

**In Their Own Words:  
Gaelic Literature in North Carolina**

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An examination of Gaelic literature in North Carolina should begin with two observations. First, there was, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a population of many thousands of Gaelic-speaking Highland Scots in North Carolina (particularly in the Cape Fear Valley). Second, wherever there was a community of Gaels in this period, there was literary activity in a variety of genres and upon a variety of subjects.<sup>1</sup>

It follows from these two observations that there must have been a great deal of literary activity among the Gaelic-speakers in the communities of North Carolina. Very little of this material, of course, would be recognized as literature by most people today, as the modern notion of literature evokes the novel, the epic poem, and other long and complex written texts. "Literary activity" should be understood in the widest possible sense as "the verbal arts," including engaging in oral tradition as well as a written literary tradition.

Some of this oral literature could be classified as "folklore" inherited from previous generations. Included in this hypothetical canon are items such as proverbs, legends about family history, charms, blessings, and children's rhymes. The learned men of the community wrote church sermons in Gaelic, a few of which survive, and corresponded with relations in Scotland. They may have also composed poetry and other forms of narrative in the high registers of Gaelic. The common people, few of whom were literate in Gaelic, would have known a vast number of traditional songs, folk tales, and clan sagas, and augmented this corpus by composing narratives (in prose and poetic form) about local characters, community affairs and personal experiences.

What do we know of this literary activity? What evidence survives of this literary corpus to document the personal and communal life of the Gaelic communities of North Carolina? These issues will be addressed by giving a brief account of literacy among the North Carolina Highlanders, a summary of the links between Gaelic communities as evidenced by contemporary Gaelic periodicals, and a survey of the poetry attributed to poets in North Carolina.

The available evidence about Gaelic literature will also be examined in order to redress the imbalance in the way in which history about Scottish Highland immigrants is usually written. Until recently, most texts describing Scottish Highland immigrant communities were as unsympathetic to their human subjects as earlier documents written by English speakers in Britain. Presumably "semi-savage," native Scottish Gaels generally have been described (explicitly or implicitly) as impoverished materially, intellectually and culturally. Their own literature provides us with a very different perspective.

### Literacy and the Church

Like the rest of pre-Reformation Europe, only the élite of Gaelic Scotland had any reason to be literate. This literate élite was particularly focused around the church. The first book printed in any Celtic language was the translation of the *Book of Common Prayer*. It was translated into Classical Gaelic under the patronage of the Earl of Argyll and printed in 1567.<sup>2</sup>

The interaction between Gaelic culture and the church is complex, for it varies widely in different places and times. This is too large a subject to address in as short a paper as this. A few brief comments should be made, however. As the native Gaelic institutions of learning collapsed, men of learning and status naturally sought professional refuge in the church. The church provided a source of patronage for Gaelic intellectual activity, at least of certain types. It could also promote Gaelic education and literacy, if it served religious purposes and suited the contemporary political and cultural climate.

It appears that most of the Highlanders in the Carolinas who were literate in Gaelic learned what they knew in Scotland and the purposes of literacy remained largely religious. There does not appear to have been any institutional support for teaching Gaelic in the Carolinas, whether through church schools, state schools, or even private tuition. This fact is underscored by the dependence of Gaelic-speaking congregations upon ministers recruited from Scotland.

The leaders of the Argyll Colony (in the Cape Fear Valley of North Carolina) petitioned the Presbytery of Inverary in 1739 to provide them with "a clergyman that can speak the Highland language since from that country all our servants are to be, many of which cannot speak any other language."<sup>3</sup> That these congregations remained Gaelic-speaking for some time is confirmed by another request for an "Irish"-speaking minister in 1748,<sup>4</sup> and by the frustrations of the Rev. Hugh McAden, whose efforts in 1755 were futile as the congregations could not understand English.<sup>5</sup>

Rev. John Sinclair identified eight Gaelic-speaking ministers brought over from Scotland,<sup>6</sup> although he neglected to include Dugald Crawford on his list. Neither

did he mention John Bethune, who served as chaplain to General MacDonald's Highland army at the Battle of Moore's Creek.<sup>7</sup> Bethune seems to have been minister at Mt. Carmel Presbyterian Church prior to the Revolution.<sup>8</sup> The only American-born Gaelic-speaking ministers that I have identified in North Carolina are Murdoch MacMillan,<sup>9</sup> John Munroe,<sup>10</sup> (no first name given) Dunlop,<sup>11</sup> and James S. Black.<sup>12</sup> We may surmise that the Rev. John Sinclair's son (James, also a minister) spoke Gaelic, but I have not found any explicit evidence of this.

One of the consequences of the isolation of literacy in the religious sphere was that the secular arts generally could not take adequate advantage of, and be recorded by, the Gaelic literati. A further consideration is that the evangelical movement (which had tremendous influence in the Highlands) in general affected an increasingly austere and disdainful attitude towards the secular arts in the Gaelic world during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>13</sup> Whereas in Scotland a number of ministers became actively engaged in antiquarian pursuits aimed at preserving and extolling Gaelic secular literature, no parallel movement seems to have occurred in North America.

The reasons for this lack of enthusiasm in the immigrant context are still not entirely clear, but some preliminary observations may go some distance towards an explanation. The first is that widespread literacy in Gaelic in Scotland was largely to *due a set of circumstances that arose in the nineteenth century, particularly concerning missionary activity:*

"It was inevitable that the evangelists active in the Highlands would before long come face to face with the problem of mass illiteracy. [...] It was the distribution of Gaelic tracts by the itinerant preachers, however, which first introduced to the highland population the concept of Gaelic literacy."<sup>14</sup>

Thus it was that educational, social, and religious circumstances in nineteenth-century Gaelic Scotland led to a drive towards literacy. These were circumstances that must not have been paralleled in American immigrant communities, where large-scale contact between Gaelic and Anglophone communities was earlier and more deeply penetrating than in the Highlands.<sup>15</sup> There must have also been important differences in the religious and educational institutions in North Carolina, and the context in which they operated, that inhibited the desire to develop Gaelic literacy. That these people were generally supportive of education is attested in the statements of a Scottish visitor to the area circa 1868:

"They have more schools than I found in any other country district in the South, and they boast of having helped North Carolina to produce more teachers and ministers than any other Southern State."<sup>16</sup>

The Ossianic controversy was a major stimulus to literary antiquarianism in Scotland, as many Scots felt it important to defend the literary effusions of James Macpherson. A number of Moderate ministers were particularly industrious collectors of traditional Gaelic verse, in an attempt to vindicate the claims of Gaelic's venerable literary past. The Ossianic controversy was probably not of any great consequence to American congregations or their ministers.<sup>17</sup> Without the need to assert Gaelic's literary merit in the face of anti-Ossianic arguments, there may have been little reason to become conscious of Gaelic literature as anything but ephemeral oral performance art. But these initial suppositions must be left for further detailed investigation.

Religious tracts, documents and memorates (anecdotes given from the memory of an informant) give us important information about the uses of Gaelic literacy and the perceptions of the Gaelic language in relation to the church in North Carolina.

A booklet of sermons was printed in Gaelic in 1791 by a press in Fayetteville. It was written by the Reverend Dugald Crawford, a native of the isle of Arran who came to preach to the Scots of the upper Cape Fear Valley after 1781.<sup>18</sup> The fact that he deemed it worthwhile to print such a booklet obviously suggests that it would find an audience of literate Gaels. The following is a transcription of the foreword to his booklet (first as given in the original Gaelic orthography, then in English translation):

### Original

#### An Roimh-radh

*Do choimhthional an Raft Swamp, & na coimhthionail eile an ann cundaiddh Mhic Rob s' an aite Mhr. M<sup>c</sup>Cai.*

Tha mi anois o chionn seachd Bliadhn aig cur eolas oirbh, gu cinnteach cha be an droch eolas e, gun cheilg, feudai mi a radh gu'm bheil moran n'ar measg a tha n'ar mais agus n'ar cliu do'n chinne daoinne, nach 'eil ar beatha na hadhbhar gealltachd, ma tha giulan beusach, geamnai, riaghailteach, agus caithe beatha, maiseach ag gairm agus ag coineadh beannachadh Dhia agus meas dhaoine, gu cinnteach cha n fhead sibhse bhi folamh. Gu tugadh Dia gras dhuibh, chum buanachdain daonnan ann an slighe na firinn, chum 's

nuair a chriochnuicheas ar beatha gu'm bi geatai ionraiceis air na fhosgladh gu reidh d'ar n anamaibh agus sibh ar ar curann an seilbh air sonnas siorruidh; an 't shearmoin so ge'd a chuaidh a loibhairt ann ar 'n eisdeachd, gidheadh feadai ni-eiginn tachairt air an fhear leughai a ghairmeas e dhachthigh a chum amharc a steach air fein a chudthromacha a chrioch dheirionnach, ma tha aon smuaintigh iom-chui na freagrach don run so ra fhaotin cha bhi mise gun duais, si mo ghui gu'm fuigh sibh beannachadh Dhia 'n so 's na dheidh so.

Air Seirbheiseach Umhal

D. Crauford

### Translation

#### The Foreword

*To the Raft Swamp congregation & the other congregations in Robeson County and [?] at Master MacKay's place*

I have been getting to know you for seven years now, and it has been a great experience, free of evil-doing, and I can say that there are many among you who add to the beauty and honor of the human race.<sup>19</sup> Life is no cause for dread, if one's conduct is virtuous, sober and orderly, and one's way of life is pleasing, calling and crying out for the blessing of God and the respect of people, there is certainly no way that you will be empty-handed. May God grant you grace, so that you may always prosper in the path of truth, and so that when your life comes to an end, the gates of righteousness will be opened smoothly for your souls and you will have secured everlasting happiness. Although this sermon was delivered for you in your presence, nonetheless, the reader may encounter something herein that may speak to him so that he may look upon himself and take his life's end seriously. If there is a single idea to be found here that is relevant to this purpose, I will not be without a reward; it is my wish that you will have God's blessing now and hereafter.

Your humble servant

D. Crauford

This introduction suggests that the booklet is a reminder of Crawford's sermons, a written mnemonic for a previous public performance. Many of the metaphors of the introduction itself are aural, referring to crying out to God, winning the praise of fellow citizens, and having the text "speak" to the reader.

A number of Gaelic Bibles owned by Carolina immigrants still survive. To take just one example, although the McLeod family had immigrated by 1777, the family Bible was not purchased until 1807.<sup>20</sup> This gap of thirty years confirms that Gaelic was still a prestige language as far as the Gospel was concerned. William Caudill informs me, however, that there are no surviving Gaelic family Bibles in North Carolina known to contain any handwritten notes in Gaelic, only in English. This is a rather disappointing remark, given that we would expect Gaelic Bibles to be a sign of Gaelic literacy and provide ample space for the reader to scribble something inspirational or historical in the same language.

There only seems to be one surviving gravestone in the Carolinas upon which Gaelic can be found.<sup>21</sup> The text may confirm the gap between religious and secular support for Gaelic in mid nineteenth-century North Carolina. Captain Angus McDiarmid was a native of Islay, Scotland, and died in 1856 at only 24 years of age. All of the text on his grave concerning his name, dates, and origins are in English; only the Bible quote, written in smaller text at the bottom of the stone, is in Gaelic.<sup>22</sup> Of course, one sees a similar discrepancy between the usage of English and Gaelic on the gravestones in the contemporary Highlands, where communities were almost entirely Gaelic-speaking (though increasingly bilingual), so this may not signify anything in terms of the demographics of Gaelic speech in North Carolina.

One of the most beloved collections of Gaelic religious verse was Pàdruig Grand's *Dàin Spioradail*, first published in 1815 in Scotland. A copy of this, which was imported to North Carolina from Scotland, is now in the possession of the Presbyterian Historical Foundation (in Montreat, North Carolina). Although it has been claimed that an edition of this was reprinted in North Carolina,<sup>23</sup> there does not seem to be any evidence of this.<sup>24</sup> This would once again confirm the declining support for, and development of, Gaelic at an institutional level in North Carolina.

To offer a contrast to the texts written by literate church élite, consider a charm apparently carried to North Carolina by immigrant Dugald McFarland around the year 1750.<sup>25</sup> It invokes the protection of St. Columba and the fairies, probably to protect its possessor during the hazardous sea voyage. Despite the fact that this charm was written in a terrible scrawl using poor orthography, Ronald Black of the University of Edinburgh has recently deciphered it. The person who wrote this likely lacked extensive formal education, and it is doubtful that he was a churchman, given

the content of the text and the poor writing skills demonstrated by it. This charm is, however, an important reminder that, despite the piety of the Presbyterians of Scottish descent in North Carolina today, the original immigrants were not far removed from less orthodox beliefs and practices.<sup>26</sup>

Despite the dearth of recorded texts, we should expect that, like any Gaelic community, the command of language was highly valued. Like many other peoples, Highlanders loved a quick turn of phrase, a sharp retort, and a witty aphorism, which, once coined, would make frequent appearance in daily conversation. Eloquence was a sign of intelligence and a means of persuasion.<sup>27</sup> This is illustrated in the context of Gaelic North Carolina by anecdotes such as the following incident describing a sparring match between Gaelic-speaking lawyers:

Mr. Banks, the State Solicitor [...] finding that the jurymen were all Highlanders, addressed them in Gaelic. Not a word was intelligible to the Judge, but the jury were visibly delighted, and it seemed certain that Mr. Banks would carry his case. It happened, however, that Mr. Leech, the prisoner's counsel, was even a better Gaelic scholar than Mr. Banks, though nobody in court was aware of it [...] He first upbraided Mr. Banks for his bad Gaelic, and declared that if he heard one of his own children speaking the ancient and noble language so ungrammatically he would take the law to him. He then took up the case, made a magnificent speech in Gaelic, carried the enthusiastic jury with him, and got a unanimous verdict for the prisoner.<sup>28</sup>

Apocryphal or not, one could hardly find a stronger statement about the esteem given to those with a mastery of the Gaelic language. There is a strange irony in the threat to punish children speaking bad Gaelic, given that so many teachers in schools in Highland Scotland at that time dealt corporal punishment to children who dared to speak any Gaelic at all.

The transition from the overwhelming dominance of Gaelic to the total conquest of English speech in North Carolina, however, was probably gradual and non-violent. The social and economic transactions between the Gaelic community and English-speaking neighbors no doubt contributed to this process as much as formal educational institutions that had always preferred English over Gaelic. The church also facilitated this linguistic migration by promoting English as the prestige language to the younger generation, while still supporting the spiritual needs of older Gaelic monoglots.<sup>29</sup> This is suggested by a mid nineteenth-century account of the Gaelic community:

At the time Mr. Campbell labored in Cumberland [mid 1700s], the larger number of the people used the Gaelic language; some could use both that and the English [...] Mr. Campbell, to accommodate his hearers, preached two sermons each Sabbath, one in English and one in Gaelic; this he did in all three of his churches. In a few congregations, in the Presbytery of Fayetteville, this practice of preaching in the two languages is still continued. The influence of this language has been great upon the Scotch settlements in Carolina. There have been some disadvantages attending it, and the language is fast passing away. But for a long time it was a bond of union, and a preservation of those feelings and principles peculiar to the Scotch emigrants, many of which ought to be preserved for ever. The change has been so gradual in putting off the Gaelic, and adopting the English, that the people of Cumberland have suffered as little, from a change of their language, as any people that have ever undergone that unwelcome process.<sup>30</sup>

### Evidence from Gaelic Periodicals

Gaelic periodicals printed in Scotland were finding a wide circulation in the 1830s and 1840s, and these had moral, religious, and cultural reform as recurring themes. The periodical titled *Fear-Tathaich nam Beann* ('the Mountain Visitor') must have had readers in the United States. This is evident because of the periodical's strong abolitionist stance, which was directed towards its readers, some of which were obviously corresponding with the editor. Take this excerpt, for example:

*Bho cheann eadar fichead agus deich bliadhna fichead roimhe seo, chaidh mòran de na Gàidheil do Stàidean America. Thuinich a' chuid mhòr dhiubh seo mu na Carolinas, cearn 's a' bheil tràil-leachd ro chumanta; agus do bhrìgh gur h-e "beus na tuath air an bìthear a nìthear," thòisich na Gàidheil uigh air n-uigh ri ceannach agus ri àrach thràilleann coltach ri'n coimhearsnaich. Tha mar an ceudna mòran de na Gàidheil òga tha dol do Chanada Uachdrach a' sgoileadh a sìos air an leitir fharsaing sin a tha ruigheachd o loch mòr Mhichigan gu New Orleans; agus gun fhèdraich co-dhiubh tha e ceart an co-chreutairean a ghnàthachadh mar bhrùidean no nach eil, cho luath 's a tha e 'nan comas tha iad a' ceannach fear-ainn agus thràilleann mar a tha muinntir eile deanamh. Mar seo, tha*



*sinn a' faicinn gum bheil mòran de na Gàidheil air an amladh 's an olc uamhasach seo. Cuimhnicheadh gach aon diubh a leughas na duilleagan seo, nach urrainn doibh nas faide a thagradh mar lethsgheul gun robh iad aineolach air a chionta throm a tha 'na luidhe aig an dorsan.<sup>31</sup>*

Between twenty and thirty years ago, many Gaels went to the United States. Most of them settled around the Carolinas, an area in which slavery is still very common, and because "people take on the manners of those around them," the Gaels began, bit by bit, to buy and raise slaves like their neighbors. Similarly, many of the young Gaels who are going to Upper Canada are spreading out down along the enormous slope of land that runs from the great lake of Michigan to New Orleans; and without questioning whether or not it is right to treat their fellow human beings like brutes, as soon as they are able, they buy land and slaves like the other people do. We see, therefore, that many Gaels are involved in this terrible evil. Let each one of you who read these pages remember that you can no longer claim as an excuse that you were ignorant of the heavy sin that lies at your own doors.

Note, first of all, that the writer is aware of the movement and activities of Gaels after they settled in the United States. Second, he expects that his admonishment in print will reach them. Both of these observations suggest a continuing link between Gaels in Scotland and the Carolinas. In 1871 a very successful and influential Gaelic periodical based in Scotland called *An Gàidheal* began its career. The magazine had agents seeking subscribers in a number of regions of North America, and one of these was in Lumberton, North Carolina.<sup>32</sup> This must have been the Rev. John C. Sinclair, who, at one time, was minister to the freed slaves of Harnett County.<sup>33</sup>

The editor was obviously interested in the descendents of the Gaelic settlers, however. He wrote a letter to a man in North Carolina inquiring about the old Highland settlements, and perhaps surprisingly, this unnamed person forwarded the query to the Rev. John C. Sinclair, who was then a resident of Philadelphia. Only a segment of Sinclair's letter is printed in the "English Department," which includes the following statements:

The old race is gone and their descendents have given up, in a great degree, the customs and manners of the old Gaels. The ancient

Celtic language is nearly dead, except with the few families who arrived within the last thirty years. [...] There is no Gaelic preached in the Carolinas now, and not likely to be in the future.<sup>34</sup>

While the reported death of Gaelic in the Carolinas was exaggerated, there is no doubt that the general pattern of rapid linguistic decline was correct by this time.<sup>35</sup> Among other information given in his letter, Sinclair lists the ministers who had served the Gaelic congregations of North Carolina. A brief response to this appeared in August of 1872 from Niall Caimbeul (apparently in Scotland), who augmented Sinclair's list of ministers by adding Dugald Crawford. There are a couple of noteworthy features to this transaction of letters. First, despite the fact that this newspaper was overwhelmingly in Gaelic, these two letters were in English. Second, no information came directly out of the Carolinas.<sup>36</sup>

Another example of the kind of second-hand information to appear from time to time in English-medium Scottish sources is the following information from a minister's Canadian travel notes:

The Carolina Highlanders formed a large and distinctly Gaelic settlement up to very recent times. Mr Duncan Stewart, of Detroit,<sup>37</sup> informed me that he visited them as recently as 1860, when he found them occupying 'four counties back off the Cape Fear River.' He then found amongst them large congregations of masters and their slaves, who regularly worshipped in the Gaelic language [...] But Gaelic is no longer preached in this famous Highland settlement.<sup>38</sup>

The only all-Gaelic periodical published in North America was *Mac-Talla*, based in Cape Breton. It began in May 1892 and had a readership throughout Canada and the western and northern United States. In the November 25, 1893 issue, the editor asked if any readers had any information regarding the Gaels of South Carolina, noting that it seemed very hard to get any information out of that part of the world. This, of course, confirms that the links between Gaelic communities had been broken by this time.

A reply from the noted tradition bearer *Ailean an Ridge* MacDonald appeared two weeks later (December 9, 1893). He contributed an anecdote about MacDonalds who were sent as convicts to South Carolina in the late seventeenth century, as well as Lochaber MacDonalds evicted to South Carolina for their part in Jacobite insurrection. Furthermore, he mentions a recent contact with the community there:

*Thachair Èireannach ormsa anns na Stàitean 's a' bhliadhna 1851 a bha gle eolach 's a' chearn 's a' bheil sliochd nan Gàidheal ud a' comhnaidh. Bha iad aig an am sin ann an àite air leth leotha fhein, agus a cheart uiread Gàidhlig aca 's a bh'aig an athraichean ann am Baideanach. Cha robh ach beagan bhliadhnaichean on sguir na fir a chosg na feilichean beaga.*

I met an Irishman in the States in the year 1851 who was very familiar with the area in which the progeny of those Gaels were living. At that time they were in an area by themselves and spoke as much Gaelic as their ancestors in Badenoch. It was only a few years previous that the men had stopped wearing the small kilt.

This is an interesting anecdote that may be useful for historical purposes to some degree, but it smacks of hyperbole. That they would have been able to maintain Gaelic for over a hundred years in its original purity is hard to believe, and unless there is substantial evidence otherwise, it would be unlikely that they would continue to wear kilts. Thus this anecdote, the only response to the query about South Carolina, suggests that folklore was taking over from fact.

A subsequent contribution appeared in the newspaper three weeks later (December 30), although this time the correspondent,<sup>29</sup> a resident of Prince Edward Island, discussed the Highland settlement of North Carolina. He mentions the poet Iain mac Mhurchaidh and gives a version of the song *Tha mi sgith dhe'n fhògar seo* and the story behind it. He also reiterates some general background information about Flora MacDonald and talks about how loyal the Highlanders were to their beloved Britain. Here we see the influence of romantic stories in English. He also mentions the letter from Sinclair in *An Gàidheal* some 21 years earlier, demonstrating his familiarity with written sources. He counters Sinclair's claim of the death of Gaelic with the following comments:

*Ma tha sin mar sin tha e a' dearbhadh gu bheil an sluagh uile ionnsuichte ann am Beurla, ach chan eil e dearbhadh gum beil iad air an Gaelic a leigeil air dicheumhne. Bha e air aithris domh gun robh Gàidheal a mhuintir C[ape] B[reton] air thuras tro phairt de'n dùthaich ud, o chionn uine nach eil gle fhad air ais, agus air dha tadhal ann an tigh tuathanaich ri taobh an rathaid dh'iarr e deoch ann am Beurla. Dh'eirich boirionnach a bha stigh a thoirt da an ni*

*a dh'iarr e. Bha sean-bhean na suidhe taobh thall an t-seomair agus ars ise, "Faighnich dheth an gabh e deoch bhainne." Nuair chuala an Ghaidheal bochd a' Ghaelic 's e air aineol, thug a chridhe leum le toileachadh 's air ball fhreagair e an Gaelic, "Gabhaidh 's mi a ghabhas agus taing do'n te a thairgeadh domh e." Fhuair e sin, is biadh is cuid na h-oidhche agus gach caoimhneas eile a b'urrainn iad a nochdadh da a thaobh gum bu Ghaidheal e a thuigeadh 's a labhradh Gaelic.*

If that is true, then it proves that all of the people have learnt English, but it does not prove that they have all forgotten their Gaelic. It was told to me that a Gael, one of the Cape Bretoners, was on a trip through that part of the country, some time not very long ago, and after he had called on a farmer's house at the side of the road, he asked in English for a drink. The woman who was inside arose to give him what he had asked for. There was an old woman sitting on the far side of the room, and she said, "Ask him if he will take a drink of milk." When the poor Gael heard Gaelic, while he was in foreign parts, his heart jumped for joy, and he immediately answered in Gaelic, "Oh, I certainly will, and thanks to the woman who offered it to me." So he had it, as well as food and lodging for the night, and every other kindness that they were able to offer him, since he was a Gael who could understand and speak Gaelic.

On the face of it, this is a very interesting anecdote which confirms the centrality of language in defining what a Gael is. However, it too bears the mark of folklore and cannot be used as historical evidence without caution and reservation. The person in question is an anonymous Cape Bretoner who was traveling in an unspecified place at some indefinite time in the past. Furthermore, the structure and motifs of the anecdote are what we would expect of a folktale: the old woman sitting in the corner; the show of hospitality in the traditional form; and the close association between language and milk, the essence of life exchanged between generations.<sup>40</sup> One final letter about the Gaels of North Carolina appeared in the March 17, 1894 issue of *Mac-Talla*. It seems that a reader of *Mac-Talla*, who was resident in Albany, New York, notified a friend in North Carolina about the interest in the Highland settlements there, and this informant returned the letter to his friend in New York, who then passed it back to *Mac-Talla*. This informant was none other than Hamilton

MacMillan, a noted local historian and academic<sup>41</sup> who was nicknamed *the Red Springs Scotchman*.<sup>42</sup>

The letter begins with a short account of the Gaelic settlement of North Carolina, and concludes with the following bits of information:

*Thainig a rithist moran Ghaidheal a-mach 's na bliadhnaichean 1804 us 1805. Uaithe sin cha d' thainig ach aireamh bheag. Shuidhich a' chuid bu mhò dhiubh-san a thainig a mach an dèigh Blàr Chùl- fhodair aig Elizabethtown, far am bheil mòran de'n sliochd gus an latha 'n diogh. Tha sliochd nan Albannach glè lion-mhor ann an Siorramachdan Moore, Harnett, Cumberland, Bladen, Robeson, agus Richmond. Tha mi creidsin gu bheil mu chòig mìle deug voter 'nam measg.*

*Tha Ghàilig [fhathast] air a labhairt le moran anns an stait ach 's i mo bharail gu bheil an aireamh a dol nas lugha. An searmon Gàilig mu dheireadh a chuala mis' air a shearmonachadh b' ann Eaglais Ghalatin an Siorramachd Chumberland 's a' bhliadhna 1860 [...]*

*Tha mi sgrìobhadh so ann an cabhaig ach theagamh gu'n téid agam air tuilleadh fiosrachaidh a thoirt dhuit uair-eigin eile.*

Many Gaels came out later in the years 1804 and 1805. After that, only a small number came. The majority of those who came after Culloden settled in Elizabethtown, where many of their descendents remain to this day. People of Scottish descent are numerous in Moore, Harnett, Cumberland, Bladen, Robeson, and Richmond counties. I estimate that they include fifteen thousand voters [...]

Gaelic is still spoken by many people in the state but I believe that the number is declining. The last Gaelic sermon that I heard was preached in the Galatin church in Cumberland County in the year 1860.

I'm writing this in a hurry, but I can probably send you more information at another time.

Unfortunately, the correspondent never sent further information. This letter seems to be the only information that ever came to *Mac-Talla* from North Carolina. It is not clear if MacMillan wrote his information in Gaelic, or if he wrote it in English and

the New York intermediary or *Mac-Talla* translated it. The material in the letter does appear to me to be a genuine record of what a North Carolinian of Gaelic stock understood about his people's history. It is significant that he understands the importance of Gaelic, and the prestige conferred upon the language by being used in church services.

A poem composed by the Confederate soldier John MacLean<sup>43</sup> is the most significant proof of the Gaelic poetic activity of North Carolina. MacLean's family emigrated from the Ashpole Church area of Robeson County, North Carolina, in the 1820s to Thomas County, Georgia. He seems to have been a second- or third-generation American. His community was obviously engaged in the Gaelic oral tradition, given that he must have learned his poetic skills orally and that the poem was meant to be performed in a *cèilidh* setting.

The poem appears to be an original composition, a four-stanza love poem of the sort common in Scotland. A younger suitor, Seonaidh, is turned down in favor of an older and no doubt wealthier paramour. The woman is described as stunningly beautiful, and so Seonaidh loves her regardless and waits for the day that the old man, Robert, dies.

Someone competent in Gaelic orthography wrote the text of the poem, and it would be useful to know where and how he acquired this skill. The poetry is what we would expect from a village poet of the era, with the use of literary conventions and language that do not differentiate it from poetry from anywhere in the Scottish Gàidhealtachd. His woman is praised according to Gaelic standards of beauty, and she is even pictured dancing the Reel of Tulloch.<sup>44</sup> Whether this is simply a stock cliché meant to emphasize her ethnicity or was a statement of fact is, of course, impossible to say at this point.

It should be mentioned that traces of Gaelic oral tradition could still be found in North Carolina in the twentieth century, albeit mostly in fragmentary form in English. The Frank Brown Collection of North Carolina Folklore was recorded by Professor Brown from the late 1910s through the early 1940s. It reflects, of course, a diverse selection of ethnic origins, especially English, German, Scotch-Irish and African, but there are also elements of Gaelic influence.

An early study of the proverbs of the collection, for example, found three proverbs of certain Highland origin.<sup>45</sup> So far as I know, no similar survey has been done on other genres of this folklore collection to identify fragments of Gaelic tradition, but they must surely exist in this and other collections.

### **The Elusive Iain mac Mhurchaidh**

The most renowned Gaelic poet associated with North Carolina, however, is Iain mac Mhurchaidh, called "John MacRae" in English. He is a known historical

figure, a native of Kintail who immigrated to North Carolina in about 1774.<sup>46</sup> He was certainly a gifted poet, and was probably a close relative of the scribe of an important Gaelic manuscript of the seventeenth century. There are a total of 33 poems attributed to him,<sup>47</sup> four of which were supposed to have been composed in North Carolina. The most famous of these American poems is *Dèan Cadalan Sàmhach*, a song you can even hear on the CDs of popular Gaelic music bands.

There is reason to be skeptical about his authorship of all four of these pieces, however. Very little tangible evidence survives about the specifics of Gaelic literature in North Carolina. We do not have a list of the songs that people composed or even sang. Most everything we have survived and was recorded in Scotland long after the fact, and after a long circulation in the oral tradition.

In order to determine the probability that Iain mac Mhurchaidh actually composed this poetry, we should take into consideration:

1. the earliest recorded texts of each poem;
2. the manuscripts in which these texts occur;
3. the people who recorded these manuscripts, their relationships and interdependencies;
4. the language of the poetry (i.e., lexicon and dialect-specific clues);
5. how the poetry fits within larger Gaelic oral tradition;
6. the contemporary significance of the poetry for those from whom it was recorded.

According to a tradition relayed by Colin Chisholm, Iain's songs were taken back to Kintail by a man who was known as *Fear na leth-làimh* ("the one-armed man"), having lost an arm fighting in America as a Loyalist soldier.<sup>48</sup> There is no doubt that many songs went back and forth between Scotland and America via the oral tradition alone.<sup>49</sup> By the time that the songs attributed to Iain mac Mhurchaidh were committed to paper, in the second half of the nineteenth century, some hundred years had elapsed since they would have been composed.

Consider the earliest recorded sources for this poetry, particularly when they were collected. These are summarized in the following chart:

Text	Date	Source area
Dornie MSS	c. 1860 - 1897	Kintail?
<i>Celtic Magazine</i>	1880s (& 1840s?)	?
<i>TGSI</i>	1886	Dornie MSS + ?
<i>Mac-Talla</i>	Aug 13, 1892; 1893	Cape Breton?; PEI
<i>History Clan MacRae</i>	1890-1899	Previous sources + Kintail?

The Dornie Manuscripts are a collection of Gaelic songs made by Captain Alexander Matheson between circa 1860 and 1897 mostly, we assume, from informants in the Kintail area. Some of them are quite old and certainly record genuine people and events. This source is the largest collection of songs ascribed to Iain mac Mhurchaidh, containing 29 different songs, some of them recorded in multiple variations. For reasons stated below, these poems appear to have been recorded prior to 1883. Without further information about the informants and their sources, however, it is difficult to come to any solid conclusions about the origins and authenticity of this material.

A total of 14 pieces were contributed to *The Celtic Magazine* between 1882 and 1883. Most of these were sent in by Colin Chisholm,<sup>50</sup> who claimed to have known the songs in the mid-1840s when they were supposed to have been recorded by John MacKenzie. These were claimed to have been among the poems meant to make it into a new edition of his classic poetry collection *Sàr Obair nam Bard Gàidhealach*, but were tragically lost. Thus, it is implied that the songs as contributed were as Chisholm himself knew them c. 1840. *The Celtic Magazine* had a wide circulation in Britain and North America, and, in fact, three of Iain mac Mhurchaidh's songs were contributed by Farquhar D. MacDonell, a Lochaber poet who had relocated to New Zealand.<sup>51</sup>

Colin Chisholm supplied four song texts, in versions slightly different from those in *The Celtic Magazine*, in a paper read in 1885 to the Gaelic Society of Inverness. The Gaelic Society of Inverness has always been a very prestigious organization, and the organization's journal, *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness* (TGSI), has always had a wide circulation among learned Gaels. We might expect that the appearance of the songs here and the information about them would have inhibited the divergence of versions in the oral tradition, due to the authority of the written word and literate Gaels who had access to it.

Colin Chisholm was an acquaintance of Captain Matheson, the compiler of the Dornie MSS, although they appear to have had a falling out.<sup>52</sup> Chisholm had a loan of volumes 3 and 4 of the Dornie MSS by the autumn of 1885. Captain Matheson probably became angry with Chisholm over the uncredited appearance of Dornie MSS material in TGSI. In self-defense, Chisholm sent him a letter listing poems that appear in the Dornie MSS but which were printed in TGSI *before* he had access to them.<sup>53</sup> The last date given next to a poem in the list is 1883, suggesting that Chisholm got a hold of the Dornie MSS in 1883 or shortly thereafter. On face value, this implies that his earlier contributions to *The Celtic Magazine* in 1882 were independent of influence from the Dornie MSS.

There is some reason to suspect that this might not be the case. Chisholm remained anonymous in the 1882 *Celtic Magazine*. Only in 1886 was it stated, "Mr.



Chisholm, who, at the time, did not wish his name to be given, supplied us in 1882 with all that he then knew..." Why the secrecy, when he was, previous to and after this date, supplying texts to TGSI? Was he already afraid of drawing the ire of Captain Matheson? Did this cause him to make deliberate but minor alterations from the texts as he found them in the Dornie MSS, so as to make them appear unique? Did his need to validate himself as an authority also encourage him to claim that he already knew the texts in 1840 and supplied them to John Mackenzie?

Given these circumstances, the most cautious and skeptical conclusion is that there is only one reliable early source for the North Carolina Iain mac Mhurchaidh poetry, that of the Dornie MSS. All later texts may have been derived from or influenced by them. Alternatively, if we risk trusting in Chisholm, he may have had independent sources for the texts that appeared in *The Celtic Magazine*, although he seems to have "fixed" his TGSI contribution by reference to the Dornie MSS to more closely match the texts as they were recorded there. As he points out in his letter to Captain Matheson, he did actually contribute a number of poems to TGSI that happened to be in the Dornie MSS but he had obtained them independently.

As Chisholm is such a central figure in this intrigue, a few biographical details<sup>54</sup> are in order. Colin Chisholm was born at Lietry, a township in Glencannich, Strathglass, in 1806. He was the eldest of a family of eleven sons and four daughters. In 1835 employment took him to Liverpool; he transferred to London in 1842; he retired to Inverness in 1876. He was President of the London Gaelic Society from 1869 to 1876 and was an active member of the Gaelic Society of Inverness, to which he contributed a number of papers that appeared in its volumes. Chisholm passed away on 29 November 1895.

In the preface to his *History of the Clan Macrae*,<sup>55</sup> the Reverend Alexander Macrae (curate of St. Helens in London) says that work on this book began "as a recreation during a brief trip to Kintail in August, 1890." Appendix J provides Gaelic poetry associated with the Macraes, including one of the Iain mac Mhurchaidh poems discussed in this paper. Reverend Macrae lists many people who aided him in his work and among them are some of the top Gaelic scholars of the day. Also listed is Captain Matheson, although their friendship was limited to only "a few weeks before his death." Given this learned company, we should assume that the previously printed versions of songs had an influence on those printed in this book. The Reverend's own knowledge of Gaelic may have been limited, given that he credits his mother for "help in the translations given in Appendix J." This may signal a limited ability to obtain new sources from oral informants, and a reliance upon his scholarly helpers.

Before addressing the song texts themselves, it would be appropriate to offer a little background to the Gaelic song tradition. Songs were meant to part of the nor-

mal life of the community, to express communal experience and values. As Gaelic poet Domhnall MacAmhlaigh has explained:

Gaelic traditional poetry was in the main one of celebration and participation. The poet produced an artefact which enabled his audience to participate in their culture; to act out culturally reinforcing roles. The poetry was largely oral-based; much of it was meant to be sung. In such circumstances innovation was not at a very high premium. The verse had to make an immediate impact, and skill in versification and verbal wit culminating in the well-wrought memorable phrase was therefore the basic requirement.<sup>56</sup>

It was commonplace for poets to fashion a new song by recycling a familiar chorus and melody from an old song. Unless tradition bearers pay careful attention, of course, this can cause song versions to be confused, but this system of reuse did have the advantage of offering appropriate song models to would-be rhymesters and to facilitate fast memorization by minimizing the amount of new information. This scheme of creating new songs by successive development and “mutation” of older songs blurs the modern distinctions between transmission and composition, and between tradition-bearer and composer, as we will shortly see.

### **The Renowned Lullaby**

Let us begin with the famous lullaby, *Dèan Cadalan Sàmhach* (‘Sleep peacefully’).<sup>57</sup> The earliest record of this song in association with Iain mac Mhurchaidh comes from Dornie Manuscript 3,<sup>58</sup> which is prefaced, “*Duanag altruim, le Iain Mac Mhurchaidh dha ’phaisde, ann an Carolina-ma-thuath* [A lullaby by John MacRae to his child in North Carolina].” This, we will assume for the moment, was collected in Kintail between 1860 and 1883.

The Dornie MSS version is very close to the version given by Colin Chisholm in TGS1.<sup>59</sup> The song was also printed anonymously in *Mac-Talla*<sup>60</sup> in a version slightly independent of the previous two and similarly credited to Iain mac Mhurchaidh. To be as skeptical as possible, I would conjecture that the only “original” ascription of the song to Iain mac Mhurchaidh was that given by the informant who supplied it to the Dornie MSS, that Chisholm simply followed the information he found therein, and that Jonathon Mackinnon (editor of *Mac-Talla*) further credited Iain mac Mhurchaidh based on the information in *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness*.

There are reasons from internal evidence alone to doubt that Iain mac Mhurchaidh was the author.<sup>61</sup> These reasons are, in summary:

1. men did not normally sing lullabies,
2. there do not appear to be any examples of genuine lullabies composed by men in Gaelic traditional song,<sup>62</sup>
3. the Gaelic term *pàisde* (which appears in the "standard" versions of the song) refers in Gaelic to a child generically, but is specifically feminine in the Kintail dialect of Gaelic, so it is not possible that Iain would refer to himself as a girl-child.

Looking at the corpus of Gaelic lullabies, it seems likely that this song was based on a generic refrain to which individual mothers would improvise their own verses. This hypothesis is supported by the appearance of a lullaby with a chorus containing the same opening line in a collection of Gaelic lullabies.<sup>63</sup> This is a fairly generic song, and we might expect that the more dramatic American setting eclipsed the less colorful one, especially as it would have become attached to oral narratives about the many family relations who immigrated to America. As Iain mac Mhurchaidh was one of the most prominent men of Kintail to have gone to the Carolinas (at least from the standpoint of the Gaelic community), it would not be surprising for an anonymous lullaby set in America to be credited to him.<sup>64</sup>

Alexander Fraser, during a trip to Bruce County, Ontario in the early 1900s, collected a song attributed to J. B. MacDonald, originally from Tiree but latterly a resident of Tiverton, Ontario. This song contains a quatrain nearly identical to the standard version of *Dèan Cadalan Sàmhach*, beginning "*S ann an America tha sinn an-dràsta...*"<sup>65</sup> This once again indicates that the song had independent versions localized in North America and was attributed to multiple authors.

The strongest evidence that Iain mac Mhurchaidh was not the author, however, comes from the MacNicol Manuscripts. The items in these manuscripts were collected by the Reverend Donald MacNicol, who died in 1802, and they include songs from the seventeenth and eighteenth-century Highlands. Among these songs is the earliest recorded version of the *Dèan Cadalan Sàmhach* song in the American setting.<sup>66</sup> Although it is anonymous in the manuscript, it seems to be in a woman's voice. Her place of origin is not explicitly stated, but given that she says that herring ships frequent her childhood home, that this was characteristic of Inveraray at that period, and that MacNicol would have had many contacts with Argyll Highlanders, the Inveraray region is a likely possibility.

A further suggestion that the later recorded variations evolved on Scottish soil and are at a further remove than the MacNicol version is the use of the term

*Innseanaich* ("Indians") in the song. Only the MacNicol song states "you are Indians sure enough"—the others state "we are Indians sure enough." Due to the political and social realities in the British colonies in North America and the role of the Gaels in these colonial contexts, it would have been much easier for someone to relate to the plight of Native Americans from a distance. Only with time, while the song was in circulation in Scotland, did this imaginative leap occur.

In summary, my hypothesis is that:

1. there was already existing in the Gaelic repertoire a generic structure for a lullaby whose refrain began with *Dèan Cadalan Sàmhach*,
2. some emigrant began with this structure and gave the song an American setting,
3. this setting of the song was carried back to Scotland and began to circulate in oral tradition,
4. a variation close to the original American setting was recorded by Rev. Donald MacNicol in the second half of the eighteenth century,
5. it made its way to Kintail and eventually became attached to the story of Iain mac Mhurchaidh in local tradition,<sup>67</sup>
6. a later version of the song was recorded in the Dornie MSS and attributed to Iain mac Mhurchaidh,
7. Colin Chisholm saw this attribution and repeated it in the version of the song he gave to the Gaelic Society of Inverness in 1886,
8. the appearance of his version in print helped to "normalize" all subsequent editions of the song and, especially, the person credited with "composing" it.

The false ascription of this song to Iain mac Mhurchaidh should alert us to the likelihood that this is not the only song incorrectly attributed to him. The late William Matheson, an outstanding Gaelic scholar, expressed his doubts that all of the poems attributed to Iain mac Mhurchaidh in the Dornie MSS were actually composed by him ("there are grounds in some cases for doubting that he was the author"<sup>68</sup>), but he does not elaborate on this.

### The Exile Song

A similar situation confronts us when we analyze the song *Tha mi sgùth dhe'n fhògar seo*, said to have been composed by Iain mac Mhurchaidh after Loyalist forces were defeated by American revolutionaries.<sup>69</sup> Sources differ as to the circumstances of its composition. The poem is recorded in Dornie MS 2: 74 and 3: 176,

which claim that Iain mac Mhurchaidh composed the song after the conclusion of the Revolution. According to Colin Chisholm, Iain composed the song after he was captured and imprisoned. According to information in *Mac-Talla*<sup>70</sup> and in the *History of the Clan Macrae*, he was on the run when he composed the song.

The line stating that the poet is in prison (“*Tha mi nis air mo dhìtheadh / ann am prìson droch bheòshlainteach*”) is only contained in the *Celtic Magazine* and *History of Clan Macrae* versions. The explanation that Iain mac Mhurchaidh was on the run when he wrote it is simply an “artifact” of the song’s mutation from the earlier song on which it was modeled, *Is fhada mi ’m ònaran*. Both of these songs are sung to the same tune, and both are about exile.

*Is fhada mi ’m ònaran* appeared in the *Gillies Collection* of 1786, and like many other songs in that collection, was previously recorded by James McLagan (who seems to have been behind the textual work on the *Gillies Collection*).<sup>71</sup> The song appears in MSS 81 of the McLagan Collection of Glasgow University.<sup>72</sup> The melody to this song (given this title) appears as a Perthshire Air in the *Patrick MacDonald Collection* of 1784. It is without a doubt older than the song attributed to Iain mac Mhurchaidh.

A few of the lines from *Is fhada mi ’m ònaran* appear in some of the versions recorded of *Tha mi sgìth dhe’n fhògar seo*, and due to the melodic and thematic similarities, they seem to have been in the process of merging in oral tradition. Most notable is the line “*Ann am bothan beag barraich / Cha tig caraid dha m’ fheòraich ann* [(I am) in a little wooden shelter / no friend comes to call on me].” We might infer from this that the story of the lonely exile of the earlier song might have attracted other lines that appear in some versions of *Tha mi sgìth dhe’n fhògar seo*, such as “*Tha mi air fògar bho’n fhoghar / Dèanamh thaighean gun cheò annta* [I’ve been exiled since the autumn / building houses with no smoke in them].”

It is possible that Iain mac Mhurchaidh composed a song in America with the refrain *Tha mi sgìth dhe’n fhògar seo*, but other people (probably in Scotland) could have composed it to tell his story for him. It seems most likely to me that the song originally described his being in prison, and that interference in the minds of singers from *Is fhada mi ’m ònaran* brought in the lines about taking shelter in wooden huts and thus introduced the idea that he was on the run, rather than in prison. This story seems to have been established early in Kintail, as no mention of prison is made in the Dornie MSS. But, without further evidence about Iain mac Mhurchaidh, these inferences will have to remain conjectural.

### Song of Nostalgia and Punishment

A third song attributed to Iain mac Mhurchaidh during his life in North Carolina looks back nostalgically on his early life in Scotland, and laments his current condition. It is generally referred to by the line *Mo shoraidh gu Sgur Ùrain* or alternatively *Gur muladach a tha mi*.<sup>73</sup> It was first recorded in Dornie MS 4: 1.

Iain mac Mhurchaidh here admonishes the revolutionaries for their act of insurgence and warns them of their impending doom once the Red Coats arrive. The descriptions in these passages may well be influenced by the experience of many Highlanders in the aftermath of the failed 1745 Jacobite Rising. Colin Chisholm's introductions to the song merely state that the poet "compares his wretched position there, a soldier in the King's army, to his former and happy state in Kintail."

A later source claims that Iain mac Mhurchaidh sang this piece while in the No Man's Land between armies to fellow Highlanders who had joined the revolutionaries, attempting to win them back for the King.<sup>74</sup> While there is no internal evidence in the text to support this tradition, the poem seems to be addressed to folk who have defected to the American side. There was also a tradition that Iain mac Mhurchaidh was captured because of being betrayed by his fellow countrymen<sup>75</sup> and those addressed in this song might have been among them. As these narrative elements are not in the song and are only provided as extra information in late sources, this might be further evidence that the legends about Iain mac Mhurchaidh were being elaborated during the course of the nineteenth century, probably to fit circumstances in the contemporary Highlands (i.e., to highlight the contrast between the loyalty and self-sacrifice of Highland soldiers and the greed and selfishness of landlords who were evicting them and sending them to America, etc.).

This song survives in only two early versions: one printed in *The Celtic Magazine* (virtually identical to the one printed in TGSI), and one from the Dornie MSS. The fact that Colin Chisholm's contribution to TGSI did not diverge from his contribution to *The Celtic Magazine* (apart from spelling reforms) might indicate that the song was scarce and he did not find any informants who knew a better or different version than he did himself.<sup>76</sup>

The version in the Dornie MSS contains text close to the Chisholm text, although the verses appear in a different order. The first four (16 line) stanzas of the Chisholm version switches back and forth between nostalgia and current circumstances before focusing the last two stanzas on the present (and future). In the Dornie text, nostalgia occupies nearly all of the first 13 quatrains in the Dornie version. It then switches to the present circumstances (and promises of future retribution) for the last 14 quatrains. There is a floating couplet and an extra quatrain in the Dornie text

not contained in the Chisholm version. Is this further confirmation of Chisholm's selective rearrangement of the Dornie MSS texts?

The Chisholm version, unsurprisingly, shows more awareness of Anglo-American life than the Dornie text. The Chisholm text mentions that the colonists are forced to use the "gripping-hoe," rather than other, more familiar Highland implements, and names the marine bird, the marlin. Neither of these terms appear in the Dornie MSS. This may suggest that the narrative about Iain mac Mhurchaidh was evolving in the Highlands according to changing knowledge and circumstances during the nineteenth century.

### **'Scottish Brogues'**

The fourth and final poem claimed to have been composed by Iain mac Mhurchaidh in North Carolina is a semi-comic statement about clothing (shoes, in particular). Clothing is commonly emblematic of social status, aspirations and pretensions, not to mention ethnicity, and this is the real subject of the poem. It is, to date, unpublished, and the sole source for it is Dornie MS 2:101 and 3:129. The following is an English translation:

If you see a man wearing a cassock,  
Oh, you'll think that he's a captain  
When you look at his shoes,  
He is fashionable enough.

With his hide-bound moccasins,  
With tops, laces, and [?] —  
I never had much affection for them,  
I much preferred Highland shoes.

They don't have a sole or heel-patches  
Or even a heel that will last  
They are totally bare and unadorned  
Wrinkled in the front.

They don't even have a tongue  
For me to tighten down what I open  
But rather have a small lid, and are dyed black —  
Those are their characteristics.

I am very, very sad  
Since I put any of them on

They have left me clumsy and depressed  
 God! I cannot play and be merry!

Shoes in many cultures represent a role or a way of life, such as in the idioms, "Walk a mile in my shoes," or, "No one could fill his shoes."<sup>77</sup> These North Carolinian shoes seem to symbolize Iain's new life in America. He says that he much prefers his old Highland shoes, even though they were humble and unpretentious. This theme is consistent with the other poems ascribed to him, and it, of course, is resonant with a great deal of Gaelic emigrant poetry.<sup>78</sup>

While there is little to contradict the ascription of the poem to Iain mac Mhurchaidh, neither does it tell us anything specific about the poet or the circumstances in which it was composed. It will, therefore, be left to speak for itself until further evidence appears.

### Conclusions

We know that there was a large settlement of Gaelic-speaking Scottish Highlanders in North Carolina, and we know that they must have composed a significant body of literature. This literature is testimony to the intellectual capacities and cultural life of the Gaelic community. Locating and identifying a substantial corpus of this material, however, has proved a serious challenge.

Gaels in other places (e.g., Scotland and eastern Canada) have always been curious about the fortunes of their relations who settled in the Carolinas, and the few traditions that made their way back to Scotland were the subject of discussion and speculation for generations. Iain mac Mhurchaidh was a highly regarded poet and social leader before he left Kintail, and this encouraged his reputation to live on. The fact that he became involved in the American War of Independence must have also heightened interest in his life. The themes of injustice and dispossession that pervade the poetry attributed to him resound with the conditions of Highlanders in the late nineteenth century. Items floating about in the oral tradition that had an American setting would have naturally tended to gravitate toward him. There is certainly sufficient evidence that narratives about him, songs, anecdotes and bits of poetry, were influencing each other and evolving in different places during the nineteenth century, especially in Kintail.

Some of the religious literature composed in North Carolina is known to us and further traces of the Gaelic verbal arts have been recorded there at a later period. It is also the case that learned Gaels and poets, such as Iain mac Mhurchaidh, relocated to North Carolina and must have continued to use their verbal skills in America.



We can infer that this must have been so by interpolation with the John MacLean poem. We have tantalizing hints of poetry that Iain mac Mhurchaidh might have composed, but even the material that was collected by song scholars in Scotland must be viewed with a skeptical eye.

There is reason to believe that more Gaelic material composed in North Carolina might survive,<sup>29</sup> scattered in various archives and attics, and as of yet unrecognized. Perhaps more material such as the John MacLean poem may surface from the documentary remains of the old Highland settlements.

Much further research needs to be done to clarify a number of issues regarding the Gaelic settlement in North Carolina, such as the uses of literacy, intergenerational transmission of Gaelic, the perceptions of Gaelic inside and outside the immigrant community, and so on. Only then can the full story of the Gaels in North Carolina, in their own words, be told properly.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Thanks to Nancy McGuire of Aberdeen University for supplying me with the materials from her M.Litt. and Ph.D. theses on the Dornie MSS and related texts, including her transcripts from the Dornie MSS and biographical information about Colin Chisholm; to Dr. Margaret Bennett for a copy of the paper by Alexander Fraser; to William Caudill (Director of the Scottish Heritage Center at St. Andrews Presbyterian College in Laurinburg, North Carolina) for various information in this paper; to Jana Blue, William Caudill, Nancy McGuire and Dr. Wilson McLeod for comments and suggestions on earlier drafts of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> Donald Meek, "The Reformation and Gaelic culture," *The Church in the Highlands* ed. James Kirk (Inverness, 1998).

<sup>3</sup> George Stevenson, "The Argyll Colony's Search for a Minister," *Argyll Colony Plus* 4 (1989): 11.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>5</sup> Rev. William Henry Foote, *Sketches of North Carolina Historical and Biographical* (New York, 1846), 171.

<sup>6</sup> *An Gàidheal* (June 1872): 97-8.

<sup>7</sup> Margaret MacDonell, *The Emigrant Experience* (Toronto, 1982), 204.

<sup>8</sup> Thanks to William Caudill for this information. Bethune is claimed to have served the Barbecue Church in Donald Fergusson, *Fad air falbh as Innse Gall* (Halifax, 1977), 19.

<sup>9</sup> Angus W. McLean, *Highland Scots in North Carolina (Governor McLean's unpublished Manuscript)* (1993), 311-14, 325.

<sup>10</sup> Thanks to William Caudill for information about Munroe.

<sup>11</sup> Douglas Kelly and Caroline Switzer-Kelly, *Carolina Scots* (Dillon, SC, 1998), 109.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 110; James MacKenzie, *Colorful Heritage, An Informal History of Barbecue and Bluff Churches* (1969), 80.

<sup>13</sup> It should be noted that there was a great flowering of religious art forms during the evangelical movement, such as hymns and sermons of great expressive and emotional power. Some of these were written down and published.

<sup>14</sup> Victor Edward Durkacz, *The Decline of the Celtic Languages* (Edinburgh, 1983), 104.

<sup>15</sup> Duane Meyer, *The Highland Scots of North Carolina* (Chapel Hill, 1961), 117.

<sup>16</sup> David MacRae, *The Americans At Home* (New York, 1952), 251.

<sup>17</sup> In McLean 1993, 274, an informant wrote (c. 1919) of the death of Gaelic in North Carolina, "It is to be regretted that a language so comprehensive and so well adapted to the comprehension of the most illiterate person should be lost. It is a cheerful language, the language of Ossian, of Wallace and of Bruce." This suggests an awareness of Macpherson's *Ossian*, and indeed bears the impression of Romanticism, but does not inform us of any consciousness about the Ossianic debate in earlier periods.

<sup>18</sup> Kelly, 130.

<sup>19</sup> It may not be excessive to suggest that this introductory passage reflects the self-consciousness of stereotypes of Gaels as lawless and amoral savages.

<sup>20</sup> Kelly, 109.

<sup>21</sup> This is confirmed by Douglas Kelly and William Caudill. This is also the one gravestone mentioned in McLean, 305.

<sup>22</sup> Kelly, 83.

<sup>23</sup> Charles Dunn, *Highland Settler* (Toronto, 1968), 75.

<sup>24</sup> The lack of evidence for this was first pointed out to me by William Caudill. I have written to the Presbyterian Historical Foundation in Montreat, North Carolina and they have confirmed that the only copy that they have in their collection of Gaelic books was printed in Glasgow, Scotland.

<sup>25</sup> Kelly, 136-8.

<sup>26</sup> Michael Newton, *We're Indians Sure Enough: The Legacy of the Scottish Highlanders in the United States* (Richmond, VA, 2001), 16-18.

<sup>27</sup> John Shaw, "The Ethnography of Speaking and Verbal Taxonomies: Some Applications to Gaelic," *Celtic Connections: Proceedings of the Tenth International Congress of Celtic Studies* ed. Ronald Black, William Gillies, and Roibeart Ó Maolaláigh (East Linton, 1999).

<sup>28</sup> Macrae, 253-4.

<sup>29</sup> Donald Meek, "Scottish Highlanders, North American Indians and the SSPCK: Some Cultural Perspectives," *Records of the Scottish Church History Society* 23 (1989): 387.

<sup>30</sup> Foote, 134.

<sup>31</sup> *Fear-Tathaich nam Beann* (July 1849): 576.

<sup>32</sup> Dunn, 79.

<sup>33</sup> McLean, 303-4. Thanks to William Caudill for first pointing this out to me.

<sup>34</sup> *An Gàidheal* (June 1872): 97.

<sup>35</sup> McLean, 274 claims that there were only two living Gaelic speakers surviving in the area c. 1919.

<sup>36</sup> Sinclair is probably the correspondent who wrote a letter in Gaelic to *An Gàidheal* from Philadelphia in August of 1872, giving anecdotes about his childhood.

<sup>37</sup> An article by Stewart about his visit to the Highland community in North Carolina (originally appearing in the *Hamilton Advertiser*) was reprinted in *The Scottish-American Journal* June 9, 1870. His

account cannot be taken entirely at face value, as it contains obvious hyperbole and makes appeals to ethnic stereotypes.

<sup>28</sup> D. Masson, "The Gael in the Far West," *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness* 3 (1873): 28.

<sup>29</sup> Named only as C. C. from Strathalba, P. E. I.

<sup>30</sup> My thanks to Dr. Kate Chadbourne for suggesting a folkloric interpretation of the anecdote. William Caudill has also pointed out to me the similarity of this anecdote to one appearing in Macrae, 253.

<sup>31</sup> McLean, v. 333, 334, 353.

<sup>32</sup> I owe the identification of this man to William Caudill.

<sup>33</sup> William Caudill and Catriona Parsons, "A Footnote to Gaelic Literary History: A Confederate Soldier's Song," (unpublished paper).

<sup>34</sup> See Macrae, 254 and William Caudill, "An Interesting Testimony to the Survival of Highland Music in North Carolina," *Argyll Colony Plus* 16 (2001) for observations about traditional forms of Scottish music and dance in North Carolina.

<sup>35</sup> B. J. Whiting, "Lowland Scots and Celtic Proverbs in North Carolina," *Journal of Celtic Studies* 1 (1949-1950).

<sup>36</sup> MacDonell, 26.

<sup>37</sup> Nancy R. McGuire, "The Dornie Manuscripts" (Ph.D. diss., University of Aberdeen, 2001).

<sup>38</sup> *The Celtic Magazine* 7 (1882): 273. This is also stated in Appendix J of MacRae, but this source probably relies upon Chisholm's earlier statements.

<sup>39</sup> Newton 2001, 26-7.

<sup>40</sup> *The Celtic Magazine* 11 (1886), 273 states that Chisholm was the source.

<sup>41</sup> *The Celtic Magazine* 8 (1883), 462.

<sup>42</sup> McGuire 2001, 12-15.

<sup>43</sup> This undated letter is given in McGuire 2001, 14 from NLS Acc. 9548/9.

<sup>44</sup> Gleaned from the obituary written by Henry White in *The Celtic Monthly* (1895), 73, and given to me by Nancy McGuire

<sup>45</sup> Rev. Alexander MacRae, *The History of the Clan Macrae* (Dingwall, 1899).

<sup>46</sup> Quoted in Michael Newton, *A Handbook of the Scottish Gaelic World* (Dublin, 2000), 90. See also pp. 92, 104.

<sup>47</sup> Editions of two of the later variations are given in MacDonell, 42-5.

<sup>48</sup> Item LXI (page 173).

<sup>49</sup> *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness* 12 (1886): 150-2.

<sup>50</sup> August 13, 1892.

<sup>51</sup> Newton 2001, 175-6.

<sup>52</sup> This point was made by Mòrag MacLeod of the School of Scottish Studies on a BBC Radio nan Gàidheal program about lullabies.

<sup>53</sup> T. D. MacDonald, *Puirt mo Sheanamhar* (Struibhle, 1907), 13.

<sup>54</sup> Note that the Badenoch text recorded by Sinton (MacDonell, 44) seems to retain more of the generic lullaby elements than the others. It, however, locates the origin of the author as Gesto, in Skye, again demonstrating the migratory nature of this song.

<sup>65</sup> Alexander Fraser, "The Gaelic Folksongs of Canada" (a paper read to the Royal Society of Canada 1903), 89.

<sup>66</sup> See Newton 2001, 177-8 for an edition and translation.

<sup>67</sup> It may even be that *fean na leth-làimh* (who appears to have settled latterly near Dornie) had a hand in this false history (MacDonell, 30). Rather than being simply the transmitter of tradition, he may have also been a creative refashioner of narratives, attributing material to Iain mac Mhurchaidh to enlarge the legend. His motivation may have been to dispel any doubt about the loyalty of Scottish Highlanders in the American Revolution. Returnees to Scotland would have wanted to emphasize their fidelity, although detailed modern historical research may find it less so than previously reported and believed.

<sup>68</sup> William Matheson, "Further Gleanings from the Dornie Manuscripts," *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness* 45 (1965): 150.

<sup>69</sup> See Newton 2001, 143-4 for an edition and translation of the poem

<sup>70</sup> December 30, 1893.

<sup>71</sup> Derick Thomson, "The McLagan MSS in Glasgow University Library: A Survey," *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness* 59 (1994), 409.

<sup>72</sup> This has been printed in an unedited form, and without translation, in *Gairm* 115: 275-6

<sup>73</sup> See MacDonell, 46-51 for an edition and translation.

<sup>74</sup> Fergusson, 24.

<sup>75</sup> MacDonell, 33.

<sup>76</sup> Fergusson, 24 also states that the song is in *Mac-Talla* 10 (1902): 223, but I have not been able to consult this source.

<sup>77</sup> See also the idiom beginning *brògan air a' chat!* in Dwelly's Gaelic Dictionary in the entry for *bròg*.

<sup>78</sup> Newton 2001, 69-80.

<sup>79</sup> Newton 2001, 265-6.