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HERITAGE • SOCIETY

***'The Adventures of
Flora MacDonald:***

***From Skye to the
Americas and back again'***



A Talk by Dr Elizabeth Ritchie

Thursday 17th November 7.30 p.m.

Council Chamber, Carnegie Building

Members and non-members welcome

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DHS talk by Dr Elizabeth Ritchie on 17th November 2011

Thank you for having me tonight. As George said, tonight I'm going to be talking about Flora Macdonald and you might be wondering a bit what the connection is.

I got very intrigued with Flora having heard about her as a child. You hear the stories about Flora Macdonald and Bonnie Prince Charlie and when I was studying the islands of Skye and South Uist Flora is connected with both of those islands and I do remember a couple of days when I was in the National Library getting distracted from the things that I ought to have been studying when I discovered that Flora Macdonald's letters were held in the National Library, So I started to have a look at them and read them and I was quite intrigued at finding out more about Flora Macdonald and I found that there was a whole part of the story which I had never known before. I knew about the story to do with Bonnie Prince Charlie but I didn't know about all that she had done afterwards. So my story to you tonight encompasses what she did in her early years but also the adventures that she had later on in life.

I expect you all know the story of Flora Macdonald. She made herself a legend in 1746. The final Jacobite rising had failed to put Bonnie Prince Charlie on the throne of Britain and he was hiding from the government troops. Under cover of night and disguised as an Irish water woman the prince was rowed by Flora from the island of South Uist to Skye and this action rendered her a romantic heroine both in the 18th century and today.



What's less well known is that in later life she emigrated first to North Carolina and then to Nova Scotia and because she was a celebrity she was encouraged to document her life story and ephemeral items, like letters which might otherwise have perished have survived.

And one of the things I noticed when I was looking at the materials to do with Flora was that her brush with war was less of an isolated incident in the 1740s as it was a pattern that dogged her throughout her life. Her life was a particularly adventurous one, though not entirely unusual in the age in which she lived, and tonight I'm going to focus mainly on those later years through her adventures in Skye, North Carolina, the Revolutionary War and Nova Scotia. We get glimpses not only into her life but into the broader experiences of ordinary people living in extraordinary times.

Flora was born in 1722 on the island of South Uist to Ranald Macdonald and Marion Macdonald. Ranald was a tenant farmer or a taxman this meant that he was fairly high up the social scale in the islands. He was closely related to the Chief Clan Ranald who had given him a large piece of land or a tack at Balivanich in Benbecula and the role of a taxman was to manage this piece of land for the chief to pay rent and to sublet it to tenants and in times of war he was also responsible for raising the fighting men that the chief needed. In 1702 20 years before Flora was born Clan Ranald gave Ranald another tack, that of Milton in South Uist, and this is where Flora and her two brothers Angus and Ranald were born.

Flora's mother Marion also had a distinguished pedigree she was descended from the lords of the isles and her father was the Presbyterian Minister of South Uist who was famed for his forceful preaching and his great physical strength. If any of you have been to South Uist you can go and visit Milton it's not far off the main road and the ruins you can see there are the building which apparently was the house that Flora was born and brought up. And you can see that there's a cairn of stones that people have built as a memorial to Flora and you can see the sort of landscape that her father and her brothers would have farmed at the Mahir down there and then they would have had access to hill pasture up in the hill behind the house as well. There would have been other people living round about as well, the sub-tenants, cotters, crofters and so on.

A year after Flora was born her father Ranald died so Marion was left with two farms to manage and three small children. Although she was better off than most of the people around her, life must have been tough for this young single mother. Four years later Marion married again. Flora's stepfather was Hugh Macdonald from the south of Skye. You'll notice there's not much originality with surnames. Hugh was known as one-eyed Hugh and he was a younger grandson of the Macdonald chief.

There's a story that he abducted the fine young widow of Milton in order to marry her but considering the affection between the couple and the good relations that Flora had with her stepfather in later life even in North Carolina, I think this seems unlikely. Anyway Hugh settled down at Milton to manage the two tacks for his wife, to raise her children and have a few of his own. Now the family were of relatively high status and so Flora was sent to Nunton in Benbecula when she was a teenager and that's where their chief Clan Ranald lived and there she picked up social graces, the ability to sing play the spinet, and read.

Her education didn't include much handwriting and later in life she employed a tutor to improve her writing skills. Her native tongue was Gaelic but she was fluent in English as well and this was common in the landlady and taxman class whose literacy and wide range of books was commented on with great surprise by Samuel Johnson and James Boswell on their travels about the Hebrides in the 1770s.

The buildings here at Nunton, they probably weren't the farm buildings that were there at the time in the 1730s when Flora was there, it's likely that they were built in later in the century but that's certainly where she was.

Her rescue of Bonnie Prince Charlie from government soldiers in South Uist by boat to the north of Skye occurred when she was only 25. Obviously that's Bonnie Prince Charlie himself. This is the beach of the prince in Eriskay where he landed in the Outer Hebrides. Flora was romantically linked to the prince in the imagination of the nation but she was actually only with him for a few days.

After her escapade she was captured and sent to London where she endured a year-long imprisonment and while her conditions were relatively comfortable the knowledge that many of her friends were being executed for similar crimes to hers must have made the time one of considerable worry and grief despite the many people who paid court to her, as she was already being considered a romantic heroine. Once she was released she didn't return to the islands immediately. Her involvement with the prince and her subsequent fame had not

gone down well with everyone in the islands especially the relatives of those who had been caught and executed.

However, by 1750 she was considering a return having received a proposal of marriage. Alan Macdonald, I told you there wasn't much originality, was the son of the taxman of Kingsburgh in the north of Skye. Alan helped his father with his work as a factor to the chief's estates. A factor was someone who managed the chief's land for him and did a lot of the administrative and legal work around that.

Alan had been groomed for this role with an education in Edinburgh and he was now a good-looking ambitious young man. 20 years later we have a description of him and he was described this way. "Kingsburgh had his tartan plaid thrown around him, a large blue bonnet and tartan hose. He had jet black hair tied behind and was a large stately man with a steady sensible countenance."

Now Alan had also been involved in the Jacobite rising. He had been desperate to follow his chief into the army and he became a lieutenant in one of Slate's militia companies under Macdonald of Kirkibost. He therefore served with the Hanoverians, the government troops, at the same time as his future wife and his own father were implicated in helping the Jacobites. This division within families wasn't actually unusual, it was quite typical of the rising and after 1746 Alan was keen to pursue a military career but it came to nothing and being unable to fulfil his ambitions seems to have become a recurring pattern in Alan's life.

By 1750 however he saw his future in the islands, he could help his father's factor, he could gain his own tack and he could marry. Alan and Flora's parents thoroughly approved of the match. Alan was a young man with prospects and Flora's steadiness would balance Alan's tendency to go off on airy-fairy schemes.

Now this is the house at Kingsburgh and I'm fairly sure that this is the house that Alan actually built. So it wouldn't have been the house that he grew up in or the house where the prince stayed but I'm fairly sure that it's the house that Alan himself built when he came back which would date us around about the 1760s, 1770s. So you can see the sort of size of building, this isn't some tiny little black house or something like that.

The building that you can see the inside of is the living house, their actual home and you can see it would have had two floors, you can see the holes for the rafters would have been halfway up the wall and there would have been a loft space as well so quite a substantial home. And it's hidden by the trees down here so you can see the shape of it, the barns and so on coming out to make a sort of square and you can see the front of them. I was standing with my back to the house when I took the picture of the barns and the stables and so on and probably that area in the middle it would have been a courtyard. It might have been paved or it might have been packed down earth, I'm not very sure, They would have brought the animals in and out there, they might have put hay in and so on there as well. So that's the type of social status that we're talking about and it's the place where I'm fairly sure Alan and Flora lived later on in their life but they didn't live there when they were first married. They got married in November and the young couple used Flora's dowry to set up home on the

tack of Flodigarry on the east side of the Trotternish Peninsula, so for those of you who have been to Skye, Trotternish Peninsula is the peninsula that goes up towards the north and they were on the east side looking over to the mainland and that's the village of Flodigarry there



now and that's looking down from the hills down towards Flodigarry with the mainland in the distance there. So the couple settled down to what they probably expected to be an end to their youthful adventuring and indeed they did have a decade of domesticity.

In October 1751 their first son was born, breaking with naming tradition they called him Charles after the prince who'd shaped their early lives. Normally in the islands there was a pattern of naming after various male relatives but they broke the pattern. Charles was followed in 1754 by a daughter Anne and then Alexander, Ranald and James.

Alan was keen on agricultural improvement but the new methods of crop rotation and winter herding that he introduced aroused much hostility. Although the methods themselves were good he had a lack of ability as a manager and he was plagued by bad weather and low prices which meant that his plans often came to naught and he was sucked into debt. His mother died in 1759 and she was buried in one of the sheets that Prince Charlie had slept in when he stayed with her at Kingsburgh House and after this event the young family gave up Flodigarry Tack to move back to Kingsburgh and take over as factor to the Macdonald chief there. And a new son John was born to Flora just after they arrived.

Alan continued to try and make improvements on his land. In 1763 he wrote, I am determined to begin immediately to enclose, plant and set quicksets and to build all my office houses with stone and lime and I think he's referring to the building that we've just seen. I mean barns, byres and mill.

He was not careful with his chief's money however and his schemes always seemed to incur losses and he seemed to make extravagant gambles. For example in 1766 he bought 2,800 cattle, the equivalent of Skye's entire cattle export and this was at a time of uncertain prices. He lost almost all of them and he was dismissed as factor.

He was allowed to stay at Kingsburgh but only at greatly increased rent. The raise in rent at Kingsburgh was part of a pattern across the Highlands. The traveller Thomas Pennant critically noted 'the whole rent of Skye was £3,500 by an unnatural force some of the rents were now doubled and trebled, the chieftains riot in all the luxuries of South Britain'.

The two boys there, some of you might recognise the painting, it's the two sons of Macdonald and the picture over at the other side is part of the tack of Kingsburgh, that's the land just outside the house so it's the type of land that was part of their farm. And the trend of rising rent was exacerbated in 1771 by what Samuel Johnson reported as, quote, "a severe season remembered by the name of the black spring from which the island has not yet recovered. The snow lay long upon the ground, part of their cattle died for want, part were unseasonably sold to buy sustenance for their owners and the kind that survived were emaciated".

So the problems that Flora and Allen were having were not of his fault. In a rapidly commercialising economy the old role of taxmen was declining in importance. Taxmen were increasingly seen by chiefs as expensive and disposable middlemen.

This, added to years of appalling difficulties of crop failure and weather, meant that by the early 1770s many people were considering emigrating. A quick glance at the business papers of the Macleods of Dunvegan on the other side of Skye reveals one of many similar letters which states things like, the state of the country is awful, the cattle are all dead, crops have failed, there is no food and no seed, the country is ruined. Another item is a circular imploring the tenantry not to emigrate.

And Flora, I'm going to describe how Flora described their situation. However I'd like to put in a caveat here, this wasn't the story across the Highlands at all time, this was a particularly bad few years. There were years which were good and productive and people lived well, but you tended not to have supplies that could carry you over more than one or two bad years.

So if you had bad weather or crop disease or something for more than one, two or maybe even three seasons your stocks would run down and you might be facing starvation even if you were relatively well off. So you're alright if there was one bad year, if there was more than that there were problems. But Flora described their situation in a letter and she wrote, "in this poor miserable island the best of its inhabitants are making ready to follow their friends to America while they have anything to bring them and among the rest we are to go, especially as we cannot promise ourselves but poverty and oppression, having last spring and this time two years lost almost our whole stock of cattle and horses. We lost within these three years 327 heads so we have hardly what will pay our creditors".

There was one spark of joy at this time though, after a gap of seven years and aged 44 in 1767 Flora gave birth to another daughter, Frances or Fanny. Unlike many of their sub-tenants Flora's family did not face hunger but the prevailing economic situation coupled with the bad years resulted in severe enough financial difficulty for the Macdonald family to consider cutting their losses and emigrating to Carolina.

Leaving Skye was an increasingly popular choice among all classes in the late 18th century. Thomas Pennant, the traveller, estimates that the population of the island had dropped from 15,000 to 13,000 between 1750 and 1772 and once emigration started it gathered force encouraged by positive reports, whether true or false, sent home by the earliest adventurers. And James Boswell wrote in his journal, a quote which you might recognise:

"we performed with much activity a dance which seems intended to show how emigration catches till a whole neighbourhood is set to float. Mrs MacKinnon, who was Flora's sister-in-law, told me that last year when a ship sailed from Portree to America the people on shore were almost distracted when they saw their relations go off. They lay down on the ground, tumbled and tore the grass with their teeth. This year there was not a tear shed. The people on shore seemed to think they will soon follow!."

This indifference is a mortal sin for the country. From Skye at this time most of the immigrants went to North Carolina and Flora for one didn't relish the prospect. She declared in her letter

that contrary to our inclination we must follow the rest of our friends who have gone this three years past to America.

There weren't only friends there, there were family also. In 1771 one-eyed Hugh and Flora's half-sister Annabella with her husband had also emigrated to North Carolina. It's been argued that because of her social position as a taxman or a member of the gentry class in the Highlands, Flora was not a typical example of an emigrant. And indeed she doesn't fit into the image that we often have of emigrants of disease-ridden, poor, arriving helpless at North American ports. But that image largely derives from some of the later clearances and from the catastrophic potato famine which devastated the rural economy in parts of Scotland and in Ireland in the 1840s. In the 1700s in contrast you had to be reasonably well off like Flora to afford the fares. After all you had to afford the fares and you also had to be able to keep yourself and your family in the new country for as long enough a time as you could start to make a living for yourself. And if that was by the land that could be a year before the next crops came up. So you needed a reasonable amount of income to support you. Either that or you travelled as an indentured servant. So Flora was typical of those of her class during that period. She travelled as a family group who had largely chosen to move even if it was motivated by bad situation at home.

She decided to settle in an area of other Gaelic speakers. Before Flora and Alan left they tried to place each of their children in some suitable position. Charles was in his late teens and they found him a commission in the East India Company. A commission was obtained for Ranald in the Marines. Johnny was approaching his 12th birthday and he was a bright lad so they sent him off to school in Edinburgh. The bottom picture is the high school in Edinburgh where he would have gone.

Anne was a problem. She was 16 but there was no money left for a dowry to attract a husband of the right social standard. However a marriage was arranged for her with a 40 year old widower, Lieutenant Alexander Macleod. This man was the illegitimate son of the Macleod chief and he held a tap in Waternish in Skye. And Waternish is another of the northern north-western parts of Skye.

And the picture at the top is of the very far end of Waternish. If you go along the road, the road stops at Trumpin but there's a track which carries on. And if you go all the way up the track it takes you to this village called Hunish at the top. And you can see on the right and on the left there's ruins of houses. So the track takes you right through the village. And further down you can see the big building down there. And I don't know if that was Alexander Macleod's house but it might well have been. And there are other buildings around there. So that may have been where Anne settled with Alexander Macleod. If it wasn't there it was within a couple of miles.

Now little Frances or Fanny was only six and she was left with family in the neighbouring island of Raasay. The McDonald's couldn't find positions for 17 year old Alexander and 14 year old James so they took the boys with them. They also took with them eight indentured servants. These people would work for them for a certain number of years to pay off the cost of their passage and they would then gain some land to farm for themselves in the colonies.

And it's the tradition that Flora and her family sailed in August 1774 on the Balliol from Campbelltown, near where she had family, to Brunswick, North Carolina. Flora and Alan arrived in Wilmington, North Carolina in 1774. And you can see Wilmington is down near the south of North Carolina on the coast there.

Everyone in North Carolina society had heard of the famous Flora McDonald and a ball was held in her honour when she arrived. This would have been a great diversion in a dull colonial time and would have added a feasible amount of excitement in a colony which by this stage was starting to rumble with political discontent against the British monarchy. The colony of Carolina had originally been conferred on a Sir Robert Heath in 1629 but he had never made any effort to colonise it. And so 40 years later it was given to eight proprietors and it was divided into two regions, north and south.

The Cape Fear Waterway, where Alan and Flora entered down near Wilmington, you can see Cape Fear marked on the map there, it was actually a waterway which was rarely used until the 1720s because of the sandbars and because pirates held the mouth of the river. However in the 1720s ship design had improved and the pirates were quashed and the Tuscarora people in the regions had effectively been subdued as well, so Europeans were able to colonise. By the 1730s Highlanders began to settle in the upper reaches of the river and Cross Creek became the centre of the Highland colony.

North Carolina had a very different climate and geography than what Highlanders were used to. There were three distinct regions. There was the coastal plain which stretched inland from the ocean for about 100 miles and it was very flat, the elevation was only about two feet per mile. Then there were the sand hills and that's what the landscape looks like in the sand hills. So after landing settlers, like Flora and Alan, still had to travel 90 miles upstream to Cross Creek in long boats and canoes. The voyage took at least a week.

The sand hills where the Highlanders settled had short ridges and undrained depressions bordering the Cape Fear River and its tributaries. It was light soil, clay and sandy loam which was very productive for farming because there was a lot of rainfall. The depressions were thickly vegetated and the hills were covered with long leaf pines. Settlers were able to extract tar, pitch and turpentine from these and they sold it to the Navy. And when they cleared the depressions they were able to produce good crops of Indian corn, wheat, oats, peas, beans, flax and sweet potatoes. They used a system of crop rotation and when the soil was exhausted they prepared new land. Highland settlers also raised cattle, horses and hogs. And the cattle were driven to Charleston annually and sold.

You'll be hearing some echoes of the way that the Highlanders lived in the Highlands before they moved. The land had its dangers as well though. The low-lying swampy lands were great for diseases like malaria, yellow fever and typhoid. And there were wild animals like bears, wild cats and snakes to contend with as well. Most Highlanders settled in Cumberland County and the first group was a large one, about 350 people from Argyll and they settled in 1739. They were led by gentry who claimed land on the basis of all the people that they had brought with them.

In the late 1760s parties from Arran, Jura, and Islay also settled and they were described as a hardy, laborious and thrifty people. So by the time of the American Revolution, just after

Alan and Flora arrived, there were about 12,000 Highlanders in the colony. Most of these Highlanders were farmers, most had been from an agricultural background and land was easy to obtain.

Flora and Alan managed to find a place to settle near One Eyed Hew and Annabella's family and within a year they were joined by their daughter Anne and her husband Alexander MacLeod. With the help of their sons and servants, they built a home and they cleared land.

Houses were a bit like this, they were log cabins with clay to fill the chinks between the logs. And land was cleared by ringing trees. An English traveller at the time exclaimed at the ominous appearance of fields filled with dead trees. Some Highlanders, like the MacDonalds, had their own plantations. Alan MacDonald was one of the wealthiest of the Highland colonists. Others were tenants and indentured servants.

Just like other colonists, well-off Highlanders also owned slaves. In 1790 we know that there were 717 slaves owned by people with Highland names in North Carolina. The ratio was one slave to four Highlanders and some of those slaves spoke Gaelic.

By the 1770s there were many Highlanders in public positions in the colonies. So the Highland community was sure to become involved in the revolutionary struggle which was emerging in the 1770s. I suspect that Alan and Flora had no idea about the level of political discontent in the American colonies before they emigrated, but they were soon to find out.

The grievances of the colonists over what they considered to be the denial of their rights as Englishmen were expressed through arguments, petitions, protest meetings and economic reprisals. And in the early 1770s several disputes created ill-will between the Assembly of Delegates and the Governor of North Carolina, James Martin.

In 1774 the Assembly called a revolutionary congress who resolved to halt commercial intercourse with Britain and to establish a revolutionary government. On hearing the news of the Battle of Lexington in Massachusetts they started to make military preparations. The Governor of North Carolina fled to the safety of a ship anchored in the mouth of the Cape Fear River, the same place that Alan and Flora had arrived at a few years previously. And the Governor remained there for several years, subsisting on biscuit, wild cabbage, fish and oysters when his slaves could get them for him. And from there he directed the counter-revolution. He wanted to recruit a battalion of a thousand Highlanders. But which side would Highlanders like the MacDonalds of Kingsburgh join? They'd been involved on both sides in the Jacobite revolts.

Like many new arrivals to the colonists, Flora and Alan decided to join the Loyalist, or the British side, rather than the Patriots. Historians have been confused by this quite often when they've looked at the large number of Highlanders who chose to fight for the King only 30 years after Culloden, when many of them had fought against the King and the Government. So why did so many of them choose the Loyalist side? I think there's several reasons.

First of all, many of them had always been Loyalists or Hanoverians. Many North Carolinian Highlanders were from Argyll, for example, which for hundreds of years had been a supporter of the Government, including during the 45. And secondly, the Highlanders knew the consequences of being defeated by the British Government. They knew at first hand the

devastation that had been wrecked on the Highlands in reprisal for the Jacobite rebellion, and they may well have thought more than twice about rising against the British Government in the American context. And the third reason is that the main draw to the American colonies was land and they obtained this land in exchange for an oath of loyalty to the King, and they feared the loss of their land, especially those Highlanders who still had land back in Scotland.

It's possible that some actually came across as soldiers because they saw that political discontent was brewing. They thought there might be a war, and that might be a way to gain land in the Americas as well if they served the Government. And they might then, assuming the Government won, be rewarded with free land in the colonies. And the last reason, I think, is that many of the men had served in the British Army. Like Alan himself, many of them were half-pay officers, because within about 10 years of Culloden, Prime Minister William Pitt had recognised that the Highlanders, with their reputation as soldiers, would be perfect for the British Army's needs during, for example, the Seven Years' War, and the military became a major source of income for Highland families.

It was retired officers on half-pay, like Alan MacDonald, who provided leaders for the loyalist movement in the colonies. There were Highlanders who joined the Patriot side, and they tended to be people who had been in the colonies for longer. They were more invested in being in the Americas, and they shared a lot of the grievances of the other colonists there.

And indeed, we know that members of the Revolutionary Congress included men with Highland names like MacLean, MacAllister, Campbell, Hepburn, and Mackay, so there was no guarantee as to which way the Highlanders would go. And indeed, through the last half of 1775, both the Governor on the British side and the Patriots worked to secure adherence and to influence the Highlanders in their direction. And the Governor specifically called on Alan and his son-in-law Alexander, who had married Anne, to raise a militia.

The Governor wrote, *"I would most humbly beg leave to recommend Mr Alan MacDonald of Kingsburgh to be Major, and Captain Alexander MacLeod of the Marines, now on half-pay, to be First Captain, who besides being men of great worth and good character, have most extensive influence over the Highlanders here, great part of which are over their own names and families"*. So despite the fact that he'd only been in the country for a couple of years, Alan's taxman status, his family connections, and his military experience made him a leader. And this actually aroused jealousy in older leaders in the colony, like Farquhar Campbell, who ended up becoming a double agent.

So the British Army brought all of this into their organisation, and in late 1775, General Gage sent two officers to organise the North Carolina Highlanders into military units. And they were to be marched to the mouth of the Cape Fear, where they would get more weapons and join other units. The idea was that an easy victory could be gained in North Carolina, and then the loyalists in South Carolina could be raised to take the strategically important town of Charleston.

The standard was raised by the Highland leaders at Brunswick in January 1776. Now the ordinary Highlanders took some persuading to join. They had to be assured that their families and their property would be safe, and that any supplies seized by the enemy would be recompensed. But after about a week or so, about 1,500 men, 1,300 of whom were

Highlanders, and half of whom had weapons, were gathered to march, led by a General Macdonald. Allen Macdonald was a lieutenant colonel in this force, and his sons James and Alexander marched with them, though they would have been in their late teens by this stage. They crossed the Cape Fear at Campbellton to evade the Patriot leader, Colonel Moore, and they descended the east bank of the river until they encountered Patriot forces at Moore's Creek Bridge, which was 18 miles above Wilmington.

The Patriots had fortified an elevation over the bridge, they'd removed the floorboards of the bridge, and they'd greased the sleepers. It was going to be difficult to cross the river. The Loyalists faced another problem. General Macdonald was ill, and his deputy was a Colonel Donald Macleod, who was a young and inexperienced officer. The young officer was determined to attack, and he led from the front, with a first wave of Highland attackers behind him. But as they tried to cross the slippery beams of the bridge, they were shot from concealed positions. This first wave was swept away, and the rest of the Highlanders panicked and fled. Fifty Highlanders were killed at the Battle of Moore's Creek, and 880 were captured. Only two Patriots died.

Alan, James and Alexander were among the captured, although James was quickly released. The prisoners were moved from jail to jail, and their families were left unprotected. Flora did not know the fate of her husband and sons, as groups of Patriots raided, pillaged and burned Loyalist farms.

Eventually Flora did get news, but later on she described this fearsome time in this way. She wrote, *"Mr Macdonald and about 30 other gentlemen were dragged from jail to jail for 700 miles until lodged in Philadelphia jail, remaining in their hands for 18 months before exchanged"* Mrs Flora Macdonald, she was writing about herself in the third person, being all this time in misery and sickness at home, being informed that her husband and friends were all killed or taken, contracted a severe fever and was daily oppressed with straggling parties of plunderers from their army, and night robbers who more than once threatened her life, wanting a confession of where her husband's money was.

Her servants deserted her and such a state grew so very insolent that they were of no service to her. While the women of the community struggled with the uncertainties of living in contested territory, Flora continued to act out the role given her by her social class. She wrote, she went to visit and comfort the other poor gentlewomen whose husbands were prisoners with Mr Macdonald, as they blamed him as being the author of their misery in rising the Highlanders, and in one of these charitable visits fell from her horse and broke her right arm which confined her for months, the only physician in the colony being prisoner with her husband in Philadelphia jails, and having no comforter but a young boy, her son, the oldest Alexander, being prisoner with his father.

Alan's high rank in the army meant it was difficult for him to get his freedom on prisoner exchange. He spent 18 months in jail, but he finally secured a release and he travelled north, first to New York and thence up to Nova Scotia, which was a colony which had remained loyal to the British crown. His sons, joined by Rannels, the one who had been sent to Marines when they had emigrated, were already there and they all resumed military duty in the British army. But meanwhile, life was not getting any easier for Flora, her daughter Anne or her grandchildren on the North Carolina plantation.

In 1777, loyalists who refused to take an oath of fealty to the revolutionary government had their property confiscated and were banished, and one estimate was that two-thirds of the people of Cumberland County were preparing to leave that summer. They went to Florida, to the West Indies, to New York and then to Britain or Canada, especially Nova Scotia. Flora's half-sister, Annabella, seems to have stayed behind to nurse her father, one-eyed Hugh, who was nearing the end of his life.

Flora, Anne and the children sailed to Nova Scotia to join Alan and the other men. Flora was not in the best of health and the little party was encumbered by small children, but they had little choice. They abandoned their house and they made their way to Wilmington, boarding the ship which was still under guard, and they sailed north.

The voyage to New York was, quote, *"in the dead of winter, being in danger of our lives for the most of the voyage by a constant storm"*. But they had got out of North Carolina just in time, as in 1778 a three-year military campaign began in the colony.

They were going to go from New York up to Nova Scotia, and on this next voyage she describes it like this: *"Very nigh death's door by a violent disorder, the rough sea and long passage had brought on"*. She doesn't have much luck with sea voyages. *"At last landing in Halifax, we were allowed to stay there for eight days on account of my tender state. The ninth day set out for Windsor on the Bay of Minas, through woods and snow, and arrived there the fifth day"*. So after four years, Flora was reunited with Alan and her two sons, Charles and Alexander, who were in the military there. Anne, her daughter, and Anne's four children were reunited with her husband, Alexander.

But despite this happy family situation, Flora hated Nova Scotia with a passion, and was miserable throughout the dreadful winter of 1778 to 1779. The fort that Flora described was a strongly fortified defence at Windsor, where two rivers converged and flow into the Minas Basin. It was a square earthwork with ramparts and a wooden palisade enclosing barracks, officer quarters, brew house, bakery, kitchens, magazines, and a fortified block house. That's a picture of it, you can go and visit it today. And the area we're talking about is this area here. Am I right? Good.

So the fort protected the overland route from the Bay of Fundy to Halifax. And Flora accompanied her husband there, and endured the cramped officers' quarters and bitter cold of the Nova Scotia winter. She wrote, *"there we continued all winter and spring, covered with frost and snow, and almost starved with cold to death, it being one of the worst winters ever seen there"*.

It certainly would have been a shock to the system after having been in North Carolina. Life did improve when a friend arrived, but unfortunately this friend Susie died in childbirth in the spring, leaving a desolate husband and a friendless Flora. And she began to dread the thought of another winter. She was 57, where could she go now? Carolina had not been the dream that they had hoped for, and it was now full of enemies. Nova Scotia was cold and lonely, but back in the Hebrides there was no tack, money, or prospects. However, they did have relations there, and at this point this was more important to Flora than anything.

Alan agreed that she should return, and secured a berth for her on the 24-gun ship Lord Dunmore. The return migration of Scots in this period is not a topic well investigated. Perhaps many did want to return, but couldn't afford it, or didn't have any friends or family remaining there. Flora though did have the option, so she turned her face home.

If she was hoping for a quiet life, she should have known better. She wrote, *"I fixed my thoughts on seeing my native country", but in the passage spying a sail made ready for action, and in hurrying the ladies below to a place of safety, my foot skipping a step in the trap, fell and broke the dislocated arm in two. It was set with bandages over slips of wood, and I kept on my bed until we arrived in the Thames"*. I told you she didn't have much luck in sea voyages. Unfortunately, her safe arrival in London did not presage happier times.

War had caught up with her once again, and she learned of the death of Alexander, her son, who'd been injured at Moores Creek, and of Ranald, the marine, who was lost at sea near Brazil. Also showing how far around the world the Aberdeen folk got. She did make her way back to Skye eventually, and she had a happy reunion with her daughter Frances, who was now a teenager.

Flora lived with various relatives across Skye and South Uist, but she didn't have a home of her own, and she wasn't in good health. When the revolution was over, Alan acquired some land in Nova Scotia, and the couple were keen to get some compensation from the British government for their losses during the conflict. Alan had heard that such claims were more likely to be effective if you applied in person, and so he returned to London.

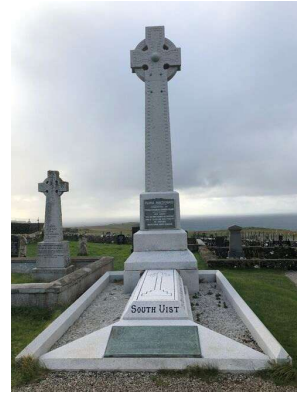
They were awarded less than tenth of what they had lost, and whatever his original intent had been, Alan never actually returned to his lands in Nova Scotia. Instead, he decided to rejoin Flora in the islands. And through the kind offices of friends, they made their last home at Penduin Farm in the north of Skye in 1787.

And that same year, Flora saw two of her sons settled. Charles married Isabella, a girl from Skye, and James took the lease of Flodigarry, where he'd been born, and he also married.

In popular mythology, Flora is often cast as a selfless patriot. But a letter sent near the end of her life tells perhaps an unsurprising but more bitter attitude to her experiences. She wrote, *"the cast in both my arms are living monuments of my sufferings and distresses, and the long jail confinement which my husband underwent has brought on such disorders that he has totally lost the use of his legs, so that I may fairly say that we have both suffered much in our person, family, and interest, as much as if not more than any two going under the name of refugees or loyalists, without the smallest recompense"*. So poor Alan was virtually unable to walk, and Flora was incessantly wracked by arthritis in both arms.

But they were sustained in their old age by friends and relatives, and the support of their son John's army salary as he served in the Imperial Army in India. Flora died in 1790. She was buried in the Kingsburgh plot at Kilmuir Cemetery, just two miles north of where she had landed with the prince that summer Sunday in 1746. She, like her mother-in-law, had

intended to be buried in one of the sheets he had used on his visit, but it seems impossible that the sheet could have survived all of her new world adventuring. Skye, though, gave Flora quite the send-off. Her body was taken from Penduin into Kingsburgh in the midst of a terrible storm of rain, thunder, and lightning. But on the day of the burial, there was a funeral cortege more than a mile in length, consisting of thousands of people. There were a dozen pipers who played a coronet, and 300 gallons of whisky. Alan died two years later at Kingsburgh, and was buried beside her.



Johnny returned from India in 1801 with a fortune, and he ordered that a memorial stone be erected over his parents' grave. So Flora's adventures were ambivalent. They resulted in her imprisonment, yet provided her with adventure, fame, and some financial gain in her youth. In her middle years, they wrecked her attempts to forge a new life, separated her from her family, and destroyed two of her sons. And in her old age, she suffered the consequences of her and Alan's war disabilities. But she certainly did a lot, and she certainly had a lot of adventures, and she saw many different parts of the world.

Although melodramatic, her experience, I think, reflected that of many Highland women caught up in the tumultuous events of rebellion, economic change, emigration, and war in the 18th century.

Thank you very much, Elizabeth, for that extraordinary story of Flora and Alan.