

Captain John MacDonald, “Glenalladale”

Rev. Allan F. MACDONALD
St. Dunstan's University, Charlottetown

In this year of Our Lord, nineteen hundred and sixty-four, when the people of Prince Edward Island are commemorating the notable events which took place in their capital one century ago, it is appropriate that the spotlight of history be turned on this province. Already historians have given to the public their studies of the Province's history and of the role played by it in the making of our country. It is fitting that a part of the program of the annual conference of the Catholic Historical Association this year should be devoted to certain aspects of the history of the Roman Catholic people of Prince Edward Island. This paper will deal with the life and times of the outstanding Catholic layman in the early history of this province, Captain John MacDonald, the Founder of the First Scottish Catholic Settlement in Prince Edward Island.

For two score years – from 1771, when he first came into contact with the then St. John's Island, to 1811 – the year of his death – John MacDonald played a leading role in the affairs of the Island. As the organizer and leader of one of the largest emigrations to its shores, as one of its principal military figures and as a leading citizen in some of the social and economic questions and controversies of his day, John MacDonald deserves the attention of later ages. Added to this is the fact that his sons took prominent roles in the political, military, and religious affairs of their generation. Of all of his descendents, only the name of his grandson, William C., later Sir William C. MacDonald, has survived the passage of time, and that principally by gracing containers for tobacco and not, as it rightfully should, for its bearer's benevolence and generosity in the aid of education. It is indeed time to subject the forebear of this family, John MacDonald, to the scrutiny of history.

John MacDonald was born at Glenalladale, Scotland, in the year 1742. He was the eldest son of Alexander MacDonald of Glenalladale and Margaret MacDonald of Scotus. The MacDonalds of Glenalladale were the senior cadet branch of the Clan MacDonald of Clanranald.¹ The Glenalladale MacDonalds occupied the eastern section of Clanranald territory and “became the hereditary guardians of Clanranald and the natural managers

¹ James Browne, *History of the Highlands and of the Highland Clans* (Glasgow: A. Fullarton & Co., 1838), IV, 428-447.

of their affairs.”² As such they constituted a sort of buffer state between the Clanranalds and any belligerent neighbors who might from time to time have designs on Clanranald property and territory.

John MacDonald was probably too young to remember, but, when he was a child of three years, a quite extraordinary visitor appeared at his father’s home at Glenalladale. This was Prince Charles Edward Stuart, “Bonnie Prince Charlie,” who had recently landed on Scottish soil and who was to ignite the highland Clans in a last heroic effort to recover the British Crown for the Stuarts.³ It was on Glenalladale territory at Glenfinnan that Charles raised his standard, and among his first adherents were Clanranald men, notably Alexander of Glenalladale and his uncle Angus MacDonald of Borrodale. In the Campaign that followed, Alexander MacDonald served as a major and second-incommand of the Clanranald regiment. He commanded this unit in the attack on Edinburgh;⁴ and he fought in the later battles of Falkirk and Prestopans, and in the final decisive battle at Culloden.

But it was during the aftermath of Culloden that Major Alexander MacDonald was especially to distinguish himself. Although seriously wounded and in spite of further danger to himself and his family, he became the principal guardian of the fugitive prince, and for almost two months conducted him from one Highland retreat to another until finally he saw him safely aboard a ship for France.⁵ As a result of his being “out in ‘45” Alexander MacDonald of Glenalladale suffered the loss of his cattle and the destruction of his property. But his bravery and exploits during and after the campaign won for him the esteem and admiration of his compatriots and the reputation of being one of the outstanding lairds in the Western Highlands.

In 1756, when he was fourteen years of age, John MacDonald left Glenalladale to enter the seminary in Ratisbon, Germany.⁶ This institution was conducted by the Benedictine Monks of St. James Abbey, Ratisbon, for the education of Scottish youth.⁷ It is a matter of interest whether John

² R. C. MacDonald, *Sketches of Highlanders* (St. John: Henry Chubb & Co., 1843), p. 43.

³ Walter Blame, *Itinerary of Prince Charles Edward Stuart* (Edinburgh: Scottish History Society, 1897), pp. 3-7.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

⁵ Robert Forbes, *The Lyon in Mourning* (Edinburgh: Scottish History Society, 1895-1896), 1, 351.

⁶ Records of the Scots Colleges I (Edinburgh: The New Spalding Club, 1906). The entry reads: Anno 1756, Advenerunt sub conductu Revdi. Domini Thomae Brochie – Carolus Drummond, ex Familia Ducum de Perth. Joannes Macdonel. Carolus Frazer.

⁷ Alphons Bellesheim, *History of the Catholic Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1887-90), III, 247; IV, 247, 175-177, 287-290, 374-377.

MacDonald's enrollment at this seminary signified any intention on his part of studying for the priesthood. On this point, while the normal practice was to accept those destined for the priesthood or religious life, it seems that it was not unusual to enroll boys who did not have this intention, especially if they were from select families. A son of Alexander of Glenalladale would surely qualify on this count. Also, the name of John MacDonald is not listed among the students of this seminary who applied for admission to the Benedictine Order.

There is some evidence that John completed the regular course of studies at Ratisbon. But, more than likely, it was broken towards the end by the death of his father in January 1761,⁸ and the necessity of his returning home to take over the administration of his father's estate at Glenalladale. That his education was not of inferior quality, at least in languages and the classics, may be discerned from this student's ability to speak, read and write seven languages and the apparent ease with which he referred to the classical authors.

Presumably it was on reaching his majority in 1763 that John MacDonald became the eighth Laird of Glenalladale. Moreover, he was chosen "Tanist," or second-in-command of the Clanranalds. In reference to this appointment, his son wrote:

It was sound judgement, varied learning, and high rank and standing among chieftans of the Clanranald family that he was selected as the "Cashnier," which in the Gaelic language signifies the guardian or one next in rank to the chief, being a transfer of power in his absence, or when he is incapacitated in case of age or illness, to command.⁹

He was singled out among the Clanranald chieftains. It was a mark of confidence in him.

Sometime during the next few years the young laird of Glenalladale married for the first time. His first wife was a Miss Isabella Gordon, of Wardhouse, the aunt of the famous 19th century British admiral, Sir James Gordon. John MacDonald was early widowed, his wife dying in childbirth. The only child of this marriage survived its mother but a few months.

"The year 1770 is memorable in the annals of the Scotch Mission for a bitter persecution directed against a number of poor Catholics in the Western Highlands..."¹⁰ So begins the account of a melancholy situation which was developing in the Western Highlands in 1770 and which would culminate in

⁸ Forbes, III, 65.

⁹ MacDonald, p. 43.

¹⁰ J. F. S. Gordon, *Journal and Appendix to Scotichronicon and Monasticon* (Glasgow: John Tweed, 1867), p. 79.

the emigration of many Scottish Catholics under John MacDonald to St. John's Island. The circumstances may be recounted briefly. The island of South Uist was divided between MacDonald of Clanranald and Colin MacDonald of Boisdale, who besides his own holdings had a large tract of land in lease from Clanranald. Boisdale had abandoned Catholicism and had embraced the tenets of the Established Church. In an effort to force his Catholic tenants to give up their faith he launched a series of measures designed for this purpose. The first was an attempt to undermine the Catholic beliefs of the children in the school administered by him. This was followed by the banishment of the Catholic missionary on Uist and by a formal demand that Catholic tenants renounce their faith under penalty of the loss of their homes on the island. The reaction of the people was immediate and unanimous. They rejected Boisdale's threats and made immediate plans to quit South Uist.¹¹

This situation and a similar one that followed on the island of Muck constituted a threat to the very existence of Catholicism in the Highlands. In the face of this peril to the faith of their people, the Roman Catholic bishops took immediate steps. In July, 1770, Bishop Hay expressed his conviction that the only remedy for the persecuted people would be emigration to America. According to the *Scotichronicon*, the chief promoter of this scheme at this time was John MacDonald of Glenalladale. That he was already deeply committed to this plan in midsummer 1770 is indicated by Bishop Hay:

Worthy Glenalladale affirms that he will sell all for that end and go himself along with them. His conduct indeed, upon this occasion is exceedingly edifying; he seems to inherit all the zeal of the primitive times, as well as the piety of his own worth ancestors.¹²

Bishop Hay proceeded to investigate the financial implications of obtaining land in America for the people of Uist and concluded that at least 2,000 pounds would be required. He was able to report in October of that year that Glenalladale had agreed to raise this sum by mortgaging his estate.¹³ That negotiations for the purchase of land were soon under way is revealed through the Bishop, writing from Edinburgh the following month: "...Glenalladale is already here, in order to treat of a place of settlement with the Lord Advocate who has large tracts of land in St. John's Island,

¹¹ This account is based largely on: Gordon, pp. 79-83; Ada P. MacLeod, "The Glenalladale Pioneers," *Dalhousie Review*, XIX (1931), pp. 311-324; and A. M. Dawson, *The Catholics of Scotland* (London: Thomas Baker, 1890), I, 226-235.

¹² Bishop Hay to A. Grant, 1770, quoted in Gordon, p. 80.

¹³ Bishop Hay to A. Grant, October 12, 1770, quoted in Gordon, p. 80.

Lawrence River – a most excellent soil and fine climate ...”¹⁴ There is evidence that the actual purchase was effected shortly after, probably early in 1771.¹⁵ In the spring of 1771, Donald MacDonald, the younger brother of Glenalladale, led a party of about a dozen men to St. John’s Island to sow grain and to prepare for the main emigration which was to follow.¹⁶ Donald returned to Scotland later that autumn with reports which were, according to Glenalladale, “the best Accounts that I could wish, & in particular of our Lot, as the first or Second best of the whole for trade, Fishing, & Agriculture.”¹⁷ Apparently Donald’s report of things on St. John’s relieved Glenalladale of some doubts concerning the wisdom of the project, and the two brothers proceeded with the planning of the emigration.

The problem of financing such an undertaking still plagued its organizers. Bishop Hay contributed what he could from his own meagre resources and turned to England for further aid. He drew up a statement explaining the origins and development of the persecution on Uist and sent it to Bishop Challoner, Vicar Apostolic of the London District. Bishop Challoner launched a public subscription among Catholics in England, and raised the substantial sum of 500 pounds.¹⁸ It was desperately needed, for, as Glenalladale was to find out on a trip to Uist in February, 1772, the Catholics on that island were destitute and totally incapable of meeting the expenses of a voyage to America. Apparently Glenalladale offered to raise the balance on his estates, and plans for an emigration the following spring were completed. On March 1772, Glenalladale was able to report from Greenock:

Several settlers have agreed to go to our Lot – Our Method is to give them by Lease for ever a certain Number of Acres, such as they can manage easily, they paying us a small yearly Quitrent out of it, & furnishing themselves all necessaries & Passage, only that we must direct & assist them to carry it on – a number of other people and our own friends have joined after this manner to the number of 214 Souls, Men, Women, and Children.¹⁹

Early in May, 1772, under the leadership of Donald MacDonald some 210 emigrants – approximately 100 from Uist and the rest from the mainland

¹⁴ Bishop Hay to Bishop Grant, November 17, 1770, quoted in Gordon, p. 80.

¹⁵ Glenalladale to Alexander MacDonald, March 7, 1772. This letter, with notes, has been published by Iain R. MacKay in his “Glenalladale’s Settlement, Prince Edward Island,” *Scottish Gaelic Studies*, X (1963), pp. 16-24.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Gordon, p. 81; also Michael Trappes-Lomax, *Bishop Challoner* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1947), p. 228.

¹⁹ Glenalladale to Alexander MacDonald, March 7, 1772.

– sailed aboard *The Alexander* for St. John’s Island. It was a well-equipped expedition. The people were “furnished with a year’s provisions, tools, every other necessary, and credit.” They had a doctor on board – Dr. Roderick MacDonald, a cousin of Glenalladale’s. And they were under the spiritual care of a priest, Father James MacDonald, a secular priest and an experienced missionary.²⁰ After an uneventful voyage of seven weeks they reached St. John’s and landed on the MacDonald’s Lot 36 at a place which they subsequently were to name Scotchfort, and settled at Tracadie.

The Laird of Glenalladale remained in Scotland in 1772. Apparently he felt that his presence was required for some time in Scotland.

For my own part, it is necessary for the scheme that I should continue at home for some time as yet, Supplying my brother in the best manner I can, & receiving such Opprest people as offer themselves to us from all Corners, but certain it is I cannot be fond of the country after all I love best are away – Having greater interest now in St. John than in the Lands I have at home – It being a much better climate and country.²¹

But initial reports from his settlers in the New World were to change plans and prompt his early departure. The settlers were dismayed by the prospects of survival on such a place as St. John’s Island and sent him an urgent request to go out and remove them to some more promising location. Their state of mind was explained some years later:

What frightened Mr. MacDonald’s people to despair was the slender and starved appearance of grain they saw almost everywhere, and that what the servants had put into the ground the preceding year, instead of thirty or eighteen returns, which all former accounts had assured from the most superficial agriculture, scarcely promised two returns.²²

Glenalladale immediately took steps to order his affairs in Scotland, and in mid-summer 1773 he left his native country for St. John’s Island. He went by way of Philadelphia, and purposefully so, “in order to form a judgement of the country in general during, the progress northwards.”²³ On his arrival at Boston he learned that a vessel with supplies that he had sent out from Scotland the previous autumn had never reached its destination. He was forced to purchase new supplies and to ship them to St. John’s. In the

²⁰ Gordon, p. 82.

²¹ Glenalladale to Alexander MacDonald, March 7, 1772.

²² *Case of the Proprietors of the Sold and Escheated Lands in St. John’s Island* (1789), p. 8.

²³ *Ibid.*

meantime, his brother had gone to Quebec where he obtained a vessel-load of provisions. These shipments were badly needed, for the crops planted the previous summer had failed. Glenalladale arrived to find his settlers quite disheartened and anxious to leave.²⁴

By this time Glenalladale had no intention of leaving. An appraisal of his territory on St. John's convinced him that his lands compared favorably with what he had seen to the south. So he put aside all thoughts of moving the settlers, and set himself to the task of ordering the affairs of the colony. It would seem that his resolution and leadership were what was needed most at this juncture, for from this point the settlement made headway. Glenalladale took steps to lay a solid agricultural base by importing such livestock as horses, cattle, swine and sheep for breeding purposes. He continued to support the settlers with foodstuffs until they could raise enough on their own lands.²⁵ There is evidence that he provided some support for the Acadians and some British settlers on the Island who were in a destitute condition and almost starving.²⁶ The necessity of his having to do so suggests that life on St. John's Island in those early years was hard – a far cry from the paradise portrayed to entice would-be-settlers in the British Isles. It left many of the early settlers disillusioned and discontented. Yet the settlers at Tracadie were already “the best off where scarcely any one was tolerably easy, and rather successful than otherwise ... they were the chief support and hope of the island ...”²⁷ It would be unwise to attend very much to such optimistic accounts as “The Uist people are doing extremely well on St. John's Island.”²⁸ A more realistic view was expressed after a decade: “From the difficulties incident to their situation, their progress was not equal to what had been reported to some proprietors at a distance, and it was thought too highly of even on the island. Still they were getting forward.”²⁹ Theirs was a record of slow and steady progress. And the principal factor in their betterment was one which other settlers lacked, that they were under the guidance and direction of a very energetic and capable proprietor, John MacDonald of Glenalladale.

One could conclude from this account that the prime motive behind this plan of emigration was a religious one. This has been the consistent interpretation of the several writers who have dealt with this event, and the

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ R. C. MacDonald, p. 44; also MacLeod, pp. 318-319.

²⁷ *Case of the Proprietors* p. 9.

²⁸ Bishop Hay to John Geddes, quoted in Gordon, p. 83.

²⁹ *Case of the Proprietors*... pp. 8-9.

present writer sees no reason to take a different view.³⁰ There was a persecution; and the only apparent solution that would protect the faith of the Uist people was emigration. To this end, the Roman Catholic authorities bent every effort and strained every resource.

But what of the role of Glenalladale in this movement? Was he drawn into this affair, and did he decide to sponsor the emigration so wholeheartedly solely out of a desire to help the persecuted Catholics of Uist? Recently evidence has been published that suggests that Glenalladale's involvement was more complex, that it resulted from a multiplicity of factors. Prior to despatching the Alexander from Greenock in 1772, Glenalladale wrote:

You know the precarious footing on which I was by a friend persuaded to accept of the Farm of Keppoch – Misrepresentations that were made of me by designing people to Lady Clanranald had like the Overturn this Security I promised Myself I might probably have of the possession of it, & upon the whole alienated My Mind from the Factory or any Dependence on that Family, So far that I was determined to take the first Opportunity of throwing off the Same, Notwithstanding that she was at least perfectly reconciled to me. This with the situation I saw many of my friends whom I loved, like to fall into, & which their Children could not avoid, Unless Some other Path was struck out for them made me wish for a feasible Method of leaving the inhospitable Part of the World, which has fallen to our share, allong with them – Emigrations that were carrying on in Argyleshire about Campbellton, opened my Eyes to the like Schemes, and my brother chanceing to come home & taking Descriptions & Plans we saw of the Island of St. John's in the Gulph of St. Lawrence, we both purchased at a venture from the Lord Advocate Mr. Montgomery the best Lot to Appearance of the Whole Island.³¹

This passage from a personal and soul-baring letter by Glenalladale to his cousin and friend, Alexander MacDonald of Borrodale, is indeed revealing. It shows that Glenalladale was unhappy in his associations with the Clanranalds; so much so that he had determined to sever the relationship. It also suggests that the economic and social upheavals which were under way in the Highlands did not escape Glenalladale.³² His caustic “Emigrations are like to demolish the Highland Lairds, and very deservedly”³³ indicates that he had little sympathy with the post-Culloden lairds, who had lost the old

³⁰ This traditional interpretation has been supported in recent years by MacLeod, and D. M. Sinclair, “Highland Emigration to Nova Scotia,” *Dalhousie Review*, XXIII, (1943), pp. 207-220.

³¹ Glenalladale to Alexander MacDonald, March 7, 1772, pp. 17-18.

³² Sinclair gives an excellent analysis of these developments.

³³ Glenalladale to Alexander MacDonald, March 7, 1772, p. 19.

patriarchial spirit and had little interest, other than monetary, in their tacksmen and tenants. In the light of his, one may conclude that social and economic factors had initially disposed Glenalladale to emigrating and that the religious persecution, something which he abhorred, brought matters to a head and prompted him to act resolutely and decisively.

Glenalladale's work at Tracadie was soon to be disrupted. In 1775 the War of the American Revolution broke out, and the beginning of these hostilities was to have immediate repercussions on the career of John MacDonald. The British authorities had some doubts about the loyalty of the Highland colonists and took immediate steps to ensure their allegiance to the crown. That fears concerning the loyalty of John MacDonald were groundless is indicated by his later explanation that "he could not decline an example and exertion of loyalty specially required by His Majesty when the dismemberment of the Empire was in question and especially the dismemberment of the part to which the petitioner now belongs."³⁴ So, in June 1755, when he received a pressing request to join a Highland regiment then being formed, and in spite of the no less pressing need for his presence at Tracadie, he proceeded on active duty to Halifax.³⁵

The unit in which Glenalladale was to be commissioned was the Second Battalion of His Majesty's Royal Highland Regiment of Emigrants, or more commonly, The Royal Emigrants.³⁶ This regiment, consisting of two battalions, was being formed under the command of Lt.-Col. Allan MacLean who was commissioned by General Gage to enlist Highlanders and other loyal subjects from any of the provinces in North America. The First Battalion was organized by Colonel MacLean about Quebec and on the northern frontier of New York from discharged men of the 42nd Regiment, Fraser and Montgomery Highlanders who had settled in these colonies after the peace of 1763. The Second Battalion was to have its headquarters in Halifax and was to be made up of recruits from Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, St. John's Island, and from Highland settlers in North Carolina. The command of the Second Battalion was given to Major John Small, formerly

³⁴ Quoted in *Montreal Gazette*, May 10, 1918. His loyalty to the crown is also attested by his presentation, in 1776, of a paper to Secretary of State Germain of Nova Scotia, in which he stressed the need for "pursuing henceforth the most vigorous measures to counteract the propensity to Independency." P.A.C. Annual Report. 1894, p. 354.

³⁵ G. A. Raikes, *Role of Officers of York and Lancaster Regiment* (London; Richard Bently, n.d.), p. 38 and p. 112. The entry reads: "MacDonald, John – Captain. 2nd Battalion, June 14th, 1775 (*Gazette*, January 16, 1779) ; to H. P. on reduction 1783 to 1811."

³⁶ The history of the 84th or Royal Highland Emigrant Regiment is contained in Patterson, George, *More Studies in Nova Scotia History* (Halifax: The Imperial Publishing Company, 1941), pp. 9-37.

of the 42nd Highlanders and then of the 21st Regiment, an extremely popular officer among Highland men. Major Small's duties with the 21st Regiment required his continuance at Boston, and the actual organization of the Second Battalion was entrusted to Captain Alexander MacDonald, a veteran officer who came out of retirement on Staten Island to resume active service with the new Highland regiment. This circumstance was fortuitous for future historians, as Captain Alexander MacDonald was a prolific correspondent and his letters constitute the principal source for the history of the Second Battalion.³⁷ These letters extend over a three and one-half year period, from June 1775 to January 1779, and present a detailed and an extremely interesting account of the doings of the Second Battalion during these war years. From these we are able to assemble a record of the first half of the eight year military career of John MacDonald of Glenalladale.

As soon as Glenalladale committed himself to the British cause, he began to raise a company from among his own people and others on the Island.³⁸ After bringing this unit to Halifax, he proceeded to Newfoundland to recruit for the battalion in that colony.³⁹ In spite of the lack of support by the authorities there he gained some recruits and brought them to Halifax. Towards Christmas, 1775, Glenalladale was appointed Captain and made company commander in the Second Battalion at Halifax.⁴⁰

This may have been a dubious distinction, for the Second Battalion was in dire straits. First of all, it suffered from the absence of its commanding officer. Secondly, it was poorly provisioned. There was such a scarcity of clothing and food, that the troops suffered from cold, hunger and malnutrition, and during the winter of 1776 many members of the Second Battalion met their deaths. Finally, the battalion had not been accorded official status in the British Army. The officers had not received any confirmation either of their pay or the commissions promised them on enlistment or any of the other benefits, such as half-pay on retirement, which were normally accorded to regular officers. Glenalladale protested against this treatment and even threatened to turn his men over to other units and to

³⁷ *The Letter Book of Captain Alexander MacDonald, 1775-1779*. New York Historical Society Collections, XV (1882). This source will be referred to as the Alexander MacDonald Letters.

³⁸ Captain Alexander MacDonald to Colonel Allan MacLean, September 1, 1775: "What men are on the Island are already engaged with Glenalladale who is now here with us." *Alexander MacDonald Letters*.

³⁹ Captain Alexander MacDonald to Major John Small, November 15, 1775. *Alexander MacDonald Letters*.

⁴⁰ Captain Alexander MacDonald to Major John Small, January 27, 1776. *Alexander MacDonald Letters*.

take the case to London if the situation was not remedied.⁴¹ It was not until the latter part of February, 1776, that Glenalladale finally received his commission.⁴²

He was to spend the next two years at Halifax. In the summer of 1776, he was obliged to return to St. John's Island to straighten out some difficulties with his tenants, some of whom were dissatisfied and were threatening to settle elsewhere.⁴³ On his return to Halifax he must have concerned himself with some of the loftier aspects of the war, as he then addressed a forty-four page memorandum to Secretary of State Germain in which he set forth his views on the future government of America.⁴⁴ It is not known what attention, if any, he received for his efforts on this level. In any case, the loss of the war removed any possibility of putting them to the test.

Late in 1778, Glenalladale was given command of a detachment at Annapolis.⁴⁵ During his term of command at this post, he was confronted by an attempt to undermine the loyalty of his men. A Justice Patten harbored a spy from New England and aided him in his efforts to infiltrate into Glenalladale's contingent and incite these soldiers to desert. By sending out his own spies, soldiers who feigned desertion, Glenalladale was successful in obtaining proof of Patten's rebellious activities and thus prevented any further threats of this nature.⁴⁶

But, from Captain Alexander MacDonald's letters we get more than a chronological record of the battalion. The captain was quite explicit in his appraisal and evaluation of his officers. Many references to his friend and brother officer "Glen al a del" illustrate clearly that he entertained a high regard for him. Glenalladale is "an ornament to any corps that he goes into."⁴⁷ But Alexander MacDonald was too much the veteran soldier to allow friendship to blur his judgment. It may be viewed as significant that Captain Alexander MacDonald, who did not hesitate to speak his mind to superiors as well as subordinates, regarded Captain John MacDonald as a competent, efficient and very capable military officer.

⁴¹ Captain Alexander MacDonald to Major John Small, January 6, 1776. *Alexander MacDonald Letters*.

⁴² Captain Alexander MacDonald to Major John Small, February 19, 1776. *Alexander MacDonald Letters*.

⁴³ Captain Alexander MacDonald to Major John Small, July 4, 1776. *Alexander MacDonald Letters*.

⁴⁴ P.A.C. Annual Report. 1894, p. 354.

⁴⁵ Captain Alexander MacDonald to Captain John MacDonald, November 18, 1778. *Alexander MacDonald Letters*.

⁴⁶ Captain Alexander MacDonald to General Francis MacLean, December 3, 1778. *Alexander MacDonald Letters*.

⁴⁷ Captain Alexander MacDonald to General Francis MacLean, June 5, 1776. *Alexander MacDonald Letters*.

On December 25, 1778, the Emigrant Regiment was regularized and placed on the British Establishment. It was now numbered and was henceforth to be known as the 84th Regiment of Foot. Unfortunately, little detailed information is available on the history of the Second Battalion from 1779 to the end of the war when it was disbanded. It is known that of the ten companies in the battalion five remained in Nova Scotia and five were incorporated into the armies of General Clinton and Lord Cornwallis. Patterson reports that Clinton drafted these five companies into his army in 1776 and had them with him when he campaigned in the south.⁴⁸ There are indications that four of these companies were in the Carolinas in 1881 and that at least some of these fought at Eutaw Springs, Yorkton and Savannah.⁴⁹

Such information, of course, tells us nothing of the activities of Captain John MacDonald during the final four years of the war. It is known, however, that he remained on active service until late in 1783. Several writers record one event in which he distinguished himself:

During the American Revolution an American ship of war came to the Nova Scotia coast, near a port where Glenalladale was on detachment, with a small party of his men of the 84th Highland Emigrants. A part of the enemy's crew having landed for the purpose of plundering the people of the country, Captain MacDonald with his handful of men boarded the vessel, overcame those who had been left to take charge of her, hoisted the sails and took her in triumph into the harbour of Halifax. He then returned with a reinforcement and took the crews of Americans and French all prisoners.⁵⁰

Apart from this incident there is little direct information on the latter half of his military service. But the following data has been gleaned from other sources. Glenalladale was on duty at the garrison in Halifax in the summer of 1781.⁵¹ Sometime after November of the same year he went by way of New York to Britain to make representations concerning the disposition of his lands on the Island. He was in London, presumably on the same journey, in the autumn of 1782,⁵² and he was still there early in 1783, and for the same reason, the land question.⁵³

A question of interest remains. Was Captain John at any time engaged in actual combat in the Thirteen Colonies? From this chronology it appears that the only time he could have been with the companies under Clinton and

⁴⁸ Patterson, p. 22.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁵⁰ R. C. MacDonald, pp. 44-45.

⁵¹ *Case of the Proprietors ...* p. 33.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 40.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

Cornwallis was between 1779 and early 1881. But the incident of the Nova Scotia coast likely took place sometime after the beginning of 1779, for Captain Alexander MacDonald would hardly have failed to report it if it had occurred prior to that date. There is no mention in Glenalladale's own references to military duty that he ever served in the south. Likewise his son Roderick would surely have included it in his account if it were the case.⁵⁴ It is this writer's conclusion that Glenalladale was not numbered among those that fought on what is now United States soil. The last two years of his military service, after 1781 when "hostilities in America were on the point of ceasing,"⁵⁵ were disrupted by the demands on him to go to London to attend to his lands on the Island.

If much of Glenalladale's military career has been unrecorded, as a soldier he was not to go unsung. Attention has already been given to Alexander MacDonald's appreciation of his ability and competence. But it remained for his commander, Major Small, to make the most explicit appraisal of Glenalladale the soldier. In an address to the British government Small stated: "The activity and unabating zeal of Captain John MacDonald of Glenalladale in bringing an excellent company into the field is his least recommendation, being acknowledged by all who knew him to be one of the most accomplished men and best officers of his rank in His Majesty's service."⁵⁶

The cessation of hostilities in 1783 brought with it the disbandment of the 84th Regiment of Foot and the release of Captain John MacDonald to retirement on half pay. For him the war must have been a disappointing and futile experience. For half of the eight years that he spent on duty his own status and that of his regiment had been nebulous and indefinite. The cause for which he had felt so strongly and to which he had given his best efforts had been lost. Too, there was the personal loss occasioned by the death in action in 1780 of his brother Donald, his longtime associate.⁵⁷ And if these seemed to have been wasted years, the outlook for the future gave little reasons for optimism. His affairs on St. John's Island were in the worst state possible. Most of his tenants had left Tracadie and had taken up lands

⁵⁴ Roderick or "R. C." includes an account of his father's military career in his *Sketches of Highlanders*.

⁵⁵ *Case of the Proprietors* ... p. 40.

⁵⁶ This tribute by Small appears in R. C. MacDonald, p. 45. It is quoted by A. W. Warburton, *A History of Prince Edward Island* (St. John: Barnes & Co., 1923), p. 173; and by Patterson, p. 19.

⁵⁷ Lieutenant Donald MacDonald was killed in a naval engagement against the French. It has been suggested that he was commissioned in the 84th Regiment. But he is not listed among the officers of that unit. Patterson, p. 24. There is some evidence that he served in a force organized on St. John's Island by Philips Calbeck, the acting governor.

elsewhere. His lands had been seized by the government in 1781 and sold to another proprietor, and although he had taken steps to recover them, a final settlement had not been made. Now in his forty-second year, John MacDonald had little to show for the past thirteen years of hard, demanding activity. As he turned to take up once more his work at Tracadie, or rather, to begin a new stage in his career, serious challenges awaited him.

When Captain MacDonald purchased Lot 36 in 1771, he assumed the obligation of paying a yearly rental, called quit-rent, to the crown. On lot 36, an area of approximately 20,000 acres, the rate of rental was to be four shillings per hundred acres. Obviously, he gained little or no revenue in the early years, and during his absence on military duty the arrears for quit-rents accumulated. There is nothing unusual about this as on only about fifteen percent of the townships were the original conditions met by their proprietors. Furthermore, Glenalladale had fulfilled the condition that required that at least one hundred persons be settled on a lot within ten years of purchase, and by this he was distinguished from the majority of the proprietors. But Governor Patterson made no exception for him and when, in 1781, he directed proceedings against certain proprietors in arrears and sold their lots, he included Lot 36.⁵⁸

Captain John had been kept in the dark about this transaction; but when report of it reached him at Halifax in 1781 he took immediate action. He went to England about the end of that year to arouse the other dispossessed proprietors to fight Patterson.⁵⁹ In a petition to the crown to void the legislation of 1781 he pointed out that he had undergone great expense to establish his settlers, and that as a proprietor he had fulfilled his obligations until his wartime service made it impossible to attend to his estate. He attacked the administration bitterly for its action and the manner in which it had carried out the sale of the lots.⁶⁰ He took a leading role in the subsequent negotiations with the British government which ultimately resulted in the revocation of the law of 1781 and the return of his lands.

But there was still the heavy burden of quit-rents. These were to keep Glenalladale in strained financial circumstances for many years. It was presumably to meet the arrears on these that in 1805 he went to England to dispose of his Estate. That he contemplated doing so is revealed in a letter of Father MacEachern (later Bishop MacEachern) in the autumn of 1805:

⁵⁸ Warbuton, pp. 198-205; and Duncan Cambell, *History of Prince Edward Island* (Charlottetown: Bremner Brothers, 1875), pp. 26-60.

⁵⁹ *Case of the Proprietors* p. 40.

⁶⁰ Campbell, p. 30, states that Captain MacDonald's petition "contributed in no small degree in causing the act of relief to be prepared." John Stewart, *An Account of Prince Edward Island in the Gulph of St. Lawrence* (London: W. Winchester and Son, 1806), pp. 189.193, does not agree with Captain MacDonald's statement of the case but concedes that it was an effective presentation.

I am sorry to have to inform your Lordship that Captain MacDonald has sold all his property to some English farmers ... As his tenants have no leases, they must of recourse remove. In that event our Church and many other things will be deranged in the Island. The poor people have not whither to go. – I received a long letter from him wherein he says he is about selling the property and his reasons for so doing.⁶¹

A letter by the same person the following year reveals that the deal was off:

Captain MacDonald has not sold any part of his lands, but has not settled with his tenants. I cannot pretend to say whether they will or not accept his terms. If they go off his lands, it will be a distressing thing to them, and to our cause at large.⁶²

Unfortunately no reason is given for the decision not to sell. But one may conjecture that by 1806 he had some hope that the crown would cancel his arrears. For in December of that same year the Assembly passed an address to the Lieutenant-Governor in which they petitioned the Crown for the remission of the arrears in quit-rent on Captain John's property.⁶³ After this, that he was in improved financial circumstances is indicated by his will, written in 1810, which shows that his estate was secure and that there was but a comparatively small debt on his property.

The letters of Bishop MacEachern previously quoted suggest that there is another aspect of the land question which requires attention. This was the system of holding land. It was Captain MacDonald's plan from the beginning to give his settlers perpetual leases for an annual rental. While they must have agreed to this arrangement, the settlers were not reconciled to it. They had had their fill of landlordism in Scotland and, probably influenced by the propaganda put out to encourage emigration, believed that they would be rid of such a system and would possess land in freehold. To their natural discontent with rentals was added the fact that Captain MacDonald departed for military service before they could be placed on their respective locations of land. So during his absence many of his tenants migrated to other areas where they could find better terms of rent, or land in freehold. This outmigration from Tracadie was so extensive that he was to complain later that only one half dozen of the original settlers remained.⁶⁴

The position of these tenants is certainly understandable. They were among those who "hated a leasehold system which meant that they could not obtain a clear title to the lands they occupied for either themselves or their

⁶¹ Aeneas MacEachern to Bishop Plessis of Quebec, October 28, 1805.

⁶² Aeneas MacEachern to Bishop Plessis, November 29, 1806.

⁶³ Warburton, p. 172.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 170; and *Case of Proprietors...*, p. 10.

children.”⁶⁵ So, at the first opportunity to better their condition, they moved elsewhere.

With regard to his first settlers, one can have some sympathy with Captain MacDonald’s position. He had sacrificed his resources and his security in bringing these tenants to America. He had provided for them in those perilous early years, and he did this to a degree beyond his commitment to them. He felt that they were indebted to him. He was too much the product of the clan system, too much the patriarch, and too much of the nobility to break away from the old system. As a result of this his estate, at great cost to him, was inevitably drained of some of its best and most enterprising tenants. But it is difficult to understand, much less justify, the fact that in 1806 his people at Tracadie were in such an unsettled condition. On this score, he was to leave a legacy of almost complete tenancy that was to persist for three quarters of the century, and was to cause no end of trouble to his descendants and no little misery to the children of his tenants.

Sometime after the resolution of the land dispute, Glenalladale purchased lot 35.⁶⁶ At Tracadie, he reserved some 500 acres for his own use. That he carried on an extensive farming operation may be discerned from the contents of a letter by him in 1806 in which he speaks of “having to support with straw and hay this winter 120 heads of near breeding stock, 16 large bullocks, 16 horses and 100 sheep.... the period being equal to about 6 months.”⁶⁷ His example in this respect must have been an invaluable one for his tenants for they lacked an agricultural background and had none of the experience and skill in farming which characterized many of the English settlers. Clark speaks of these Highlanders as “no farmers” and as a people “who never had their hearts in farming,”⁶⁸ and it was doubtless to such as these that Bishop MacEachern referred when he spoke of those of his “hearers” who were “struggling under the disadvantages of a new country

⁶⁵ Francis W. P. Bolger, *Prince Edward Island and Confederation 1863-1873* (Charlottetown: St. Dunstan’s University Press, 1964), p. 6.

⁶⁶ There is no little confusion concerning the proprietorship of these lots. Clark suggests that lot 35 was purchased by Glenalladale in 1771, was sold for arrears and restored in 1791; see A. H. Clark, *Three Centuries and the Island* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1959), Appendix B, p. 266. But there is evidence that in 1781 lot 35 was the property of Lieutenant General Maitland. There is no doubt that the Macdonald’s original purchase was lot 36. There is need of further research on this question.

⁶⁷ Glenalladale to John MacDonald of Borrodale, November 29, 1906. This letter has been published by Iain R. MacKay in his “Glenalladale’s Settlement, Prince Edward Island,” *Scottish Gaelic Studies*, X (1963), pp. 16-24.

⁶⁸ Clark. n. 68.

and works to which they were formerly entire strangers.”⁶⁹ In spite of these cultural handicaps, the people made out, and by 1798 the total population on lots 35 and 36 had reached 275 souls. Even Stewart, writing in 1806, had to acknowledge that “these lots are considerably improved.”⁷⁰

The picture of the Tracadie settlement in those early years of the nineteenth century which may be gleaned from the various sources is that of a closely-knit Catholic community. The centre of the community was Captain John’s large home, New Glenalladale, “intended to accommodate a priest or two or three with a schoolmaster.” For several years there was a resident priest, Father Augustine MacDonald, a brother of Captain John, who came out from Scotland in 1802 and served as pastor until his death in 1807. Captain John’s report in 1806 that “Sandy Rhetland keeps the school” indicates that Tracadie boasted a school, a unique institution for that period. At New Glenalladale Captain John hosted his Highland friends, preserving the customs and festivals which they had observed in Scotland. The feast of St. Andrew was the occasion for a special assembly of Highlanders at the Glenalladale residence. Too, that they were some outdoor diversions to break the monotony of the settler’s life is suggested by Captain John’s reminder to his cousin of the Black River, “where you caught many a trout, eel and perch, eat many a trout, eel and perch, guzzled many a draught of rum, cracked many a horse joke, swore like a trooper and stunk like a Badger, in the Days of yore.”⁷¹

To *New Glenalladale* in 1792, Captain John brought his second bride, Margaret MacDonald of Guernish, Scotland. It will be recalled that he had been widowed early in life. One or two writers have stated that he had resolved not to remarry and had made his brother Donald his heir; but that the latter’s death in the Revolutionary War had necessitated a change in plans. Whether it was as lacking in romance as all this is not known, but there is every indication that it was a happy and successful marriage. Four sons and one daughter were born of this union. The first son, Donald, succeeded as head of the Tracadie Estate and later entered political life in the province. He was the father of Sir William C. MacDonald. The second son, William, was lost at sea on his way to study in England. The third son, John, became a priest. After serving for several years in Scotland, he brought a contingent of Irish settlers to the Prince Edward Island. His being a landlord conflicted with his pastoral role and he later retired from the Island to serve as a pastor in England. The youngest son, Roderick C., served as an officer in the British Army. He was distinguished by his efforts to organize Highland societies in the Maritimes for the promotion of the education of

⁶⁹ Aeneas MacEachern to Bishop Plessis, May 30, 1801.

⁷⁰ Stewart, p. 213.

⁷¹ Glenalladale to John MacDonald of Borrodale, November 29, 1806.

Scottish youth. Their sister, Flora Ann Marie, married Alexander MacDonnell and lived at Donaldston. Glenalladale and his wife spared no expense to give their children the best in education. All of the boys were educated in Europe, and Flora received that training suitable for a young lady of the age offered by the Ursuline Sisters at Quebec.

No account of Glenalladale's life and career would be complete without some reference to his Catholicity. Reared in a staunchly Catholic family, and educated in a Catholic institution, he ever reflected this tradition. All references to him state that he was a sincere and zealous Christian. His son has given us the pertinent observation that, "He never made the slightest difference as to the religion of his tenantry, clansmen, friends or acquaintances," and he illustrates this by relating that his father had subscribed to the building of the first Protestant church in Charlottetown.⁷² It is from the same author that we learn that Glenalladale was on one occasion offered the governorship of Prince Edward Island, but that he refused it on account of the oath which as a Catholic he could not take. Captain MacDonald, it seems, had one favorite apostolate and that was the training of boys for the priesthood. In 1794 he proposed a plan for raising money for the support of students inclined to study for the priesthood. It was many years before this plan was adopted, but it eventually was by the Bishop of Quebec, and, according to MacMillan, it bore much fruit in the succeeding years.⁷³

The same author relates the story of another situation when the views of Captain MacDonald and those of the ecclesiastical authorities were not so compatible.⁷⁴ This refers to Glenalladale's opposition to some of the procedures pertaining to the building of the church at St. Andrew's, and his appeal to Bishop Denault of Quebec against the policies of Father MacEachern. MacMillan is quite definite that Glenalladale was seeking his own convenience rather than the public good. One might suggest that this interpretation was more categorical than warranted. Certainly, a reading of MacDonald's statement of his position inclines one to the view that he was sincere in his beliefs and that he could have had sound reasons for the course he followed.

But the best insights into the Christian values and beliefs which inspired him are given by his own writings. A prolific letter-writer, he was never reticent about giving expression to his ideas and views; and in his letters to his children he set down his innermost thoughts and beliefs on matters of religion. A letter to Flora, written for her guidance when she was a student

⁷² R. C. MacDonald, p. 45

⁷³ John C. MacMillan, *The early History of The Catholic Church in Prince Edward Island* (Quebec: Evenement Printing Company, 1905), p. 140.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

in Quebec, is a veritable treatise on the fundamental beliefs and moral principles of the Christian.⁷⁵ That Glenalladale was a man of unusual piety and spiritual perception may be judged from the following exhortation which he wrote as a final counsel to his children:

Morning and evening prayers never omit. Get copies of short ejaculations which you will address to God through the day. Never omit confession and communion once a month. Thus will you have a good chance of saving your souls. If you neglect it, you will continue passionate and quarrelsome, you will fall into serious difficulties and, perhaps, into grievous sins besides disobedience. The frequent and due recourse to the sacraments is the best cure and preservation against such things ...⁷⁶

When Captain John MacDonald wrote the above words he was in the last year of his life. In the summer of 1810 his health began to decline. Sensing that his illness was fatal he made a final disposition of his property, bequeathing it equally to his wife and five children. He devoted his final days to the preparation of his soul for eternity. Early in 1811, at Tracadie, death came to the former VIIIth Laird of Glenalladale, Captain 84th Regiment of Foot, Founder of the First Scottish Catholic Settlement on Prince Edward Island John MacDonald, "Glenalladale."

⁷⁵ Anna MacDonald, "A Knight of the 18th Century," *The Messenger*, (January, 1902).

⁷⁶ *The Arrival of the First Scottish Catholic Emigrants in Prince Edward Island and After* (Summerside: Journal Publishing Company, 1922), pp. 40-41.