

The Recorded History of MacNeil /McNeill Families in Scotland from 1400 AD

Barra

One of the earliest references, from 1427, is a grant of the island of Barra and the lands of Boisdale in South Uist from Alexander of Islay, Lord of the Isles, to Gilleonan MacNeil.

Gilleonan's father was called Ruari and this has prompted a suggestion that the MacNeil interest in Barra might have arisen from a marriage with a daughter of the MacRuari family sometime in the 14th century. In following years the clan chief often used the name of Ruari or Roderick.

For most of the 15th century, the position of the MacNeills of Barra as lords holding their estates from the MacDonald Lords of the Isles was relatively undisturbed. However, in 1493 John MacDonald was forfeited by the minority administration of James IV (1488–1513) and the MacDonald's extensive lands and rights of lordship in the Hebrides were, theoretically, annexed to the Crown (Macdougall 1997: 100–1).

Technically, the MacNeills now held the island of Barra directly from the king. In 1495, James IV confirmed the earlier grant by Alexander, Lord of the Isles in favour of Gilleonan MacNeill, an act that regularised the position of the Barra lords as Crown tenants.

Following the dissolving of the kingdom of the Lord of the Isles in 1493, the clans or family tribes in the coastal area of Argyll and the Outer Hebrides lost their unified leadership in the Council of the Isles and began feuding between each other. The MacNeils of Barra aligned themselves with the MacLeans of Mull who were a much larger and stronger clan. They also aligned with the MacLeods of Harris.

Knapdale, isle of Gigha and the Kintyre Peninsula

The territory of Knapdale and the Kintyre Peninsula at this time was held by the Crown. Shortly after the Lordship of this region was given to the Earl of Argyll as Chamberlain.

In 1505, Archibald, 2nd Earl of Argyll came to Kintyre with David, Bishop of Argyll and prepared a list of rentals on Crown lands between 1502 and 1505.

It is important to look at the clan families who lived on the Kintyre Peninsula when considering the island of Gigha and Tainish in Knapdale.

The rental records in South Kintyre include –

Sir Morice McNeil, Rector of Kilblane who died in 1527

Hector McNeill of Carskey and a number of other McNeills were tenants on small properties in South Kintyre.

Both Hector McNeill of Carskey and Lachlan McNeill of Tirfergus on the Kintyre Peninsula claimed their family ancestries to the Gigha leading family.

In this period, we need to also look at the records of the McNeills in Argyll. After the dissolving of the kingdom of the Lord of the Isles, the McNeills aligned themselves with the MacDonalds of Dunyvaig and Glens of Antrim. In time as Clan Campbell became the major force in Argyll, the McNeills aligned themselves with Clan Campbell.

The earliest records tell us that Torquil McNeill of Taynish and Gigha fought with Alexander, 3rd Lord of the Isles in the battle at Lochabar against King James 1st in 1429. Following the battle, they were imprisoned in Tantallon castle until October 1431.

Between 1429 and 1449 Alexander, Earl of Ross and Lord of the Isles granted in heritage to Torquil McNeill, constable of castle Sween, certain lands on the island of Gigha, a number of lands in Taynish, Knapdale and the officer of Toshachdeora of the lands of Knapdale.

1455 John, Earl of Ross and Lord of Isles executed a Charter to Neil, son of Torquil, son of Neil, constable of castle Sween and parts of lands on the island of Gigha.

1478 Malcolm McNeill of Gigha witnessed a Charter executed by John, Lord of the Isles.

The Earl of Argyll commenced recording details of tenants of Crown land and the first list was recorded in 1505 on the Kintyre Peninsula.

The earliest list is dated 1505 and was made at Kilkerran (Campbeltown) by the second Earl of Argyll, (the Crown Chamberlain appointed on the forfeiture in 1493 of John Macdonald Fourth and last Lord of the Isles) and David, Bishop of Argyll. (Exchequer Rolls XII.352 et seq).

In this list, the 12 merkland of Carskey and Mull of Kintyre is shown as occupied by Hector Mclain MacGilliecallum. He was in fact a McNeill and is given this name later in the list where he appears with the Earl as joint guarantor for Donald McGillicallum McGorre tenant of the 17 merkland of Killeonan. Although they did not trouble to get a feudal charter till 1700, McNeills continued to occupy Carskey till the male line failed in 1824. (a merkland was an old Scottish measurement of land)

“In 1541, the tenant of Killeonan is shown as Cory McNeill McIllichallum. In 1596, most of this holding was occupied by Donald Dow McNeill. In 1605 it was said to be waste but in a decree obtained by the Earl against his Kintyre tenants in 1609 the occupier is named as Gillichollum McNeil McGorrie McNeill. In 1636, the occupier of inter alia 8 merklands of Killeonan was Archibald Roy McOlchallum. Killeonan appears to have been an important McNeill holding and it was there in 1594 that a Bond of Manrent was entered into between Sir James MacDonald, last of the MacDonalds of Kintyre, and various leading McNeills. I suggest that all the above named persons were really McNeills, that Archibald was the son of Malcolm McNeil, that the successors may have been Malcolm, Neil, Gorrie, Neil Malcolm & Archibald and that since at that period patronymics were becoming fixed surnames Archibald and his descendants became McCallums.”

THE EVOLUTION OF GAELIC SURNAMES IN KINTYRE

A.I.B. Stewart

Deeds of manrent

Bonds of manrent were familiar and commonplace documents in late-fifteenth and sixteenth century Scottish society. They recorded the obligation of allegiance and service by men to their lords, obligations entered into, with few exceptions, for life or passed on to their heirs.

Jennifer M Brown BONDS OF MANRENT IN SCOTLAND BEFORE 1603

<http://theses.gla.ac.uk/4014/1/1974BrownPhD.pdf>

Deeds of Manrent in Argyll & Bute, and Kintyre

The Campbells of Loch Awe and of Glenorchy became the leading kindred and other smaller clans or tribal families signed deeds of Manrent with the Campbells.

On 16 August 1518, a deed was executed by the Earl of Argyll on the island of Eilean-an-t-sagairt in the Locharian Dubh, near the modern farmhouse of Kilvarie in Lorn. The signatories were Duncan Brek Mcdunlave on behalf of his kin, viz. Duncan Mcdunlave Mcdonchy Iain m'donlave m'donche his brother, Donald dow m'douil m'conche and Neyll his brother and Lachlan McEwin McLachlen.

The other signatory was a certain Ewin McNeill on behalf of his kin, viz. Dunslave McNeill, Iain dow McNeyll, Duncan M,Neyll roy, Niall his brother. All these McNeills seem to be related to the McDunslaves; vide the use of Dunslave as a Christian name by one of them.

Source - "The book of the Thane of Cawdor" 1236 – 1742

Deeds of Manrent at Loch Tay, Perthshire

A bond of maintenance executed by Colin Campbell of Glenorchy binding the kindred of Clan Laurane.

Clanlaurane Loch Tay Bond 22 May 1573, The Black Book of Taymouth, interestingly contains a reference to two brothers, Patrik M'Ewin V'Neill (70) and Neill M'Ewin V'Lauren (75),

Finla M'Nele (8), and in his absence Duncan M'Nicoll (9),

Finlay M'Neill (52 another Finlay?) with his bairns viz.: Jhone M'Finlay V'Neill (53), Donald (54) his brother, Archibald (55) his brother, Malcum (56) his brother, Laurence (57) his brother, Neill (58) his brother, Archibald M'Finlay V'Lauren (59), Finlay (60) his [brother],

Neill M'Nicoll V'Neill (69),

Patrik M'Ewin V'Neill (70), Jhone (72) his son, Donald (73) his brother, Laurence (74) his brother,

Neill M'Ewin V'Lauren (75),

Jhone MTatrik V'Neill (76), Duncane MTatrik (77) his brother, Finlay (78) his brother

Source –“The Black Book of Taymouth from the Breadalbane charter room”

Variations in the spelling of family names in historic records

Very early information concerning family genealogy in Scotland was passed on from Druids or senior members of families by word and no records were made on paper or parchment.

As names were recorded later on parchment the names were often in Gaelic or part Gaelic and part English. Individuals were identified as a son by the word “Mac Neil” and a daughter with “Nic Neil”. They were used to link their relationship to their father and mother. We have also seen the variations of the root family name of Neil expressed as Niall, Neal, Neile, MacNeil and McNeill among many others.

In the records of the Black book of Taymouth and the Book of the Thanes of Cawdor, we can see our family names shown as McNeill, McNeyll and McNele.

If we move 100 years forward then there are records of births in Kenmore, Loch Tay showing the births of children in nine families with the family name of McNeill.

Lachlan McNeill of Tirfergus, Kintyre Peninsula

He was Lachlan, the son of that Neill Buidhe McNeill who witnessed a bond of Manrent between Sir James McDonald and McNeill of Carskief and several other leading McNeills, signed at Killeonan on 18th July 1594. .

Neil Buidhe was a substantial farmer and in 1619 he held the lands of Clochkiel, Darlochan, Aros and Lochrodale at a rent of £368 and Drumore at £80 . In 1611 he held Clochkiel, Letregan and Machrihanish . These farms were part of a holding of 16 marklands in the Laggan of Kintyre which pertained of old to the McNeills of Gigha and their occupation by his father provides some evidence for the justification of Lachlan's claim when he matriculated arms in 1672 that he was of the family of Gigha.

Lachlan is said to have been born in 1611 and to have died in 1695.

Lachlan was twice married: first to a kinswoman Mary McNeil, daughter to Carskief, by whom he had John, Neil Buidh, Archibald, Torquil, Isobell and Elizabeth, and secondly to Margaret, daughter of McAllester of Tore in Arran, by whom he had Hector, Malcolm, Daniel (or Donald), Neil Oig, Mary, Annabell, Isabell and Margaret. Despite his eldership he also produced a natural daughter Margaret. During his lifetime Lachlan acquired substantial lands in Kintyre beginning with a wadset Charter of Tirfergus and Largieban in 1660 followed in 1668 by Losset, Knockhantie and Glenahantie.

His eldest son John succeeded him in Tirfergus, and later moved to Ireland and acquired the estate of Faughart in Co. Louth. Neil Buie, the second son, also crossed the sea to Ireland and acquired the estate of Killoquin in County Antrim. The third son, Archibald, married an Irish McNeill, Torquil, the fourth son, acquired Ugadale by marriage with Barbara, the last of the McKay family which had held Ugadale, Arnicle and Arinanuan since the Bruce's day. Hector, the fifth son, succeeded to Losset. Malcolm, the sixth son, went to Ireland as a Tory hunter and was so successful in dealing with these native Irish outlaws that it is said he was given in gratitude the estate of Ballymascanlon. Daniel or Donald, the seventh son acquired Kilchrist and Neil Oig, the eighth son purchased Macrihanish.

The daughters had good marriages. Isabel married Dugald Campbell of Drumnamucklach, younger son of Archibald Campbell of Glen Carradale who played such a prominent part in the expulsion of the MacDonalds of Dunnyveg and Kintyre; Elizabeth married John Campbell of Kildalloig. Mary's husband was Donald McNeill of Crear, the founder of the family of Colonsay.

Her second son was the first McNeill of Ardnacross. Annabell, the fourth girl, married Rev. John McLean, Prebendary of Roseharken in Ireland, and her sister, Isabell married David Simson, Minister of Southend and Kilchoman in Islay, whose father of the same name had been exiled in 1685. Margaret married a relative, Donald McNeill in Ballygrogan. Lachlan's natural daughter, also Margaret, married an Irish Stewart.

Source-.LACHLAN McNEILL BUIDHE (Kintyre magazine)
A. I. B. Stewart



- Barra
- Black Locks, Lorn
- Kemore, Perthshire
- Taynish, Knapdale
- Isle of Colonsay
- Isle of Gigha
- Tirfergus, Kintyre
- Ugadale &, Lossit, Kintyre
- Carskey, Kintyre

The Macneil /McNeill leading families of Barra, Argyll and Bute

The dynasty of the leading or chiefly family of the Macneil of Barra has been well documented from 1427 and the present chief and descendant of this family is Roderick (Rory) Wilson Macneil of Barra. He and his wife have two sons, Ruari and Seumas.

In Argyll, the records have shown us that the first persons to be identified were the McNeills of the island of Gigha and Taynish, Knapdale and the McNeills of Carskey and Tirfergus on the Kintyre Peninsula.

The Carskey family discontinued after the death of Archibald McNeill in 1824.

Both the Gigha / Taynish and Tirfergus, Kintyre family lines still exist today.

Firstly, the Gigha/ Taynish family has one descendant line which continues today. In 1700, Donald McNeill came to an agreement with the Duke of Argyll and exchanged his lands of Crear and Druimdrishaig in Knapdale for the islands of Colonsay and Oronsay.

His descendant living today is John Duncan McNeill who holds the matriculated arms of Colonsay executed by his grandfather. Duncan lives in Australia.

Another member of the Gigha/ Taynish family was Roger McNeill who married into the Hamilton family of Raploch, Lanarkshire and changed his name to Roger McNeill Hamilton. His last male descendant was William Montgomery McNeill Hamilton who flew in the Royal Flying Corp in World War I.

The Tirfergus family line commenced with Lachlan McNeill who married twice and produced a number of sons who settled both in Argyll and in Ireland. One son Torquil married Barbara MacKay and gained the title to the lands at Ugadale. His living descendant is Torquil Macneal of Ugadale and Lossit who lives in Australia.

Another son of Lachlan was Neil Buie McNeill married Rose Stewart and settled in County Antrim, Ireland. Their son Neil Buidh of Colliers Hall married Jane Clerk on 15 June 1752.

Neil Buie's fourth son, Daniel founded the McNeiles of Ballycastle, Antrim which family produced Lt. General Daniel McNeile, a distinguished soldier in the service of the Honourable East India Company. Note that the family surname was changed.

The living descendant of this family is Peter Roy McNeile of Gloucestershire, England born 1963. Details of the complete family ancestry of this family can be found in Burke's Landed Gentry of Scotland.



Torquill Macneal



Duncan McNeill with Sally Thomas AM



Rory Macneil of Barra



Peter McNeile