

# Clan Donald Lands Trust: The First Steps

A recollection from the Right Honourable Godfrey James Macdonald of Macdonald, 8th Lord Macdonald and 34<sup>th</sup> High Chief of Clan Donald, March 2019

## Introduction

It is now nearly fifty years since our Clan embarked on the latest chapter of our great history, namely the establishment of the Clan Donald Lands Trust. What we created then was without precedent - a Clan owning its own lands, administered by a board of Trustees from all parts of the English speaking world, for the benefit of all clansmen worldwide.

This was a truly gargantuan undertaking, and as there are now only two of the original Trustees still alive, Clanranald and myself, I think that it is important to place on record those exciting, nail-biting, terrifying and sometimes desperate early days that have enabled the Clan Donald Lands Trust to become a reality.

## Background

Following the death of my father in November 1970 and the inevitable sale of the Macdonald Estates to cover two lots of Death Duties and other inherited honourable debts some dating back to 1812, I was approached by Donald J Macdonald of Castleton, then President of the Clan Donald Society of Edinburgh.

It had always been his dream that the Clan should acquire a small piece of the original Kingdom of the Isles, and that it should be held in perpetuity for all clansmen, while also concentrating on the historical and educational aspects associated with the Lordship of the Isles.

The family were under enormous pressure to conclude a sale of the estate by the end of July 1971, so the Clan had less than six months to raise sufficient funds to enable it to make a meaningful offer for the estate. It was estimated that we would need to have donations or pledges amounting to about £200,000 (£3 million in present day terms) if our bid was to be successful.

## The Appeal

An appeal committee was formed, consisting largely of members of the Clan Donald Society of Edinburgh with the addition of Robert Macdonald, then President of the Clan Donald Society of Glasgow, and Archie Macdonald, President of the Clan Donald Society of London, who had also been a Member of Parliament.

This group was supported by myself as Chairman, together with Clanranald and the late Glengarry. We recruited the services of Donald MacAulay, a lawyer with Bonar, Mackenzie and Kermack, a man of highland ancestry and very sympathetic to our cause. The priority was to form a charitable trust which would purchase and manage any lands that we might acquire. We were able to borrow £2000 from the Royal Bank of Scotland through its Chairman, Sir Hamish Blair Cunningham, a friend of my late father. He believed in our project and did not ask for any security, save that we gave an undertaking to give our business to the Royal Bank should we succeed.

This enabled us to hire the services of a professional fund raiser, Dick Crauford-Benson, of Appeal Planning, who in turn employed Colonel Hugo Callender to run our appeal office in Edinburgh. We were very aware that if the appeal was to raise this sort of money, most of the funds would almost certainly have to come from overseas, and North America in particular. At the same time we felt that a meaningful proportion must come from home based members of the Clan, while fully supportive of our aims but could not necessarily produce large sums of money.

### **The Clansmen**

Donald J gave me a list of ten clansmen, scattered around the English speaking world, with who over the years he had had communication , and felt that they would support our venture. During February 1971, I wrote by hand to each of these people, outlining our vision and asking them their opinion as to the feasibility of what we were proposing. There was considerable pressure to write and post these letters - no one telephoned overseas in those days - as the United Kingdom was on the point of embarking on a national postal and telecommunications strike, that in fact was to last six weeks.

By the end of March we had received sufficient positive responses from those people who had received my letter, to begin to realise that there was great enthusiasm for our proposal. However, to maximise this potential within our tight timescale, it was becoming obvious that Claire and I would have to travel to North America and personally spearhead this campaign. We understood the need to concentrate our efforts on a small number of people and limited areas if we were to raise or have promises in hand of sufficient funds to place our bid at the end of July.

With the help of a friendly travel agent we put together a ten week itinerary which had us criss-crossing most areas of the United States and Canada in which lived those clansmen who had responded most enthusiastically.

### **USA bound**

We departed from Prestwick on May 24th 1971, piped on board, and waved off by a deputation from the Clan Donald Society of Edinburgh, but only after my Sgian Dubh had been confiscated!

### **New York**

We landed in New York and were met by Bill McDonald, an advertising executive with Doremus and Company, and no mean player of the saxophone. In the two hours we spent together before our flight to Houston, he urged us to contact Lady Natalie Douglas Hamilton, the widow of Lord Malcolm Douglas Hamilton, who had been MP for Inverness Shire in the 1950s and a great friend of my late father. She, an American, had founded the American Scottish Foundation, a charity which Bill felt could provide a charitable conduit for funds raised in the USA for onward transmission to Scotland. This was vital for the long term prospects and viability for the whole project, as funds donated this way were tax deductible for the donor under American tax laws. Bill's enthusiasm and knowledge were fantastic.

Not only did he facilitate a meeting with Natalie, which led to tax deductible donations coming to Scotland, but he also introduced us to his cousin Robertson McDonald. Robertson owned an advertising agency in Nashville Tennessee and over the next few months, he and his family became such a vital and enthusiastic part of our plans, not only to do with the CDLT, but with

the future building of Clan Donald in the USA, that I appointed him my first High Commissioner in the United States.

### **Houston**

We landed in Houston Texas that night, and were met by AP Macdonald, a professor at Rice University. He was a protégé of Robert Eli Macdonald of Glenelg, who had almost single handedly nurtured Clan Donald in the South East for many years, following the death of RH Macdonald of Kingsburgh, my father's High Commissioner. We stayed in Houston for five days, and addressed a number of small gatherings, and most excitingly received the first donations, amounting to several thousand dollars.

### **St Louis**

We then travelled to St. Louis, Missouri, as guests of the sister of Eugene Macdonald, an engineer who had designed and built the Golden Arches. He was working on a large engineering project in Greece, but, It was here that we met Sandy McDonnell of McDonnell Douglas Aviation. He pledged a substantial sum of money, which gave us the exciting feeling and belief that we might really pull off our fund raising target.

### **New York and the East Coast**

Over the next few weeks we travelled through the Eastern Seaboard, with several visits to New York to try and finalise an arrangement with the American Scottish Foundation to enable donors to benefit from IRS regulations regarding donations to overseas charities.

### **Canada - Toronto**

Then on to Toronto in Canada, where we were met by John H. Macdonald, a reporter with the Toronto Star. His enthusiasm for the project was boundless, and following a very successful fund raising dinner, he announced that he had managed to secure us a meeting in Montreal with David MacDonald Stewart, owner of the MacDonald Tobacco Corporation.

### **Canada and David MacDonald Stewart**

David had just returned from Scotland, where he had financed a film of The Massacre of Glencoe. His reaction to what we were doing was absolutely amazing.

Not only did he give us a very substantial cheque, but he also lent us the services of his personal assistant Don Carter, who had a large number of influential Scottish orientated business contacts. They both pointed out the value of securing a small number of large contributions to underpin the viability of the venture when approaching other potential large donors. This we learnt was really the most important aspect in fundraising for substantial sums. Confidence breeds confidence, and David's confidence in what we were trying to do knew no limits.

David Macdonald Stewart's initial contribution together with the tireless travelling and persuasive expertise of Don Carter, virtually ensured that we could bid for the purchase of the estate. His continued substantial financial support coupled with his vision and quiet dignity were truly inspirational and his early tragic death in 1984 was an enormous blow to our still embryonic efforts. The more so, as he had been anxious to ensure that the CDLT was to be a major beneficiary from the Macdonald Stewart Foundation, sadly, a plan that never materialised after his death

However, he personally financed and provided all the labour and materials for the complete restoration of the Armadale House section at the end of the Castle. He was adamant that we had a physical presence at Armadale to house a small museum, shop and tearoom. It also provided secretarial services and an address to enable us to continue our fundraising and Clan related and estate matters.

### **Canada Nova Scotia**

Following a protracted stay in Montreal with David, we then made for Nova Scotia. We met a number of very enthusiastic clansmen, and received a number of donations which although small in monetary terms, underlined the real value of what we were trying to do.

### **Back in the USA**

After returning to Montreal, we then went back to the United States, where Bill McDonald had arranged, through his cousin Robertson McDonald, for us to be guests of Nestor J Macdonald, Chairman of the Thomas and Betts Corporation.

### **North Carolina and Nestor MacDonald**

Although Nestor lived in New Jersey, he had a house in Linville, North Carolina, where he had been co-founder and was President of the Grandfather Mountain Highland Games.

We were the Guests of Honour at these enormous Games, and spent five really happy and productive days with Nestor and his wife Helen. He, like David, was thoroughly enthused by what we were proposing, and after very lengthy discussions as to the viability of such an enormous undertaking, he gave us a very substantial cheque.

Nestor was a man of few words, but what he said he meant with the utmost sincerity, and throughout my life I have yet to meet a wiser or more diligent man of unimpeachable integrity and humour. Although then quite elderly, his love for what we were doing, coupled with his love for Clan Donald and having been born at Armadale, persuaded him to accept my offer to become Deputy High Commissioner under Robertson McDonald. Over the next twenty years Nestor donated enormous sums to the CDLT, and his death in 1991 at the age of 96, robbed the Trust of one of its greatest supporters, both in a financial and wise advisory capacity.

### **New York and Ellice MacDonald**

Returning once more to New York, Bill McDonald felt that we should meet Ellice McDonald, Jr,. He was a patron of the American Scottish Foundation, married to Rosa DuPont and resident in Delaware. He had heard from several people what we were doing, and although at the age of fifty three he had never visited Scotland, he admired the concept of clan ownership of land. Rosa, a Laird by distant descent was absolutely steeped in Highland tradition and following very lengthy discussions about the whole project and its long term viability, she persuaded Ellice that they should become involved, and we left the following day with another substantial donation.

This meeting was to be the start of the most outstanding generosity on the part of Rosa and Ellice McDonald. Their financial contributions, latterly through the Glencoe Foundation, endowed through their estates, has ensured a measure of financial stability for the Clan Donald Lands Trust, and their contribution, spanning nearly fifty years can never be underestimated.

**USA Clan Donors**

In the final weeks of our fundraising we received substantial donations and pledges from Donald Macdonald Thurber of Detroit, John R H Macdonald of Chattanooga, Tennessee, Earnest Macdonald Fletcher of Texas, Rosemary and Owen McBride of Texas, Robertson McDonald and family from Tennessee. In the United Kingdom we received a valuable contribution from Sir Reginald Macdonald Buchanan, and many thousands of smaller, but nonetheless important donations from all round the world.

**CDLT – a reality**

We flew home on July 26th, and it was felt by our advisors that we had raised sufficient funds, by either actual contributions or pledges, to enable us to place a realistic bid for the purchase of the Macdonald Estates.

On July 31st the Clan Donald Lands Trust became a reality. Claire and I were still 23!

Godfrey Macdonald  
18 March 2019