

# Daniel Macpherson: Highland emigrant, Loyalist soldier, Gaspesian merchant-settler and Canadian seigneur

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[Reprinted from *Canadian Genealogist*, Vol. 6, No. 2, June 1984]

Daniel Macpherson, Loyalist soldier and later seigneur of L'Isle-aux-Grues, has usually been referred to in print<sup>1</sup> as an emigrant to Philadelphia and a native of Fort William in Scotland, born 1753, personal origins unknown. His gravestone in the Protestant cemetery at Trois Saumons near Montmagny, however, records him as "native of Badenach in Scotland"; Fort William is in Lochaber, and was probably the point of departure for the New World. The stone has been confirmed by a genealogy of the *Sliochd Iain* Macphersons compiled in 1767 and annotated in 1820<sup>2</sup>. This provides the evidence of his immediate ancestry. He was the second son of Lachlan Macpherson of Shirobeg (a cadet of Macpherson of Clun [Cluain]) and Mary MacKenzie who emigrated about 1774 with four children: Alexander, Donald, Margaret and Ann. Alexander was drowned, and the two girls married. By 1820 'Donald' resided on Crane Island, Quebec. 'Daniel' is the Biblical equivalent used for 'Donald' in the system used by the Highlanders and the Irish to render their outlandish Gaelic names in biblical or classical guise; Daniel Macpherson was clearly still in touch with Badenoch kinsfolk in Britain as late as 1820, who preferred to give him his original name.

The annotator of 1820 does not mention Philadelphia, and if his statement is to be interpreted narrowly it means that Lachlan of Shirobeg took his family out to Quebec where the drowning and the daughters' marriages took place. A letter in the archives of the Glenbow Institute, Calgary, Alberta, dated 1849, gives a variant account of this episode in emigration from Badenoch:

Mr. John MacKenzie, Minister of the Gospel in the Parish of Laggan, Badenoch, had 3 daughters all married to Macphersons of that district . . . the daughter Mary married Lachlan Macpherson, called Maclid. This . . . family went to America about the year 1774 and . . . the Crane Island family are this branch<sup>3</sup>.

This account, though thirty years later in date, leaves room for an initial emigration to Philadelphia, but no trace of Lachlan Macpherson has been found in the records of either Quebec or Philadelphia between 1774 and 1780 when his son emerges at Sorel, the big Loyalist refugee camp on the south bank of the St. Lawrence below Montreal, to permit any resolution to this question. Lachlan, indeed, may well have died shortly after his arrival in North America.

## Scottish ancestry

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<sup>1</sup> J.-M. Lemieux, *L'Île aux Grues et L'Île aux Oies: les îles, les seigneurs, les habitants, les sites et monuments historiques*. Quebec, 1973. This volume is invaluable for the period 1802 to 1840, following the purchase of the Seigneurie

<sup>2</sup> J.E. Macpherson, "The Pimlico Package." *Creag Dhubh*. No. 26, 1974, pp. 629-647, The passage reads (1820 additions italicized); Donald Macpherson of Pitghouinn (Pitgown) is a cadet from Macpherson of Clun Cluain . . . Lachlan, of Shirobeg, fourth brother of the said Donald, married Mary, daughter of the Rev. Mr. John MacKenzie, Minister of Laggan, and has by her two sons, Alexander and Donald, and two daughters, Margaret and Ann. This family went to Canada about the year 1774, Alexander was drowned, and Donald resides in Crane Island near Quibeck. The daughters both married

<sup>3</sup> Jane Macpherson, Pimlico (London) to her nephew John Thomson, Army Medical Staff, Montreal 22 November 1849. Printed in A.G. Macpherson, "Coincidental Pleasures of a Clan Genealogist", *Creag Dhubh*. No. 31, 1981, pp. 944-950

Daniel Macpherson's maternal grandfather, the Rev. John MacKenzie, whom he never saw, was evidently not a Badenoch man, for his first appearance in his vocation was in the Argyllshire parish of Inverchaolain, whence he was translated in 1701 to the Badenoch parish of Kingussie, "being skilled in the Irish tongue", and in 1709 to the upper parish of Laggan where he remained till his death in April 1745. Through his two MacKenzie aunts, Daniel was full cousin to Gen. Kenneth Macpherson (1726-1814) of the Bombay Army of the East India Company who spent his life in India in the Company's service, dying there at the advanced age of 92; and to Maj. Charles Macpherson of Gordonhall in Badenoch (1751-1820) at one time Barrack Master General of Scotland and, latterly, the senior representative or chieftain of the *Sliochd Iain* Macphersons - the second major lineage of the clan - of which the Clune-Pitgown-Shirobeg-Crane Island family was a cadet branch<sup>4</sup>. Shirobeg, the Laggan farm from which Daniel and his family emigrated in 1774 - and where he was probably born late in 1752 or early 1753 - is one of the highest grazing properties in the headwaters of the Spey. It was part of the Duke of Gordon's estates, and Lachlin 'Maclid' was undoubtedly a tenant of the Duke. In the early 1770s, the Duke and his factors were forcing many of the old Macpherson tenants, the principal tacksmen, to remove to make room for newcomers. As Daniel's father was a member of this class, the move across the Atlantic was probably part of the induced "tacksman emigration".

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<sup>4</sup> The account of Daniel's paternal ancestry is largely based upon the unpublished manuscript genealogy compiled by Sir Aeneas Macpherson of Invereshie, *Sliochd nan Triuir Bhraithrean* before 1704. See. A.G. Macpherson, "An Old Highland Genealogy and the Evolution of a Scottish clan", *Scottish Studies*. No. 10, 1966, pp. 1-43; and *The Posterity of the Three Brethren, A Short History of the Clan Macpherson*. Clan Macpherson Association, Canadian Branch, 1066 rev. ed. 1976

Daniel Macpherson of Crane Island had a distinguished ancestry in the Highlands of which - although he did not pass it on to his descendants - he was undoubtedly cognizant and proud<sup>5</sup>. The entire *Clann Mhuirich* or Macphersons of Badenoch were descended from the three sons of Ewan *bàn MacMhuirich*. The second of these was John, the eponymous ancestor of the *Sliochd Iain*, and his son Alexander was that Allister *goint Mclain* (the fey or bewitched) who about the middle of the fifteenth century undertook to extirpate the MacNivens from their lands in Badenoch. He and his son John and the latter's son Thomas were the early possessors of Pitmean. Thomas's fourth son Donald *dubh* Macpherson (extant 1564-1595) was successively possessor of land in Wester Raits, Pitmean and Pitourie. In 1592 at Pitmean, he applied for a wadset of Schafin and was described as "Donald Dow McThomas McAne McAllister", the multiple patronymics referring to his father, grandfather and great-grandfather. By Eveir Cameron, a daughter of Cameron of Glennevis, he had an illegitimate son, John, who in turn had a son John of Clune. This John married Helen, only daughter of Thomas Macpherson of Pitmean, and they were at that place in 1650 when they obtained a wadset right to Clune. Of their three sons, the eldest was William who "went to the wars and was killed at the Fight of Worcester" where Charles II was defeated by Cromwell on 3 September 1651. The second son was Murdoch Macpherson of Clune, *Muireach Mclain*, a noted deer-hunter to whom stories of encounters with witches and the fairy folk have become attached, who was responsible for driving off a large party of marauding Macdonalds in 1672. The youngest, however, is the one we are concerned with. He was Allister (Alexander) Macpherson who married Girsell, daughter of Rev. Lachlan Grant, Minister of Kingussie. Their eldest son, Thomas *bàn* Macpherson, of Pitgown (ex. 1703-1718) and his wife Ann, daughter of John Clerk in Gaskinloan (part of the estate of Macpherson of Clunie, the chief) were the grandparents of Daniel, our subject.

## **The Loyalist Family and the Seigneurie**

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<sup>5</sup> See note 4

Daniel Macpherson was in his early twenties in the years 1774-1776 when he is alleged to have been a merchant in Philadelphia. Neither his age - he may have been an agent's clerk - nor the interval of time would suggest that he made a fortune there. Whatever the case, and whatever his family's experience in the early days of the Revolution, his first known appearance in North America was at the Loyalist camp at Sorel where he married Mary Kelly (1762-1842), probably a sister of Martin Kelly, a sergeant in the first company of Jessup's Provincial Regiment of Loyal Rangers who, in 1784, drew for a lot at New Carlisle in the Gaspé and who, in 1790, applied for land at Point St. Peter on the north side of Gaspé Bay in the vicinity of property acquired there by Daniel Macpherson<sup>6</sup>.

The Macphersons' daughter Charlotte was born 18 March 1781, their son John 2 January 1783. There is uncertainty as to their birthplaces and the precise date when Daniel joined the Loyalist community at Gaspé. He would appear to have bought two acres of land on the Richelieu River at Sorel on 3 March 1781 preparatory, perhaps, to the impending birth of his daughter. By his own conflicting accounts he settled in Douglstown, the new Loyalist settlement in Gaspé, (a) in 1783, (b) in 1785 (LCL resp. pp. 67039 and 67020). The original Loyalist contingent arrived in 1784, joining a pre-Loyalist community in Gaspé Bay which included veterans of the disbanded 78th Fraser's Highlanders. Among the latter may have been one Murdoch Macpherson, a petitioner for land on Gaspé Bay or Chaleur Bay in 1765 - almost certainly a Badenoch man. However the case, Daniel was a trusted member of the community by June 1787 when he is on record as acting as unofficial banker to several of both parties. He was appointed Justice of the Peace for the District of Gaspé on 24 July 1788, a member of the Land Board on 2 April 1789, and on 15 October 1795 he became the Commissioner for Administering Oaths to Settlers on the Crown Land. Between 1790 and 1801 he appeared frequently in connection with applications for land, culminating with his purchase of the old Seigneurie de L'Ile-aux-Grues (Cranes Island) in the St. Lawrence between Montmagny and St.-Jean-Port-Joli, on 21 December 1802.

He retained, however, property which he had assembled by land grant in Douglstown, where he had already given a piece to Henry Johnston, his Scots-born son-in-law, when the latter married Charlotte in 1799. This marriage resulted in seven grand-children and several great-grandchildren before Daniel's death in 1840. It was preceded, in 1796, by another between John Paterson, a son of the first English-speaking settler in Gaspé Bay, and Daniel's sister Margaret, whence came five offspring: John, Daniel, Laughlin, Julia and Mary - the last named after her grandmother Mary MacKenzie.

Meanwhile, Daniel Macpherson and Mary Kelly had added two more children to their family: Julia Anne, born 17 October 1788, and Laughlan Thomas, born 6 December 1790, the latter named after Daniel's father and grandfather. Julia married Benjamin Le Moine des Pins (1785-1856) at Crane Island on 7 September 1810, and produced ten grandchildren before her death at Quebec on 16 May 1828. Among these were Benjamin Henri Le Moine who married his cousin Sophia Eliza Macpherson at L'Ile-aux-Grues (4 April 1836), their eldest son McPherson Le Moine eventually succeeding to the seigneurie in 1873; and Sir James Macpherson Le Moine (1825-1912) who, with two of his younger brothers, was raised by his grandfather, first at L'Ile-aux-Grues, and after 1829 at St.-Thomas-de-Montmagny. Sir James became a lawyer, civil servant, ornithologist, historian and significant writer of *belles lettres* in both languages.

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<sup>6</sup> LCL = Lower Canada Land Papers, Public Archives of Canada, RG 1, L3L, p. 55995. The writer is deeply indebted to Dr. D.J. McDougall, Geology Dept., Concordia University, Montreal, for details of this and other references in this collection, and for information concerning: Daniel Macpherson's purchase of land at Sorel, Point St. Peter, and Douglstown; [Murdoch Macpherson; Daniel's public appointments;] accounts of the Johnston and Paterson families; John Urquhart and Alexander McPherson "of the hotel"; and John Macpherson's involvement in the Gaspé fishery.

Laughlan Thomas Macpherson (1790-1871) married Margaret Urquhart on 8 December 1821, probably at Quebec where he was a notary public. She was, perhaps, related to John Urquhart, a Scots-born merchant involved in the Gaspé-northern New Brunswick fisheries as early as 1773, at Percé in 1779, and a godfather at a baptism in Quebec in 1783. Two years later Alexander McPherson "of the hotel" and Catherine McPherson (his wife?) acted as godparents for the same family, suggesting that this might be Daniel's elder brother who drowned. Laughlan, who acted as a legal agent for his father and brother John's business affairs, produced in the 1820s five grandchildren, including sons called Daniel, John and Laughlan<sup>7</sup>

### **Fishers and Merchants: the Gaspé Family**

Daniel Macpherson's purchase of L'Île-aux-Grues in 1802 did not break the family connection with Gaspé. His son John married Sophia Wills (1784-1842) at the Anglican Church, Trois Rivières on 24 November 1805, John being described then as "of Gaspé". Their family consisted of Melinda (b 29 November 1806), Mary Juliana (b 9 September 1808), neither of whom married and who became joint owners of the seigneurie on their father's death in 1847, and Sophia Eliza (b 1812), mother of McPherson Le Moine who succeeded his surviving aunt in 1873. John Macpherson and his brother-in-law Henry Johnston, both residents of the Gaspé, were co-owners of the schooner *Magdalene*, registered in their names in August 1806. In May 1809 when they became co-owners of the schooner *Charlotte and Sophia* (named after their wives). Macpherson was resident at Quebec, Johnston at Gaspé. Two months later, John Macpherson advertised for sale a fishing post at Point St. Peter, Gaspé Bay, where "three thousand quintals may be cured on the premises and about four thousand more annually collected in the vicinity." Thus, the Macphersons were prosecuting the Gaspé cod fishery and buying fish from other fishermen. The property was bought by his brother-in-law, Henry Johnston, and was occupied by his son, Henry Bisset Johnston (Daniel's eldest grandson) in 1825.

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<sup>7</sup> The writer is indebted to the late Mrs. Phyllis Marianne (Macpherson) Hardy for details of the family of her great-grandfather, Laughlan Thomas Macpherson of Quebec. She died 30 December 1982, the last descendant of Daniel Macpherson to have borne his surname

Involvement in the Gaspé fishing industry inevitably meant business and social contacts with the powerful group of Jersey merchants who dominated that enterprise in the person of Philippe Robin<sup>8</sup>. From 1818 to 1824 when she married, Robin's daughter Elizabeth was a member of the Macpherson *ménage* on the Ile-aux-Grues, presumably for her education, but also perhaps as a result of the clandestine marriage which her parents had formed in 1811 at Percé, several years after her birth. Well loved, she was enjoined by her father, in a letter of 23 March 1820 from Paris, to "Profit by the good example of regularity and oeconomy which you see practiced there." His letter of 20 March 1822 from Marseille (a major market for Gaspé fish), places the relationship in a fuller light:

. . . it gives me pleasure to know that you are well pleased with your situation in the family of my good friends Mr. and Mrs. McPherson, and that they appear to be equally so with your conduct towards them . . . he can draw this season on my agents in London for £130 Sterling . . . which money deducting his commission is to be paid according to your good mother's direction.

The payment was essentially for Elizabeth Robin's food and clothing.

Relationships between the Macphersons and Robins, however, were not always amicable. In March 1826, Philippe Robin sent Mrs. Daniel Macpherson a gift of a silver plate; but in July 1829 he was writing to express his annoyance with John Macpherson for his failure to outfit, provision and provide a capable crew for one of Robin's vessels.

### ***The Seigneur de L'Ile-aux-Grues***

In a letter to Elizabeth dated 1 March 1830 - she was now married and long gone from L'Ile-aux-Grues - Robin provides a succinct evaluation of Daniel Macpherson's career to that point. After learning and approving of Daniel's putting John in possession of the seigneurie the previous year and retiring to St.-Thomas-de-Montmagny, he writes:

. . . Mr. McPherson has great merit in having brought up his family as he has done, and in realizing by his care and industry, in such a poor country as the district of Gaspé, a comfortable fortune; his purchase of Crane Island was a fortunate circumstance for him . . .

References to Daniel and his family continue to appear in the Robin correspondence until 9 March 1841 when, in reply to Elizabeth's of 2 November 1840 reporting Daniel's death at Trois Saumons in June, he writes from Bern, Switzerland:

. . . I was sorry to notice in your letter the death of two of my old friends McPherson and Stewart . . .

Predeceasing his wife, Mary Kelly, who died at Quebec 25 November 1842, Daniel Macpherson had been buried in the lovely little Protestant cemetery established at Trois Saumons by David Harrower, one of three brothers, Scots, who conducted a distillery at St.-Jean-Port-Joli. The inscription on his stone reads:

Sacred to the memory of DANIEL MACPHERSON of Crane Island, in this country, native of Badenach in Scotland, who departed this life on 1st June 1840, aged 87.

A member of the displaced Highland tacksman class, frustrated and perhaps ruined by the American Revolution, he had succeeded in re-establishing his family's fortunes to a status and level of prosperity that exceeded those of his forebears. That, perhaps, explains why pride in his Highland place of origin remained with him to the end of his life.

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<sup>8</sup> The Robin correspondence is published and referenced in P.L.P. Le Garignon, "Un héritage normand sur la coste de Gaspé: une étude socio-historique de la présence jersiaise sur la coste de la Gaspé" *Revue d'Histoire et de Traditions Populaire de la Gaspésie*. No. 62-63, 1978. The writer is also indebted to Dr. Rosemary Ommer, History Dept., Memorial University, for the letter of complaint sent by Philippe Robin 17 July 1829 to John Macpherson, St. Thomas, Québec.