

## NARRATIVE OF BENJAMIN MACDONALD\*

In the early 90's I received a letter from Donald MacDonald, a son of the cousin of Benjamin MacDonald, Angus MacDonald, in which letter he stated that my half brother Ranald MacDonald left a box containing documents, papers and manuscripts with a man<sup>1</sup> living about twelve miles from Spokane, Washington, but some time ago I lost this letter and cannot now recollect the name of the man with whom the box of papers, etc., was left by Ranald MacDonald.

Possibly by making inquiry of Donald MacDonald, whose address now is Dixon, a station on the Northern Pacific Railroad in Western Montana, you may be able to ascertain the name and location of the party who has the box in question and which was supposed to contain manuscripts of Ranald MacDonald's life, experiences, etc.

Mr. Donald MacDonald wrote me that he had made an effort to get possession of this box but was unable to do so, the man claiming that he had to show proper authority therefor before he would let him have the property in question, and thereupon Donald MacDonald wrote the aforesaid letter to me in regard thereto. I was at that time living in Denver, Colorado.

My father, Archibald MacDonald, was born in Glencoe, Argyllshire, Scotland, on the 12th day of September, 1790<sup>2</sup>, and died at St. Andrews, Province Quebec, in the Dominion of Canada, on the 15th day of January, 1853.

On the 12th day of September, 1823, Archibald MacDonald was married to Princess Sunday, a daughter of Chief Cumcumly, at Astoria, Oregon, and as the fruits of this marriage there was born but one child, my half brother, Ranald MacDonald. Princess Sunday died a few months after Ranald was born, the time being given as the "salmon running time," which is usually in the months of May and June.

After the death of his mother, Ranald was taken by an aunt of his mother, Carcumcum, and Ranald and his mother's sister were kept at a lodge at the fort at Astoria by Archibald MacDonald until a year or two later when my father, Archibald MacDonald, went to Fort Garry (now Winnipeg, in the Province of Manitoba) and there married his second wife, Jane Klyne, on the 1st day of September, 1825, The Rev. Mr. Cochrane officiat-

\*Recorded and edited by William S. Lewis, of Spokane.

<sup>1</sup> Mr. A. D. Burnett of Spokane, was formerly connected with the *Spokesman-Review*.

<sup>2</sup> An error; the correct date is 3rd February, 1790. The narrator has confused this with the date of his father's marriage hereafter given.

ing. He then returned to Astoria, Vancouver, and Oregon, where he was one of the Chief Traders of the Hudson's Bay Company more directly under Dr. McLoughlin.

The parents of Archibald MacDonald and Archibald had continued to reside in Argyllshire, Scotland, until Archibald graduated from college, thought to be the University of Edinburg, Scotland. After graduating from college, Archibald MacDonald had become private secretary to Lord Selkirk, and had come with Lord Selkirk to America about 1813, Lord Selkirk then being Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company, going first to Lachine, about eight miles from Montreal, Canada, where headquarters of the Hudson's Bay Company in America was located. Archibald MacDonald made several annual trips across the American continent in connection with the business of the Hudson's Bay Company inspecting different forts. In all, fourteen different trips were made across the continent between 1812 and 1845. And my father was at the Red River Settlement at the time of the contest with the North-West Company and returned to England after the coalition of 1821 by which he was retained as clerk.

The first Hudson's Bay Company fort on the west side managed by Archibald MacDonald was that of Langley on the Fraser River in British Columbia, about sixteen miles east of New Westminster. He was here about 1828 to 1831 and calling the Company's attention to the salmon fishery was the founder of the present salmon packing industry.

The next fort Archibald MacDonald was placed in charge of was Nisqually, some fifteen miles or so from the now city of Tacoma. The supervising and laying out of this fort was done by Archibald MacDonald, who had the general supervision or construction thereof, about 1831. The site of this old fort is now shown by a monument erected by the Historical Society of Washington.

The next fort conducted by Archibald MacDonald for the Hudson's Bay Company was that at Colville on the Columbia River at what is known as Kettle Falls, erected about 1835-37.

In addition to these principal forts, Archibald MacDonald also had charge of a number of minor stations at other points throughout the Northwest for trading purposes and to facilitate the intercourse between the different forts.

In addition to supervising and managing these forts and stations, Archibald MacDonald also had charge of the placing of the land in cultivation, the acquiring of horses, cattle, sheep, etc., and

generally completing, establishing and putting in running condition each one of these forts. At Fort Colville he also superintended the rebuilding of a grist mill and saw mill there, which grist mill and saw mill were probably the first erected on the Pacific Coast, north of California.

Archibald MacDonald remained at Fort Colville as Chief Trader in charge thereof until he was promoted to Chief Factor and retired from the Hudson's Bay Company in 1844. After leaving Fort Colville he moved his then wife and family overland to Montreal, Canada, where he took up his temporary residence for about two years and then moved to St. Andrews on the Ottawa River where he purchased a large tract of land and established a permanent home and built his residence which he called "Glencoe Cottage," as he was a descendant of the clan of the MacDonalds of Glencoe, Scotland. There he continued to live until his death on the 15th day of January, 1853.

I remember back to the time when I was about the age of five or six years when my father's family was living at St. Andrews, Canada, and I well remember Sir George Simpson, the then Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company; Mr. Finlayson, one of the Chief Factors of the Hudson's Bay Company, and a number of the other officers of the Hudson's Bay Company, visiting at my father's home in St. Andrews. I also remember when about the age of eight years a visit to father's home by Archibald McKinley, from Oregon City, Oregon, where he owned and operated extensive woolen mills, and the narrations of the said Archibald McKinley fired my mind with my first desire to go west to the Pacific Coast.

The next event that forcibly impressed me was the news of the gold discovery on the Fraser River about 1857, which fired my mind with still further desires to visit the extreme west and the Pacific Coast.

I also remember distinctly and well the time of my father's death at St. Andrews in 1853, and the funeral arrangements and services, I being at that time about nine years of age.

During my boyhood I heard numerous narrations and tales and stories from the officers and employees of the Hudson's Bay Company who visited my father's home, all of which had a tendency to instill in my mind a great desire to visit the scenes of those narrations and stories in the west.

In the year 1858, my brother Ranald MacDonald returning

from his great Japan adventure, visited the home at St. Andrews on his way from Australia to British Columbia, and I well remember his appearance at that time.

From my recollection the photograph of Ranald MacDonald taken July 5th, 1891, conforms to my recollection of Ranald as I saw him in 1858 and 1864, with the exception that Ranald at that time wore no beard.

My mother continued to live and occupy the family residence at St. Andrews until her death December 15th, 1879.

I continued to reside at home up to April, 1862, when I left St. Andrews for Fraser River, British Columbia, Canada, by way of Montreal and New York, and took steamer from New York on the *North Star* steamer on what was at that time known as the Vanderbilt Line, for Aspinwall, crossing the Isthmus of Panama on the narrow gauge railroad from Aspinwall to Panama, and thence by the Pacific Mail Steamship Company's steamer *Orizaba* to San Francisco, and from San Francisco to Victoria by the Hudson's Bay Company's steamer the *Golden Age*, landing at Victoria, British Columbia, in the fore part of June, 1862, stopping as a guest at the residence of Governor Douglas in Victoria for a few days; I had letters of introduction from my mother to the Governor and his wife, the Governor's wife being a distant relative of my mother's.

From Victoria I went by boat to New Westminster, and from New Westminster, by another boat to Douglas on Harrison Lake, thence over several portages to Lilloet on the Fraser River, thence by trail to Bonaparte where my half brother Ranald and my brother Allen had a ranch on the Bonaparte River. There I met Ranald and Allen; at which time both Ranald and Allen were single men and engaged in conducting a ranch and establishing and running pack trains to the gold mines on the upper Fraser River in Cariboo. Shortly after my arrival at Bonaparte I was employed as a packer for my brother Allen in the mule train of pack animals, continuing at this occupation during the summer of 1862, passing the winter at Bonaparte.

During the summer of 1862, with my brother Allen, I acquired a one-eighth interest in what was known as the Cameron Claim<sup>3</sup> on Williams Creek in the Cariboo country, which afterwards proved to be one of the richest claims on the Pacific Coast at that time in gold. Allen went to the claim in the fall of 1862

---

<sup>3</sup> See Bancroft's *History of British Columbia*, p. 498.

and I remained at Bonaparte. Allen, after having sunk shafts on the said claim to a depth of about forty feet, contending with immense quantities of water and missing the deposit of gold, became greatly discouraged and sold both his and my interests in the mine to a man by the name of McGinnis for a nominal sum. Allen then returned to Lillooet on his way to Montreal, Canada, where he afterwards took up his residence and resided until his death. About two weeks after Allen had left I received a letter from one of my former partners in the said mine, Bob Dexter, advising me not to sell my interest in the mine for any reasonable price as he, Bob Dexter, had been offered fifty thousand dollars for his interest therein, which was the same interest as that owned by my brother Allen and myself—a one-eighth interest.

In the spring of 1863, I bought a mule train and devoted my attention during the summer of 1863 to packing from Lillooet to the gold mines in the Cariboo country. In the fall of 1863 I sold a part of my pack train and took the remainder thereof overland to Walla Walla, Washington, where I passed the winter of 1863-64. At that time there was great excitement over mining prospects in the vicinity of Boise on the Wood River and Owyhee Districts, then in what was part of Washington Territory but since has been set off and become the State of Idaho.

I made but one trip to Boise in the spring of 1864, and then got word of the discovery of gold on the Kootenay, and went from Walla Walla to the Kootenay country, putting in the remainder of the summer of 1864 in running a restaurant and other new ventures in mining, and in the fall of 1864 I returned to Fort Colville on the Columbia River to winter where my cousin Angus MacDonald was then living at old Fort Colville,—my own birth place, and the former home of my father, Archibald MacDonald, from 1835 to 1845.

I made my headquarters at Fort Colville for several years thereafter, making periodical trips across the surrounding mining country in the Big Bend, of the upper Columbia, and I also helped to build, and owned an interest in, the first steamer built on the Columbia River at Fort Colville above Kettle Falls, in 1864; this boat was called *The Forty-nine*, and navigated the Columbia River across the boundary line into British Columbia up to the Big Bend mines and a point on the river called French Creek.

The steamer, *The Forty-nine*,<sup>4</sup> made its last trip about the month of September, 1865, from French Creek down the Columbia

<sup>4</sup> See mention in Bancroft's *History of British Columbia*, pp. 533-534.

River under the charge of Captain White, who was also the first man to run a steamer on the Willamette, and Alfred Ralles, chief mate. I was a passenger on the boat with some pack horses, and when about twenty miles below French Creek, the river being at too low a stage for safe navigation, the boat ran upon a reef of rocks and filled with water. The crew saved all they could of the freight and supplies, including the pack horses. The boat finally keeled over and sank in the Columbia River and remained there until about ten years ago when some enterprising individual wrecked the boat and salvaged the engine and some other parts thereof.

I had four of my pack horses landed from the boat but was obliged to leave them there to perish in the winter snow as there was no trail out of that country and the only way out was to float by bateaux down the Columbia River. The officers, crew and passengers of the steamer built such a bateaux and floated down the Columbia River some three hundred miles to Colville.

About the year 1860, Ranald MacDonald was associated with some capitalists of San Francisco who conceived the idea of finding a shorter way up to the gold mines on the upper Fraser River. They went from Victoria by boat up the coast to see if they might chance to find a bay or an inlet from the Pacific Ocean and then cut across and strike the Fraser River and the gold mines. Ranald did this exploring for a bay or inlet around Bentict Arm and was successful and finally got a permit from the Canadian Government to establish a toll trail there, but soon after the government was approached by some other people, and Ranald's grant was small, simply for a pack trail, and someone more influential persuaded the government into building a wagon road. Ranald finally built a trail but never got a line of steamer connection. He had a few things shipped in but the wagon took all the business.

After that Ranald MacDonald was interested in mining and had great faith in the Horsefly country, but the mines never proved of any great value.

During the time that Ranald MacDonald was promoting his trail, my brother, Allen, was running a supply store at Douglas on Harrison Lake. Ranald MacDonald also had a Government license and ran a ferry across the Fraser River at Lillooet in 1859 to 1861. Allen was not a partner or interested in a ferry or in promoting the trail with Ranald, but ran a supply store at Douglas on Harrison Lake.

About 1861 both of them became associated in the ranch and the ferry and Allen gave up the store at Douglas.

Allen MacDonald went out to what is now British Columbia in 1857 and was joined there at Douglas in 1858 by Ranald MacDonald, who came there after his visit to his father's home at St. Andrews, on his return from Australia.

During the time that Allen MacDonald was at Cameron mine on Williams Creek, in the Cariboo country, and I was running a pack train between there and the ranch at Bonaparte, Ranald was in the Horsefly country prospecting and developing his mining claims there.

Allen MacDonald left Bonaparte in the full of 1862 and went to Montreal, Canada, and I remained at Bonaparte and the next year continued packing. That winter Allen MacDonald sold most of his pack train that was used that year before and I continued to run the pack train with the balance of the animals, and that summer Ranald MacDonald returned to the Horsefly mining claims and returned for the winter of 1862-63 to the ranch at Bonaparte.

Ranald MacDonald must have left Bonaparte in the latter 70's, having remained there some eight or ten years after I had left. Ranald MacDonald still devoted his attention to prospecting in the Northwest Territory and finally disposed of his mining interests and came down to his cousin Angus MacDonald at old Fort Colville and preempted or took up land near old Fort Colville and improved it, where he remained engaged in farming and kindred pursuits for six or eight years and finally died at a place near Boundary Creek on Kettle River, about seventy-five miles west of Marcus, or old Fort Colville. Ranald MacDonald died on the 24th day of August, 1894, and was buried near Boundary Creek on Kettle River. My half brother Ranald MacDonald never married.

My father Archibald MacDonald in the early 40's, when in charge of the Hudson's Bay Company's forts, had nearly five thousand acres of land in the vicinity of old Fort Colville under cultivation or in pasture at one time.

Mr. L. W. Meyers bought the old Hudson's Bay Company grist mill from the Hudson's Bay Company in 1865 and his heirs, I am informed, now own the old mill at Fort Colville, the mill now being known as Meyers Post Office.

I remember amongst the old settlers particularly Pat Moran, the blacksmith, Dan Drumheller, well known in the early days,

and then devoting his attention to cattle raising, and James Monahan, who then owned the ferry on the Spokane on what was known as Colville Road Crossing.

When I left the Colville country in 1864 there was no town or anything at what is now known as Spokane on the Spokane River, there being nothing there but Indians in their teepees. The Hudson's Bay Company had a station on the Spokane River at that time in charge of Antoine Plante, about eight miles from the falls of the Spokane.

About 1864, James Monahan and I were on our way to the Kootenay country from Walla Walla and camped at Antoine Plante's crossing on the Spokane River, and Mr. Monahan went in the morning for the horses that had strayed away during the night and he did not get back until about noon. On his return he gave no reason for his delay nor did he say where he had been, but in 1907, nearly fifty years afterwards, when I met him in Spokane he said, "Ben I want to show you where I found those horses." He then took me to the Spokane Hotel and pointing to the southwest to near where Dave Stuart's blacksmith shop was formerly located on or near Sprague Street, he said, "That is where I found the horses and the bell-mare was lying down."

I think that Pat Moran, associated with Walsh and others, put in the first bridge across the Spokane River in 1864, about twenty miles above the falls of Spokane. Charles Connor and Charles Kendall put in another bridge a few miles above the Moran bridge about 1864 or 1865.

I never saw my maternal grandfather, Michael Klyne, but I did meet my uncle George Klyne, a son of Michael Klyne, in 1870 or 1872. He was then a member of the Canadian Parliament at Winnipeg. I have no recollection or knowledge of the time or place of my grandfather's, Michael Klyne's death, but I do remember the death of my grandmother, the wife of Michael Klyne, for the reason that my mother went from St. Andrews, Canada, to Red River, Fort Garry, to see her in her last illness. This was then a very long journey in the absence of railroads and other means of rapid transportation. This was about 1855 when I was about ten or eleven years old.

There must have been several members of the Michael Klyne family, at least four or five, and possibly some member of the family may still be living at or near St. Boniface, an old settlement across the river from Winnipeg.

I have no particular recollection of any special incidents which I heard my father mention in connection with his life in Old Oregon.

I remember my mother mentioning Father Walker, one of the early missionaries, who came with Father Eells and established a mission at what was then known as Walker's Prairie. Father Walker and Father Eells were Presbyterians or Congregationalists, while my mother was an Episcopalian, and they often had arguments on the different orthodoxical views of their churches and my mother was about the only one at that time well enough informed in regard to her creed or religion to be able to hold her own with Father Eells or Father Walker in religious arguments.

My father, Archibald MacDonald, kept a very accurate journal during his many years in the Northwest. One of these was published by Malcolm McLeod. The fact that these journals described in detail the country from the Great Lakes west to the Pacific Coast through plains and over the mountains as regards to the topography, soil, timber, rivers, etc., was of great advantage to the Canadian Government when they contemplated building the Canadian Pacific Railway, and Mr. Duncan MacDonald (no relative) being one of the locating engineers of the Canadian Pacific and a friend of the family, knowing of these journals, acquired possession of them from Malcolm McLeod, the administrator of the estate of my father, the late Archibald MacDonald, and the information contained in these journals proved of great value to the officers in deciding on the location of the projected Canadian Pacific Railway.

In the conversations with my brother Ranald MacDonald, he told me he had been mining at Ballarat near Melbourne, Australia, where the gold was found in a formation resembling chalk, specimens of which Ranald MacDonald brought with him to Canada, and demonstrated and explained to the family how they washed the gold from this chalk formation by crushing it.

Ranald MacDonald also related an incident that occurred at Ballarat when there was some trouble with the miners over the working of the claims. Ranald was naturally of a very mild and non-combative disposition. In the course of the difficulty and the melee which occurred thereover, Ranald was attacked by a man who was a stranger to him and in defending himself Ranald knocked this man out and went on about his business and gave

the affair no further thought until the evening of that day he heard a rap on his cabin door and upon opening it he found some men who said they were a committee to interview him and they handed him a belt. On Ranald MacDonald inquiring what they meant they informed him that he was now entitled to the belt as champion of Australia, having knocked the previous champion out. However, Ranald not being interested in that branch of athletics declined the belt and shook hands with the committee and thanked them for the honor proffered him.

When Ranald MacDonald returned from Australia he must have sailed around the Cape of Good Hope as he told me of having visited Rome, Paris and London on his way home.

Ranald MacDonald must have returned to old Fort Colville in the late 70's when he took up his permanent residence on his pre-empted claim which he took up from part of the land which had been previously cultivated by our father as a part of the Hudson's Bay Company holdings at Fort Colville open for settlement, excepting one hundred and sixty acres, the immediate side of old Fort Colville. Ranald MacDonald built a residence on his pre-empted claim where he made his permanent residence up to the time of his death, dividing his time between improving his pre-empted claim and prospecting on the upper Kettle River in the vicinity of Boundary Creek.

When I went to Fort Colville in 1860, I met many old Indians who had known my father and mother personally during their residence at Fort Colville, and the high esteem and affection in which my parents were held caused these Indians to be very friendly with me, and many of the half-breeds who married and settled there in the valley also made themselves known to me as having been acquainted with my parents during their residence at old Fort Colville.

There were three grades of officers in the old Hudson's Bay Company. A Chief Factor who was next in office to the Governor, and entitled to two shares of the profits of the Hudson's Bay Company, a Chief Trader who was next in rank, was entitled to one share of the profits of the Hudson's Bay Company, and the next in rank was a Post Master or Post Trader, who was not eligible to promotion but received a stipulated salary per year and occupied a position about equal to a Chief Trader. The advancement in the Hudson's Bay Company was by promotion, much like the advancement in the army. A clerk would advance to Chief

Trader usually after about five to ten years of service and would then be eligible for Chief Factor, if he proved of the right mettle, after the expiration of ten years more.

The Chief Factors often realized on their shares as high as ten to twelve thousand dollars per year, and it was not unusual for them to occasionally retire after a service of about twenty-five years or more with a competency for life.

During the time that I was making my headquarters at Fort Colville in the early 60's, I also became interested in the Okanogan Country and located a ranch at the foot of the Osoyoos Lake, about three miles south of the boundary line, and obtained from Judge Haines, the gold commissioner, of British Columbia, and also from Mr. H. Young, who represented the Indians on the United States side, permission to erect a weir across the Okanogan River. This weir was the first one ever erected on the river which was a success, and at this weir, during the salmon running season, was caught from ten to twenty wagon loads of salmon a day. It soon became noised about among the Indians of the success of this weir and they came as far as a couple hundred miles to purchase salmon, which I was permitted to sell for five cents each the Chuine or small salmon, and ten cents each for the Tyee or large salmon (Chinook for large and small salmon); these prices were regulated by the commissioners.

During this time my partner was John Utz, to whom I sold my interest in the Okanogan country at the time I left Fort Colville for the Walla Walla country. Mr. Utz afterwards died and James Monahan was administrator of his estate.

During the time that I was interested in the Okanogan country the principal trail for driving cattle between the Walla Walla country and the British Columbia mining country was up the Okanogan valley and across the line into British Columbia. At the boundary line there was a duty imposed of six dollars a head on all cattle, besides an *ad valorem* duty on all cattle that passed over the line into British Columbia, and I and my partner carried on quite a cattle business in buying footsore calves and other animals that were unfit to stand the journey further north into the rougher British Columbia country. We were able to buy that class of cattle at a very low price and after resting and recuperating up on the ranch they were soon in good condition again and rapidly increased in value.

Among other old settlers I became acquainted with George B. Wonnicat.

From 1864 to 1868 I was a personal friend of Marcus Oppenheimer who at that time had a store about two miles up the Columbia River from Fort Colville where Major Runrill had established a garrison about 1858 and settled with the British sappers and miners, the expedition that established the boundary line through that country between the United States and Canada. I understand that this point is now a station on the railroad and known as Marcus in commemoration of Mr. Oppenheimer. Mr. Oppenheimer's brother was also well known to me and was in partnership with Mr. Ferguson who owned a large commercial business in Pinkney City and also a grist mill about six miles from there on Chewelah or Little Pend O'Reille Creek.

I was also well acquainted with A. Reeves Ayer, who for many years was clerk of the United States Court in the state of Washington, and who frequently visited Fort Colville and lived for a time with his uncle on Chewelah Creek.

I also knew Jack Bonner well, who ran the ferry known as Bonner's Ferry across the Kootenay, and gave his name to the Idaho town located there.<sup>5</sup>

BENJAMIN MACDONALD.

---

<sup>5</sup> The remaining six pages of the narrative comprise a family genealogy the substance of which has appeared in a sketch of the narrator's father, Archibald MacDonald.