

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

“Gairloch” settlements in the 19th century: Wester Ross and the Canadian Maritimes

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Gairloch, Wester Ross

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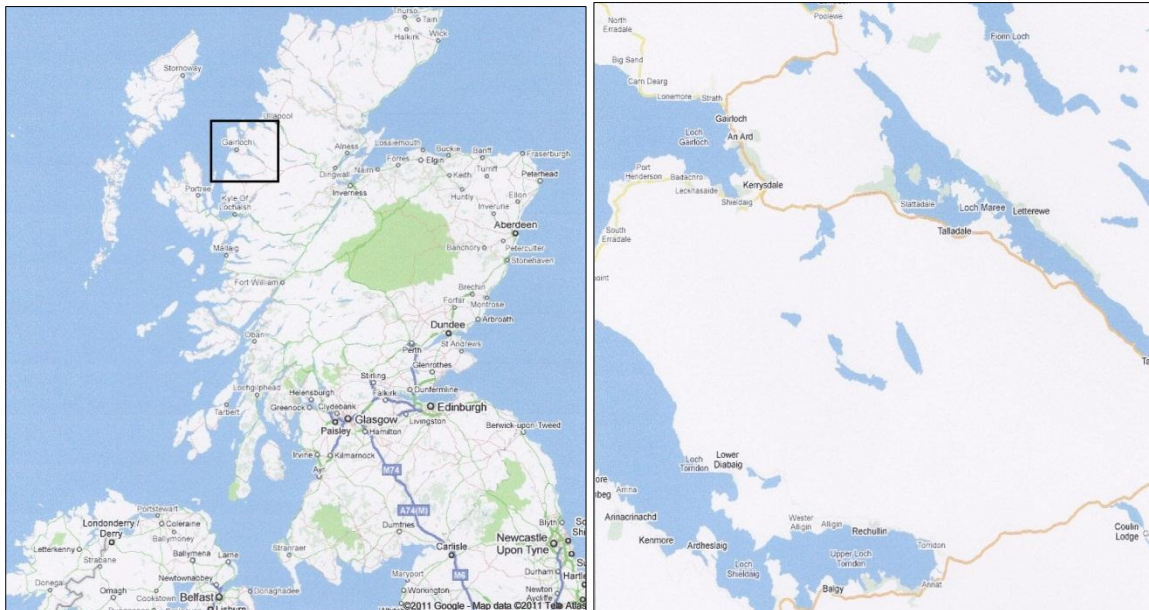
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INTRODUCTION

This study investigates the links between Gairloch, Wester Ross and three settlements of the same name in the Canadian Atlantic Provinces of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. The Canadian “Gairloch”s seem to have been settled at different times within the 19th century and the social and economic context of each of these settlement periods will be examined, on both sides of the Atlantic.



Location Maps: Gairloch, Wester Ross

Sources consulted include the Gairloch Estate Papers located in the Archive of the Gairloch Heritage Museum, Wester Ross where a run of Estate Rentals is available from 1720. Some of the earliest rentals are partial and, prior to 1841, only record tacksmen and major tenants, rarely subtenants and others. A major evaluation of people and property occurred in the 1840s when the MacKenzies of Gairloch embarked on widespread agricultural reform. Minutes of Sett, Tacks and Leases for the estate are also available. Parish Records over the period concerned begin in 1796 and are also partial due to a combination of the inaccessibility of much of the extensive parish and from absenteeism from the Church of Scotland as a result of the Disruption of 1843, when much of the population, including Dr John MacKenzie, Trustee and Factor of the Estate, left the established church and formed the Free Church.

Newspaper accounts list what vessels left which ports and when but it has not been possible, as yet, to match up each voyage with passenger lists available.

From the Canadian Archive were sourced lists of grants of land, and particularly pioneer settler information from the deed books and early maps held in the Court House of Victoria County, Baddeck, Cape Breton.

Personal communications with family historians with links to Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island have been invaluable in filling in local colour to the black and white archive data. Dr Neil MacGillivray, Honorary Post-Doctoral Fellow in Scottish History, University of Edinburgh provided information on the changing face of Gairloch, Wester Ross in the mid-19th century and Dr John MacKenzie's role in it.

EMIGRATION STUDIES

The study of emigration from Scotland has become bound up in popular thinking with the emotive word “Clearance”. At its very basic level the term “Clearance” can refer to any involuntary movement of an individual from one place to another. At the other end of the spectrum is the eviction of whole communities. The decision for any individual, or extended family group, to emigrate has to take into account a complex balance of a number of factors. Favourable reports from friends or family who had moved previously were always highly influential. In the early years of the 19th century, maybe the “pull” factors outweighed any “push” factors that may have included rising rents and the falling prices for agricultural produce. Within Gairloch Estate itself it has always been said that during the 19th century there were “No Clearances”. Is it possible from the separation of almost 200 years to either confirm or deny this? What was meant here by “Clearance”? From the Estate Rentals there is no direct evidence of wholesale eviction of townships, although this did occur in neighbouring estates which were once part of a larger Gairloch holding. What we do see is the shrinking of more remote settlements until they disappear from the rentals and the buildings are declared as “Uninhabited” in subsequent Census returns. During the 19th century the population of Gairloch Estate appears to have been very mobile within the estate and, as patterns of land use changed, fewer people were required in the agricultural economy.

There are records of emigration from Wester Ross as early as 1773 when the “Hector” left Loch Broom for the eastern part of Nova Scotia, landing at the embryonic timber exporting port of Pictou. Before the start of the 19th century most emigrants from Wester Ross were voluntary, seeking new opportunities and land of their own. Once landlords began to feel commercial pressure from outside influences they sought to maximise income from their property by signing up secure tenants such as sheep farmers. In these early years of the 19th century many estates surrounding Gairloch changed hands with new Proprietors embarking on a programme of “clearance” in the way thought of in popular culture.¹ This does not seem to have been the case in the, much reduced, lands of Gairloch Estate itself.

¹ J.B. Caird “The Making of the Gairloch Crofting Landscape” In...Peoples and Settlement in NW Ross (1994)

One significant influencing factor in the decision to remain on the land may have been the attitude of Dr John MacKenzie, who managed the estate for his young nephew before he attained his majority and also for some time previously before his brother, Sir Francis the fifth Baronet, died in 1843. Dr John was adamant that the land of the estate could support its population comfortably if cultivated properly and set about implementing plans for reorganisation. Some tenants, when presented with Dr John's plans, refused to co-operate with the schemes and, possibly by mutual agreement, did not renew their leases once they had expired. Several of these tenants remained in the district and moved into non-arable occupations, others chose to emigrate. A few of these later emigrants went to Canada, but many, with increasing advances in passenger transport chose the longer voyage to Australia.

THE GAIRLOCH CONNECTION

Early links between Gairloch, Wester Ross and the New World may never have involved active settlement. In 1624 King James VI initiated the creation of a new order of chivalry – the Baronets of New Scotland – primarily as a compensation scheme to reimburse the losses incurred by one Sir William Alexander who made two attempts to colonise in the 1620s after persuading the King to grant him all the lands “between our Colonies of new England and Newfoundland, to be called New Scotland”.² This area of land includes what is now Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and the Gaspé Peninsular. James had previously raised funds in this way by establishing Baronets of England in 1611 and Ireland in 1619. Multiple colonisation failures could be seen as harmful to the monarchy but James was to die in 1625 before the order could be established. His son, Charles I, implemented the scheme and at the outset 22 new Baronets were created. In the latter half of the 17th century the scheme went into abeyance as domestic concerns regarding the Civil War were more pressing for the nobility. However, following the Restoration of the Monarchy, it was re-established. On 22nd February 1703 Queen Anne made Sir Kenneth MacKenzie, 1st Baronet of Gairloch, a Baronet of Nova Scotia. He had represented Ross in Parliament, but had been opposed to the Union of the Crowns. He did not enjoy the title for very long as he died in the December of that year, aged just 32.

Early baronets paid 1000 merks for a grant of land and then an additional 2000 merks to maintain 6 soldiers in the colony for 2 years. Those baronets created after 1632 gave no commitment to settle since Charles I had ceded the majority of the lands to the French in a Peace Treaty and after 1639 they received no grant of land, from whatever land remained, for their payment, just the title. The order of the baronets of Nova Scotia continued until 1707 when a total of 329 baronets existed.

Traceable settlement of people emigrating from Gairloch, Wester Ross to the Maritimes does not seem to have occurred until almost 100 years later.

² Bruce LENMAN “Highland Aristocracy & North America” In...”The 17th Century in the Highlands” (1985)

THE SETTLEMENTS IN THE CANADIAN MARITIMES

In the early years of the 19th century, Pictou or Prince Edward Island were the destinations of choice for Scottish emigrants where good land was available. The island of Cape Breton was, generally, settled later as there were no direct voyages from Scotland to Cape Breton at that time. The rich coal mining industry, around the town of Sydney, was in its infancy and the British Government imposed heavy restrictions on settlers with the coal being used to supply the British army bases in Halifax and Newfoundland rather than being exported to the emerging USA. Land grants were restricted to Loyalist settlers and those involved in cod fishing. However, many emigrants settled illegally by squatting on the land only applying for land grants after 1817 when regulations were relaxed.

Abundant timber resources found in the Canadian Maritimes attracted settlement throughout the 19th century. The early settlers from Wester Ross to Pictou County on mainland Nova Scotia established their communities along the West, Middle and East River valleys selling on timber cleared from their plots and not required for immediate building projects. The cleared land could then be cultivated in line with the terms of their land grants using money raised from the sale of timber. Timber became a valuable export, despite its bulk, following a substantial increase in the duty on importing European timber to Britain by 1811 with the town of Pictou growing in response to the increasing trade and becoming the major port of entry for passengers on the returning ships.

The wholesale stripping of timber for export inevitably denuded the landscape and the trade began to source other supplies from elsewhere in the Maritimes – New Brunswick and Quebec and by the 1840s transatlantic timber ships were bypassing Pictou. However, increased coal production from mines in Pictou and around Sydney, Cape Breton ensured continued sources of employment for emigrant Scots who were facing increasing hardships at home.

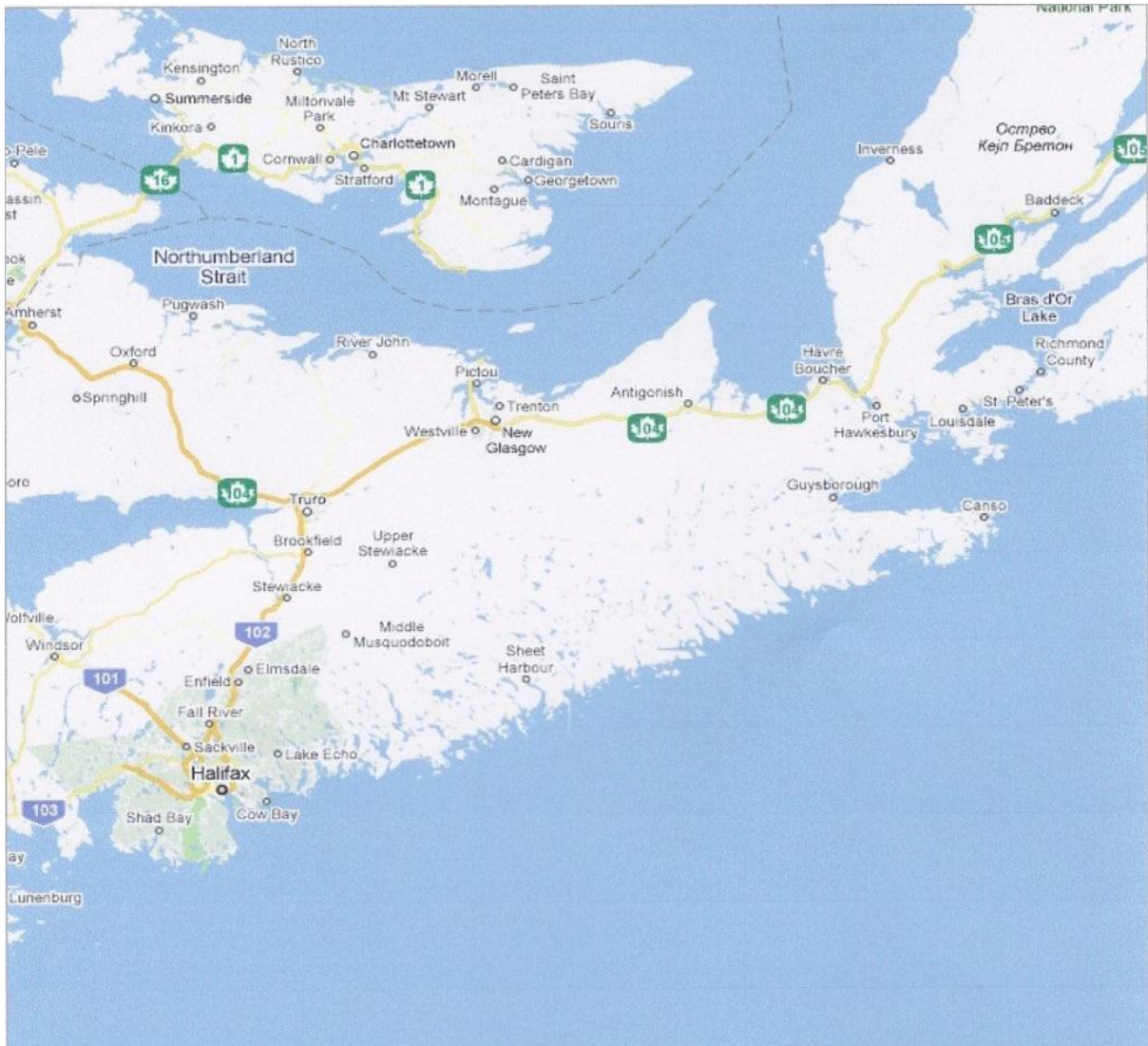
Despite Dr John MacKenzie's best efforts to retain the population of Gairloch Estate, which would enable him to prove the efficacy of his "petite culture" theories, with the inevitable changing agricultural practices locally and nationally, reflecting the shifting emphasis within the national

economy, individuals and families still left the area. Some went to the expanding towns and cities of the Central Belt of Scotland and others overseas. This study is concentrating on those who settled in the Canadian Maritime Provinces of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, and who are traceable by the placename of “Gairloch” linking them back to their place of origin. There is some evidence that people emigrating from the communities of the West Coast of Scotland and the Islands would travel with, and subsequently settle near, people of their place of origin, replicating the community which they had left.³

In the 1840s environmental and economic conditions had deteriorated in the Canadian settlements just as they had in Scotland, with failure of the potato crops and poor harvests caused by vagaries of the weather. By the 1850s the preferred destinations for Scottish emigrants fleeing famine were the farms of Ontario or Australasia.

As the 19th century progressed, seasonal and permanent, employment opportunities increased in the emerging manufacturing towns and cities of Lowland Scotland, as well as the fishing towns and villages of the north and east coasts. For some families this may have meant an, unsought, dilution of culture and loosening of family ties. Emigration with extended families and neighbours resulted in the ability to retain Gaelic culture and religious affiliations as well as recreating the community they had left.

³ Rosemary E. OMMER “Highland Scots Migration to SW Newfoundland: Study in Kinship” In...”The Peopling of Newfoundland” John J Mannion (ed).



Map of the Canadian Maritime Provinces of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island

A WORD ABOUT PLACENAMES

When Pioneer Settlers came to the New World one of the many challenges they faced, apart from the obvious ones of clearing ground for homes and crops, was the challenge of naming the landscape where they stayed. Naming defines a place and makes it manageable to residents and visitors alike, enabling it to be referred to in a geographical context.

Placenames often have original descriptive meanings: meanings which can become lost as repeated usage of the name comes to define a physical place rather than a general descriptive term. Gairloch, Wester Ross, and Gaelic for “short loch”, describes the physical attributes of that part of the coastline compared to the long sea lochs of Lochbroom to the north and Lochcarron to the south. The term also came to refer to the Estate, which has been in MacKenzie family control for over 400 years; also to the head of that MacKenzie family and to the ecclesiastical parish which overlaps into neighbouring estates.



Gairloch, Wester Ross from the air

Early settlers faced with naming their new lands had a store of names and descriptive terms to choose from. There are the basic descriptive “Middle River” and “Black Brook” but also placenames from Scotland make an appearance. It is unlikely that a Scottish placename will be coined by somebody with no connection with the original, so for pioneer settler studies placename evidence is a useful tool to indicate areas of origin for a population. These translated placenames have lost their original descriptive meaning but retain the ability to distinguish one settlement from another, even though they may not be unique.

Within the Maritime Provinces there are at least three settlements with the name “Gairloch”, each chosen by pioneer settlers with a link to Gairloch, Wester Ross. Only one is associated with a body of water, originally called “Gair Loch” it is now, on the modern maps “Gairloch Lake” but this name was secondary to the naming of the farming settlement nearby. These settlement names also survive even when the language of their original descriptive terms is no longer in common usage in the area.

A cautionary word is also needed here as there is a place called Dingwall in the north of Cape Breton. Not called after the market town in Easter Ross, it had been known as “Young’s Cove” until a Robert Dingwall arrived and opened a shop in the settlement in the 1870s. Once established he later applied to open a Post Office, suggested to the Government a change of name would be appropriate and in 1883 Young’s Cove became “Dingwall”.



Signpost for Gairloch Mountain, Cape Breton

AND PERSONAL NAMES

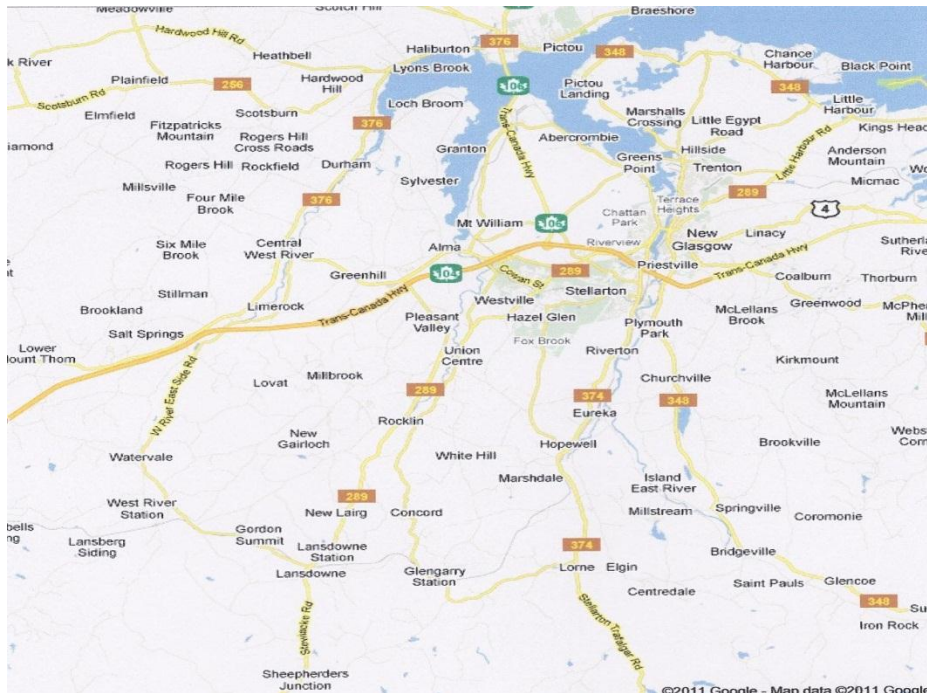
Working with the records of extended families from the Gairloch estate one has to keep a tight hold one which generation is which. The dominant surname is MacKenzie and, in common with much of the Highlands at this time, the allocation of Christian names follows a prescribed pattern. The first son is named after the paternal grandfather, the second son is named after the maternal grandfather and the third son after the father. Similarly the first daughter is named after the maternal grandmother, the second daughter after the paternal grandmother and the third daughter after the mother. After these names are used up there is more individual freedom in choice. However, this can result in multiple people with the same name. For example, in South Erradale, at the start of the 19th century there were at least three Kenneth MacKenzies, one of whom emigrated to Nova Scotia with his extended family, while two remained and are present in the Estate Rentals until the 1840s where they are differentiated by their by-names (or nick-names). Once in the New World many families retained their by-names as, within their new community, duplication of names was as common as it was back home.



Hunter's Mountain, Cape Breton. Typical Scenery facing pioneer settlers.

NEW GAIRLOCH, PICTOU COUNTY

The earliest of the “Gairloch” settlements in the Canadian Maritimes is in Pictou County, Nova Scotia. Now known as New Gairloch it is located in the interior of the county on the western branch of the Middle River of Pictou. It was settled in the first years of the 19th century.



Modern map of New Gairloch, Pictou County.

The town of Pictou itself was the landing place of the pioneering settlers from Loch Broom on board the ship “Hector” in 1773 and remained an important destination for transatlantic emigrants well into the 19th century. It may well have been the “Hector” which started the rumour that all emigrant ships were leaky old hulks, as it had been classified by the Lloyd’s Shipping Register as fit for short voyages within European waters only. However, the timber trade of the Pictou hinterland was at its height between 1800 and 1820 and the cargo needed to arrive in Britain in good conditions, so the ships had to be sea worthy.⁴ It was this trade with Scotland that facilitated a return “cargo” to Canada of emigrants. Numbers of transatlantic crossings increased and in 1803 Lord Selkirk reported 20 vessels of around 400 tonnes were loaded at Pictou Harbour for Britain each year. This had risen to 50 ships by 1805.

⁴ Lucille H. Campey “After the Hector” (2004)

Two ships sailed in the June of 1805 from Stornoway, “The Albatross” and the “Sir Sydney Smith”. The descendants of the passengers recall that, apart from one family from Lewis, all the others were from Gairloch, Wester Ross. Both vessels took a northerly route across the Atlantic to avoid contact with the French Fleet, as the Wars with France were still ongoing. Other hardships were endured on the voyage, with the shortage of water, possibly being the most serious. This voyage took nine weeks and the settlers arrived as the seasons were turning with a long winter ahead and no time to plant crops.

For a population unused to a heavily wooded landscape it would literally have been an impossibility to see the wood for the trees and the first task on any grant of land would have been to clear a sufficient platform on which to build an initial log house.

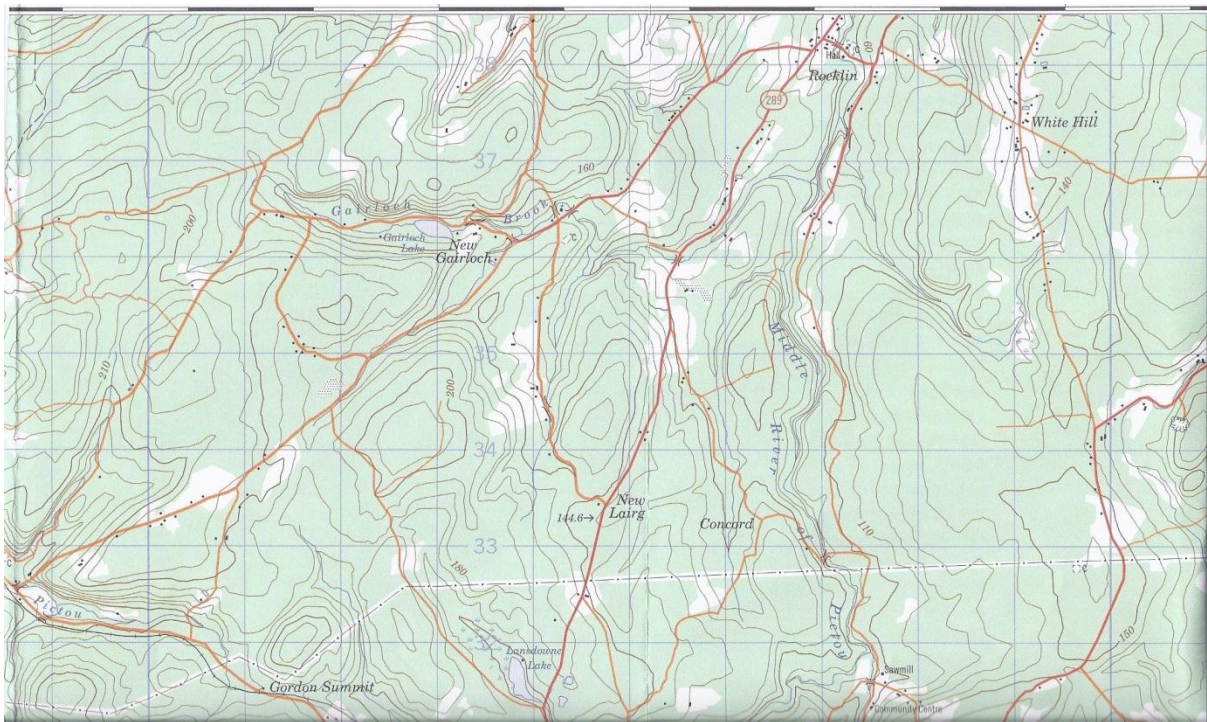


Reconstruction of a Pioneer Log House from the Highland Village, Iona, Cape Breton.

The mixed woodland included maple, birch, beech, pine and hemlock. The sugar maple not only supplied timber for construction but also the favoured maple syrup which could be made into red rum, described by some pioneering settlers as flowing as abundantly as water!⁵ The Nova

⁵ Marjorie Hawkins et al “Gairloch, Pictou County, Nova Scotia” (1977)

Scotia Legislature had set aside £2000 to be spent on clearing, fencing and cultivating land. However, it was stipulated that this had to be cleared between 1st January and 15th June 1806 and then planted between 1st August that year and 20th June the following year. Small acreages were allocated at first to people who had arrived in previous years and had been living temporarily on the coastal fringe. New arrivals could not hope to both clear and plant in the first year even if, as in the case of New Gairloch, much of the land was highly fertile river frontage and water meadows.

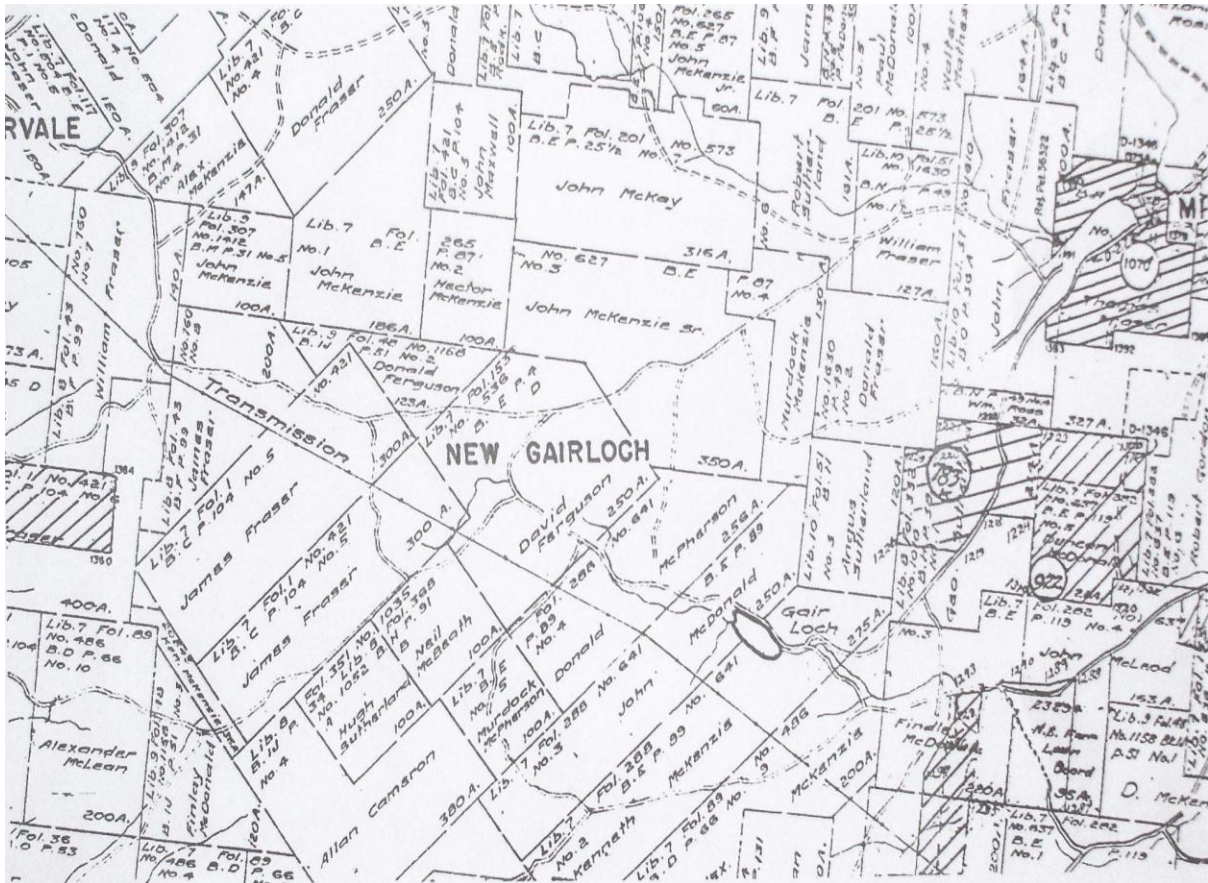


Modern topographic map of New Gairloch, Pictou County and associated settlements.

Pioneering settlers in this area were Philip (or, more properly, Finlay, in the Scottish records) Macdonald who had arrived in 1801. In 1805 brothers Donald and Murdo MacPherson arrived from South Erradale by Gairloch, Wester Ross along with Alexander MacKenzie and Kenneth MacKenzie, who had been born in Gairloch, Wester Ross in 1768. Kenneth married a Margaret Campbell in Gairloch in 1790 and brought along his wife and several young children. His elderly mother, Margaret MacIvor, had planned to accompany them, but in the event stayed behind. A copy of the “character reference” they brought with them still exists within the family and runs as follows:

“This is to certify that the bearer, Kenneth MacKenzie and also Margaret MacIvor, mother of the said Kenneth and natives of the parish of Gairloch in the county of Ross-shire, Scotland, are of exceptional moral character, being honest, industrious people. So that we know of no reason why they may not be received into any Christian Society where Providence may cast their lot, and be entitled to all the privileges thereof. Given in name and by appointment of the Kirk Session of Gairloch this 30th day of April 1805. Signed James Russell, Minister.”

Kenneth and his wife arrived with four children with a fifth being born almost immediately they landed. Four more children would eventually complete their family. With some of the best land in the lower river valleys already taken, many of the Gairloch families moved inland to higher ground between the West and Middle Rivers, some settling by a small lake they called Gair Loch, and which has become Gairloch Lake on modern maps. Initially they squatted on the land but in March 1815 made an application for a formal grant of land to the Governor. This was made jointly in the names of Kenneth MacKenzie, John MacDonald, Donald MacPherson, Murdoch (Murdo) MacPherson and Murdoch (Murdo) MacKenzie. The grant of land was for 1191 acres and of this Kenneth received 300 acres then dividing it between three of his four sons (the fourth being a schoolmaster) in the way that land in Wester Ross was serially sub-divided amongst subsequent generations. However, with 300 acres instead of one or two to cultivate, there was a greater chance of being able to support a growing family. A clause in the Land Grant required the Grantee to sow annually a proportion of the land with hemp and flax. Once sufficient land had been cleared for a house, additional ground would be cleared for arable and pasture. An early method of clearing the ground involved trees being cut down to stump level only, then burned out and potatoes planted in the ash between the stumps which, after a few years, could be hauled out.



Land Grant map showing acreages granted to Kenneth MacKenzie, John MacDonal, Donald MacPherson, Murdo MacPherson and Murdo MacKenzie.

Even in the “New World” the settlers could not escape the hardships brought about by the environment. In the New Gairloch area the year 1815 was known, for generations, as The Year of The Mice. An explosion in the population of these rodents resulted in widespread losses of stored foodstuffs and the next years’ seed. Wildfires in 1820 caused extensive damage to property and land with remembered events being calculated within the community as happening “before” or “after” the Miramichi Fire. Crop failures were also not a thing of the past for the settlers with folklore remembering times when even newly planted seed potatoes had to be dug up to prevent starvation one hungry spring.

Of the MacPhersons, Donald had been born in Gairloch in 1739 and had married a Christina MacDonal. Three sons had been born before they emigrated – Roderick, Donald and Murdoch (Murdo). It was this Murdo,

who married a Jane MacLellan/MacLennan from MacLennan's Brook, Pictou, who is mentioned in the Land Grant along with his father.

The first church in new Gairloch was built of logs around 1810 and was repaired in 1814 or 1816 after storm damage. This church remained in use until 1858 when a more modern one of timber planks was constructed.

Although the settlement at New Gairloch, Pictou County, reduced in size into the 20th century with many arable farms reverting to scrub and forest; the loss of blacksmiths, shops and the school; and the church congregation amalgamating with Saltsprings and Middle River it still remained an active community unlike another of the New World "Gairloch"s, Gairloch Mountain, Cape Breton.



Topographic map of the Middle River area of Cape Breton. Gairloch Mountain indicated on the high ground to the west.

GAIRLOCH MOUNTAIN, CAPE BRETON

The second “Gairloch” settlement of the Canadian Maritimes is Gairloch Mountain, located to the northwest of the town of Baddeck, Cape Breton and part of the wider Middle River community. Pioneer settlers are believed to have arrived around 1806 (Rory MacKenzie, Kenneth MacLeod (Snr.) and Donald MacRae and their families.) from Caithness and Wester Ross.⁶ More followed in 1812 including the family of Peter Campbell who had left Applecross on the “Polly” in 1803. They had settled first near Farnet Prince Edward Island⁷ before taking up land at Middle River. Another wave arrived from Wester Ross in the 1820s with settlers from the parishes of Applecross, Lochalsh and Kintail.

By the 1820s new settlers arriving in the Middle River region found the best land already granted and their allocation was in the upland areas known as the “backlands”. The pioneers of Gairloch Mountain, along with the neighbouring settlements of Gillanders Mountain and Crowdis Mountain made an effort to make their settlement work.

The climate is much harsher than on the lower valley land but does have the advantage of avoiding the frosts which are common in the valley. There was a school and a Post Office both of which remained active until the early 20th century but by the 1930s the higher farms had been abandoned. However, the soil is thin and poor once the forest cover is removed and quickly deteriorates in quality under arable cultivation and much of the arable farming land has been taken back by scrub and forest. The settlers had difficulty keeping roads and trails passable in the winters and the settlement was finally abandoned in the 1960s. Gairloch Mountain was first settled around 1842 when Kenneth (Rhur) MacKenzie and his wife Ann MacRae arrived from Gairloch, Wester Ross with four children. They occur in the Gairloch Estate Rental Survey of 1841 as being from South Erradale where they were sole occupants of one lot and are listed as having one house, two barns and a byre.⁸ It is possible that they were among the passengers of the Greenock registered ship “John Kerr”.

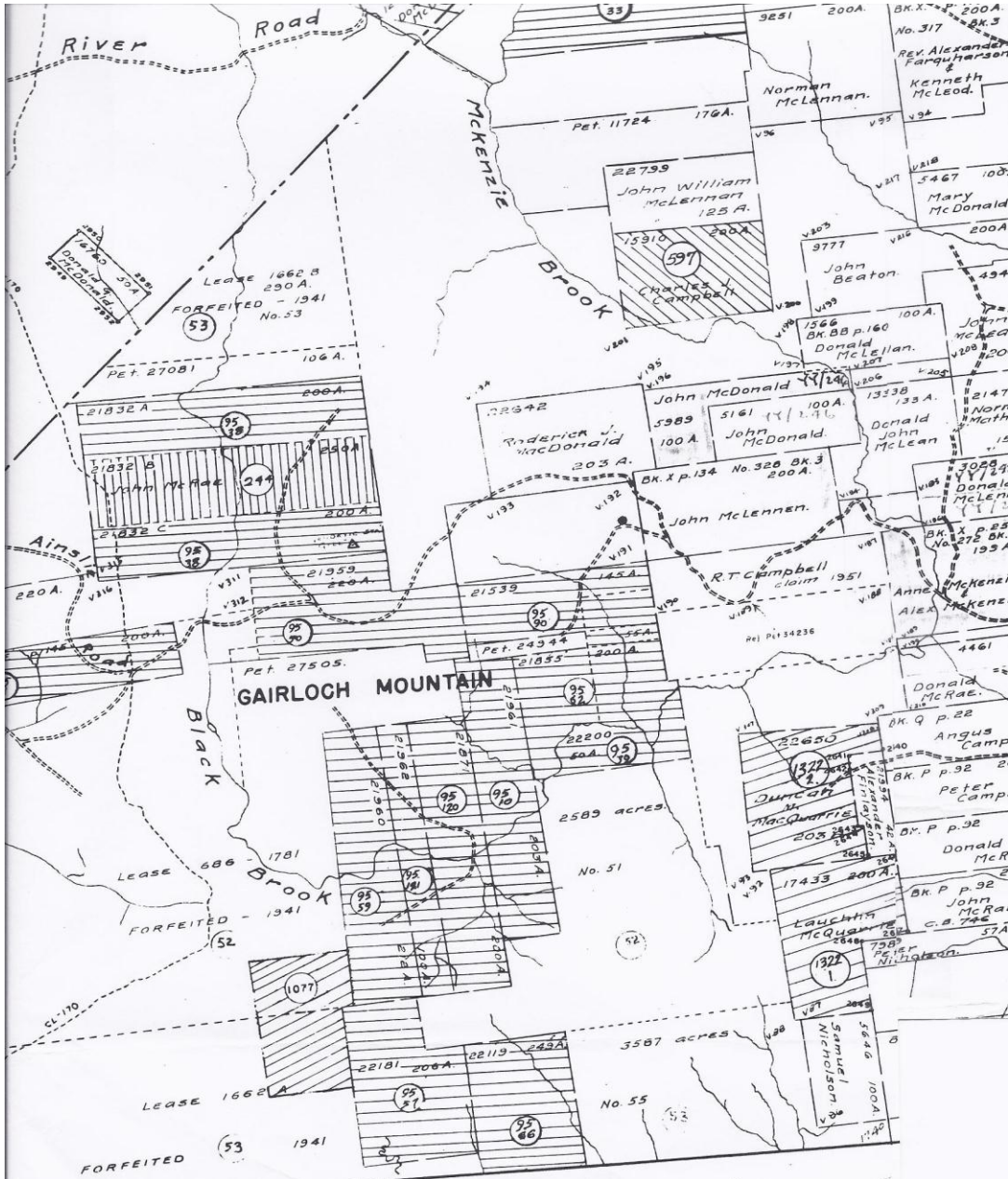
⁶ John A Nicolson et al “Middle River: Past and Present: History of a Cape Breton Community 1806-1985” (1985)

⁷ Unable to trace this location as yet.

⁸ Gairloch Estate Papers: Estate Survey 1841

“EMIGRATION:- on the 4th Instant a fine vessel, the John Kerr of Greenock, 516 tons burden, cleared Gairloch, on the west coast of Ross-shire, for Cape Breton and Quebec, with 215 passengers on board. The emigrants are principally from Gairloch and Torridon, with a few from Skye. Those from Torridon were formerly on the estate of Mr Macbarnet, and were removed last year. The Gairloch and Skye people were voluntary emigrants. All appeared to be in good spirits, anticipating success among their friends and countrymen in Canada.” – Inverness Journal, Friday July 15th 1842.

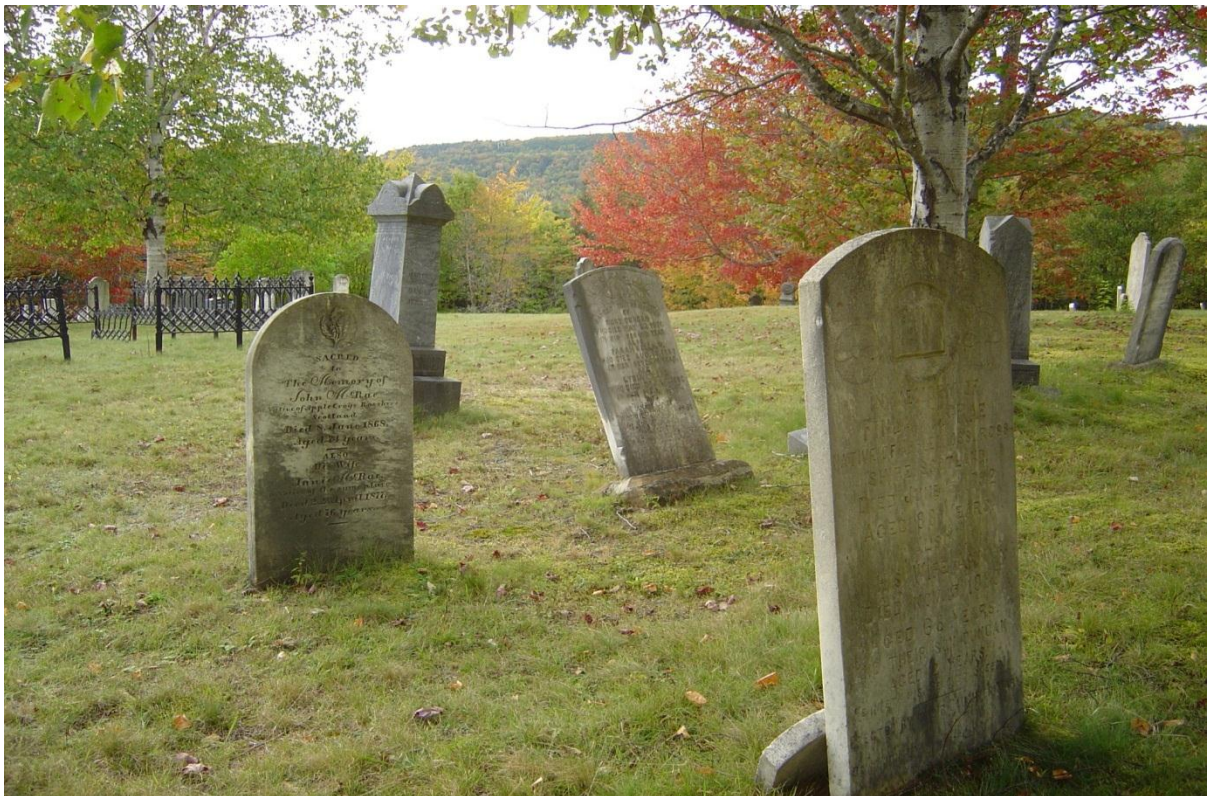
One of the children, Philip/Finlay married Kate Kemp, who had been born on the island of Bouladerie and was part of the extended Kemp family who had immigrated around 1821 from Gairloch, Wester Ross. (Subsequently the fortunes of many of the Kemp family followed that of the Rev. Norman MacLeod as he shifted his congregation around Nova Scotia and finally to New Zealand in the 1850s in search of religious freedom.)



Land Grant map for Gairloch Mountain, Cape Breton

Once in the New World settlers continued to move around to find their ultimate home, but often this was still at extended family or small community level. Other early settlers of the Middle River community include the family of Angus Campbell, who had been born in 1795 in Applecross, Wester Ross and left with his parents Peter Campbell and Mary MacKenzie (whose father was from Gairloch, Wester Ross) on board the ship "Polly" in 1803. In the middle of the Napoleonic Wars contact between emigrant ships and the French Navy were to be avoided, however, there

was one encounter that the “Polly” had with a French vessel, evading capture when the Captain ordered all passengers to lie on deck and put out word that the ship had an outbreak of smallpox on board. The “Polly” landed at Prince Edward Island and the Campbell family settled there, along with their neighbours, for nine years before hearing of the good quality land to be had in Cape Breton. In 1812 the Campbells, MacRaes, MacDonalds, MacLennans and MacKenzies, mostly all originally from Wester Ross, settled the lower ground of Middle River, and paved the way for others to join them.



MacRaes of Applecross buried in Man o’War Point Cemetery, Bouladerie.

The Land Grants these settlers received required them to clear and cultivate at least three acres of plantable land and on every 50 acres regarded as barren, put three meat cows. The Grantee was also required to build a house at least 20 feet long by 16 wide. The first houses were of cut logs and these were replaced by houses of sawn timber once saw mills had been established. Unlike the improved stone houses back on Gairloch estate by the mid-19th century, stone houses in Canada were a rarity with the abundance of available timber, and are usually referred to in the record as

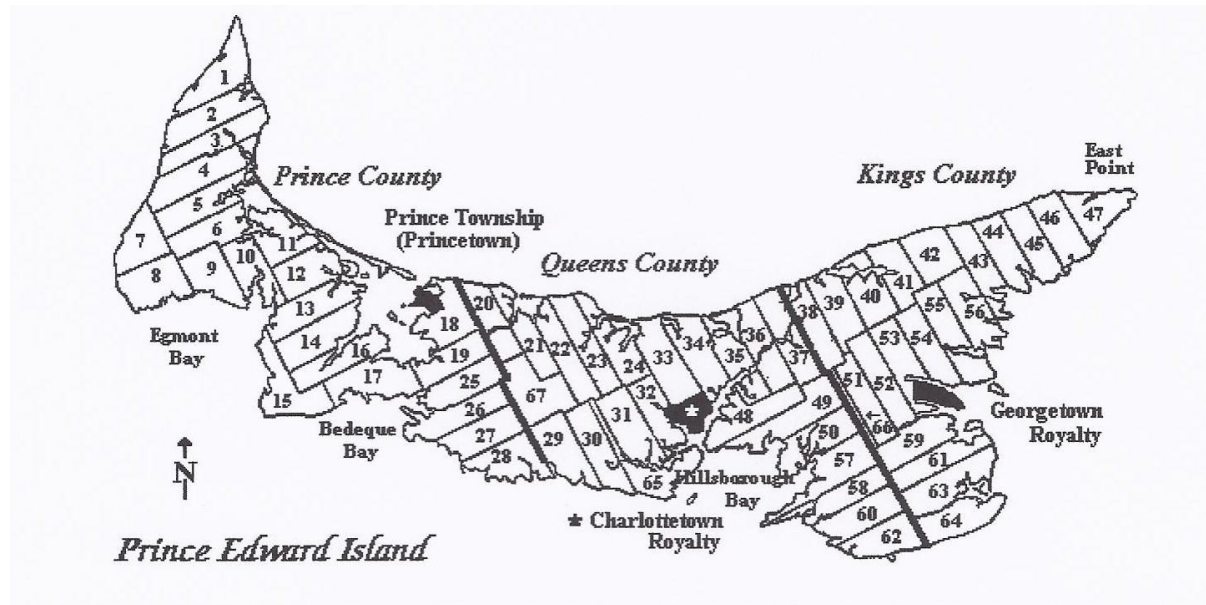
“The ... Stone House” with the occupying family name becoming part of the house name.



House of sawn planks reconstructed at Highland Village Folk Museum, Iona, Cape Breton.

GAIRLOCH, PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

The third of the “Gairloch” settlements in the Canadian Maritimes is located on Prince Edward Island. Although this was a region of early 19th century settlement, with pioneers from the “Polly” settling nearby in 1803, the settlement name “Gairloch” or “Gairloch Road” is maybe a late addition to the records examined so far. It was a tiny hamlet, part of Lot 60 in Queens County owned by Lord Selkirk who assisted settlement in the Belfast area.



Lot Numbers for Prince Edward Island

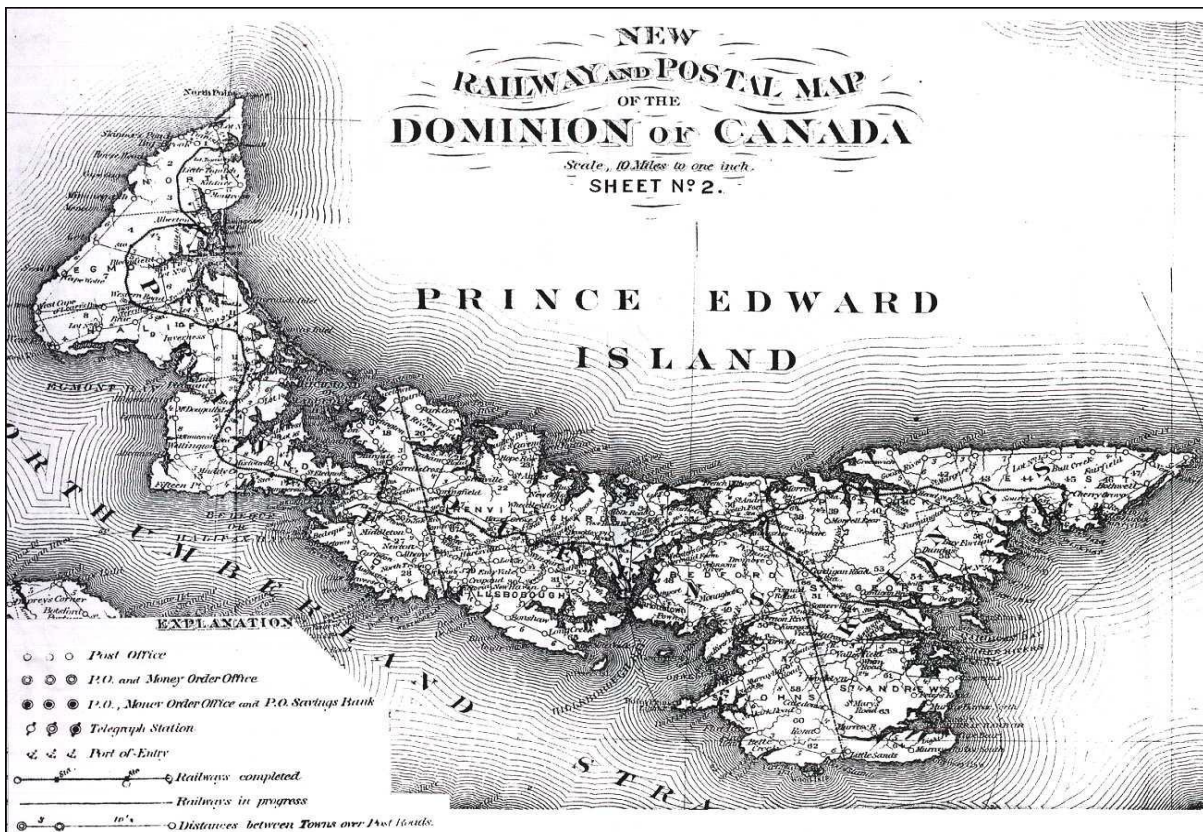
Instigating emigration, which included the passengers of the “Polly”, some under Lord Selkirk’s influence may have settled these lots. Further investigation of, as yet, elusive land grants and leases may identify and bring into focus these pioneers, but by the 1838 Census Lot 60 had a recorded population of 236.

Names of the early settlers are a little uncertain but there are clues in the baptismal registers of St John’s Presbyterian Church in the nearby town of Belfast. These begin in 1823 and extend to 1949 and early ministers from this church also served the wider congregation of Cape Breton which included the settlements at Middle River, Gairloch Mountain and the island of Bouladerie.



Tourist map of the Gairloch area to the northwest of Wood Islands Ferry Terminal

The placename of “Gairloch” does not occur in the registers until 1861 recording the birth and baptism of a Donald MacKenzie to a Roderick MacKenzie and his wife Mary Gillies. Throughout the early 1860s the additional name “Wood Island Road” is attached to “Gairloch”, perhaps to differentiate it from Gairloch Mountain by Middle River although, by 1834 Middle River had its own resident Presbyterian minister. From these scant records, the Gairloch settlement on PEI was composed of at least six families – four MacKenzies, a Beaton and a Matheson. There is much still to research on this settlement.



1878 map of Prince Edward Island.

THE GAIRLOCH ECONOMY IN THE 19TH CENTURY

Agricultural improvement came about a little later on Gairloch Estate lands than in many places in Scotland. The first outsider's impression of the Gairloch economy comes from the maps drawn by William Roy of the Board of Ordnance between 1745 and 1755.



Roy Map for Kinlochewe, the south eastern part of Gairloch Estate

He depicts clustered settlements with unenclosed parcels of arable land. The most widespread crop grown was oats but once the potato was adopted, after 1760, the nutritional value was greater than that of meal and a family could be supported by a smaller area of arable land. A later account written by Thomas Pennant in 1772 describes potatoes being grown amongst the peat near Poolewe and was informed that they were "*kiln-dried for preservation*". At Gairloch Pennant spoke about the abundance of herring and cod which were cured and sun-dried then sold to a merchant from Campbelltown who exported them to Bilbao, Spain. He mentioned that some improvements were being attempted with lime being burnt for fertiliser with the addition of seaweed and occasionally shell sand. Pennant describes the most important trade being in black cattle with an estimated 500 sold annually at between £1.7s and £2 each. He also makes mention of spring and autumn blood-letting of the cattle, presumably preserved as black pudding.⁹

As the 19th century approached the Old Statistical Account recorded the status of the local economy. The contributor was the Rev. Daniel MacIntosh who gave a very brief account of the parish in which he states that there

⁹ Thomas Pennant "A Tour of Scotland and Voyage to the Hebrides" (1774)

was little arable land and even in good years crops could only sustain the resident population for seven or eight months of the year. The staple diet was based heavily on fish and potatoes with supplementary meal being regularly imported. Commercially, he records an established cod-fishery with people also engaged in seasonal herring fishing. Of the arable crops he lists oats and barley and *“some gentlemen sow a small quantity of pease”*.¹⁰

In 1803 James Hogg visited the district and met up with Mr John MacIntyre who had taken the tenancy of Letterewe (owned by the Seaforth MacKenzies) and had begun to introduce large scale sheep farming. This estate marched with that of Gruinard, owned by Davidson of Tulloch who had evicted the tenants of Strath na Sealg that Whitsuntide. They had been given notice but still planted potatoes and corn that spring. It appears that MacIntyre of Letterewe was also renting the lands of Strath na Sealg from Davidson of Tulloch as James Hogg mentioned that the Strath was occupied by MacIntyre’s shepherds.¹¹

By the time John MacCulloch was making his series of journeys around the Highlands and Western Isles, between 1811 and 1821, a salmon fishery had been added to the coastal economy at Poolewe.¹²



Ruined Fishing Station, Red Point, by South Erradale

¹⁰ Old Statistical Account 1793

¹¹ James Hogg “A Tour of the Highlands in 1803”

¹² J McCulloch “The Highlands and Western Isles of Scotland” (1824)

The New Statistical Account of 1836 compiled by Rev. Donald MacRae, expanded on the Old Statistical Account, listing the rentable values of arable land from 10 shillings to £1 per acre; grazing for a cow or ox from £1 to £2 per annum; pasture for one sheep 1s 6d to 2s 6d per annum. The fisheries for salmon, herring, cod and also ling were still commercially viable. However, he notes with approval, that the previous occupation of smuggling was on the decline. He also described the state of the housing of the general population who lived in combined byre-dwellings with cattle in one end of the building and people in the other. He noted that under the direction of Sir Francis Mackenzie some of these tenants were beginning to build separate accommodation for livestock and humans.



Thatched post-improvement house, Melvaig, by Gairloch

Finishing his report by lamenting the lack of roads through the parish, linking it with the east, he also commented that the population density was too high for the land to support and he favoured Government grant assistance to *“convey one-third of the people to Upper Canada”*.¹³

The Estate Rentals over this period switched from payments in kind plus a small money rental to total payments in cash. The last year to include payments of cheese, butter etc. was 1770, when a Kenneth MacKenzie was the tacksman for South Erradale paying rent in kind and cash of £7.16s.10d. By 1785 there were three joint tenants, Donald MacPherson, John MacPherson and John MacKenzie who shared in the rent of £8. By 1790 this

¹³ New Statistical Account 1842

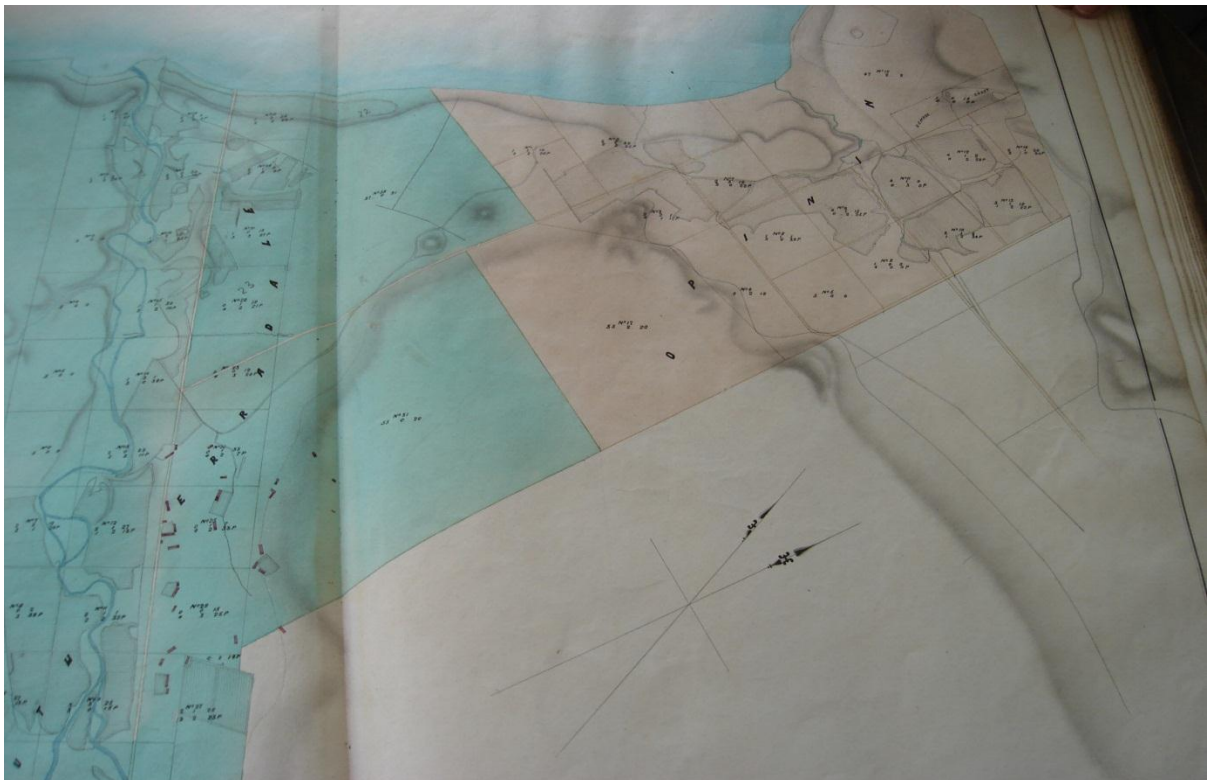
had risen and was divided between them in the following way: Donald MacPherson £4.10s, John MacPherson £4.10s and John MacKenzie £3. In 1795 the rents rose again Donald and John MacPherson each paying £5.5s with Kenneth MacKenzie paying £5.5s also. Kenneth MacKenzie (Snr) is also listed as paying £5.5s for a share of the lands at South Erradale, along with other lands he held in that part of the estate.¹⁴ These rents almost doubled by 1800, Kenneth MacKenzie (Snr.), Kenneth MacKenzie, Donald MacPherson and the widow of John MacPherson each charged £9 with both Kenneth MacKenzies being late in settling their accounts. In the Rental of 1805 there was a nominal reduction of rent, but this also corresponded to a reduction of land available with six tenants now sharing the land. Kenneth MacKenzie (Snr) was charged £12.10s and was late paying, Kenneth MacKenzie and his brother Roderick were charged £6.5s with Murdo MacPherson, John MacPherson and, new tenant, Colin MacKenzie each paying £8.6s.8d. Donald MacPherson had already dropped from the Rental and we next see him in Pictou County, Nova Scotia with other members of his family and neighbours.



The Campbell-Smith original plan for South Erradale – copyright Royal Commission for Ancient & Historical Monuments in Scotland

¹⁴ Gairloch Estate Rentals

As a preliminary to major Estate reorganisation in the 1840s, Dr John Mackenzie commissioned a survey of the whole of Gairloch Estate from Mr George Campbell Smith of Banff. Individual townships were mapped in considerable detail with the position of houses, outbuildings, stackyards, scattered enclosures and also the irregular field boundaries, head dykes etc. Overlain on these maps of existing structures were the proposed croft outlines. Unusually these are uniformly square in outline, unlike many of the planned crofts in the Highlands and Islands which are long, rectilinear and arranged along one township road.



The coloured-up final proposed croft layout for South Erradale and Opinan

The square crofts had roads, or “loans” running between them and onto the hill ground beyond. Also on the existing maps are pencilled in the names of the preferred tenants for each newly created croft, assigning the best ones to those tenants who paid their rents most promptly over the previous few years. The remaining crofts were assigned by drawing lots.



“Loans” between crofts at Naast, by Poolewe.

Along with the tangible assets of the Estate, an inventory of people was also carried out along the lines of the 1841 Census. In this way Dr John discovered the existence of many more people than were accounted for in the Estate Rentals. The smallholdings were severely overcrowded with multiple subdivision being practiced so that the amount of arable land available could no longer support the generations of one family that occupied and worked it. Tenant housing was located in clusters, often at great distance from the arable land which was typically in tiny plots amongst the moorland pastureground. The arable land in any one township was also being worked communally on a run-rig basis, each strip assigned to a different individual each spring, with no incentive to improve it for the long term.

In the estate survey a typical entry for one property in South Erradale for 1841-1845 is as follows: (principle tenant in bold)

John MacPherson and wife Jess	<i>1 house, 2 barns & 2 byres</i>
<i>Farquhar Mackenzie and wife</i>	
<i>Children 2</i>	
<i>Servants 2</i>	
<i>Subtenant William MacKenzie and wife Barbara</i>	
<i>Children 2</i>	

After reorganisation the, much enlarged, Rental Ledger for 1846-1852 records:

<i>Lot 8</i>	<i>Late 6</i>	<i>John MacPherson</i>
<i>Lot 13</i>	<i>Sub-tenant</i>	<i>Farquhar MacKenzie</i>
<i>Lot 19</i>	<i>Sub-tenant</i>	<i>William MacKenzie</i>

By 1864 the Rentals for this part of South Erradale runs as follows:

	<i>Arrears at 1st November 1863</i>	<i>Present Rent</i>	<i>Sum Paid at Martinmas 1863</i>
<i>John MacPherson</i>	<i>£7.5s.0d</i>	<i>£3.1.9d</i>	<i>£3</i>
<i>Farquhar MacKenzie</i>		<i>£2.4s.7d</i>	<i>£2.4s.7d</i>
<i>Wid. William MacKenzie</i>	<i>£9.5s.0d</i>	<i>£1.9s.2d</i>	<i>£0.5s.0d</i>

Dr John MacKenzie could not have started his scheme of agricultural reform at a worse time. In 1845 the first of a series of seasons of potato blight occurred in the Gairloch area with a very severe recurrence the following year and although his aim had been to ensure that the crofters were ultimately less vulnerable to the fluctuating fortunes of potato monoculture and its susceptibility to blight Dr John found it more difficult to persuade the crofters to change from the familiar to the unknown in times of hardship. As well as trying to reorganise Gairloch Estate at individual croft level, Dr John also had to take into consideration the requirements of the larger tenants who provided a considerably more reliable source of income. John MacIntyre of Letterewe had rented the township grazing of Smirsary and Slioch (in the rentals called "Sleughach") by Kinlochewe from 1795. With his partner Birtwhistle, MacIntyre went on to create a large sheep farm at the southeastern part of the estate, which, by 1815 was paying (promptly) £312 in rent per annum, and which included the hill ground for the townships of Bruachaig, Lecky and Aultroy as well as Slioch. One of the major complaints the Gairloch crofters brought to the Napier Commission was the loss of their hill grazing to sheep farmers who also had their eyes on the, more favourable, lower ground, cropped for arable by the tenants, as overwintering ground for the, less hardy, new sheep breeds.



Sheep fanks at Bruachaig, by Kinlochewe

Sheep farms had also been established in other parts of the estate. In 1805 two tenants Kenneth and John MacKenzie took the lease of Shieldaig, by Gairloch, for £200, which Kenneth had held the previous year for £28.7s.6d. Also in 1805, Talladale was rented for £150 by William and Murdo Kemp which William was paying £46.13s.4d for the previous year. Not all of these farms thrived. The Kemps soon fell into arrears with their rent with only £60 of the £150 rent paid in 1807 by William alone. Murdo had emigrated to Nova Scotia where we see him petitioning the Governor for a grant of land on the southwest branch of the Margaree River, Cape Breton Island. By 1808 the farm had been taken over by John MacIntyre. The last time William's name is linked with Gairloch is in a notice in the Inverness Journal of 7th August 1812:

The creditors of William and John Kemp, late tenants in Taladale (sic), parish of Gairloch, are requested to meet at Pollew (sic) on Tuesday the 8th September next, when a final dividend is to be made on the whole subject, by John MacIntyre, the Trustee, and all persons who do not then come forward

and produce clear affidavits as to the justness of their claims, will be cut out of their share of the subject.

In 1821 William, and much of his extended family, also left for Cape Breton, and we pick up his son, Grigor, petitioning the Governor for land on the Island of Bouladerie in 1825.

Another influential sector of the economy was only newly established in the area, that of the sporting tenant. There had been a considerable amount of interest from the emerging class of wealthy industrialists in Britain to rent Highland properties for leisure pursuits by the middle of the 19th century. Within Gairloch estate various deer forests were selected for seasonal occupation which could overlap with the agricultural changes planned for the resident population. Kinlochewe Deer Forest was created in 1842, Flowerdale added five years later and by 1884 Sheildaig (Gairloch) brought the total area under deer forest to 42,750 acres. Rents for the Kinlochewe Shootings began at £290 in 1845 and rising steeply with each change in tenant to a peak of £1650 by 1884, after which there was a steady decline.¹⁵ Some conflict did occur with crofters complaining that sheep farmers took their summer sheiling hill grazing, and the tenants of the deer forest complaining that the sheep farmers' stock was grazing ground they wanted for deer.¹⁶



Kennels and associated buildings at the Keeper's House, Kinlochewe.

¹⁵ Gairloch Estate Rentals
¹⁶ Napier Commission 1883

Over the famine years of the 1840s the estate borrowed around £10,000 under the Drainage Act loaning it to crofters to improve the drainage of their holdings. The 6.5% interest on the loan was added to the rent, but with incomes severely reduced, many crofters or their descendants, were still paying off this debt in the 1880s although overall living standards had risen in the 1850s with increased seasonal migration for work. In 1888 the fair Rents Commission reduced rents to the 1845 level and cancelled some debts all together.

Pasture improvement was also a critical part of the overall scheme of reorganisation. Several lime kilns have been located within the old Gairloch Estate boundary and one resident of Kinlochewe recalls his uncle describing burning lime for fertiliser and mortar for building, calling it “the dirtiest job ever”.¹⁷ In nearby parishes of Applecross and Kishorn, although there was plentiful limestone outcropping, the estates there preferred to buy in lime from the kilns at Broadford, Skye regarding it as cheaper than any home-produced material.¹⁸



Crofts at Big Sand, from the air - 2009

¹⁷ Edwin Cross – pers. com.

¹⁸ New Statistical Account 1842

THE WIDER ECONOMY IN THE 19TH CENTURY

For all that Gairloch Estate was part of the Western peripheral region of the Highlands it never seemed to be quite in step with some of the external leads which determined the directions other estates took. All areas felt the same effects of the vagaries of the Highland climate with gales ruining harvests and wet springs encouraging the rampant spread of potato blight, but, especially in the middle part of the century, there seemed to be a sense of “all in it together”, with the MacKenzie proprietors spending much of their time on the estate and still being seen to try and work with the people for the economic benefit of them both. Nationally, within Scotland many proprietors were spending increasing amounts of time in Edinburgh or London, far removed from the concerns of their tenants and, unlike the MacKenzie heirs, not educated at home.

In the last quarter of the 18th century outside commercial influences began to have a profound effect on the agricultural life of the area. The first movements occurred under the tenure of the 4th Baronet, Sir Hector MacKenzie, who created the first sheep farms on the estate in 1795, leasing Letterewe and then Kinlochewe soon after to Mr John MacIntyre. In the same year the neighbouring estate of Gruinard had been bought by Henry Davidson of Tulloch who cleared the tenants to make way for the large scale sheep farm.

At the start of the 19th century urbanisation and population increase further south created a greater demand for produce, and prices for both cattle and the newer breeds of sheep began to rise. This rate of inflation increased markedly during the years of the Napoleonic Wars when foreign imports were blocked and demand for raw materials such as processed kelp. At this time estate rents over the whole country were rising rapidly, often ahead of the profit from goods sold. The Gairloch rentals show an Alexander MacKenzie of Badachro paying £23.4s.10d for the kelp grounds in 1799; £31.13s.4d in 1800 and £43.15s.0d by the next year. However, by 1815 and the end of the Napoleonic Wars the embargo on imports was lifted and prices of commodities from these fringe regions fell drastically as the infrastructure in the form of roads and piers was not then in place to

cut transport costs. Also, previously restricted markets reopened and the wool market began to receive produce from Australia by the 1820s, although Scottish wool still made up between 10 and 25% of the UK output. At the same time the seasonal shoals of herring around the west coast became less predictable, migrating to grounds accessible only by the larger boats of the east coast. These factors for hardship were already in place to compound the effects of a run of poor harvests leading up to the tipping point of the potato-blight famines of the mid-1840s. The west coast had become used to relying on imported meal to supplement home produced grain with a system of credit in place. What was new about the distribution of meal during the famine years was the requirement for a claimant to complete a full days work before any relief was given. The Committee in charge of distribution of relief at this time was dominated by men who regarded charity as encouraging laziness.¹⁹ This same attitude of regular work for regular pay did not complement the seasonal nature of occupations in Highlands, where feeding the poor was a common act of charity. The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1845 regularised giving to the poor of a parish through taxation and was criticised as being unnecessary in communities which would give generously out of their surplus, often above that required by taxation. For example, Dr John MacKenzie, in his memoirs, cites the miller of Contin who would regularly leave out a barrel of meal to the value of £10 for those in need to help themselves but resented being taxed £6 under the new Act as he could see those he had previously helped, still in need. It also made landlords financially liable for their poor tenants prompting several to assist their tenants to emigrate and thereafter rely on their own efforts rather than support them at home for an uncertain number of years.

Poor harvests continued in the early years of the 1860s and, although herring fishing was much improved by 1879, frosts destroyed potato crops in 1881 and storms caused much damage to fishing fleets, followed by a year of poor sheep and cattle prices. As external relief was brought in again to the Highland and Island communities, political moves were afoot to provide more security for the crofting population. There were calls for compensation to crofters who improved their land; fair rents; security of

¹⁹ Pauline Butler "Eighty Years in the Highlands: The Life and Times of Osgood H. MacKenzie of Inverewe 1842-1922 . (2010)

tenure and, from some, redistribution, or at least an increase in land. Following extensive consultation by a Royal Commission in 1883 (latterly known as the Napier Commission) the Crofters Act of 1886 put into law all but the last of these recommendations. The major complaint heard from the Gairloch crofters when the Commission met in Poolewe was the fact that Dr John MacKenzie had removed cattle from some crofters.²⁰ At the time of Dr John's reorganisation each crofter was allocated a fixed number of cattle to run on the land based on an estimation of what the land could support. Within the clauses of each lease was a stipulation that on no account should the croft become overstocked with livestock. However, the market prices for cattle in 1850 were so poor that several crofters decided to put off the sale until the following year, overstocking their land by default and compounding the situation by not having the ready cash, usually the profit from cattle sale, with which to pay the rent. The lease agreements stated that in these cases the Proprietor had the right to remove excess stock and sell them to make up the rent arrears. Dr John and the other Trustees were, themselves, facing mounting debts and so seized and sold tenants' stock to alleviate their own problems.



Heights of Kinlochewe: Byre-dwelling in the foreground with post-improvement house and attached barn behind.

²⁰ Napier Commission 1883

CONCLUSION

Early settlers from Gairloch, Wester Ross to Pictou County established themselves along river valleys connected to the main timber exporting port of Pictou itself. Britain had been colonising Nova Scotia since the French surrender of the territory in 1713 with many of the settlers being English, others retired ex-soldiers on Government-sponsored settlement packages following the defeat in the American War of Independence (1784). The “Hector” passengers of 1773 were the first wave of Highland Scots who settled by community. The “Hector” sailed from Loch Broom, the neighbouring parish to the north of Gairloch and, although extant passenger lists record the only Wester Ross settlers as being from Coigach, it is entirely possible that some were related to people from Gairloch Estate, providing a bridgehead of familiar community for subsequent settlers.

Once the best timber-producing locations on mainland Nova Scotia had established communities settlers expanded into other areas. From the 1820s Highland Scots are documented as landing preferentially in Cape Breton where grants of Crown Land were readily available. After 1827 however, land was sold to the highest bidder by public auction so the Land Petitions which used to run “...craves land adjacent to...” cease. The New Statistical Account (of Scotland) of 1836 records the Rev. Donald MacRae of Poolewe recommending Government assisted emigration to “Upper Canada” ie. the Ontario region, favoured by many other Europeans for its good farmland and plentiful employment opportunities. The emigrants themselves persisted in joining fellow Gaelic-speakers in established communities even when the available land was considered marginal at best.

Community and family ties seem to be a more important factor in governing both initial and ultimate destinations of emigrants from Highland Scotland in general and Wester Ross in particular. There seems to have been a desire to replicate the extended family system and way of life. A major benefit was the removal of layers of class structure and landownership which enabled each settler to own a parcel of land outright therefore ensuring that prosperity could only come by the efforts of the individual. The communities within this study are all from a Presbyterian

background which was continued in the New World and totally separate from the Catholic settlers who arrived at the same time.

New Gairloch, Pictou County demonstrates an early established community with pioneers who could pay their own passage and have some capital to set themselves up. Other Gairloch settlers also paid their own passage and there is no evidence that any assistance was ever forthcoming from the Proprietors of the Gairloch Estate in Scotland to enable tenants to emigrate. Dr John MacKenzie was convinced the population of the Estate could live well if drastic changes in agricultural practices were followed rigorously. Decades after the decline elsewhere along the west coast there were numerous tenants employed as “Hand-loom Weavers” and “Stocking-knitters”.^{21 22}

The abundant written records from the time of Dr John MacKenzie’s factorship may skew the evidence in favour of there being no “clearance” as such from Gairloch Estate but even when evidence was taken at the Napier Commission complaints were directed at the reduction of grazing land and the lack of security of tenure, rather than any evictions. People from Gairloch, Wester Ross, always seem to have moved voluntarily, either to positively improve their situation (pull factor) or from the decline in traditional labour-intensive rural employment (push factor). In the second half of the 19th century emigration to the Canadian Maritimes declined markedly in favour of Australia where, once again, groups linked by community ties of kinship emigrated together.

²¹ Census Kinlochewe 1871/1881/1891

²² Pauline Butler “Eighty Years in the Highlands”

APPENDIX

DR JOHN MACKENZIE AND THE GAIRLOCH CROFTING EXPERIMENT



Flowerdale House, Gairloch. Built 1738 by Alexander MacKenzie, 2nd Bart.

The Gairloch Estate was in a state of flux in the first half of the 19th century. The fifth Baronet, Sir Francis, succeeded his father, Sir Hector, in 1826. Unlike many of his contemporary Highland Proprietors, Francis inherited his father's interest in the practical working of the estate and was an enthusiastic agricultural reformer leading by example on his own farm on the Isle of Ewe. As his brother, Dr John MacKenzie, explains in his memoirs

The usual plan with an heir to a Highland Estate of sending him far away from home for the education he could get quite as well near home, then putting him into the army and keeping him quite in the dark about everything connected with the estate (except a little shooting yearly) has the result that when his father dies and he, probably by then well advanced in life, succeeds to the estate, he is as void of all rural information as a baby – and too old to study it or anything else.....How different was my father's life...interested in all farming, gardening, planting, building

*improvements...daily advising his people...looking up to him how to better improve themselves and, of course, himself also through their prosperity.*²³

In this way the young Francis was given a slice of the estate to manage for himself under his father's supervision, the Isle of Ewe which, if managed wisely, would earn £500 per annum. Francis found the challenge an uphill struggle having insufficient patience with his tenants who were resistant to change. For example one tenant refused to sow turnips as they never repaid the effort and neither would he sow grass as his cornlands were already full of it. However, they were not always so resistant to change as they had taken up the cultivation of the potato only 50 years previously.

Not all of Francis' education was received locally. He travelled extensively throughout England, Ireland and Continental Europe gathering information on new methods of cultivation, new breeds of livestock and crops and also farm building design. He was particularly impressed with "La Petite Culture" – the spade agriculture of Belgium and sought to introduce it to Gairloch planning crofts of around 4 or 5 acres in extent – or what could have been cultivated by a spade. However, the greatest difference between the farmers of Belgium and the tenants of Gairloch was land ownership. The Belgium farmers owned their own land and had the incentive to improve productivity. The tenants of Gairloch at that time were subject to short leases and, until the recommendations of the Napier Commission in the 1880s, had no security of tenure for their holdings. Therefore, they had no wish to expend energy improving land which would be rented by somebody else after a couple of years. Neither was there any compensation available at the end of a lease for any improvement that might have been made.

Sir Francis took his improving role seriously though and in 1838 published "Hints for the Use of Highland Tenants and Cottagers, by A Proprietor". At 300 pages long and printed in English with Gaelic alongside, it was a comprehensive guide to his ideas of crofting reform. However, few of his tenants could read either English or Gaelic and were unable to benefit from the text which gained widespread acclaim outwith the district. On a

²³ Christina Byam Shaw "Pigeon Holes of Memory: The Life and Times of Dr John MacKenzie (1803-1886)" Edited from his manuscript memoirs. (1988)

personal level also Francis was seen as being too soft on his tenants when they resisted his attempts to increase overall productivity.

He had been tragically widowed in 1834 and hastily remarried two years later but, according to Dr John's memoirs, never really recovered mentally. Attempting to emulate his father he employed no Factor to help oversee the running of the estate and keep correct accounts. Unable to compel the estate tenantry into complying with his new ideas and unwilling to evict the recalcitrant, his stress increased. The result was stagnation in the economic output of the estate and in 1841 he asked his brother to take over the role of estate Factor and immediately left Scotland for France. Plans had been devised by Sir Francis and his younger brother Dr John, to set out crofts for Gairloch Estate following the Belgium model of square units but Sir Francis' health deteriorated and he died in June 1843 in a private mental asylum in London. In 1842 part of the estate had been converted to deer forest and let to seasonal sporting interests but more was needed to revitalise the economy of the lands of Gairloch.

Sir Francis was succeeded by his son Kenneth, aged eleven. Dr John was chief amongst the Trustees who administered the estate until he came of age, the others being his mother, Mary, and MacKenzie of Ord.

Dr John MacKenzie continued with the plans for the Estate stating in his Memoirs...

I had about enough to do in Frank's lifetime, but his death made me see that I would be of little use to Kenneth if the whole system at Gairloch was not all taken to pieces and rebuilt wisely.

Dr John was convinced that with careful reorganisation and attention to detail there would be no need for any evictions, the like of which were so prevalent from surrounding estates. He divided the arable land into portions which would then have a rental assigned dependant on its quality, typically from £1 for an acre of good arable and as low as one shilling for an acre with no arable and only moorland which required extensive cultivation. Another element of the plan was to build new croft houses within the confines of each croft boundary. The Estate provided larch trees for roof supports and also paid for a mason to be employed in building a model or demonstration cottage for the crofters to copy, the crofters doing

the rest under the mason's supervision. According to the Estate Accounts, between 1843 and 1845 £132.17s 5d was spent on "picks, spades and shovels from Glasgow" in an effort to convince the crofters that the new tools would prove to be more efficient in cultivating the ground to a greater depth than their traditional "cas-chrom" – or foot-plough, which merely scratched the surface of the land. The deeper cultivation would increase the yield of crops with deeper rooted systems. (In the Gairloch to Applecross area the cas-chrom was known as the "cas-chaibe", the term "caibe" reserved elsewhere for the iron "foot" portion of the tool only.²⁴ Dwelly 1901) These tools were meant to be exchanged for the crofters cas-chrom, but although the new ones were accepted, the old tools were retained and came back into use at a later date.

Dr John was equally convinced that the schemes for reorganising the whole estate could only proceed if a team of agricultural instructors could be employed to oversee the work in the townships. He applied to the other Trustees for the necessary funds but the Estate was in so much debt on the death of Sir Francis that, although on paper income exceeded expenditure, it would never clear the £13,000 of inherited debt and get into credit, so any further expenditure was vetoed by the family accountant, a Mr Scott, in Edinburgh. Instead of the trained teachers Dr John wished for, he had to make do with selecting a crofter from each township who would then instruct his neighbours. However, this did require the chosen crofter to be in agreement with all the changes required, which was not always the case.

The Gairloch Crofting Experiment had high profile supporters and critics, with much of the detail being thrashed out in the editorials and letters pages of the Highland newspapers of the day. The Inverness Courier was amongst the most vocal critic and the, newly established, Inverness Advertiser reporting favourably on the Gairloch efforts. The Courier's editor was in favour of large farms or emigration. However, both newspapers agreed that the key to long term land improvement would be longer lease terms. Many of the critics were Lowland Scots whose agricultural experience, if it existed at all, was of large farms which had been successfully reorganised in the closing decades of the 18th century. One critic was Sir John MacNeill who was on the Board of Supervision for

²⁴ Edward Dwelly "Illustrated Gaelic-English Dictionary" 1901

the Relief of the Poor in Scotland. He produced a report in 1851 on the Western Isles and Highlands concerning the destitution, or otherwise, of the population. Among the 27 parishes he examined he compared Gairloch with Applecross, where no encouragement for improvement had been given to the tenants. Sir John stated that the tenants of Gairloch were “*less contented*” than those of Applecross where the run-rig style of agriculture was still practiced and regarded all efforts, short of assisting tenants to emigrate, as useless. In the light of the MacNeill Report, a vociferous reply in support of Dr John’s strategies came from philanthropist Dr William Alison, who quoted his own knowledge of poor relief from improved, small-scale, farming methods in the Highlands and elsewhere.

Dr John MacKenzie, writing in his memoirs from a distance of almost 40 years, reflected on the factors which eventually failed to bring these schemes to fruition. He speculated that had his elder brother, Sir Francis, lived to the age of their own father, he would, with time, have been more capable of ensuring that the agricultural improvements went through to his satisfaction. He cites as his reason for this the fact that Francis wrote his book “Hints...” in both Gaelic and English and hoped that the tenants would be inspired by what they had read, but immediately countered the argument by stating that Francis thought his tenants only needed to be told how to improve their own plots, whereas Dr John “*knew ...that they required also to be compelled to crop their land rationally*”.

Two of the largest tenants at the time were the most resistant to change. Ruaridh Og MacKenzie, whose rent was about £500 p.a. and who had commented that he need not sow grass seed when his cornland was full of it, was heavily involved in whisky smuggling. He had no need to increase the productivity of his cultivated land as the source of his wealth lay elsewhere. Most of his whisky found its way to Skye where it was exchanged for potatoes.



Illicit whisky still concealed in the hills above Kinlochewe

The other was Murdo MacDonald of Achtercairn Farm. He was a drover and cattle dealer of some substance – the Caledonian Mercury for 1841 records him as selling 209 head of cattle at the Muir of Ord mart resulting in the equivalent of today's money of £20,000. He was also involved in trading salted cod from Gairloch. Both were influential amongst their fellow crofters and without their co-operation no reform could proceed. Dr John approached the other Trustees who agreed that unless the tenants conformed, their leases, which were both due to expire, would not be renewed. Neither tenant had the slightest intention of making his main living through arable farming and, by 1849, Murdo MacDonald had left Achtercairn Farm which was let to Dr Charles Robertson, the first Medical Officer of Gairloch who had arrived in 1847. However, Murdo was still critical of the Gairloch situation, writing to his son Hector living in Australia in 1851.....*“There is nothing now in Gairloch but starvation and poverty...I hope you feel no want of food such as they do in this Country, which is now*

*come to a great extent among the poor tenants since the failure of the Potato crop".*²⁵ Hector and family had emigrated only in 1849 so would have been well aware of the potato famines in the years prior to their departure.

As well as seeking to include actions for improvement within the conditions of estate leases, Dr John initiated annual Crofters' Dinners and Prize Giving with cash prizes for categories such as "Greatest extent of land... under turnips". Some crofters were convinced by the new methods, but some still preferred the old systems and were soon to revert to them once Dr John's tenure as Factor was over.

When his nephew, Sir Kenneth, attained his majority in 1853, Dr John stayed on as factor for three years but Sir Kenneth appeared eager to run the estate his own way. In 1852 Sir Kenneth suggested he and his uncle, Dr John, divide up the estate to see how each group of crofters would perform as he had stated that Dr John was being too hard on the tenants by putting conditions on the leases to the effect of comply with the agricultural improvements or risk eviction. In reply Dr John agreed but in his Memoirs remarks ...

I doubt if one in the hundred of his people ever sowed a turnip or clover seed again, or dreamed of a rotation of cropping, while mine persevered well till I said goodbye to them.

In 1856 Dr John took advantage of the fact that his lease on the farm at Isle Ewe was due to expire and he did not renew it, leaving the district for Inverness. He regarded his nephew as having little of the agricultural knowledge of his father although Sir Kenneth was an enthusiastic social reformer, encouraging education in English and improving means of communications with the rest of the country. However, with the crofters reverting to the old fashioned methods of cultivation, yields decreased and rent arrears increased.

Rent arrears were becoming the norm by the 1860s following a series of poor harvests, in the late 1840s, resulting from the partial or complete failure of the potato crop combined with a reduction in herring catches reducing much of the population to a reliance on Poor Relief. Seasonal migration took many family members to the herring fishing and, with

²⁵ NAS MacDonald Letters, Gairloch GD1/1196 20th April 1851

improving communication links, others went to the towns and cities in other parts of Scotland sending money home as and when they could to support those working the crofts.

In the Crofting Commission Report hearing evidence in 1883, opinion was divided as to the efficacy of the reforms attempted by Dr John. Some said that the results were ultimately beneficial but that the removal of cattle from overstocked properties still caused ill feeling locally. Witnesses to this Commission also stated that the crofters had returned to using the “cas-chrom” to turn the soil, instead of the spade favoured by Dr John.

When the findings of the Napier Commission were made public and acted upon with the Crofting Act of 1886 crofters were ensured security of tenure and longer leases, along with the right to assign their croft to family members. At this time many crofters left the Gairloch district seeing no future in mere subsistence agriculture.

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