

*While conducting genealogical research at the Beaton Institute in Sydney I uncovered the following article. This provides important genealogical information about the prominent Piper MacNeil family of Barra and Cape Breton. I am a descendant of James (Malcolm, John Rory the Piper) MacNeil mentioned below. Enjoy the article!*

*Vince MacNeil*

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## Genealogical Sketches

Families of the Piper Branch of The MacNeils of Barra who settled at Washabuck, in the County of Victoria.

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(Necessary corrections and suggestions for additions or amendments are solicited, and may be addressed to, J.A. MacDougall, 1 Alexander St. Glace Bay, N.S.)

In the olden days when the Clan System was in vogue in the Highlands of Scotland, the Bagpipe held the place of honour in the "time of peace and of war." Its strains inspired the Scottish warrior to deeds of unsurpassed valour, and down to our day, its war-blasts were sounded on every battle-field where the supremacy of Britain was being maintained. It occupied an honoured place as well in the halls of gaiety and festivity, and to its strains the dead were mournfully borne to their last resting place.

It is not then surprising that the Chiefs of the various Clans vied with one another in having the most accomplished Piper. The McCrimmons of the Macleods were probably the most famous but tradition has it that Roderick Macneil, Piper to the Lairds of Barra, was possessed of musical gifts not excelled even by the McCrimmons.

Descended from this gifted Piper were the Macneils who first came to Cape Breton from the island of Barra in the early days of the nineteenth century, and whose descendants were subsequently scattered all over the United States and Canada. To this day they are known as "The Pipers".

Roderick, the celebrated Piper, had a son John. In the year 1805 two of John's sons, Hector and Roderick came to Pictou, N.S., and later to the shores of the Bras d'Or Lake, and settled at a place ever since held and occupied and known as Piper's Cove. These early settlers and their descendants, noted for great physical strength and many admirable qualities of head and heart, are admired and respected in every community in which they find themselves.

A full account of these settlers will be found on page 91 of MacKenzie's History of Christmas Island Parish. Later, another brother of Hector and Rory came to this country and settled in Washabuck in the County of Victoria. This man was Neil, commonly known as "Neil Gael"

(White Neil). He had two sons and four daughters, and the history of this well known family will be dealt with in a later one of these sketches.

## The Donald MacNeil Family

In the year 1817, another brother of Hector and Rory, a son of John, grand-son of Roderick, the gifted Piper of the Macneil chief of Barra, arrived in Cape Breton, and with Murdock Mackenzie, married to his only daughter, Lucy, settled on lands at Washabuck. Although this family received mention in the MacKenzie History, some of its members having become prominent in several districts of the County of Victoria, it is deemed proper to give this family more in detail than MacKenzie did.

Donald Macneil (Domhnull Piobaire) was married to a sister of another Donald Macneil (known as Domhnull MacNeill), who came to Cape Breton the same year and settled at Shunacadie, in the County of Cape Breton on lands later occupied (1821) by the families known as Clann Thearlach. Domhnull MacNeill sold his land to Tearlach (Charles), a connection of his own, and went across the lake to Gillis Point and there settled on lands adjacent to those of his brother Eachunn MacNeill (Hector Macneil). Domhnull Piobaire's wife, sister of Domhnull and Eachunn MacNeill, was a talented woman and it was her privilege to nurse more than one of the family of the Chief, the sixth Roderick of Barra, the son and successor of Roderick the 5<sup>th</sup> who was killed at the taking of Quebec in 1759. The 6<sup>th</sup> Roderick was married to Jane, daughter of Ewen Cameron of Fassifern, by whom he had two sons (one of whom was General Macneil of Barra, the last resident Chief) and three daughters, one of whom was named Louisa, nursed by the wife Domhnull Piobaire, who named her first daughter Lucy (already mentioned) after her. This name Lucy was and is to this day found among the descendants of Donald. Mrs. Macneil was held in high esteem by the members of the family and household of the Chief, and one of her descendants today (1937) has in her possession a souvenir of that friendship, a sewer's companion, gift from the maids of the household of the Chief to Mrs. Macneil when he was leaving Barra for Cape Breton in 1817.

Donald Macneil (Domhnull Piobaire) had one already mentioned and eight sons;

Murdock, Hector, Michael, John, James, Roderick, Charles, and Philip.

## The family of Murdock, son of Donald MacNeil (Domhnull Piobaire).

This Murdock was generally known as "Murchadh Beag" (Little Murdock). He was, as was his grandfather, John, son of Roderick, engaged as a page in the household of the Chief. He married a maid in the Castle a Miss Nellie Robertson, whose father was the Secretary of the Kirk of Session of Barra. She embraced the Catholic religion.

Hector the son of Murdock was known as Black Hector. He was a ship-carpenter and was employed at Arichat, where, in those days, there was much ship building. There he married

Virginia, daughter of Philip Marraud. Leaving Arichat, he became a resident of Baddeck, and he died at Washabuck in the year..... He had several sons and daughters, one of whom, Jane, became a religious. When a mere child, Jennie, as she was known, was adopted by her cousin Mrs. Josephine C. Macneil of Grand Narrows, of whom reference will be made here later. The child received her early education at Christmas Island, and later at St. Bernard's College, Antigonish. She entered the novitiate of the Congregation de Notre Dame in September 1885. The greater portion of her religious life of forty six years was spent on missions in the United States. In 1931, Sister St. Joseph Copertine, as she was named in religion, took ill at St. Alban's Vermont. In compliance with her own wish, she was rushed to the Mother House, at Montreal, where she died a beautiful death on the 31<sup>st</sup> day of July of that year at the age of seventy years.

John, son of Murdock, married Ann, daughter Roderick Macneil, son of Neil Macneil (Gael), already mentioned. He died.....

Michael, another son of Murdock, was married to another daughter of Neil Gael. He died at Christmas 1872.

Both families, and the particulars of these two sons of Murdock and their descendants will be found in the sketch devoted to Neil (Geal) Macneil.

### Family of John MacIntyre of Big Pond

This family having become so closely connected, through marriage with the family of Domhnall Piobaire and other families of the Pipers, a brief reference to it may here be of interest.

John MacIntyre, a blacksmith by trade and better known as Ian Gobha, emigrated with his family, then consisting of one daughter one year old, emigrated from the island of Barra in the year 1802 and located at a place known as Troy, in the County of Inverness. Twenty six years later, in 1828, he with his family moved to Big Pond, in the County of Cape Breton. His wife (name left blank but her name was Sarah MacNeil), was a daughter of Hector MacNeil, known in Barra as Eachann Og (Young Hector), who was Tanist and acted as Chief during the absence of Chief Roderick at the siege of Quebec. Another daughter of Hector Og was married to Donald Macneil, whose descendants are at Big Beach, in the County of Cape Breton. A sister of this Donald Macneil (Murdock) was married to Hector MacKenzie, to whom reference will be made later in this sketch. A daughter of this Donald Macneil, Elizabeth (Elassid Mhor) was married to Roderick Macneil (Ruairidh Mac Chalum Piobaire) of Benacadie, in the County of Cape Breton; while this Roderick's brother, James (Seumas MacCalum) also of Benacadie (but later of Low Point), was married to a daughter of Hector Bane (Eachann Bane), a son of Eachann Og. Another daughter of Eachann Og was married to John Macneil son of Donald Macneil (Og) of Big Beach, and thus became the mother of Alexander Macneil (Sandy Mor) of Big Beach, already mentioned as having married Mary, daughter of Murdock Beag.