

MACLEOD.

Source: The Scottish Highlands, Highland Clans and Highland Regiments, Volume II (of 2) by Sir John Scott Keltie

The clan Leod or MacLeod is one of the most considerable clans of the Western Isles, and is divided into two branches independent of each other, the Macleods of Harris and the Macleods of Lewis.

To the progenitors of this clan, a Norwegian origin has commonly been assigned. They are also supposed to be of the same stock as the Campbells, according to a family history referred to by Mr Skene, which dates no farther back than the early part of the 16th century.

The genealogy claimed for them asserts that the ancestor of the chiefs of the clan, and he who gave it its clan name, was Loyd or Leod, eldest son of King Olave the Black, brother of Magnus, the last king of Man and the Isles. This Leod is said to have had two sons: Tormod, progenitor of the Macleods of Harris, hence called the Siol Tormod, or race of Tormod; and Torquil, of those of Lewis, called the Siol Torquil, or race of Torquil. Although, however, Mr Skene and others are of opinion that there is no authority whatever for such a descent, and "The Chronicle of Man" gives no countenance to it, we think the probabilities are in its favour, from the manifestly Norwegian names borne by the founders of the clan, namely, Tormod or Gorman and Torquil, and from their position in the Isles, from the very commencement of their known history. The clan itself, there can be no doubt, are mainly the descendants of the ancient Celtic inhabitants of the western isles.

Tormod's grandson, Malcolm, got a charter from David II., of two-thirds of Glenelg, on the mainland, a portion of the forfeited lands of the Bissets, in consideration for which he was to provide a galley of 36 oars, for the king's use whenever required. This is the earliest charter in possession of the Macleods. The same Malcolm obtained the lands in Skye which were long in possession of his descendants, by marriage with a daughter of MacAraile, said to have been one of the Norwegian nobles of the Isles. From the name, however, we would be inclined to take this MacAraile for a Celt. The sennachies sometimes made sad slips.

Macleod of Harris, originally designated "de Glenelg," that being the first and principal possession of the family, seems to have been the proper chief of the clan Leod. The island, or rather peninsula of Harris, which is adjacent to Lewis, belonged, at an early period, to the Macruaries of Garmoran and the North Isles, under whom the chief of the Siol Tormod appears to have possessed it. From this family, the superiority of the North Isles passed to the Macdonalds of Isla by marriage, and thus Harris came to form a part of the lordship of the Isles. In the isle of Skye the Siol Tormod possessed the districts of Dunvegan, Duirinish, Bracadale, Lyndale, Trotternish, and Minganish, being about two-thirds of the whole island. Their principal seat was Dunvegan, hence the chief was often styled of that place.

The first charter of the Macleods of Lewis, or Siol Torquil, is also one by King David II. It contained a royal grant to Torquil Macleod of the barony of Assynt, on the north-western coast of Sutherlandshire. This barony, however, he is said to have obtained by marriage^[192] with the heiress, whose name was Macnicol. It was held from the crown. In that charter he has no designation, hence it is thought that he had then no other property. The Lewis Macleods held that island as vassals of the Macdonalds of Isla from 1344, and soon came to rival the Harris branch of the Macleods in power and extent of territory, and even to dispute the chiefship with them. Their armorial bearings, however, were different, the family of Harris having a castle, while that of Lewis had a burning mount. The possessions of the Siol Torquil were very extensive, comprehending the isles of Lewis and Rasay, the district of Waterness in Skye, and those of Assynt, Cogeach, and Gairloch, on the mainland.

To return to the Harris branch. The grandson of the above-mentioned Malcolm, William Macleod, surnamed Achlerach, or the clerk, from being in his youth designed for the church, was one of the most daring chiefs of his time. Having incurred the resentment of his superior, the Lord of the Isles, that powerful chief invaded his territory with a large force, but was defeated at a place called Lochsligachan. He was, however, one of the principal supporters of the

last Lord of the Isles in his disputes with his turbulent and rebellious son, Angus, and was killed, in 1481, at the battle of the Bloody Bay, where also the eldest son of Roderick Macleod of the Lewis was mortally wounded. The son of William of Harris, Alexander Macleod, called Allaster Crottach, or the Humpbacked, was the head of the Siol Tormod at the time of the forfeiture of the lordship of the Isles in 1493, when Roderick, grandson of the above-named Roderick, was chief of the Siol Torquil. This Roderick's father, Torquil, the second son of the first Roderick, was the principal supporter of Donald Dubh, when he escaped from prison and raised the banner of insurrection in 1501, for the purpose of regaining the lordship of the Isles, for which he was forfeited. He married Katherine, daughter of the first Earl of Argyll, the sister of Donald Dubh's mother. The forfeited estate of Lewis was restored in 1511 to Malcolm, Torquil's brother. Alexander the Humpback got a charter, under the great seal, of all his lands in the Isles, from James IV., dated 15th June, 1468, under the condition of keeping in readiness for the king's use one ship of 26 oars and two of 16. He had also a charter from James V. of the lands of Glenelg, dated 13th February, 1539.

With the Macdonalds of Sleat, the Harris Macleods had a feud regarding the lands and office of bailiary of Trotternish, in the isle of Skye, held by them under several crown charters. The feud was embittered by Macleod having also obtained a heritable grant of the lands of Sleat and North Uist; and the Siol Torquil, who had also some claim to the Trotternish bailiary and a portion of the lands, siding with the Macdonalds, the two leading branches of the Macleods came to be in opposition to each other. Under Donald Gruamach ("grim-looking") aided by the uterine brother of their chief, John Mactorquil Macleod, son of Torquil Macleod of the Lewis, forfeited in 1506, the Macdonalds succeeded in expelling Macleod of Harris or Dunvegan from Trotternish, as well as in preventing him from taking possession of Sleat and North Uist. The death of his uncle, Malcolm Macleod, and the minority of his son, enabled Torquil, with the assistance of Donald Gruamach, in his turn, to seize the whole barony of Lewis, which, with the leadership of the Siol Torquil, he held during his life. His daughter and heiress married Donald Gorme of Sleat, a claimant for the lordship of the Isles, and the son and successor of Donald Gruamach. An agreement was entered into between Donald Gorme and Ruari or Roderick Macleod, son of Malcolm, the last lawful possessor of the Lewis, whereby Roderick was allowed to enter into possession of that island, and in return Roderick became bound to assist in putting Donald Gorme in possession of Trotternish, against all the efforts of the chief of Harris or Dunvegan, who had again obtained possession of that district. In May 1539, accordingly, Trotternish was invaded and laid waste by Donald Gorme and his allies of the Siol Torquil; but the death soon after of Donald Gorme, by an arrow wound in his foot, under the walls of Mackenzie of Kintail's castle of Ellandonan, put an end to his rebellion and his pretensions together. When the powerful[193] fleet of James V. arrived at the isle of Lewis the following year, Roderick Macleod and his principal kinsmen met the king, and were made to accompany him in his farther progress through the Isles. On its reaching Skye, Alexander Macleod of Dunvegan was also constrained to embark in the royal fleet. With the other captive chiefs they were sent to Edinburgh, and only liberated on giving hostages for their obedience to the laws.

Alexander the Humpback, chief of the Harris Macleods, died at an advanced age in the reign of Queen Mary. He had three sons, William, Donald, and Tormod, who all succeeded to the estates and authority of their family. He had also two daughters, the elder of whom was thrice married, and every time to a Macdonald. Her first husband was James, second son of the fourth laird of Sleat. Her second was Allan Maclan, captain of the Clanranald; and her third husband was Macdonald of Keppoch. The younger daughter became the wife of Maclean of Lochbuy.

William Macleod of Harris had a daughter, Mary, who, on his death in 1554, became under a particular destination, his sole heiress in the estates of Harris, Dunvegan, and Glenelg. His claim to the properties of Sleat, Trotternish, and North Uist, of which he was the nominal proprietor, but which were held by the Clandonald, was inherited by his next brother and successor, Donald. This state of things placed the latter in a very anomalous position, which may be explained in Mr Gregory's words:—"The Siol Tormod," he says,[180] "was now placed in a position, which, though quite intelligible on the principles of feudal law, was totally opposed to the Celtic customs that still prevailed, to a great extent, throughout the Highlands and Isles. A female and a minor was the legal proprietrix of the ancient possessions of the tribe, which, by her marriage, might be conveyed to another and a hostile family; whilst her uncle, the natural leader of the clan according to ancient custom, was left without any means to keep up the dignity of a chief, or to support the clan against its enemies. His claims on the estates possessed by the Clandonald were worse

than nugatory, as they threatened to involve him in a feud with that powerful and warlike tribe, in case he should take any steps to enforce them. In these circumstances, Donald Macleod seized, apparently with the consent of his clan, the estates which legally belonged to his niece, the heiress; and thus, in practice, the feudal law was made to yield to ancient and inveterate custom. Donald did not enjoy these estates long, being murdered in Trotternish, by a relation of his own, John Oig Macleod, who, failing Tormod, the only remaining brother of Donald, would have become the heir male of the family. John Oig next plotted the destruction of Tormod, who was at the time a student in the university of Glasgow; but in this he was foiled by the interposition of the Earl of Argyll. He continued, notwithstanding, to retain possession of the estates of the heiress, and of the command of the clan, till his death in 1559." The heiress of Harris was one of Queen Mary's maids of honour, and the Earl of Argyll, having ultimately become her guardian, she was given by him in marriage to his kinsman, Duncan Campbell, younger of Auchinbreck. Through the previous efforts of the earl, Tormod Macleod, on receiving a legal title to Harris and the other estates, renounced in favour of Argyll all his claims to the lands of the Clandonald, and paid 1000 merks towards the dowry of his niece. He also gave his bond of service to Argyll for himself and his clan. Mary Macleod, in consequence, made a complete surrender to her uncle of her title to the lands of Harris, Dunvegan, and Glenelg, and Argyll obtained for him a crown charter of these estates, dated 4th August, 1579. Tormod adhered firmly to the interest of Queen Mary, and died in 1584. He was succeeded by his eldest son, William, under whom the Harris Macleods assisted the Macleans in their feuds with the Macdonalds of Isla and Skye, while the Lewis Macleods supported the latter. On his death in 1590, his brother, Roderick, the Rory Mor of tradition, became chief of the Harris Macleods.

In December 1597, an act of the Estates had been passed, by which it was made imperative upon all the chieftains and landlords[194] in the Highlands and Isles, to produce their title-deeds before the lords of Exchequer on the 15th of the following May, under the pain of forfeiture. The heads of the two branches of the Macleods disregarded the act, and a gift of their estates was granted to a number of Fife gentlemen, for the purposes of colonisation. They first began with the Lewis, in which the experiment failed, as narrated in the General History. Roderick Macleod, on his part, exerted himself to get the forfeiture of his lands of Harris, Dunvegan, and Glenelg, removed, and ultimately succeeded, having obtained a remission from the king, dated 4th May, 1610. He was knighted by King James VI., by whom he was much esteemed, and had several friendly letters from his majesty; also, a particular license, dated 16th June, 1616, to go to London, to the court, at any time he pleased. By his wife, a daughter of Macdonald of Glengarry, he had, with six daughters, five sons, viz., John, his heir; Sir Roderick, progenitor of the Macleods of Talisker; Sir Norman of the Macleods of Bernera and Muiravonside; William of the Macleods of Hamer; and Donald of those of Grisernish.

The history of the Siol Torquil, or Lewis Macleods, as it approached its close, was most disastrous. Roderick, the chief of this branch in 1569, got involved in a deadly feud with the Mackenzies, which ended only with the destruction of his whole family. He had married a daughter of John Mackenzie of Kintail, and a son whom she bore, and who was named Torquil Connanach, from his residence among his mother's relations in Strathconnan, was disowned by him, on account of the alleged adultery of his mother with the breve or Celtic judge of the Lewis. She eloped with John MacGillechallum of Rasay, a cousin of Roderick, and was, in consequence, divorced. He took for his second wife, in 1541, Barbara Stewart, daughter of Andrew Lord Avondale, and by this lady had a son, likewise named Torquil, and surnamed Oighre, or the Heir, to distinguish him from the other Torquil. About 1566, the former, with 200 attendants, was drowned in a tempest, when sailing from Lewis to Skye, and Torquil Connanach immediately took up arms to vindicate what he conceived to be his rights. In his pretensions he was supported by the Mackenzies. Roderick was apprehended and detained four years a prisoner in the castle of Stornoway. The feud between the Macdonalds and Mackenzies was put an end to by the mediation of the Regent Moray. Before being released from his captivity, the old chief was brought before the Regent and his privy council, and compelled to resign his estate into the hands of the crown, taking a new destination of it to himself in liferent, and after his death to Torquil Connanach, as his son and heir apparent. On regaining his liberty, however, he revoked all that he had done when a prisoner, on the ground of coercion. This led to new commotions, and in 1576 both Roderick and Torquil were summoned to Edinburgh, and reconciled in presence of the privy council, when the latter was again acknowledged as heir apparent to the Lewis, and received as such the district of Cogeach and other lands. The old chief some time afterwards took for his third wife, a sister of Lauchlan Maclean of Dowart, and had by her two sons, named Torquil Dubh and Tormod. Having

again disinherited Torquil Connanach, that young chief once more took up arms, and was supported by two illegitimate sons of Roderick, named Tormod Uigach and Murdoch, while three others, Donald, Rory Oig, and Neill, joined with their father. He apprehended the old chief, Roderick Macleod, and killed a number of his men. All the charters and title deeds of the Lewis were carried off by Torquil, and handed over to the Mackenzies. The charge of the castle of Stornoway, with the chief, a prisoner in it, was committed to John Macleod, the son of Torquil Connanach, but he was attacked by Rory Oig and killed, when Roderick Macleod was released, and possessed the island in peace during the remainder of his life.

On his death he was succeeded by his son Torquil Dubh, who married a sister of Sir Roderick Macleod of Harris. Torquil Dubh, as we have narrated in the former part of the work, was by stratagem apprehended by the breve of Lewis, and carried to the country of the Mackenzies, into the presence of Lord Kintail, who ordered Torquil Dubh and his[195] companions to be beheaded. This took place in July 1597.

Torquil Dubh left three young sons, and their uncle Neill, a bastard brother of their father, took, in their behalf, the command of the isle of Lewis. Their cause was also supported by the Macleods of Harris and the Macleans. The dissensions in the Lewis, followed by the forfeiture of that island, in consequence of the non-production of the title-deeds, as required by the act of the Estates of 1597, already mentioned, afforded the king an opportunity of trying to carry into effect his abortive project of colonisation already referred to. The colonists were at last compelled to abandon their enterprise.

The title to the Lewis having been acquired by Kenneth Mackenzie, Lord Kintail, he lost no time in taking possession of the island, expelling Neill Macleod, with his nephews, Malcolm, William, and Roderick, sons of Rory Oig, who, with about thirty others, took refuge on Berrisay, an insulated rock on the west coast of Lewis. Here they maintained themselves for nearly three years, but were at length driven from it by the Mackenzies. Neill surrendered to Roderick Macleod of Harris, who, on being charged, under pain of treason, to deliver him to the privy council at Edinburgh, gave him up, with his son Donald. Neill was brought to trial, convicted, and executed, and is said to have died "very Christianlie" in April 1613. Donald, his son, was banished from Scotland, and died in Holland. Roderick and William, two of the sons of Rory Oig, were seized by the tutor of Kintail, and executed. Malcolm, the other son, apprehended at the same time, made his escape, and continued to harass the Mackenzies for years. He was prominently engaged in Sir James Macdonald's rebellion in 1615, and afterwards went to Flanders, but in 1616 was once more in the Lewis, where he killed two gentlemen of the Mackenzies. He subsequently went to Spain, whence he returned with Sir James Macdonald in 1620. In 1622 and 1626, commissions of fire and sword were granted to Lord Kintail and his clan against "Malcolm MacRuari Macleod." Nothing more is known of him.

On the extinction of the main line of the Lewis, the representation of the family devolved on the Macleods of Rasay, afterwards referred to. The title of Lord Macleod was the second title of the Mackenzies, Earls of Cromarty.

At the battle of Worcester in 1651, the Macleods fought on the side of Charles II., and so great was the slaughter amongst them that it was agreed by the other clans that they should not engage in any other conflict until they had recovered their losses. The Harris estates were sequestrated by Cromwell, but the chief of the Macleods was at last, in May 1665, admitted into the protection of the Commonwealth by General Monk, on his finding security for his peaceable behaviour under the penalty of £6,000 sterling, and paying a fine of £2,500. Both his uncles, however, were expressly excepted.

At the Revolution, Macleod of Macleod, which became the designation of the laird of Harris, as chief of the clan, was favourable to the cause of James II. In 1715 the effective force of the Macleods was 1,000 men, and in 1745, 900. The chief, by the advice of President Forbes, did not join in the rebellion of the latter year, and so saved his estates, but many of his clansmen, burning with zeal for the cause of Prince Charles, fought in the ranks of the rebel army.

It has been mentioned that the bad treatment which a daughter of the chief of the Macleods experienced from her husband, the captain of the Clanranald, had caused them to take the first opportunity of inflicting a signal vengeance

on the Macdonalds. The merciless act of Macleod, by which the entire population of an island was cut off at once, is described by Mr Skene,[181] and is shortly thus. Towards the close of the 16th century, a small number of Macleods accidentally landed on the island of Eigg, and were hospitably received by the inhabitants. Offering, however, some incivilities to the young women of the island, they were, by the male relatives of the latter, bound hand and foot, thrown into a boat, and sent adrift. Being met and rescued by a party of their own clansmen, they were brought to Dunvegan, the residence of their[196] chief, to whom they told their story. Instantly manning his galleys, Macleod hastened to Eigg. On descriing his approach, the islanders, with their wives and children, to the number of 200 persons, took refuge in a large cave, situated in a retired and secret place. Here for two days they remained undiscovered, but having unfortunately sent out a scout to see if the Macleods were gone, their retreat was detected, but they refused to surrender. A stream of water fell over the entrance to the cave, and partly concealed it. This Macleod caused to be turned from its course, and then ordered all the wood and other combustibles which could be found to be piled up around its mouth, and set fire to, when all within the cave were suffocated.

The Siol Tormod continued to possess Harris, Dunvegan, and Glenelg till near the close of the 18th century. The former and the latter estates have now passed into other hands. A considerable portion of Harris is the property of the Earl of Dunmore, and many of its inhabitants have emigrated to Cape Breton and Canada. The climate of the island is said to be favourable to longevity. Martin, in his account of the Western Isles, says he knew several in Harris of 90 years of age. One Lady Macleod, who passed the most of her time here, lived to 103, had then a comely head of hair and good teeth, and enjoyed a perfect understanding till the week she died. Her son, Sir Norman Macleod, died at 96, and his grandson, Donald Macleod of Bernera, at 91. Glenelg became the property first of Charles Grant, Lord Glenelg, and afterwards of Mr Baillie. From the family of Bernera, one of the principal branches of the Harris Macleods, sprung the Macleods of Luskinder, of which Sir William Macleod Bannatyne, a lord of session, was a cadet.

The first of the house of Rasay, the late proprietor of which is the representative of the Lewis branch of the Macleods, was Malcolm Garbh Macleod, the second son of Malcolm, eighth chief of the Lewis. In the reign of James V. he obtained from his father in patrimony the island of Rasay, which lies between Skye and the Ross-shire district of Applecross. In 1569 the whole of the Rasay family, except one infant, were barbarously massacred by one of their own kinsmen, under the following circumstances. John MacGhilliechallum Macleod of Rasay, called Ian na Tuaidh, or John with the axe, who had carried off Janet Mackenzie, the first wife of his chief, Roderick Macleod of the Lewis, married her, after her divorce, and had by her several sons and one daughter. The latter became the wife of Alexander Roy Mackenzie, a grandson of Hector or Eachen Roy, the first of the Mackenzies of Gairloch, a marriage which gave great offence to his clan, the Siol vic Gillechallum, as the latter had long been at feud with that particular branch of the Mackenzies. On Janet Mackenzie's death, he of the axe married a sister of a kinsman of his own, Ruari Macallan Macleod, who, from his venomous disposition, was surnamed Nimhneach. The latter, to obtain Rasay for his nephew, his sister's son, resolved to cut off both his brother-in-law and his sons by the first marriage. He accordingly invited them to a feast in the island of Isay in Skye, and after it was over he left the apartment. Then, causing them to be sent for one by one, he had each of them assassinated as they came out. He was, however, balked in his object, as Rasay became the property of Malcolm or Ghilliechallum Garbh Macallaster Macleod, then a child, belonging to the direct line of the Rasay branch, who was with his foster-father at the time.[182] Rasay no longer belongs to the Macleods, they having been compelled to part with their patrimony some years ago.

The Macleods of Assynt, one of whom betrayed the great Montrose in 1650, were also a branch of the Macleods of Lewis. That estate, towards the end of the 17th century, became the property of the Mackenzies, and the family is now represented by Macleod of Geanies. The Macleods of Cadboll are cadets of those of Assynt.

FOOTNOTES:

[172]Smibert's Clans, pp. 77, 78.

[173]Highlanders, ii. 266.

[174]Early Kings, i. 75.

[175]In March 1870, the present Duke, in answer to inquiries, wrote to the papers stating that he spells his name Argyll, because it has been spelled so by his ancestors for generations past.

[176]This, through the mis-spelling, intentional or unintentional, of Sir Walter Scott, is often popularly corrupted into Maccallum More, which, of course, is wrong, as the great or big ancestor's name was Colin, not Callum.

[177]In 1489, by an act of the Scottish parliament, the name of Castle Gloom, its former designation, was changed to Castle Campbell. It continued to be the frequent and favourite residence of the family till 1644, when it was burnt down by the Macleans in the army of the Marquis of Montrose. The castle and lordship of Castle Campbell remained in the possession of the Argyll family till 1808, when it was sold.

[178]Highlands and Isles of Scotland, p. 128.

[179]Calderwood, vol. ii. p. 215.

[180]History of the Highlands and Isles, p. 204.

[181]Highlanders, vol. ii. p. 277.

[182]Gregory's Highlands and Isles of Scotland, p. 211.