

VISIT OF MACNEIL OF BARRA TO CAPE BRETON

AUGUST OF 1929

Clansmen Give the Chief and his Lady a Genuine Highland Welcome; Brief Stay at Glace Bay and Grand Narrows; Address to the Chief and his Reply.

The most important event of the year in local Clan Macneil circles was the visit of Macneil of Barra and his lady in August. Their visit had been announced but due to some uncertainty as to the exact day of arrival, no extensive preparation had been made to receive them. The Chief and Lady Macneil, who came from New York to Nova Scotia by steamer, motored here from Yarmouth, stopping overnight (Sunday, August 26) at St. Peter's and on Monday proceeded to Glace Bay arriving here shortly before noon.

While in town the distinguished visitors were guests of Mr. and Mrs. A.D. MacNeill, both of whom take an active interest in clan affairs. On Monday evening Cape Breton members of the clan availed themselves of the kind invitation of Mr. and Mrs. MacNeill to meet the Chief and Lady Macneil and their hospitable home was invaded by a large clan party that evening.

The proceedings resolved themselves into a somewhat informal meeting of the Kisimul Sept. among the officers present being Vice-President S.B. MacNeil and the secretary A.D. MacNeill who was also the host of the evening. The visitors expressed themselves as delighted with their reception, and there was an implied promise that they would return at no distant day.

Speech making largely took up the evening and the chief was obliged to respond to a number of complimentary remarks. The occasion was taken advantage of to present the chief of Barra with an ? (paper is damaged!) on behalf of the Kisimul Sept, which was read by the secretary, in which the chief was formally welcomed to Cape Breton. He was congratulated on his elevation to a position of such distinction among Scots, and reference was made to the immigration from Barra to Cape Breton at the beginning of the century.

The Macneil of Barra, 45th Chief of the Macneils of Barra and Honorary Chief of the Clan Macneil Association of America.

Most worthy Chief: - On behalf of the Kisimul Sept. of the Clan Macneil Association of America and the Macneils and descendants of Macneils in Cape Breton, it gives me unbounded pleasure to extend to the Macneil of Barra, the 45th Chief of that most honourable and distinguished Scottish Clan, and Lady Macneil a cordial and truly Scottish welcome to Cape Breton, a land that abounds in Macneils, where there are more Macneils and descendants than perhaps ever populated at any one time the island of Barra itself.

It is a happy and remarkable coincidence that our distinguished chief of today should pay his first visit to Cape Breton since assuming that honorary title, in this summer of 1928, as the first

visit by the Macneil immigrants from Barra to Cape Breton shores along our beautiful Bras d'Or lakes was in the summer of 1803, one hundred and twenty-five years ago.

These sturdy Macneils of Barra were of the 370 Hebridean emigrants who landed at Pictou in the year 1802. After spending some the winter with friends along the Gulf Shore of Nova Scotia, they sailed the following summer through the Bras d'Or Lakes. They saw the lands on both sides, from the mountain tops to the water's edge, completely covered with forest primeval. They were not discouraged at the scene, but with stout hearts and wonderful physical strength they set themselves to the herculean task with that firm determination that was ever characteristic of them. They cleaned sufficient land then to make their first planting, after which they went back to spend another winter with their friends, and early in the summer of 1804 they returned to take up their abode in Cape Breton. And here I may say that it would indeed be a further happy coincidence if our distinguished guest of today would some day come back as they did, to take up his permanent residence in the midst of their descendants and become The Macneil of Barra in Cape Breton. Be this as it may, it is a duty devolving upon the Clan MacNeil Association of America to perpetuate in some suitable and appropriate manner, memories of the first visit and permanent settlement of the Macneils in Cape Breton as the Clan did a few months ago so praiseworthy in North Carolina. Let us hope ?? the ? (damage due to paper fold) as at hand when a memorial will be erected to commemorate the one hundred and twenty fifth anniversary of the permanent settlement of the Macneils in Cape Breton and the project we must respectfully submit to the favourable consideration of our distinguished Chief.

The Macneil Clan has grand and glorious traditions extending back to the days when Neil of the Nine Hostages became King of Ireland in 379, and led an army that conquered the Picts and gave their country the name Scotland. We are most fortunate indeed that we have here today as our Chief one who is thoroughly versed in these glorious traditions and so deeply interested in them. We most sincerely thank him for his visit, and once more let me repeat that we extend to him a right royal welcome and trust his sojourn among us will be pleasant and will add greatly to his already well stacked store of knowledge of the Macneils and their descendants on Canadian and American soil.

Responding to the address the chief of Barra dealt with the historical aspect of the clan system contrasting it with the mode of government, the feudal system, which prevailed generally through most of Europe. The feudal system, was essentially an autocracy, degenerating frequently into tyranny, and was based on force. Under it the masses of the people were practically serfs, changed owners with the estates, and generally had little or nothing to say with reference to their rulers.

The clan system on the other hand, was a democracy in the true sense. The chief was head of the clan by virtue of his position as head of the family and this position he held by consent of the clan itself. Kinship between the chief and the leading houses of the clan generally was always recognized and was a distinguished and highly valuable element in clan life.

A remarkable fact about the clan system was its vitality. Though officially abolished nearly 200 years ago it still survives in an informal way wherever Scots are found in large numbers. Not only is it to be found in remote places like Barra and Cape Breton but in great

cities like New York, as he could personally testify. There was something in the system that appealed powerfully to the better instincts of mankind, and he had no reason to doubt that it would continue to exist indefinitely while human nature continues to be what it is.

The chief urged the Macneils of Cape Breton to extend their organization and suggested that the Kisimul Sept should be sub-divided into local organizations for each town and district. With a membership of several hundred it would be able to undertake something for the promotion of the very worthy aims and objectives which they had in view.

He hoped that shortly steps would be taken to commemorate in a practical way the landing of the Macneils in Cape Breton, as was done in the case of the Macneils in Carolina whose landing in that country nearly 200 years ago was celebrated last May. There on the campus of the Flora Macdonald College a striking monument had been raised to those early pioneers at which ceremony distinguished citizens of the United States, including Governor Maclean of the state assisted.

The chief's account of the affair and the attending ceremonies was interesting in the extreme and listened to with rapt attention. It might be said that the Chief of Barra, besides being possessor of a fine presence is an exceedingly good speaker, not a word of any of his brief address being lost on his hearers. He reiterated his hope that the Macneils of Cape Breton would organize and get in touch with their fellow clansmen in the old world on the one hand and with those in North America on the other. One central clan society with numerous septs, this was his idea of a practical organization. He interspersed his speeches with many remarks of a personal and intimate nature that were highly interesting to the gathering.

Waterford Clansman Writes of Trip to Narrows

New Waterford, Cape Breton.- There has been a great stir among the MacNeils in Cape Breton during the past week. The members of the clan have all been agog and very active. The occasion has been the visit to these parts of the chief of the Clan Macneil and his lady. The present holder of that honourable position and the forty-fifth of his line is Mr. Robert Lister MacNeil of New York.

The visitors arrived in picturesque Cape Breton as the consummation of a desire for the supreme head of the clan to visit brethren of that ilk in these districts which hold so many of the old Scotian clachans. His visit has been one round of pleasure to himself, will be of infinite advantage to the clan at large and has given great delight to those who came in contact with the chief. The archives of the clan will be enriched by the stories, facts and folklore pertaining to the old originals which will be carefully recorded and put away with the records of the clan.

So far as the public is concerned, the outstanding event was a monster reception accorded the chief and Mrs. Macneil by the Glace Bay branch of the fraternity. With characteristic thought and kindness they decided that the Waterford scions of the clan would have to be present at the affair in order to make this gathering of the clan a decided success. The fiery cross was lit and the messenger sent all post haste to Waterford to the abode of F. H. MacNeil of that ilk on County Road. He summoned his retainers and a pilgrimage to Glace Bay resulted. Principles in

the party going to Glace Bay were Mr. F. H. MacNeil, his sons Hector, John Dan, (who by the way is secretary of the Bishop Fraser Society) and Alexander) a son-in-law. A splendid time was spent at the banquet at Glace Bay, but as your readers have been informed of this from another source further mention of that phase of the festivities will be superfluous.

On Tuesday a pilgrimage to Christmas Island and Iona was planned and carried out for the benefit of the distinguished visitor and a better and more profitable outing could not have been imagined or carried through with such distinct success.

The gathering for the trip of the representatives of the clan took place in Glace Bay.

The cavalcade consisted of five well filled cars headed by the Rev. Fr. John J. McNeil of Dominion No. 4. Besides the chief and Mrs. MacNeil there were Mr. and Mrs. A.D. MacNeill and High Chief Stephen B. MacNeil the present head of the Scottish Catholic Society in Canada. Those with Mr. and Mrs. D.A. Cameron and Mr. Joseph MacDonald completed the Glace Bay contingency which has as guide, philosopher and friend, Mr. Stuart McCawley.

The New Waterford branch of the fraternity was represented by Mr. F. H. MacNeil the County Road merchant so well known in town.

Headquarters of the clan were, for the time being, established at Grand Narrows Hotel situated in the midst of the strongest settlement of MacNeils known on this continent and probably the biggest outside of the motherland of Scotland.

A round of visits and introductions were accorded the Chief to his local brethren and presently the goodly company sat down to a repast provided by Mine Host MacNeil of the hotel. Various stories of the family tradition were the order of the day on this occasion and presently the Chief had the pleasure of having pointed out to him on the north shore of the narrows,- the exact spot where the first MacNeils landed in Canada from Scotland. In the address accorded the Chief at Glace Bay it was stated that the immigration of the clan took place in the year 1803. It was pointed out by Mr. F. H. MacNeil, however, that the MacNeils came here on the year 1800 as he the seventh in his line, had family records to show the fact and he was also able to say that his own grandfather were in the small company of first settlers.

Mr. Francis MacNeil's data is accepted as correct as he noted for his retentive memory and the information handed down to him is indisputably reliable.

The Chief was obviously greatly interested in the facts disclosed, and in view of the unveiling of a monument to commemorate the landing of the MacNeils in North Carolina 200 years ago suggested that a suitable monument testifying to the date of the landing of their forefathers in Cape Breton be erected at or near the spot by local members of the clan. It is taken for granted that the suggestion will be followed up with enthusiasm and a fund be inaugurated without delay.

Iona was visited very thoroughly during Wednesday and it is felt that the Chief and his lady will go back to the United States with a joyous recollection of the handsome and hospitable welcome accorded them by their namesakes in Cape Breton. The local MacNeils have had a real

time of happy association through this visitation and the event has done much to cement the bonds of family and clan ties.

Who were the MacNeils of Cape Breton mentioned in the above article?

By Vincent MacNeil

Stephen B. MacNeil, Vice-President of Clan MacNeil in 1929, was the son of Michael MacNeil and Ann MacLean. His paternal grandfather Alasdair "Mor" (Neil, John, Neil, Lauchlin) MacNeil settled at Gillis Point near Iona, Cape Breton. For more information on this family see All Call Iona Home family #141. Stephen B. MacNeil is listed in "The Clan Macneil" on page 209. Alasdair Mor's daughter Sarah was the mother of Mary II MacNeil who was my great-great grandmother. Francis Hector MacNeil, also mentioned in the article was married to Mary MacNeil and she was Stephen B.'s first cousin.

Reverend John J. MacNeil, chaplain of the Clan MacNeil, was the son of Allan MacNeil and Kate (Alexander. Lauchlin) MacLean. Allan was the son of John "Red" (Donald, John, Rory "Piper" MacNeil) and Mary MacKenzie. I am twice related to this family as well through both my mother and father's "Piper" MacNeil lines. Francis Hector's step-mother Catherine MacNeil was Rev. John James MacNeil's aunt. For more information on this family see "MacKenzies' History of Christmas Island Parish page 140.

F. H. MacNeil of County Road, New Waterford was my maternal great-grandfather. My mother Patsy MacNeil was the daughter of Hector Joseph MacNeil who was Francis Hector's son. Hector MacNeil and John Dan MacNeil mentioned in the article were my grandfather's older brothers. Alexander MacNeil (Francis Hector's son-in-law) was married to my grandfather's sister Sarah MacNeil. These MacNeils descend from two of the first four MacNeils to come to Cape Breton in 1802. Francis Hector would be Francis Xavier (Hector Rory, Rory "Mor", Donald, Ruairi). This family is number 48 in All Call Iona Home.

I have not be able to determine who A.D. MacNeil mentioned in the above article was. He may have been one of the Big Pond MacNeils as he owned a cottage there.