next year young men and women went to find seasonal work in mainland towns and cities. Rather ominously, the parochial Death Register for Colonsay starts in 1848. By the 1851 census, the population had declined by 15% to 837, signaling more decades of emigration and 150 years of depopulation.

### Colonsay Ancestors

Our connections to ancestors from Colonsay starts with four DNA matches. However, these matches require some degree of evaluation to determine just how our family tree fits it. My first DNA match was to a person identified on Ancestry.DNA as Alice McDougall. Ancestry.DNA estimated that she and I are 5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> cousins. The "Thru-lines" feature on Ancestry.DNA predicted that we had common ancestors named Donald Currie and Annabella Currie. Alice McDougall posted public member tree is very well documented and sourced and I find it to be reliable. Her tree traces to common ancestors on Colonsay named Donald Currie and Annabella Currie. Using those persons as our common ancestors results in a determination that we are 4<sup>th</sup> cousins, once removed which is within the Ancestry.DNA estimate. Alice McDougall provided that Donald Currie's father was a Neil Currie. She provided a note that said she got this from a letter written by Malcolm Munn in 1822 from Colonsay that said that Barbara Currie's (daughter of Donald Currie) grandfather was Neil Currie.

Another DNA match was identified as "D.G." which I determined was a Deborah Graham. Ancestry.DNA estimated that she and I are 5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> cousins. The "Thru-lines" feature on Ancestry.DNA predicted that we had common ancestors named Donald Currie and Annabella Currie. Using those persons as our common ancestors results in a determination that we are 5<sup>th</sup> cousins. However, her posted public member tree only included three generations tracing to a Daniel Scott. "Thru-lines" predicted connections to 14 other public member trees. One of the promising trees was that identified for "ChristineFerguson55" which is a well document tree tracing to Donald Currie and Annabella Currie. But the connection made to a Mary Currie (b.1816) as a daughter of Donald Currie and Annabella Currie is sketchy at best and perhaps unreliable. Unlike the rest of the Donald Currie and Annabella Currie family, I could not find reference to this Mary Currie in the available Colonsay records. However, this Mary Currie may in someway be related to the family of Donald Currie and Anabelle Currie.



## Traces Through World History

Another DNA match was identified as Jaci Hill. Ancestry.DNA estimated that she and I are 5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> cousins. The “Thru-lines” feature on Ancestry.DNA predicted that we had a common ancestor named John Currie. However, her posted public member trees only include a few generations and “thru-lines” showed possible connections to other public member trees. One of the promising trees was that identified for “wrightmaryanna” which is a well documented tree tracing to John Currie and Agnes McKinley. This tree did not identify a Donald Currie as a child of John Currie and Agnes McKinley. As “Thru-lines” predicted only a DNA relationship with John Currie and not his wife Agnes McKinley, I surmised that our Donald Currie may have a father named Neil Currie (as shown above) who was the brother of John Currie. Using this scenario resulted in a determination that Jaci Hill and I are 7<sup>th</sup> cousins, which is still in the range estimated by Ancestry.DNA.

The final Currie match was to an “L.G.” who I determined to be Jennifer Gummow. The tree she posted had only minimal data, so the connection predicted by “Thru-lines” is at best sketchy. Nevertheless, “Thru-lines” showed a connection to a well documented tree identified as “becpau” that traces to the same John Currie identified above.

So using this evaluation I can say with some degree of confidence that the story of our Colonsay ancestors begins with Donald Currie and Annabella Currie. Then following the public member trees backwards leads to James Currie and Janet Ferguson, Donald Currie’s grandparents.

### The Curries

James Currie’s ancestry goes back seven generations to Currie ancestors who lived in Canongate in Midlothianshire near Edinburgh. Some sources indicate that the surname originated as a habitational name, derived from the place name Currie in Midlothian, Scotland. Tracing a public member tree back to that location tends to bear this out. However, some other sources trace the name back even further describing how the name came from MacMhuirrichs (pronounced MacVurich), Currie being an anglicized evolution of the name. The MacMhuirrich were a highly distinguished clan, they were noted for their high literacy, which was not a common thing back in clan times. The MacMhuirrich’s studied heroic literature and genealogy of the ancient Gaelic world. Many Gaelic surnames became anglicized and the name MacMhuirrich could be seen in a variety of forms before settling on Currie (Curry and Currey included), variations before included McCurrie in the Hebrides, MacMureach, MacVurich, and MacCurry.

Janet Ferguson’s ancestry goes back to the Scottish families of antiquity. For example, one of her ancestral lines goes back at least seven generations to the 6<sup>th</sup> Earl of Glencairn William Cunningham and his wife Lady Janet Gordon. This was in the 16<sup>th</sup> century in the vicinity of Sutherlandshire.

James Currie’s grandparents John Currie and Mary Polly lived in the area of Greenock of Renfrewshire. His parents were John Currie and Anna Dougall. James was born on February 16, 1724 at Greenock. His wife Janet Ferguson was born at Greenock in about 1726. The two were married at Glasgow on May 17, 1752. They reportedly had seven children. Among them was a John Currie who would later marry an Agnes McKinley. It was this John Currie that two DNA

## Traces Through World History

matches trace to. However, AncestryDNA “thru-lines” predicted only a connection to John Currie and not his wife. This usually means a match for a second spouse, or to a sibling. Another DNA match that led to a Donald Currie had a source that said Donald’s father was a Neil Currie. So I have surmised that John Currie and Neil Currie were brothers and children of James Currie and Janet Ferguson.

It appears that it would be our ancestor Neil Currie who would find his way to the Isle of Colonsay. This probably occurred in the late 1700s. It may be that Neil was recruited to be a crofter on the Island by the McNeill lairds. As the records of Colonsay really don’t start until around 1800, his presence there cannot be confirmed, other than his son Donald Currie is believed to have been born there in 1771. So the Currie’s are our oldest known ancestors who lived on Colonsay.

Our primary ancestral family on Colonsay was Donald Currie and his wife Annabella Currie. Donald and Annabella were adherents to the Church of Scotland. As the Old Parish Register does not start until 1796, it is believed that they most likely were married just prior to that in 1795. The baptism register for Colonsay just happens to begin in 1796. Donald and Annabella’s first child Marrion was baptized on March 20, 1797 in Colonsay. Donald and Annabella lived on the crofting district of Kilchatten. They had eight children all of whom were baptized and recorded in the Old Parish Register for Colonsay. Their children (all female) with their birth years are as follows: Marrion (1797), Barbara (1800), Annie (1803), Mary (1805), Catherine Hester (1808), Margaret (1812), and Lucy (1817). A public member tree and a family tree on Familysearch.org also traces another Mary Currie (b. 1816) to this family. But since this Mary does not appear with this family in the 1841 or 1851 census, it is very doubtful whether this link is true.

At this point, it is important to review the origins of our Great Great Grandmother Mary McKinnon. Mary McKinnon was born in November 1827, reportedly on the Island of Colonsay. The one and only record found for her on Colonsay is in the 1841 census. In that census she is found in the household of Duncan McKinnon and Mary Currie. She is listed as age 14. It was the pattern of the census taker to list first the husband and wife, then the male children in order of their age, then the female children in order of their age, and then the names of non-family members, usually servants or other relatives. In fact, the household includes at the bottom a Mary Currie, age 15, with the notation F.S. which probably means farm servant. Our Mary McKinnon is listed in the household in a manner that would imply that she was a child of Duncan McKinnon and Mary Currie. However, what complicates this is that the marriage of Duncan McKinnon and Mary Currie is not recorded in the Old Parish Register until February 7, 1829, fifteen months after Mary McKinnon’s birth. As pointed out above, Professor John Sheets did not believe that our Mary McKinnon was a child of this family for that reason.

DNA matches clearly point to Mary McKinnon’s parentage as coming from the families of Angus McKinnon and Janet McKinnon and Donald Currie and Annabella Currie. Because she bears the surname of McKinnon, her father was a son of Angus McKinnon and Janet McKinnon and her mother was a daughter of Donald Currie and Annabella Currie. So from a DNA standpoint any of these Currie daughters could be her mother. We can pretty much rule out Margaret and Lucy as they were only age 15 and 10 at the time of Mary’s birth in 1827. Then we

## Traces Through World History

can rule out Barbara as her son Donald was born in 1827. Further, Annie was also engaged in child bearing with her husband in 1827. Marrion had an illegitimate daughter born to her in 1825 (who would have been a 2 year old toddler in 1827) and seems to have disappeared from the records after that. Catherine married Duncan McNeill in 1830, although she was indeed still single in 1827. Mary Currie remains the most likely candidate despite the fact that Mary McKinnon was born before her marriage date to Duncan McKinnon. Duncan McKinnon and Mary Currie are the only couple relationship who came from each of the families for which the DNA matches trace to. I will examine the McKinnon sons of Angus McKinnon and Janet McKinnon later in this narrative.

The timeline of the Donald Currie and Annabella Currie family starts with the birth of their children and their childhoods that range from 1797 to about 1841. Their daughter Barbara married Peter Campbell on January 26, 1822 at Colonsay. Then there is an entry in the Old Parish Register for the baptism of a child name Forbus born to a Marrion Currie on August 21, 1825. The record did not identify a father's name. However in the 1841 census, a Forbus McNeill of a matching age is living with Donald Currie and Annabella and was probably their grandchild. A marriage record was not found for Annie to Angus Brown, however census data would yield an estimate that they were married in about 1825. As noted above, Mary Currie married Duncan McKinnon on February 7, 1829 at Colonsay. Catherine Hester was married to Duncan McNeill on January 9, 1830 at Colonsay. Lucy was married to John McLugash on June 22, 1846 at Colonsay.

The 1841 census taken on June 6, 1841 was the last record that Donald Currie and Annabella Currie appear in. They were both shown as age 70 and living in Kilchatten. With them in their household was their daughter Lucy and a Forbus McNeill who was probably their granddaughter. They both died sometime after 1841, but a burial record has not been found for either. For the most part, Donald and Annabella's daughters would marry and settled in households nearby in the crofting district of Kilchatten.

Peter Campbell and Barbara Currie would have 10 children from 1826 to 1845. Their children and their birth years are as follows: Archibald (1826), Neil (1826), Donald (1827), Barbara (1830), Alexander (1832), James (1834), Sarah (1838), Angus (1839), Annabella (1842), and Peter (1845). As there were no baptism records found in the Old Parish Register for any of these Campbell children, it is assumed that this family were not adherents to the Church of Scotland. Professor Sheets in some of his articles infers that some Colonsay families belonged to the Baptist faith. That may be the case here. Peter and Barbara and their children are found in the 1841 census living in Kilchatten. Peter Campbell died on April 26, 1850 in Colonsay leaving Barbara as a widow. Barbara is found in the 1851 census still living in Kilchatten with her children Donald, James, Sarah, Annabella and Peter in her household. Barbara Currie died on January 24, 1878 in Colonsay.

Annie Currie married widower Angus Brown in about 1830. Angus and his first wife Mary McFayden had the following sons with their birth years: Neil (1822), Donald (1826), and Angus (1828). Annie was about 27 when she was suddenly a mother to these young boys. Annie and Angus would have the following children with their birth years: Catherine (1831), Isabella (1836), Alexander (1837), Ann (1840), and Archibald (1842). Three of their children had

## Traces Through World History

baptism records found in the Old Parish Register, so it is assumed they were adherents to the Church of Scotland. Angus and Annie and their children are found in the 1841 census and 1851 census living in Kilchatten.

Catherine Hester Currie married Duncan McNeill on January 9, 1830. Their first child was born six months later. Their nine children with their birth years are as follows: Mary (1830), Rory (1831), Annabella (1834), Neil (1836), Donald (1839), Archibald (1841), Malcolm (1844), Angus (1847), and Margaret (1850). All their children except Angus had baptism records in the Old Parish Register. So it is assumed that they were adherents to the Church of Scotland. Rory did not live to adulthood, dying in 1848. Duncan and Catherine and their family are found in the 1841 census in Screden. Screden is a farming area just north of Kilchatten. In the 1851 census, the family is shown as living in Kilchatten. These McNeills for the most part would remain on Colonsay for their entire lives. However, Catherine Hester Currie died on November 8, 1886 at Colonsay. Duncan McNeill died on March 28, 1897 at Colonsay.

Lucy Currie married John McLugash on June 22, 1846 at Colonsay. Their eight children with their birth years are as follows: Annabella (1847), Mary (1848), Ann (1850), Donald (1852), Archibald (1855), John (1856), Sarah (1859), and Archibald (1861). All these children were known to be born on Colonsay, but only Mary and Ann had baptism records that could be found in the Old Parish Register. In the 1851 census, John and Lucy and their children were living at Baleroman on Colonsay. In the 1861 census, they were living at Balnahard.

Mary Currie would marry Duncan McKinnon in 1829. The history of their family will be discussed below.

### The McKinnons

Compared to the Curries, the McKinnons were sort of latecomers to Colonsay. According to Professor John Sheets, Catherine, Donald, Duncan, John, Lachlan and Sarah McKinnon (with their elderly parents Angus and Janet) moved to Kilchattan from Mull in the 1820s. There is relatively little evidence of the family's presence on Colonsay during the 1820s. The primary evidence found in the Old Parish Register was: (1) the marriage of Sarah or Marrison McKinnon to Charles Munn in 1826; (2) the baptism of Charles and Marrison's child Mary in 1828; and (3) the marriage of Duncan McKinnon and Mary Currie in 1829.

Margaret McKinnon, who did not go to Colonsay, stayed on Mull where she married Donald McCormick on January 11, 1823 at Kilfinichen. Their six children with their birth years are as follows: John (1825), Janet (1827), Cormick (1829), Angus (1831), Malcolm (1833), and Catherine (1836). For the most part, their family remained in Scotland in the vicinity of the Isle of Mull. Margaret McKinnon died in April 1849 at Kilfinichen.

Angus McKinnon also stayed on Mull where he married Mary Black on June 29, 1826 at Kilfinichen. Their five children with their birth years are as follows: William (1829), Janet (1832), Ann (1833), Sarah (Marrison)(1835), and Neil (1840).

Sarah (Marrison) McKinnon married Charles Munn on April 6, 1826. Their eight children with their birth years are as follows: Mary (1828), Charles (1831), Donald (1833), Angus (1835), Malcolm (1838), John (1841), Neil (1843), and Annie (1849). Only Mary Munn's baptism on

## Traces Through World History

May 7, 1828 is found in the Old Parish Register on Colonsay.

According to Professor Sheets, all the McKinnon children of Angus and Janet except for Duncan, left Scotland to migrate to the vicinity of Erin Township of Wellington County, Ontario, in 1831.

In review, DNA matches clearly point to our Great Great Grandmother's Mary McKinnon's parentage as coming from the families of Angus McKinnon and Janet McKinnon and Donald Currie and Annabella Currie. Because she bears the surname of McKinnon, her father was a son of Angus McKinnon and Janet McKinnon and her mother was a daughter of Donald Currie and Annabella Currie. So from a DNA standpoint any of these McKinnon sons could be her father. We can rule out Angus McKinnon as he was known to have stayed on Mull. John McKinnon was born in 1813 and would have only been 14 years of age at the time of Mary's birth, so he is ruled out as well. That leaves Donald, Duncan, and Lachlan. As Donald and Lachlan left for Canada in 1831, and young Mary McKinnon was left behind and is later found in the household of Duncan in the 1841 census, I believe that Duncan McKinnon is her father.

Duncan McKinnon established a relationship with Mary Currie, the daughter of Donald Currie and Annabella Currie who lived at Kilchatten on Colonsay. One could say that their relationship started in 1827 as a daughter named Mary was born to them on or about November of 1827. They may have practiced the ancient Scottish tradition of "handfasting" to establish their marriage. A baptism record was not found in the Old Parish Register for Colonsay. Her pre-marital birth may have been a discouragement for this. The solemnization of their marriage is found in the Old Parish Register on February 7, 1829. That was only 15 months after Mary's approximate birth. A pre-marital birth may not have been that uncommon. For example, Mary Currie's sister Marrison had an illegitimate child in 1825 and her sister Catherine had her first child baptized just 6 months after her marriage.

Duncan McKinnon and Mary Currie's seven children with their birth years are as follows: Mary (1827), Malcolm (1830), Laughlin (1831), Janet (1833), twins Mary and Anne (1835), and Donald (1839). The baptisms of Malcolm, Laughlin, Janet, and twins Mary and Anne are all found in the Old Parish Register. Baptism records were not found in the register for Mary (the eldest) and Donald. But their existence in the family are confirmed by the 1841 census.

Duncan's mother Janet died in May 1836 on Colonsay and his father Angus died in 1838 on Colonsay.

Duncan McKinnon and his family are found in the 1841 census living in Kilchatten. Although this census does not identify the relationship of each person to the head of household, the census taker appears to have a pattern in the way persons in the household are listed. First is the husband and wife, then is the male children, then is the female children, and all non-family members are listed last. In their entry, Duncan (age 35) and Mary (age 35) are listed first, then the male children Malcolm (age 10), Lauchlan (age 9), and Donald (age 2) are listed second, then the female children, Mary (age 14), Jennet (age 7), Ann (age 5), and Mary (age 5) are listed third. Lastly is listed a non-family member Mary Currie (age 15) with the notation F.S. which is assumed to mean farm servant. If our Great Great Grandmother Mary McKinnon was not a child of Duncan and Mary, she most likely would have been listed at the bottom along with the said



## Traces Through World History

Mary Currie.

Duncan and Mary are listed again in the 1851 census living in Kilchatten. The entire family is there with the exception of Mary (the eldest) who apparently may have already emigrated to Canada. Duncan's birth place of Kilfinichen is confirmed by this record. Not long after this census, Duncan died on May 17, 1851. Then twins Anne and Mary died on November 18, 1851 and May 18, 1852 respectively.

On December 21, 1860, Malcolm McKinnon (leader of the Baptists in Colonsay) in Kilchattan, Colonsay, wrote to his uncle Lachlan McKinnon in Erin, Ontario. About his mother, Mary Currie, he wrote: "She will be found among those who get their sins washed and made them white in the blood of the Lamb . . . I know that she was not rightly nourished this long while past . . ." Like so many still in Colonsay, Malcolm McKinnon wondered if they should all not emigrate to live near their family and fellow Baptists in Ontario. "I don't think that I shall go to America as long as my mother lives now altho I don't see any way of making a living here ." Neither Malcolm, his wife, mother nor father-in-law ever left Colonsay, but others in the family did.

Mary Currie McKinnon is found as a "crofter's widow" in Kilchatten in the 1861 census. Living with her are Malcolm McKinnon and his new wife Ann McNeill. Mary Currie McKinnon died on February 13, 1862 at Colonsay. Some broken gravestones behind the ruin of Cille Chatain (Kilchatten) read as follows

1. MEMORY OF DUNCAN MACKINNON, ROSS OF MULL, MAY 1851, AGED 47 YEARS / MARY CURRIE HIS WIFE, AGED 51 YEARS.
- 2 DAUGHTERS / - AND MARY / MALCOLM / DIED IN MARCH 1872, AGED 42, WAS BURIED HERE.

Malcolm McKinnon married Ann McNeil on Colonsay in 1856. Their seven children with their birth years are as follows: Mary (1862), Duncan (1863), Catherine (1866), Janet (1867), Neil (1869), Donald (1871), and Anabella (1872). They were all known to be born on Colonsay. Malcolm died on March 5, 1872 and his broken gravestone is found near the stones of his parents as identified above.

Janet McKinnon married Finlay McEachern on April 30, 1853 on Jura, Argyll, Scotland. Their nine children with their birth years are as follows: Lucy (1854), Duncan (1856), Annie (1858), Donald (1860), Malcolm (1865), Isabella (1866), Mary (1867), Lucy Ann (1874), and Helena (1875). This family would migrate to Canada.

Duncan McKinnon and Mary Currie's last child was Donald. Recall what Clark McLean wrote in a 1979 letter about our Great Great Grandmother Mary McKinnon's family: ". . . one of these boys was a professor in the University of Edinburgh, Scotland. He died in 1913 or 1914." I believe that this Donald McKinnon was that person. Although a baptism record for Donald was not found in the Old Parish Register, he reportedly was born on April 18, 1839.

Donald enrolled in the local Sean Sgoil (The Old School), and at the age of eighteen, and attended the Church of Scotland Training College. He was Clerk to the Church of Scotland's Educational Scheme (1869). Continuing his study at Edinburgh University, he obtained the

## Traces Through World History

degree of M.A. in 1870. Later he became clerk and treasurer to the School Board of Edinburgh.

Donald married Catherine McPhee on November 3, 1873. Their five children with their birth years are as follows: Malcolm (1874), Katherine (1875), Mary (1879), Neil (1882), and Duncan (1885). They were all reportedly to have been born on Colonsay.

Donald was a Celtic scholar, the first elected Professor of Celtic languages, literature, history and antiquities at Edinburgh University. He began this chair in 1882 and occupied it for 32 years retiring in June 1914, at the age of 75. He is known particularly for his edition and translation of the so-called Glenmasan manuscript, and also catalogued the manuscripts in the Advocates Library collection.

Donald began publishing essays in *An Gaidheal* (which ran from 1871 to 1877), and these essays were generally on the topic of proverbs or poetry. He also contributed to the *Mac Talla*, a Gaelic-language newspaper published 1892 to 1904 in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. Later he wrote his observations entitled "Place Names and Personal Names in Argyll," in *The Scotsman*, Nov–Jan 1888, in eighteen serialized parts. He edited, translated, and annotated the fifteenth century Glenmasan manuscript, now at the National Library of Scotland, an important codex containing a later romance version of the Deirdre story besides other material. After retiring from the university, he returned to his beloved Colonsay where he died at Balnahard on December 25, 1914. His family gravestones in the Colonsay cemetery are as follows:

DONALD MACKINNON, 1839 - 1914, PROFESSOR / OF / CELTIC IN EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY  
1882 - 1914  
CATHERINE / MACPHEE , HIS WIFE, 1842 - 1917  
HIS DAUGHTERS, CATHERINE 1949 , MARY 1960

A Gaelic Phrase is given:

CAOCHLADH BEATHA THA ANN'S CHA BHAS / LE BEANNACHADH GRASMHOR BUAN /  
GACH NEACH A NI A'CHUID AS FHEARR / IS MAITH AN T'AIT AM FAIGH E DHUAIS

The English translation of this is:

there are various lives there is no death / blessed permanent grace / everyone who does  
the best / best where does it reward?

### Migration to Canada

The McKinnon's would be very early emigrants to Canada. 1831 would see the migration of all the children of Angus McKinnon and Janet McKinnon except for Duncan, who stayed behind with his parents in Colonsay, and Margaret who lived with her family on Mull. It appears that Angus McKinnon and his wife Mary Black and their children William, Janet, Ann, and Sarah went to Canada in 1846 without ever having lived on Colonsay.

Those leaving for Canada from Colonsay in 1831 included Sarah McKinnon and her husband Charles Munn and their children Mary and Charles. Going with them were the single

## Traces Through World History

siblings, Donald, Lachlan, Catherine, and John.

Angus McKinnon, his wife Mary Black and four children left Mull to join his McKinnon siblings in Erin Township of Wellington County, Ontario. Upon their arrival 14 year old Janet contracted smallpox. Her Uncle John came from Erin with a team of horses and wagon and took them home, a journey of 18 miles over rough roads and it was too much for her weakened system and she died. Angus McKinnon and his family were found in Esquesing Township of Halton County, Ontario in the 1861 Canada census. Esquesing is a township adjacent to the southern boundary of Erin Township. So they actually lived nearby the other McKinnon households. Reportedly, Angus McKinnon died at sea on January 13, 1875. His wife Mary lived out her life, dying around 1880 at Erin Township.

Charles and Sarah McKinnon Munn and their two children's destination was Erin Township in Wellington County, Ontario. The township was surveyed in 1819, received its first settlers in 1820 and became a haven for Gaelic-speaking people from the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. Settlement in this township would give large families the possibility of establishing contiguous 100-acre farms. The land assessment of April 5, 1833 listed Charles Munn and Laughlin McKinnon, each with 100 uncultivated acres near their brother-in-law William Trout's farm. The Charles and Sarah McKinnon Munn family were found on page 64 in Erin Township in the 1861 Canada census. They ultimately would have a total of eight children with six born in Erin Township. Sarah McKinnon Munn died on January 19, 1871 in Erin Township. Charles moved on to live in Elderslie Township of Bruce County, Ontario where he died on August 10, 1891.

In 1838, Donald McKinnon received 100 acres near his brother-in-law, Charles Munn. Donald McKinnon married a Mary McKinnon, daughter of Farquhar McKinnon and Marrion Livingston, on July 24, 1842 in Erin Township. Donald and Mary McKinnon had six children born in Erin Township. Donald's first wife Mary McKinnon died on November 13, 1858 at Erin Township. Donald, with his second wife Isabella Robertson, and his children were found in the 1861 Canada census on page 71 in Erin Township. His household was listed in the census next to the Lachlan McKinnon household. Donald McKinnon died on April 24, 1870 at Erin Township.

The land assessment of April 5, 1833 listed Charles Munn and Laughlin McKinnon, each with 100 uncultivated acres near his brother-in-law William Trout's farm. On December 2, 1834, Lachlan McKinnon married Sarah McKinnon from Esquesing Township in Halton County. By 1838, Lachlan, had 30 cultivated acres, one horse, two oxen, three young cattle and four milk cows to support his growing family. Lachlan and Sarah McKinnon had seven children all born at Erin Township. Lachlan and his family were found in the 1861 Canada census on page 71 in Erin Township. His household was listed in the census next to the Donald McKinnon household. Lachlan McKinnon died on November 28, 1862 at Erin Township. His wife Sarah died on September 17, 1865 at Erin Township.

Upon her arrival in Ontario, Catherine McKinnon first served in the house of James Leslie, later publisher of the *Toronto Examiner*, until she met William Trout from Erin. They married around 1833 somewhere in Ontario. They would eventually live and farm on 120 acres in Erin and Garafraxa Townships. The land assessment of April 5, 1833 indicates that the William Trout farm was not far from the farms of Charles Munn and Laughlin McKinnon.

## Traces Through World History

However, William Trout and his family were found in the 1861 Canada census in St. Vincent Township of Grey County, Ontario. Catherine McKinnon died on December 16, 1869 in Grey County. William Trout died on December 2, 1877 at Meaford, Ontario.

John McKinnon married Margaret McGill on December 2, 1842 at Erin Township. John and Margaret had six children all born at Erin Township. John died at the young age of 45 on May 25, 1868 at Erin Township. His widow Margaret and their children were found in the 1861 Canada census on page 68 of Erin Township.

By the 1850s some family members had migrating to Elderslie Township in Bruce County, Ontario. Lachlan McKinnon in Erin owned lots in Bruce County's Elderslie Township around the Saugeen River, a future and favored destination for Colonsay emigrants. In the Coningsby Cemetery between Ospringe and Erin in rural Wellington County are buried almost side by side Donald, John, Lachlan, and Sarah McKinnon from the Ross of Mull and Colonsay.

Even though the Curries had found their way to Colonsay far earlier than the McKinnons, they were emigrants to Canada much later than the McKinnons.

The Angus Brown and Annie Currie family migrated to Ontario, Canada in the 1850s. The family is found in the 1861 and 1871 Canada census in Arran Township of Bruce County, Ontario. Angus Brown died at Arran Township in about 1875. Annie Currie died on March 16, 1890 at Arran Township.

Mary McNeill, daughter of Duncan McNeill and Catherine Hester Currie had married Angus Buie on Colonsay in 1850 and soon after the 1851 census they migrated to Bruce Township of Bruce County, Ontario. They are found in the 1861 and 1871 Canada census in Bruce Township of Bruce County, Ontario.

A record was found for the John McLugash and Lucy Currie family that indicates that they were passengers on a ship in 1862 that sailed from Londonderry, Ireland to Quebec, Canada. Their final destination would be Arran Township in Bruce County, Ontario. The family is found in the 1881 Canada census in Arran Township. Lucy Currie died on June 22, 1884 at Arran Township. John McLugash died on October 4, 1886 at Arran Township. Some of their children would find their way to Regina, Saskatchewan.

Although the Duncan McKinnon and Mary Currie family remained behind in Colonsay, three of their children would find their way to Canada. According to our family lore, our Great Grandmother Mary McKinnon left Colonsay for Canada in 1850. She was no longer found in the household of Duncan McKinnon in Colonsay in the 1851 census. It would be reasonable to theorize that she most likely went to Erin Township first to join her McKinnon uncles, aunts, and cousins. To confirm this, the best methods would be to locate her in the 1851 Canada census. Unfortunately that isn't possible because the Erin Township pages in the 1851 Canada census are missing.

Family lore indicates that Mary McKinnon's first child Mary was born to her and her husband John McLean in 1856 in Minto Township of Wellington County, Ontario. However, the first actual Canada record she is found in is the 1861 Canada census where her and her family are located in Minto Township. Minto Township is about 57 miles from Erin Township, both in Wellington County. Although a marriage record for John McLean and Mary McKinnon has not been found, it seems likely that Mary McKinnon would have been living in the same area as John

## Traces Through World History

McLean prior to their marriage. All of John McLean and Mary McKinnon's children were born at Minto Township. But in 1880, the family migrated to Bruce Township of Bruce County, Ontario. Bruce Township is right next to Elderslie Township, which was another favored McKinnon family location.

Janet McKinnon and her husband Finlay McEachern with four children migrated to Canada in about 1862. Their destination would be Elderslie Township of Bruce County, Ontario. Five of their children would be born at Elderslie from 1865 to 1875. The family was found in the 1881 Canada census in Elderslie Township. Finlay McEachern died on September 16, 1908 at Elderslie Township. Janet McKinnon McEachern died on December 18, 1913 at Elderslie Township.

Not much is known of Lachlan McKinnon. He was still located in his family's household in Kilchatten in the 1851 census. However a death record was found for him dated July 27, 1887 at Paisley, Ontario. Paisley is a small town in the middle of Elderslie Township.

### Colonsay Conclusion

It is my belief that there is a preponderance of evidence to prove that our Great Great Grandmother Mary McKinnon was indeed the sister of Professor Donald McKinnon. This is despite the opinion of Professor Sheets who does not believe she was Donald's sister. In review, the following is the evidence:

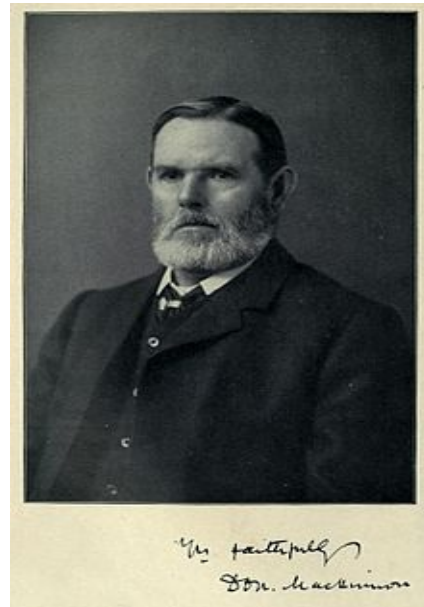
- Our family lore says that Mary McKinnon was born on Colonsay and had a brother who was a Professor at the University of Edinburgh.
- The 1900 U.S. Census provided that Mary McKinnon's birth year was 1827.
- It is improbable that our elder McLean family members could have come up with such a family story independently. It doesn't seem likely that family members living in Walsh County, ND around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century would even be aware of the existence of a Professor Donald McKinnon at the University of Edinburgh, unless it was an actual story told by Mary McKinnon McLean prior to her death. Then the story would still be remembered and written down in 1979.
- The first actual record found for Mary McKinnon in Canada was the 1861 Canada Census for Minto Township in Wellington County. This record shows that she was married to John McLean (although a marriage record has never been found) and she had three children at the time: Mary (age 5), Allan (age 3), and Sarah (age 2). As these children were shown to have been born in Ontario, it is assumed Mary McKinnon married John McLean in about 1855 in Ontario. Of note is that a Mary Smith (age 60) is shown in the household and under the column "residence, if out of limits" is the word "Erin", which is to mean Erin Township. Recalling that many of Mary McKinnon's uncles, aunts, and cousins were residents of Erin.
- A Mary McKinnon born in 1827 was found in the 1841 census on Colonsay. This was a match on the name, birth year, and the household she was recorded in just happens to be of the same family of a Donald McKinnon who would later be a Professor at the

## Traces Through World History

- University of Edinburgh. It was a direct match to the family story.
- The 1841 Scotland census seems to imply that Mary McKinnon was a child of Duncan McKinnon and Mary Currie. She was listed by the census taker in the same manner and with the same pattern as children shown in other households. She was the one child of theirs that was absent from the family in the 1851 Scotland census, because she was already in Canada by that time.
- Several of my DNA matches trace to the parents of both Duncan McKinnon and Mary Currie.
- Finally, comparing their images, they seem to have similar features.



Mary McKinnon



Donald McKinnon

### Sources:

- *Mull, The Island & Its People*, Jo Currie, Carnegie Publishing, Lancaster, UK 2000.
- *The Colonsay-Canada Connection*, from *Transatlantic Studies*, John Sheets, University Press of America. Inc. 2000.
- Isle of Colonsay, Colonsay Family History. Webpage, <https://colonsay.org.uk/history/colonsay-family-history>.
- Various Wikipedia articles. A few of the narratives are extractions from Wikipedia articles which I have abridged and edited.

## Traces Through World History

- *Donald MacKinnon (Celtic Scholar)*, Wikipedia Article.
- DNA matches for Dennis McLane in Ancestry.DNA.
- Information on the above named persons can also be found in The Public Members Trees on Ancestry.com.

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