

Bishop's Gambit: The Transatlantic Brokering of Father Alexander Macdonell

by

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the transatlantic life and journey of Father Alexander Macdonell within the context of his role as a broker in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. While serving as a leader for the Glengarry Highlanders throughout the British Isles and Upper Canada, Macdonell acted as a middleman, often brokering negotiations between his fellow Highlanders and the British and Upper Canadian governments. This relationship saw Macdonell and the Glengarry Highlanders travel to Glasgow, Guernsey, and Ireland, working as both manufacturers and soldiers before they eventually settled in Glengarry County, Upper Canada. Once established in Upper Canada, Macdonell continued to act as a broker, which notably led to the participation of the Glengarry Highlanders in the colony's defence during the War of 1812. Over time, Macdonell's role as a broker aided him to progressively grow in reputation. Furthermore, it helped him rise through the religious and political ranks of the Roman Catholic Church and Upper Canada politics, ultimately resulting in his appointment as the Bishop of Regiopolis and a member of the colony's Legislative Council. From his new positions, Macdonell attempted to implement his vision of a Highland future for Upper Canada, rooted in Roman Catholicism, loyalism, and Scottish tradition.

## **Lay Summary**

This thesis looks at Father Alexander Macdonell's role as a broker and the impact it had on his life in both Britain and Upper Canada. Furthermore, it explores the negotiations Macdonell undertook as a middleman, generally between the Glengarry Highlanders and the British and Upper Canadian governments, alongside the subsequent political and religious positions of power to which he amounted. These new positions in Upper Canada led Macdonell to envision a Highland future in Upper Canada, rooted in Roman Catholicism, loyalism, and Scottish tradition.

## **Preface**

This dissertation is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Eben Prevec.

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*For Ludvik Prevec*

## Introduction

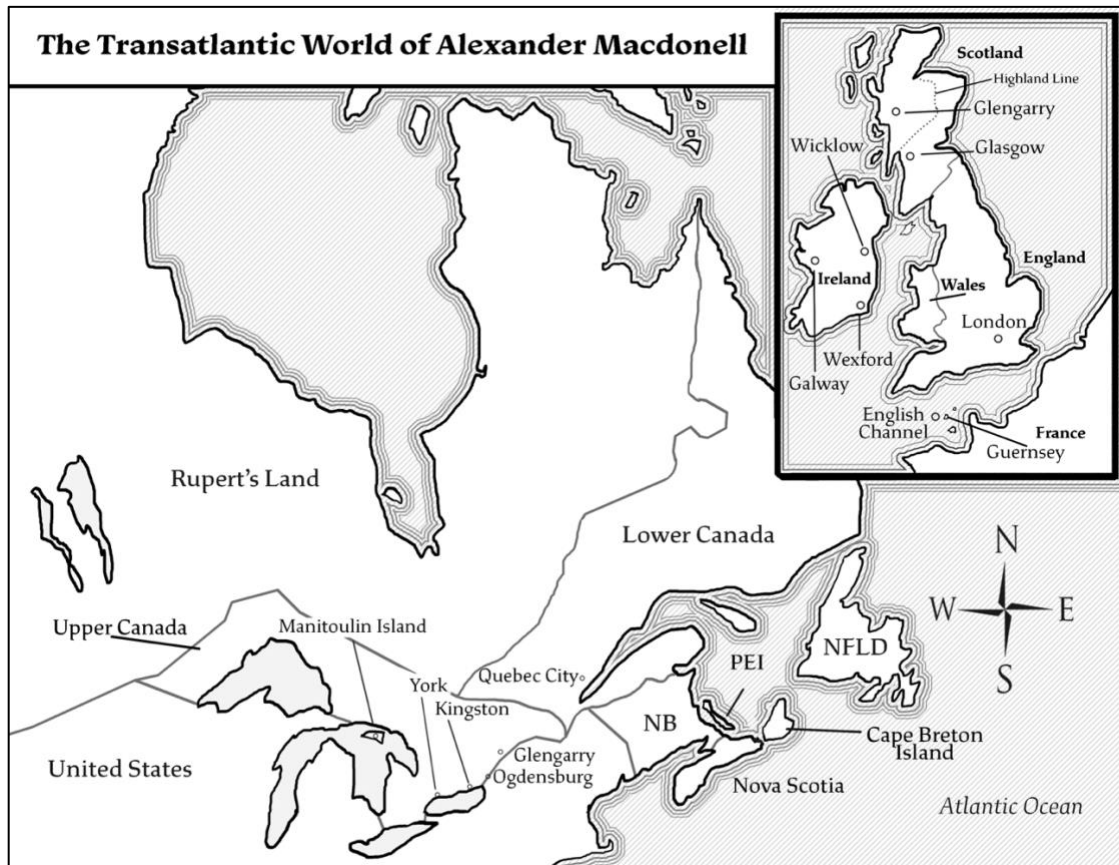


Figure 1: A map of key locations along Alexander Macdonell's transatlantic journey.

For the Glengarry Highlanders, June was about cutting peat. While the burden of the harvest generally fell upon the women, peat cutting was a community-based activity, where everyone had to pull their weight to ensure comfortable living until the following spring.<sup>1</sup> This agrarian cycle had supported Highland tenants for centuries and generations, through famines and wars, deviating only for the occasional introduction of a new crop.<sup>2</sup> June of 1792, however,

<sup>1</sup> I. F. Grant, *Highland Folk Ways* (Edinburgh: Birlinn Ltd, 2018), 227.

<sup>2</sup> Grant, *Highland Folk Ways*, 102, 107, 109-111.

was different; the landscape of the Highlands had changed. Instead of swinging peat irons and loading crops, the Glengarry Highlanders, at the behest of their Roman Catholic priest, Father Alexander Macdonell, left for Scotland's fast-growing metropole, Glasgow. The economy's swift changes had forced hundreds of Glengarry residents to abandon the only life they knew and move into a seemingly foreign city for their awaiting factory jobs.<sup>3</sup> Soon after they arrived in Glasgow, war broke out between Britain and the budding French Republic, sending the Highland priest and his flock on a much longer journey than they had initially anticipated. Through battles and across seas, this war was the catalyst that led Father Macdonell and his Glengarry Highlanders off the British Isles to the distant colony of Upper Canada.

Although remaining in a Protestant Empire that continued to oppress Roman Catholic Highlanders, Macdonell and the Glengarry emigrants defended Britain and Ireland during the Revolutionary War and Upper Canada during the War of 1812. Throughout their journeys, the Highland priest operated as a leader for his fellow Glengarry Highlanders, often acting as their liaison when dealing with the British and Upper Canadian governments. Through the accompanying interactions and negotiations, Macdonell progressively gained access to increasing privileges for both himself and the Glengarry Highlanders, including cultural aspects of Highland life, the practice of Roman Catholicism, and the freedom to develop essential institutions. By acting as a broker throughout his transatlantic journey, Alexander Macdonell worked dutifully to implement his vision of a Highland future in Upper Canada, rooted in Roman Catholicism, loyalism, and Scottish tradition.

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<sup>3</sup> J. A. Macdonell of Greenfield, *A Sketch of the Life of the Honourable and Right Reverend Alexander Macdonell: Chaplain of the Glengarry Fencible or British Highland Regiment, First Catholic Bishop of Upper Canada, and a Member of the Legislative Council of the Province* (Glengarry: Office of the Glengarrian, 1890), 7.

To further appreciate Father Alexander Macdonell and his role among the Glengarry Highlanders, it is first vital to understand his role as their broker. As Lisa Mar explains in her book *Brokering Belonging*, brokers were leaders for groups of immigrants, who acted as middlemen in the relationship between their communities and the larger societies around them. These brokers could be aspiring politicians, businesspeople, or even religious leaders in their respective communities and often "expect[ed] payment in loyalty, coin, tribute, or souls" from those they brokered to and for in exchange for their services as leaders.<sup>4</sup> While Mar's study focused on Chinese political middlemen, it offers a framework that sheds light on Macdonell's role in the immigration, settlement, and development of the Glengarry Highlanders. As a priest for the Highland migrants, a chaplain for the fencibles, or a Bishop for Upper Canada's Catholics, Alexander Macdonell was a middleman, brokering relationships between the Glengarry Highlanders and the governments of the British Empire. The priest not only shepherded his flock along their transatlantic journey but acted as a broker between the Highlanders and other communities, religious officials, and governments in Britain, Ireland, and North America. He acted with intentions that he believed were best for the Glengarry Highlanders, but was undoubtedly simultaneously leveraging loyalty, coin, and souls from both his flock and the governments of Upper Canada and Britain in return. Macdonell's role as a middleman, while mutually aiding the parties he brokered between, ultimately allowed him to grow in reputation, status, and power, whether religious or political.

Macdonell's vision for Upper Canada's future was rooted first and foremost in Scottish traditions, which he spared no effort to establish in the colony throughout the early nineteenth century. Tradition, however, is a complex and multifaceted concept, which for the purpose of

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<sup>4</sup> Lisa Rose Mar, *Brokering Belonging: Chinese in Canada's Exclusion Era, 1885-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 3-4.

this work, must be contextualized. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's *The Invention of Tradition* introduces three kinds of "traditions" that must be differentiated from one another. The first kind relates to customs or precedents in traditional societies, while the second refers to conventions or practices. Both kinds are automatic procedures, "which [have] no significant ritual or symbolic function as such." The third is invented traditions, or the creation of an immutable and unchanging "ritualization, characterized by reference to the past."<sup>5</sup> In their collection of essays, Hobsbawm and Ranger, alongside their collaborators, focus solely on this third type of tradition. Their main objective is to demonstrate that invented traditions tend to be created more recently than they appear and are essential in shaping national identity. This approach has inspired many scholars who have studied the invention of different Highland traditions over the years, from the rise of Highlandism in Walter Scott's literary works to the creation of the Highland Games in North America to the popularization of Ossian poetry.<sup>6</sup> This MA thesis builds on this framework and literature as it addresses how Macdonell both facilitated the importation and adaptation of the Highlanders' customs and conventions and participated in the invention of Highland traditions in his new Upper Canadian home.

Macdonell's Highland origins, Roman Catholic education, and British military experiences allowed him to develop, promote, and work to implement a conservative worldview in Upper Canada, reconciling loyalty to the British Empire and Roman Catholic faith. With its origins often associated with Edmund Burke, modern conservatism is an ideology primarily based on the "preservation of the ancient moral traditions of humanity," shaped by specific

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<sup>5</sup> Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, ed, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 2-4.

<sup>6</sup> Kenneth McNeil, *Scotland, Britain, Empire: Writing the Highlands, 1760-1860* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2007); Grant Jarvie, *Highland Games: The Making of the Myth* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991).

circumstances, historical development, and national character.<sup>7</sup> As argued by Daniel O’Neill and Emily Jones, this type of conservatism defended the British Empire throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>8</sup> For many historians, conservatism made its way to Upper Canada with the arrival of the Loyalists in the late eighteenth century. It became particularly influential in the development of an Upper Canadian elite, which came to be known as the Family Compact.<sup>9</sup> According to David Mills, the Family Compact's conservatism went hand in hand with a particular conception of loyalty, namely a strict obedience to a connection with Britain in the face of potential American invasion of Upper Canada, which was "the basis of political legitimacy and acceptance in provincial society."<sup>10</sup> Loyalty was so crucial to early Upper Canadian politics that Jane Errington argues in *The Lion, The Eagle, and Upper Canada* that loyalism was, in fact, at the basis of Upper Canadian identity.<sup>11</sup> While historians have predominantly understood loyalism as Protestant-based, some have shown that it was also present among Catholics in both Upper and Lower Canada.<sup>12</sup> While Macdonell’s vision was

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<sup>7</sup> Russel Kirk, *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Eliot*, Seventh Revised Edition (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, Inc, 2001), 8.

<sup>8</sup> Daniel I. O’Neill, *Edmund Burke and the Conservative Logic of Fear* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2016); Emily Jones, *Edmund Burke and the Invention of Modern Conservatism, 1830-1914: An Intellectual History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

<sup>9</sup> Janet Ajzenstat and Peter J. Smith, ed, *Canada’s Origins: Liberal, Tory or Republican?* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1995); Patrick Brode, *Sir John Beverley Robinson: Bone and Sinew of the Compact* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984); Terry Cook, “John Beverly Robinson and the Conservative Blueprint for the Upper Canadian Community,” *Ontario History* 64, no. 2 (1972): 79-94; David W. L. Earl, ed, *The Family Compact: Aristocracy or Oligarchy?* (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1967); Norman Knowles, *Inventing the Loyalists: The Ontario Loyalist Tradition and the Creation of Usable Pasts* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1997); Graeme Patterson, “An Enduring Canadian Myth: Responsible Government and Family Compact,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 12, no. 2 (Spring 1977): 3-16; Albert Schrauwers, “The Gentlemanly Order and the Politics of Production in the Transition of Capitalism in the Home District, Upper Canada,” *Labour/Le Travail* 65 (Spring 2010): 9-45; S. F. Wise, *God’s Peculiar People: Essays on the Political Culture in Nineteenth Century Canada* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1993); S.F. Wise, “Upper Canada and the Conservative Tradition,” in *Profiles of a Province*, ed. Edith G. Firth, (Toronto: Ontario Historical Society, 1967), 19-33.

<sup>10</sup> David Mills, *The Idea of Loyalty in Upper Canada, 1784-1850* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1988), 5.

<sup>11</sup> Jane Errington, *The Lion, The Eagle, and Upper Canada: A Developing Colonial Ideology* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1987).

<sup>12</sup> Lower Canadian Catholic Loyalism: D. C. Bélanger, “Loyalty, Order, and Quebec’s Catholic Hierarchy, 1763-1867,” in *Violence, Order, and Unrest: A History of British North America, 1749-1876*, ed. Jerry Bannister and

definitively conservative, it took the form of Catholic loyalism interpreted from a Scottish point of view.

As a prominent figure in early Upper Canadian history, a modest well of literature exists on the Alexander Macdonell detailing his life on both sides of the Atlantic. While some historians have touched upon the Highland priest's political conservatism, loyalist allegiances, and religious advocacy, others have noted his role within the Scottish Catholic Church, the Glengarry Highland Fencibles, and Upper Canadian legislature.<sup>13</sup> J.E. Rea, however, has written the only comprehensive biography of Macdonell, which thoughtfully presents the priest's religious and political capacities. That said, Rea's publication does not put these capacities in the context of Macdonell's relationship with the Glengarry Highlanders or British and colonial governments.<sup>14</sup> By understanding his vision and role as a transatlantic broker, this MA contributes to this scholarship by studying Macdonell's religious, loyal, and social actions as a leader in his community in both the British Isles and Upper Canada.

To best interpret and analyze the brokering and vision of Father Alexander Macdonell, this thesis will study a variety of primary sources, including two of the priest's autobiographical publications. The first of these is a booklet Macdonell had published in 1839 by the *British Whig*

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Liam Riordan (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019), 51-67; Upper Canadian Catholic Loyalism: Denis McKim, "Anxious Anglicans, Complicated Catholics and Disruptive Dissenters: Christianity and a Search for Social Order in the Age of Revolution," in *Violence, Order, and Unrest: A History of British North America, 1749-1876*, ed. Jerry Bannister and Liam Riordan (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019), 68-92; R. MacLean, "The Highland Catholic Tradition in Canada," in *The Scottish Tradition in Canada*, ed. W. Stanford Reid (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976), 93-117; Jerry Bannister and Liam Riordan, ed, *Violence, Order, and Unrest: A History of British North America, 1749-1876* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019), 5.

<sup>13</sup> Stewart D. Gill, "The Sword in the Bishop's Hand": Father William Peter MacDonald, A Scottish Defender of the Catholic Faith in Upper Canada," CCHA, *Study Sessions*, no. 50 (1983): 437-452; Teresa Gourlay, "Subject to Authority: Bishop Alexander Macdonell and his Scottish Religious Superiors, 1788-1804," *The Innis Review* 61, no. 2 (2010): 150-168; Carol Wilton, *Popular Politics and Political Culture in Upper Canada, 1800-1850* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000).

<sup>14</sup> J. E. Rea, *Bishop Alexander Macdonell and the Politics of Upper Canada* (Toronto: Ontario Historical Society, 1974); J. E. Rea, "McDonell, Alexander," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 7, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003–, accessed May 1, 2020, [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/mcdonell\\_alexander\\_7E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/mcdonell_alexander_7E.html).



*Office*, a regional Kingston newspaper. This booklet was released as a third-person account and is a testament to the Glengarry Highlanders, their military units, and most importantly, as made clear by the author, their Bishop, Alexander Macdonell.<sup>15</sup> Another essential document used throughout this thesis is an 1890 reprinting of a pamphlet written by Macdonell and is similarly composed of the Highland priest's account of both the Glengarry Highlanders and his transatlantic narrative. These publications have been supplemented with further primary sources, comprising mainly of letters detailing Macdonell's correspondence with his contemporaneous world. Alongside these letters are addresses, accounts, and reports, which help represent the Highland priest's religious, military, political, and social interactions. This thesis synthesizes these sources with Father Macdonell's publications and secondary literature to better understand his role as a broker on his journey throughout the British Empire and reveal the nature of his vision of Upper Canada.

While providing first-hand insight into the world of Alexander Macdonell, these sources must still be approached with a critical eye to help best understand the key players in the Highland priest's transatlantic journey. As the sources focus primarily on the Bishop and his documented communications, they chiefly comprised of military, political, and clerical affairs, which almost exclusively feature men. While there are occasional references and mentions of both women and children, they are generally amalgamated and consequently termed as families. Similarly, these sources tend to feature leading figures, such as high-ranking members of Clan Macdonell, politicians, or clergy. While this approach does not provide a thorough understanding

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<sup>15</sup> Alexander Macdonell, *A Short Account of the Emigrations from the Highlands of Scotland to North America; and the Establishment of the Catholic Dioceses in Upper Canada with an Appendix* (Kingston: British Whig Office, 1839).

of self from every acquaintance throughout his life, it helps demonstrate how Macdonell himself would have understood those around him.

To further help illustrate Alexander Macdonell's transatlantic journey, this thesis is divided into two distinct yet congruous sections. The first section looks at Alexander Macdonell and the Glengarry Highlanders before they departed from their homeland. This initial foray is followed by the journey of Father Macdonell and his flock throughout the British Isles, their involvement in the war against France, their eventual settlement in Upper Canada, and their subsequent participation in the War of 1812. Central to the first section is the discussion of Father Macdonell as a broker for the Glengarry Highlanders. This work's second section rejoins Macdonell and the Highlanders following the War of 1812 and focuses on the different aspects of the Highland priest's vision for Upper Canada as well as the Bishop's final act as a broker for the Highlanders, namely his involvement with Lord Durham's inquiry. When these two sections are read together, they show that thanks to Macdonell's leadership, foresight, and diplomatic skills as a broker, Roman Catholicism, its accompanying provincial loyalism, and Scottish tradition were envisioned as an Upper Canadian reality.

## **A Highland Departure, A British Sojourn, An Upper Canadian Arrival**

Born to parents of the Glengarry clan on July 17<sup>th</sup>, 1762, Alexander Macdonell grew up in a Highland society that faced a myriad of challenges following generations of socio-economic turmoil, political struggles, military defeats, and repressive legislation. Indeed, in the century and a half leading up to 1745's Jacobite Uprising, changes had been steadily occurring across the Highlands.<sup>16</sup> The rural lifestyles practiced by Highlanders were being slowly integrated into the rapidly modernizing and increasingly urban economies of southern Britain. Following this final Jacobite Uprising, parliament's consequential legislation accelerated change for the Highlanders and their way of life. The Highland region of Western Inverness-shire and its two long-time resident clans were particularly affected. Both the Macdonells of Glengarry and McMillans of Loch Arkaig had been ardent Jacobites and, as a result, had seen the British government crackdown hard on their virtually feudal lifestyle. After generations of a Roman Catholic "kin-based agrarian society with a rich [Gaelic] musical and oral-literary tradition," Westminster moved swiftly to assimilate the Highlanders into the economy and society of southern Britain. Parliament forced landowners, who had been on the losing Jacobite side, to forfeit their land titles and replaced them with loyal Hanoverians.<sup>17</sup>

Westminster soon passed new legislation that targeted the rebellious Highlanders, their culture, and their means of subsistence. The most infamous of these laws was the *Act of Proscription*, which was enacted by Parliament in 1746. This Act limited the possession of arms held by Highlanders, greatly diminishing the possibility of violent revolutions. Furthermore, it

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<sup>16</sup> For more information on 1745's Jacobite Uprising, see: Magnus Magnusson, *Scotland: The Story of a Nation* (New York: Grove Press, 2000); Geoffrey Plank, *Rebellion and Savagery: The Jacobite Rising of 1745 and the British Empire* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

<sup>17</sup> Marianne McLean, *The People of Glengarry: Highlanders in Transition, 1745-1820* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991) 14-22 (p.14 for the quote. Continued on p.16).

forced anyone in an educational position, such as teachers, chaplains, and tutors, to take an oath pledging allegiance and loyalty to the British Crown. Finally, it banned anything considered to be “Highland clothes.”<sup>18</sup> This included kilts, plaid, or shoulder belts for any male who was not employed by the British army. Anyone who broke these laws faced penalties, including jail time for up to six months or transportation to overseas plantations, where the offenders were forced to work for up to seven years.<sup>19</sup> The Act's purposes were explicit: to nullify any chance of military uprising, while simultaneously eroding Highland culture. The Glengarry Highlanders’ way of life was under attack.

British Parliament did not stop with the *Act of Proscription*, and soon after passed the *Heritable Jurisdictions Act*. While continuing to attack the Highlander’s culture, this *Act* further challenged their political structures. It stripped the clan chiefs of the power of appointment for positions such as local justices and ministers. This power was then transferred to the Crown, which significantly increased the Crown's influence on political life throughout the Highlands.<sup>20</sup> As Scottish historian Marianne McLean noted, "the Highland area was brought under the direct rule of the central government in the south." After gaining power over the Highlanders’ cultural and political structures, Westminster's Government hoped to finally integrate the Highlands “as an appendage into the British state.”<sup>21</sup>

While Britain moved to assimilate the Highlands, the southern part of the British Isles underwent severe economic changes. Both England and the Scottish Lowlands saw their economies and societies transform into the world’s first modern industrial state. Cities and factories took over from rural and farming life, and opportunity and wealth both began to grow

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<sup>18</sup> *Act of Proscription* 1746, 19 Geo. 2, c. 39.

<sup>19</sup> *Act of Proscription* 1746, 19 Geo. 2, c. 39.

<sup>20</sup> *The Heritable Jurisdictions (Scotland) Act* 1746, 20 Geo. II c. 43.

<sup>21</sup> McLean, *The People of Glengarry*, 22.

in southern Britain.<sup>22</sup> The Highlands, however, continued in their agricultural way of life and were being ruled by increasingly more Englishmen and Lowlanders. The new landlords saw their southern counterparts cashing in on Britain's rising capitalist industrial state and did their best to compete. As a result, the landlords raised rents to unprecedented levels, which many Highland tenants struggled to pay. Furthermore, the landlords transformed large plots of land into sheep farms that were far more profitable than the crop-based farming that it had replaced, leaving their land without the need for so many tenants.<sup>23</sup> These economic changes played a significant role in Scottish emigration, most notably with the Highland Clearances.

Known for the swathes of Highlanders driven out of their traditional lands and towards Britain's transatlantic colonies, the Highland Clearances have been the subject of much debate by Scottish historians. While author John Prebble has argued that the Clearances resulted from the forced eviction of Highland tenants, J. M. Bumsted has contended that these migrations were more voluntary in nature.<sup>24</sup> Seeing an impasse between these two schools of thought, historian Eric Richards argued that the basic nature of the economic developments leading to clearances are, in fact, a classic historical problem. By this, he meant that the causes for the Highland departures will never have a definitive answer as it can be interpreted as either forced or more voluntary, depending on the historian's point of view.<sup>25</sup> The people of Glengarry were not immune from these economic changes. As Marianne McLean has argued, the region's emigrants were not abruptly forced out of their traditional homes by their landlords, but trickled to British

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<sup>22</sup> For more information on the Industrial Revolution in Britain see: Robert C. Allen, *The British Industrial Revolution in Global Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Christopher A. Whatley, *The Industrial Revolution in Scotland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>23</sup> McLean, *The People of Glengarry*, 62.

<sup>24</sup> John Prebble, *The Highland Clearances* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1963); J.M. Bumsted, *The People's Clearance: Highland Emigration to British North America, 1770-1815* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1982).

<sup>25</sup> Eric Richards, *Debating the Highland Clearances* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007).

North America in groups, driven by a gradual integration into the British economy.<sup>26</sup> With their traditional agricultural lives no longer tenable or affordable by June 1792, the Glengarry Highlanders, led by their priest Father Alexander Macdonell, set off for Glasgow.<sup>27</sup>

Standing at a towering six foot four, Alexander Macdonell was hard to miss, not only from his physical appearance but from his sizeable accompanying personality. Following his childhood in the Highlands, Macdonell promptly dedicated his life to the church in his early teen years. As legislation had banned the training of Catholic priests in the British Isles from 1560 to 1714, getting a Roman Catholic education had become impossible in Scotland. This ban resulted in a growing tradition of Scottish seminaries on the European continent, whose importance continued into the late eighteenth century.<sup>28</sup> In this context, Macdonell had to enroll at these Scottish seminaries on the continent and be funded by the Scottish Catholic Mission in order to be ordained as a priest.<sup>29</sup> Beginning his studies at the Scottish College in Paris shortly before a move to the Scots College of Valladolid, Macdonell graduated and was subsequently ordained as a priest in 1787.<sup>30</sup> In line with the theology and morality he confronted during his clerical education, the Highland-born priest became known for his orthodox and conservative principles. Following a short spell as a missionary in the Western Highlands at Badenoch, he was introduced to the chief of the Macdonell clan, Alistair Ranaldson Macdonell, and set in motion the priest's lifelong relationship with the Glengarry Highlanders.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> McLean, *The People of Glengarry*, 9-10.

<sup>27</sup> McLean, *The People of Glengarry*, 5.

<sup>28</sup> Christine Johnson, *Developments in the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland 1789-1829* (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers Ltd, 1983), 48

<sup>29</sup> Rea, *Bishop Alexander Macdonell and the Politics of Upper Canada*, 196-7; Gourlay, "Subject to Authority," 150, 152. Johnson, *Developments in the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland 1789-1829*, 57

<sup>30</sup> Gourlay, "Subject to Authority," 152; Macdonell of Greenfield, *A Sketch of the Life of the Honourable and Right Reverend Alexander Macdonell*, 4.

<sup>31</sup> Rea, "McDonell, Alexander," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 7, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003–, accessed May 1, 2020, [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/mcdonell\\_alexander\\_7E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/mcdonell_alexander_7E.html).

Just a missionary priest at the time of their departure, Father Alexander Macdonell's established connections, including his friendship with the clan chief and his role within the Church, had made him a leader among the Glengarry Highlanders. In this new position, Macdonell procured the Highlanders factory jobs in Glasgow after brokering negotiations in the metropolis. The Roman Catholic and Gaelic-speaking labourers had been apprehensive about moving to a Protestant-dominated and Anglophone working environment. Similarly, the Protestant manufacturers were wary of the incoming Catholics considering the uneasy relationship between the two denominations. Twelve years prior, Glasgow had its Roman Catholic chapels and houses owned by Catholic Clergy burned to the ground by local Protestants unhappy with legislation for Roman Catholic relief. While relations between the two denominations had mildly ameliorated since the riots, Macdonell believed there was still a "strong and rancorous feeling" towards the reintroduction of Catholics into Glasgow.<sup>32</sup>

Father Macdonell, however, downplayed the possibility of tensions to the manufacturers, stating that anti-Catholic attitudes had been progressively changing since the 1780 riots. After addressing potential sectarian violence, Macdonell next insisted on the importance of his presence for the Glengarry migrants to "afford them the exercises and consolations of their religion," to maintain their Catholic morality and serve as a linguistic interpreter for the Gaelic speaking Highlanders. By bringing a Catholic priest and parishioners into a Protestant hotbed, the manufacturers were undoubtedly taking a risk but were getting hard workers in return. With this in mind, the factory owners told Macdonell that the Highlanders could come to Glasgow for employment, although the manufacturers stated they would not be held responsible should any violence arise. <sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Macdonell, "A Page from the History of the Glengarry Highlanders," 5.

<sup>33</sup> Macdonell, "A Page from the History of the Glengarry Highlanders," 6.

Not long after they arrived in Glasgow, however, Macdonell realized that the Glengarry Highlanders had to adjust their lives to adapt to the bustling metropole in which they now found themselves. Even with an accompanying priest, living in Protestant Glasgow posed a central challenge for the Glengarry Highlanders and one of their most important religious activities, namely holding mass. This was an obstacle that Father Macdonell addressed head-on out of fear that his flock would seek religious guidance, whether Presbyterian or Anglican, and perhaps even convert to these other Christian denominations. Macdonell believed that the only way to operate a Catholic church in Glasgow was through the careful balance of discretion and compromise. Services were held during Sunday's early hours at a hall that had been repurposed into a chapel. These services were cleaned up long before their Protestant counterparts had opened their eyes, let alone sung their weekly hymns.<sup>34</sup> On top of their early hours, Macdonell delivered the sermons in both Gaelic and English, a tactic that had at the time been used by Presbyterian ministers to convert devout Catholics throughout the Highlands.<sup>35</sup> The bilingual services were tailored to not only preach to the Gaelic Highlanders but also accommodate the small but pre-existing population of Anglophone Catholic Glaswegians.<sup>36</sup> Through this linguistic compromise, the priest hoped that his flock would not be swayed by the accessible lure of Glasgow's other denominations and remain loyal, yet irregular Catholics.<sup>37</sup>

Worries for Father Macdonell and the Glengarry Highlanders, however, were not limited to their religious sphere as they soon encountered a problematic urban economy. Following the

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<sup>34</sup> Alexander Macdonell, "A Page from the History of the Glengarry Highlanders," (April, 1833), in Macdonell of Greenfield, *A Sketch of the Life of the Honourable and Right Reverend Alexander Macdonell*, 6; Johnson, *Developments in the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland 1789-1829*, 23.

<sup>35</sup> Colin Kidd, *British Identities Before Nationalism: Ethnicity, and Nationhood in the Atlantic World, 1600-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 130; Macdonell, "A Page from the History of the Glengarry Highlanders," 6.

<sup>36</sup> Johnson, *Developments in the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland 1789-1829*, 23.

<sup>37</sup> Macdonell, "A Page from the History of the Glengarry Highlanders," 6.



French Revolution across the English Channel, France began to export its revolutionary ideas to Europe's reluctant monarchies. The rising tensions between the two political systems reached a breaking point in 1793, which was marked with the outbreak of war between Britain and France. British manufacturers immediately ceased sending a majority of their exports to the continent, which created a wartime recession and spike in unemployment.<sup>38</sup> Father Macdonell and the Glengarry Highlanders found themselves particularly vulnerable to this recession due to their lack of urban work experience. Furthermore, the Glengarry Highlanders were missing the necessary linguistic skills to compete in such a difficult market, speaking almost exclusively Gaelic instead of English. Unable to obtain regular work, the Highlanders fell into what Macdonell described as a “helpless and destitute state,” moving to the bottom of Glasgow’s social order shortly after they lost their employment.<sup>39</sup> The Glengarry emigrants were down and out, struggling for work and sustenance in the wartime economy in which they now found themselves.

Soldiering, however, was an employment that went hand in hand with wartime. Following the Jacobite defeat in 1745, Highlanders had played a role in the British Army. Seen by the British Government as both cheap and expendable, Highland units first featured in the Seven Years War between 1756-63, with diverse ranks full of Highlanders, Lowlanders, and Irishmen, most of which had been forced into service through the Impressment Act. Later driven by the lucrative rewards and the prospect of settling overseas, the units’ ranks filled with a growing percentage of Highlanders, driven by the regional redevelopment of the Highland economy. The impact of this potential reward is most notably seen in the Highland units that were used in the American Revolution between 1775 and 1783. While on the losing side, they

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<sup>38</sup> Macdonell, “A Page from the History of the Glengarry Highlanders,” 7.

<sup>39</sup> Macdonell, “A Page from the History of the Glengarry Highlanders,” 9.

were awarded 54,300 acres of land in Upper Canada, Lower Canada, and Nova Scotia at the end of the war. The service of these Highland units did not go unnoticed by British politicians, who saw the Highlanders as epitomizing valour and martial spirit.<sup>40</sup> These Highland units had, however, only been deployed overseas and never used domestically.

The reluctance to relocate Highland units for home service changed in Britain with the Wars of the First and Second Coalitions between 1792 and 1802. Fear of French invasion had sparked the British army to raise several fencible regiments, the sole purpose of which was to defend the British Isles from any possible invasion or uprising. Enlisting in fencible units such as these in 1793 required the recruits to declare themselves Protestant, swearing allegiance to King and country, which was intended to create a cohesive British unit, devoid of internal religious dissent.<sup>41</sup> Building upon this idea of a religiously cohesive unit, Macdonell inquired about a potential unit of his Highlanders, composed of Roman Catholics, to serve and defend the British Isles. An exclusively Catholic unit had been near unthinkable since 1688's Glorious Revolution. Now a century later, although many British politicians did not view this idea favourably, the potential manpower offered by Father Macdonell proved a powerful bargaining chip.

Similar units, although of standard Protestant ilk, had been formed across Scotland. They refused, however, to move far from where they had enlisted, even rejecting orders to march to England. With this knowledge, Macdonell offered the services of the Glengarry Highlanders with an explicit willingness to travel and defend anywhere in the British Isles. By using the Glengarry Regiment as the new standard, the British Government would be able to set a precedent to pressure other fencible units to be similarly stationed where they were needed, and

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<sup>40</sup> Andrew Mackillop, "Military Scotland in the Age of Proto-globalisation, c. 1690 to c. 1815," in *A Global Force: War, Identities and Scotland's Diaspora*, ed. David Forsyth and Wendy Ugolini (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), 18, 20-26.

<sup>41</sup> Macdonell, *A Short Account of the Emigrations from the Highlands of Scotland to North America*, 6.

not just where they wished to be.<sup>42</sup> Macdonell further offered testimonies from the Protestant manufacturers, for whom the Highlanders had worked and who spoke highly on their behalf.<sup>43</sup>

Still wary of the idea of an all Catholic unit and the practice of mass in the British Army, the government and Macdonell came to several compromises in creating the unit. These accommodations included the enlistment of two chaplains, a yet unnamed Protestant chaplain, and Macdonell as the Catholic chaplain. Furthermore, the two parties worked on a unit name that would in no way sound explicitly Catholic.<sup>44</sup> Britain's need for troops was so dire that Secretary of State for War Henry Dundas, who had already built a good relationship with Scottish Parliament members, approved the idea and created the First Glengarry Regiment.<sup>45</sup> The British Parliament formally raised the unit in June 1795, and it was immediately sent to defend the island of Guernsey in the English Channel. Command of the Glengarry Fencibles was given to clan Chief Alexander Ranaldson Macdonell, while the Secretary of War awarded his namesake, Father Alexander Macdonell, with the unit's chaplaincy. This appointment made the priest the first Roman Catholic chaplain to serve in the British Army since the Glorious Revolution.<sup>46</sup> With the fencible unit in place, the army had increased its ranks, while Father Macdonell and the Glengarry Highlanders had fresh, albeit dangerous, employment.

Three years after their initial deployment, the Highlanders relocated from Guernsey to Ireland following the outbreak of a French-inspired Irish rebellion.<sup>47</sup> According to Macdonell,

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<sup>42</sup> Macdonell, "A Page from the History of the Glengarry Highlanders," 8.

<sup>43</sup> Macdonell, "A Page from the History of the Glengarry Highlanders," 7.

<sup>44</sup> Macdonell, "A Page from the History of the Glengarry Highlanders," 8. The Protestant chaplain was never appointed.

<sup>45</sup> Gourlay, "Subject to Authority," 158.

<sup>46</sup> Macdonell, "A Page from the History of the Glengarry Highlanders," 11; Gourlay, "Subject to Authority," 156.

<sup>47</sup> Macdonell, "A Page from the History of the Glengarry Highlanders," 11. For more information on the 1798 Irish Rebellion, see: Stuart Andrew, *Irish Rebellion: Protestant Polemic, 1798-1900* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Thomas Pakenham, *Years of Liberty: The Story of the Great Irish Rebellion of 1798* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1969); Ruan O'Donnell, *The Rebellion in Wicklow 1798* (Dublin, Irish Academic Press,

the Glengarry Fencibles had earned a sizable level of trust from the British Government because of their favourable conduct and loyalty throughout their time in Guernsey. This trust resulted in the Highlanders' deployment to what the chaplain described as Ireland's most disturbed parts, such as the predominantly Catholic and mountainous counties of Wicklow, Wexford, and Galway. Even after significant parts of the Irish Rebellion were put down, Republican rebels, both Catholic and Protestant, continued to inhabit the hills of these counties, continually raiding the local towns and camps.<sup>48</sup> Before the arrival of the Highlanders, this guerilla warfare had been unsuccessfully met by native Protestant Yeomanry units, who responded by harassing peaceful residents, burning down habitations, and plundering the locals. When Father Macdonell arrived with the Glengarry Fencibles, he remarked that he found a distraught and untrusting populace.<sup>49</sup> To add to the chaos, the jail had been left overcrowded with wounded rebels, and Catholic chapels had been turned into stables by the Yeomanry, housing their horses instead of worship.<sup>50</sup> While the Highlanders set out into the hills to deal with the raiders, Macdonell set upon a personal three-fold plan to establish relationships with the locals.

According to his 1839 publication, Father Macdonell first took to the prison, where he brought the Fencibles' surgeon to tend and dress the wounds of the Irish rebels who overflowed from the limited cells.<sup>51</sup> Following this, the chaplain wrote that he did his best to accompany both the Highlanders and Yeomanry into the field at every opportunity to reduce the plundering and violence directed towards the locals. The final component of his mission saw the chaplain have the Catholic chapels "cleaned out and restored to their proper use," before inviting the

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1998); Jim Smyth, *Revolution, Counter-Revolution, and Union: Ireland in the 1790s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>48</sup> Stella Tillyard, *Citizen Lord: The Life of Edward Fitzgerald, Irish Revolutionary* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997), 204.

<sup>49</sup> Macdonell, "A Page from the History of the Glengarry Highlanders," 7.

<sup>50</sup> Macdonell, "A Page from the History of the Glengarry Highlanders," 14-5.

<sup>51</sup> Macdonell, *A Short Account of the Emigrations from the Highlands of Scotland to North America*, 6.

clergy and county locals to resume their religious practices.<sup>52</sup> This offer was accepted by reconvening congregations, including many who fled to the mountains and the bogs before the arrival of the Highlanders.<sup>53</sup> As services resumed, Father Macdonell believed he had opened up a discourse between himself and Catholic locals.<sup>54</sup>

Father Macdonell assured the locals of peaceful, tranquil, and prosperous lives under the protection of the British Government. He further stated that even though Protestant subjects were Britain's primary concern, the interests of Catholics remained on Westminster's agenda. He used the Glengarry Fencibles to emphasize this, pointing out that as Roman Catholics, they had been entrusted with weapons, ammunition, and a military unit. This line of reasoning, according to Father Macdonell, gained him the trust of the locals, mainly on the back of the merits of the Glengarry Fencibles he had brokered into existence.<sup>55</sup>

Between the success of their raids against the rebels and the persuasion of locals onto the side of the British Government, Father Macdonell believed that the Glengarry Fencibles had thrived in driving revolt out of Ireland's mountainous counties. This sentiment is clearly noted in his writings, where he states the Highlanders had been so successful, that Commander of the Forces Lord Cornwallis sought to have the unit augmented, an indication of the growing trust the Government had in the Roman Catholic unit. Following the unit's proposed expansion, the Fencibles were redeployed to Connemara, where the rebellion fought on until the Peace of Amiens in 1802 and the subsequent end of the war. This treaty reduced Britain's need for units,

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<sup>52</sup> Macdonell, "A Page from the History of the Glengarry Highlanders," 12, 14.

<sup>53</sup> Macdonell, *A Short Account of the Emigrations from the Highlands of Scotland to North America*, 7.

<sup>54</sup> Macdonell, "A Page from the History of the Glengarry Highlanders," 15.

<sup>55</sup> Macdonell, "A Page from the History of the Glengarry Highlanders," 10.

and the Government quickly disbanded the Glengarry Fencibles, who once again found themselves destitute and without employment.<sup>56</sup>

As the recently unemployed Highlanders began to look for work back in Glasgow, Father Macdonell set out instead to London, this time with a proposal for Prime Minister Henry Addington.<sup>57</sup> Knowing that many Loyalist Highlanders had moved to Upper Canada following the American Revolution, Macdonell suggested that the disbanded Glengarry Fencibles emigrate across the Atlantic to join their fellow Highland migrants. Macdonell noted that Addington was sympathetic to the Highlanders' situation and was “convinced of their principles of loyalty to their Sovereign and attachment to the Constitution of their country,” owing in significant part to their service during the French Revolutionary Wars and Irish Rebellion.<sup>58</sup> Worried that Britain's hold on Upper Canada was too slender and could be lost to the Americans at any moment, however, the Prime Minister offered the Highlanders a lucrative proposal to move to the recently conquered and predominantly Catholic Trinidad, which the British Government would heavily support and finance.<sup>59</sup> Macdonell declined this offer as he worried about his health and that of his fellow Highlanders in the tropical conditions of the West Indies.<sup>60</sup> In declining this offer, the Highland priest once again countered with the idea of settling the Glengarry Highlanders in Upper Canada. This time, however, he suggested a military emigration, where instead of

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<sup>56</sup> Macdonell, “A Page from the History of the Glengarry Highlanders,” 16-19; Macdonell, *A Short Account of the Emigrations from the Highlands of Scotland to North America*, 8.

<sup>57</sup> Macdonell, “A Page from the History of the Glengarry Highlanders,” 19.

<sup>58</sup> Macdonell, *A Short Account of the Emigrations from the Highlands of Scotland to North America*, 8; Alexander Macdonell to Bishop Alexander Cameron, 10 February 1803, SCA BL/4/209/17.

<sup>59</sup> Macdonell, *A Short Account of the Emigrations from the Highlands of Scotland to North America*, 9; S. Karly Kehoe, “Colonial Collaborators: Britain and the Catholic Church in Trinidad, c. 1820-1840,” *Slavery & Abolition* 40, no. 1 (2019), 135. Trinidad had been acquired from Spain in 1802's Treaty of Amiens.

<sup>60</sup> Macdonell, *A Short Account of the Emigrations from the Highlands of Scotland to North America*, 9. Around a century earlier, a mercantilist Scottish colony had been founded on the Isthmus of Panama, known as the Darien Expedition. Harsh conditions, fever, and sea voyage killed around three-quarters of the 1,200 Scottish colonists. Magnusson, *Scotland*, 530.

pensions, the Highlanders would be rewarded with land grants after serving in the army's ranks.<sup>61</sup> Macdonell added that in the case of an American invasion of the colony, this arrangement would require fewer troops deployed from the British Isles and stressed that this proposal was mutually beneficial to both Addington and the Glengarry Highlanders.<sup>62</sup>

Seeing an opportunity to satisfy both Macdonell and his Highlanders while simultaneously increasing Britain's means of colonial defence would have certainly appealed to Addington. The Prime Minister soon agreed to Macdonell's proposed emigration scheme and stated that the families of the former Glengarry Fencibles, upon arrival in Upper Canada, would each receive 200 acres of land.<sup>63</sup> While this proposed emigration appeared useful for both the out-of-work Glengarry Fencibles and the British Government, it was equally, if not more beneficial for Macdonell himself. Macdonell's progression up the ranks of Scotland's Roman Catholic clergy had not only stagnated by 1802, but he could only count on a small military pension supplementing his church salary if he remained on the Isles. While this pension from the British government was a tribute to his achievement as chaplain of the First Glengarry Regiment since such pensions were not generally extended to chaplains, it was hardly a significant source of sustenance. Although the Catholic presence was minimal in Upper Canada, his emigration to this region was bound to open new opportunities, which might have given Macdonell more room to further his position in the Catholic Church.<sup>64</sup>

Before the Highlanders procured their transatlantic migration, however, Addington resigned and was replaced by William Pitt the Younger. The new Prime Minister, heavily influenced by Highland landowners who were afraid that their tenants would follow the

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<sup>61</sup> Macdonell, *A Short Account of the Emigrations from the Highlands of Scotland to North America*, 9.

<sup>62</sup> Macdonell, "A Page from the History of the Glengarry Highlanders," 16.

<sup>63</sup> McLean, *The People of Glengarry*, 146-147.

<sup>64</sup> Gourlay, "Subject to Authority," 167.

Glengarry clansmen to British North America, looked to put an end to this type of emigration. As a result, the *Passengers Vessels Act* was introduced to Parliament in the Spring of 1803, raising the price of naval travel in an attempt to stem the flow of migration to the colonies.<sup>65</sup> Most remaining prospective passengers could no longer afford the new fares, effectively ending the frenzy of Highland migration to Upper Canada for the time being.<sup>66</sup>

While some of the Highlanders had made it to Upper Canada before Parliament enacted the *Passengers Act*, the rest had to be smuggled over by Father Macdonell, whom himself had his own way over paid for by the Bishop of Quebec, Joseph-Octave Plessis.<sup>67</sup> Instead of using the rapport that the Highlanders had established with Addington and the British Government, Macdonell turned to the Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada, Peter Hunter, for help.<sup>68</sup> Hunter, who had previously served in Nova Scotia, Lower Canada, and as a colonel during the Irish Rebellion before his promotion to the military governor of County Wexford, had briefly overseen the efforts of the Glengarry Fencibles in Ireland and agreed to help.<sup>69</sup> After initial difficulty from the Colonial Government, the Lieutenant Governor, at the behest of Macdonell, eventually got his way and awarded the priest and his fellow emigrants the patents to a total of 160,000 acres of land in Glengarry County, Upper Canada.<sup>70</sup> The county, which had been Mississauga land before its settlement by Lower Canadians and eventual reshuffle to Upper

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<sup>65</sup> McLean, *The People of Glengarry*, 145.

<sup>66</sup> McLean, *The People of Glengarry*, 148.

<sup>67</sup> Bernard W. Kelly, *The Fate of Glengarry; or, The expatriation of the Macdonells, an Historio-Biographical Study* (Dublin: Duffy, 1905), 49; McLean, *The People of Glengarry*, 147-148.

<sup>68</sup> Macdonell, *A Short Account of the Emigrations from the Highlands of Scotland to North America*, 11.

<sup>69</sup> Rev. Alexander Macdonell to Bishop J.O. Plessis, October 26, 1806, Archives of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Toronto (ARCAT), MCG01.03. "Hunter, Peter," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 5, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003–, accessed May 1, 2020, [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/hunter\\_peter\\_5E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/hunter_peter_5E.html).

<sup>70</sup> Macdonell, *A Short Account of the Emigrations from the Highlands of Scotland to North America*, 11.



Canada in 1791's Constitution Act, had been settled by Scottish loyalists following the American Revolution, who named it after their traditional Highland homeland.<sup>71</sup>

Although hardly established, small pockets of Roman Catholics were scattered throughout Upper Canada and had increased with the Loyalist migrations of the late eighteenth century. These small groups had fallen under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Quebec, who had been fighting his own battle for survival against Lower Canada's new British-imposed administration.<sup>72</sup> While under the purview of the Roman Catholic Bishop of Quebec, Upper Canadian Catholics were not at the forefront of the Montreal-born Bishop's concerns. Realizing that more needed to be done to nurture and care for Upper Canada's flock, Bishop Plessis was more than happy to pay for Father Macdonell's trip to the colony.<sup>73</sup>

When Father Macdonell first landed in Upper Canada in 1804, he realized the presence of the Catholic Church was scarce. According to his writings, there were only two clergymen throughout the entire colony: "a Frenchman, who did not speak a word of English, and the other an Irishman who left shortly after the Highlanders' arrival."<sup>74</sup> As a Protestant colony, Upper Canada had no funds reserved or allocated towards Catholic ventures, including Macdonell's future plans to build places of worship and education. With Glengarry County under his jurisdiction, Bishop Plessis provided funds for these projects instead, which supplemented the personal funds that the Highland priest had put forward for the projects himself.<sup>75</sup> New projects

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<sup>71</sup> Michael E. Vance, *Imperial Immigrants: Scottish Settlers in the Upper Ottawa Valley, 1815-1840* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2012) 20; McLean, *The People of Glengarry*, 5; MacLean, "The Highland Catholic Tradition in Canada," 96.

<sup>72</sup> Terence Fay, *A History of Canadian Catholics: Gallicanism, Romanism, and Canadianism* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002) 38-39; Jean-Pierre Wallot, "Religion and French-Canadian Mores in the Early Nineteenth Century," *Canadian Historical Review* 52, no. 1 (1971): 90.

<sup>73</sup> Gourlay, "Subject to Authority," 166-167; McLean, *The People of Glengarry*, 148.

<sup>74</sup> Macdonell, *A Short Account of the Emigrations from the Highlands of Scotland to North America*, 11.

<sup>75</sup> Rev. Alexander Macdonell to Bishop J.O. Plessis, February 10, 1806. Archives of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Toronto (ARCAT), MCG01.01.

such as the construction of St. Raphael's Parish in Glengarry soon got underway, along with a stone presbytery, which shortly after converted into a seminary.<sup>76</sup> These measures began the process of institutionalizing the Roman Catholic Church as a force in Glengarry settler life.

Not long after Macdonell's Highlanders had settled into their Upper Canadian lives, the United States declared war against the British Empire. In the late Spring of 1812, American troops marched north and put Britain's thin grip on the colony to the test. Father Macdonell had long been preparing for such a threat, continually trying to mobilize a fencible unit to help protect the colony. Most notably, in 1807, both Colonel John Macdonell and Father Alexander Macdonell wrote to Major-General Isaac Brock, pushing for the creation of a fencible unit, which Brock in turn forwarded to Secretary of State for War William Windham.<sup>77</sup> Noting their prior success in Ireland and King George III's accompanying praise of the Glengarry Fencibles, Brock recommended the formation of a unit, with the appointment of Lieutenant-Colonel John Macdonell at the unit's helm and Father Macdonell as chaplain. If the Fencibles could operate as they had in Ireland's hills, the Major-General believed that a Glengarry fencible unit could vigorously defend British North America. This initial request for a new Glengarry fencible, however, was not formally approved.<sup>78</sup>

Major-General Brock had long thought that the majority of Upper Canada's population was untrustworthy and believed they would change allegiances when the Americans declared

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<sup>76</sup> A History of St. Raphael's development as a Parish, 1974, Archives of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Toronto (ARCAT), MCE03.04; Rev. Alexander Macdonell to Bishop J.O. Plessis, February 20, 1810, Archives of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Toronto (ARCAT), MCG01.11.

<sup>77</sup> Rev. Alexander Macdonell to Bishop J.O. Plessis, December 21, 1811, Archives of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Toronto (ARCAT), MCG01.14; Colonel Isaac Brock to Right Hon. William Windham, Quebec, February 12, 1807, in Macdonell of Greenfield, *A Sketch of the Life of the Honourable and Right Reverend Alexander Macdonell*, 26. For more on Isaac Brock's early life, See: Wesley B. Turner, *The Astonishing General: The Life and Legacy of Sir Isaac Brock* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2011).

<sup>78</sup> Colonel Isaac Brock to Right Hon. William Windham, Quebec, February 12, 1807, in Macdonell of Greenfield, *A Sketch of the Life of the Honourable and Right Reverend Alexander Macdonell*, 26.

war. So profound was his lack of trust that he proposed the suspension of *habeas corpus* and to force an oath of allegiance upon the Upper Canadian settlers to ensure their loyalty. When Westminster denied Brock's request, he quickly revived his prior recommendation to create a Highlander unit after its failure five years prior. The Major-General's request was promptly approved, and as a result, the Glengarry Light Infantry Fencible Regiment was raised for the defence of British North America. The Regiment was led by Major George Macdonell, with his fellow-clansman Father Macdonell once again the Highlanders' chaplain.<sup>79</sup> Due to their track record in Ireland, Father Macdonell's established rapport with the British Government, and Major-General Brock's needs for loyal and trustworthy manpower, the Highlanders found themselves once again among the ranks of Britain's military.<sup>80</sup>

Unlike most Upper Canadian militia and fencible units, the Glengarry Light Infantry Fencible Regiment were in the thick of the war and quickly became a staple of the British forces. The Highlanders were present at a total of fourteen engagements, including pivotal battles at Sackett's Harbour, Lundy's Lane, and Stoney Creek, where according to Macdonell, they increased their reputation and credibility with the British Government.<sup>81</sup> Most notably, in the winter of 1813, a British force composed primarily of the Glengarry Light Infantry marched from Kingston across a frozen St. Lawrence River towards the American town of Ogdensburg. The battle was considered a decisive success for the British, with four officers and seventy Americans taken prisoner, along with the capture of the town's arms and supplies. Furthermore, Ogdensburg remained unmanned and unoccupied by American forces for the remainder of the

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<sup>79</sup> Macdonell of Greenfield, *A Sketch of the Life of the Honourable and Right Reverend Alexander Macdonell*, 27; Turner, *The Astonishing General*, 86, 90.

<sup>80</sup> Colonel Isaac Brock to Right Hon. William Windham, Quebec, February 12, 1807, in Macdonell of Greenfield, *A Sketch of the Life of the Honourable and Right Reverend Alexander Macdonell*, 26.

<sup>81</sup> Colonel Isaac Brock to Right Hon. William Windham, Quebec, February 12, 1807, in Macdonell of Greenfield, *A Sketch of the Life of the Honourable and Right Reverend Alexander Macdonell*, 26.

war, removing a threat that had been ever-present to Upper Canadian security.<sup>82</sup> Augmented by the Fencibles' success at the Battle of Ogdensburg, the War of 1812 was a defining moment for the Glengarry Highlanders. Father Macdonell believed that not only had they once again proved their worth to Britain's Colonial Office but had this time also shown their value to Upper Canada's Government.

In the winter of 1814, the Treaty of Ghent was signed, bringing the War of 1812 to an end. The reputation of Father Macdonell and the Glengarry Highlanders was at a high among the British and Upper Canadian Governments. Looking to capitalize on the situation, Macdonell sought to strengthen his foothold in Upper Canada and enshrine Roman Catholicism in the Protestant colony. After arranging a meeting with high ranking officials of the British Government through former Prime Minister and then leader of the Privy Council Henry Addington, the clergyman made his way to England in 1816. Once in London, he was received favourably by Colonial Secretary Earl Bathurst, who then introduced him to the Prince Regent and future king, George IV.<sup>83</sup> As noted by Macdonell, the reputation and sacrifice of the Glengarry Highlanders had preceded him, and upon request, he was awarded funds by the Prince to be assigned by the colonial government with the purpose of appointing three Roman Catholic clergymen and four Roman Catholic schoolmasters to be appointed throughout the province. Macdonell argued that this would help ensure the protection and continuation of Roman Catholicism in Upper Canada.<sup>84</sup>

Upon returning to Upper Canada, however, Macdonell discovered that this funding was not as easy to obtain as he had initially thought. Although the monetary allocation had been

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<sup>82</sup> Macdonell of Greenfield, *A Sketch of the Life of the Honourable and Right Reverend Alexander Macdonell*, 86.

<sup>83</sup> Macdonell, *A Short Account of the Emigrations from the Highlands of Scotland to North America*, 12.

<sup>84</sup> Macdonell, *A Short Account of the Emigrations from the Highlands of Scotland to North America*, 12.

awarded to the Highland priest by the British Crown, the motion was stopped by the Upper Canadian executive council, maintaining that there were no colonial funds from which these salaries could be obtained.<sup>85</sup> Without the colony's support to fund Catholic clergy or educators, Macdonell set out looking for new ways to secure the finances he needed to advance Upper Canada's Roman Catholic population.<sup>86</sup> Turning his attentions to the colonial Clergy Reserves, Macdonell saw a potential source of funding for his vision of Upper Canada that remained in his sights for the rest of his life.

British Parliament had established the Clergy Reserves a quarter-century prior, stating that a seventh of every plot of land be reserved "for the Support and Maintenance of a Protestant Clergy."<sup>87</sup> This land could then be sold off or rented to be transformed into churches, seminaries, or parishes. The British Government saw this as a way to allow the Church of England, to thrive and establish itself as Upper Canada's predominant religious denomination. Due to the ambiguous use of the term Protestant in the Canada Act, Presbyterians and Methodists believed that they were equally entitled to shares of the reserved land. While knowing that he was on the wrong side of the sectarian divide, Macdonell still believed that the colony's Roman Catholics should have access to the Clergy Reserves. His argument for such unprecedented inclusion was partly due to the growing presence of Catholics in the colony, alongside the reputation of the Catholic Glengarry Highlanders, whom he stated had time and time again shown loyalty to the

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<sup>85</sup> Macdonell, *A Short Account of the Emigrations from the Highlands of Scotland to North America*, 12.

<sup>86</sup> Resolutions to be Proposed to Toronto Catholics Regarding Organizing Subscriptions, July 2, 1837 Archives of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Toronto (ARCAT), MAA08.10.

<sup>87</sup> Gerald M. Craig, *Upper Canada: The Formative Years, 1784-1841* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), 15-16; Catharine Anne Wilson, *Tenants in Time: Family Strategies, Land, and Liberalism in Upper Canada, 1799-1871* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), 24, 48; *31 Geo III c. 31 (R.U), Article XXXVI*.

Crown and province.<sup>88</sup> While Macdonell may have presented what in his eyes was a reasonable argument for Catholic access to Upper Canada's Clergy Reserves, he lacked the political and religious standing to have a genuinely influential voice in the colony's capital, York. Over the next three decades, however, his stature in provincial affairs significantly increased.

This surge in Macdonell's prominence was first noticeable in his climb up the ranks of the Roman Catholic Church. Shortly after the War of 1812, Bishop Plessis began to consider dividing the Diocese of Quebec into smaller pieces, creating three further Apostolic-Vicariates to ease the financial and jurisdiction burden of Lower Canada's Catholic clergy. After the Vatican's approval, these new Apostolic-Vicariates consisted of Nova Scotia, a conglomerate of New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and the Magdalen Islands, and finally Upper Canada. In January 1819, after approval from London and the Vatican, Macdonell was nominated to the role of Vicar-Apostolic of Upper Canada. Unfortunately, since Plessis had not been consulted on this appointment, Macdonell's initial promotion was never carried out. Instead, he was promoted to titular Bishop of Resina and episcopal vicar general of Upper Canada. This arrangement lasted only a few years. In early 1826, Pope Leo XII erected the Bishopric of Regiopolis, the Latin clerical name given to Kingston, and appointed the former chaplain to the inaugural position which covered the entire colony of Upper Canada.<sup>89</sup> Now a Bishop, Macdonell found himself in more regular and prominent contact with Upper Canada's political elite.

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<sup>88</sup> Bishop Macdonell to Rev. William P. MacDonald, December 23, 1837, Archives of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Toronto (ARCAT), MCD06.04. At least 36,435 Catholics in UC in 1828 while between 7,000 and 10,000 in Glengarry (although not all Catholic). MacLean, "The Highland Catholic Tradition in Canada," 97-8.

<sup>89</sup> Macdonell of Greenfield, *A Sketch of the Life of the Honourable and Right Reverend Alexander Macdonell*, 33-4. J. E. Rea, "McDonell, Alexander," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 7, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003–, accessed May 1, 2020, [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/mcdonell\\_alexander\\_7E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/mcdonell_alexander_7E.html).

Since the colony's foundation, Upper Canada politics had been run by an elite few who eventually came to be known as the Family Compact.<sup>90</sup> This group was primarily composed of young second-generation Loyalists, generally seen as "men of sound education, high-intelligence and proper ambition, brought up in a tradition of unswerving devotion to the King and the Mother Country."<sup>91</sup> These men occupied critical positions in the colony's administration, including executive and legislative councillors, senior officials, and judiciary members. Coming from similar backgrounds, they shared four principal tenets that they regularly applied when making both immediate and long-term decisions concerning the Upper Canadas future. Maintaining a tie with Britain, defending an oligarchic colonial government, favouring an established Church of England, and promoting economic progress were at the heart of all things for the Family Compact, and it showed. Lower-ranking appointments were typically given to likeminded officials, and before long, even local governments were showing the influence of the Compact at the ground level.<sup>92</sup> It was clear to everyone living in both the British Isles and the province; the Family Compact ran Upper Canada.

Although Bishop Macdonell was appointed to the Legislative Council in 1830, he remained outside the Family Compact for all his life. While Macdonell was a political conservative and promoted the preservation of the colony's connection with Britain, he did not believe that the Church of England should lie at the center of Upper Canadian thought and political decision, which put him squarely at odds with many members of the Family Compact. Nevertheless, thanks to his religious responsibilities, his political savviness, and his well-known conservative principles, Macdonell was able to act as a broker between the Glengarry

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<sup>90</sup> This expression was initially coined to reference the Kingston elite.

<sup>91</sup> Craig, *Upper Canada*, 108.

<sup>92</sup> Craig, *Upper Canada*, 107, 110.

Highlanders, the Roman Catholic population, and the Upper Canadian political elite, as he had done previously with the British Government in the years following his 1792 departure from the Highlands. Now established politically and religiously in Upper Canada, Bishop Macdonell sought to put in place his vision of a Highland future rooted in Roman Catholicism, loyalism, and Scottish tradition.



## Envisioning Father Macdonell's Upper Canada

Until the 1810s, Macdonell had succeeded in brokering alliances and negotiations primarily concerned with ensuring his community's survival. His successes until this point can be explained by both circumstances, such as Britain's need for troops, and Macdonell's main bargaining chip: the Glengarry Highlanders. Once settled in Upper Canada, however, Macdonell expanded his brokering to promote the development of a conservative Roman Catholic community in the colony. In his new ecclesiastic position, Bishop Macdonell now had full religious jurisdiction over the colony's Catholic population, which was chiefly composed of Highlanders and Irish, although it did include some smaller groups such as Germans.<sup>93</sup> Alongside his new clerical power came financial and political backing to aid in the growth and conservation of Catholicism in Upper Canada. Macdonell quickly used his newfound financial support to erect Catholic churches and seminaries throughout the colony. On top of Catholic parish in Glengarry, the Bishop helped to fund the erection of churches in York (Toronto), Prescott, Brockville, Bytown (Ottawa), Hamilton, Dundas, and Tyendinaga, among others. Each new building had profound importance to Macdonell and his Roman Catholic flock. As historian Teresa Gourlay argues, "the bricks and mortar gave a message: that this was a community with a solid future and nothing to hide."<sup>94</sup> Macdonell also used the small amounts of government and episcopal money he had been able to obtain through negotiations to maintain and repair the colony's Catholic buildings of worship.<sup>95</sup> Through these endeavours, Bishop Macdonell made it clear that although living in a Protestant colony, Upper Canada's Catholics would be able to practice their religion.

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<sup>93</sup> Statistics concerning churches and priests throughout Upper Canada, 1840, Archives of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Toronto (ARCAT), MAA08.11.

<sup>94</sup> Gourlay, "Subject to Authority," 167.

<sup>95</sup> Macdonell, *A Short Account of the Emigrations from the Highlands of Scotland to North America*, 13.

The fortification of Roman Catholicism in Upper Canada was further evidenced from the Bishop's first official address to the colony's Catholic clergy in 1833, which established the rules and direction that the new Diocese would follow. With no pre-existing Upper Canadian "ordinances or regulations yet established in [the colony] for the guidance of the Clergy," Bishop Macdonell turned to the foundation from the Dioceses of which he was most familiar, those of Scotland.<sup>96</sup> In adopting the guidance of the Scottish Roman Catholic Church, Macdonell believed that it was "better adapted to the situation and circumstances of the Catholics of this Province, than any other," likely due to the a significant portion the Highlanders composing Upper Canada's Catholics.<sup>97</sup> This adaptation included the adoption of the Scottish Roman Catholic Church's authority of Bishops, duties of pastors and clergy, instruction of youth, regulations for feasts and fast days, clerical guidelines for administering weddings and baptisms, and the delivery of the sacraments. <sup>98</sup>

While following the outline of the Scottish Church he wished to recreate, Bishop Macdonell understood that he would need to make some adjustments for his Diocese's diverse congregations. When expressing the responsibilities of Upper Canada's Catholic clergy, Macdonell stated that different approaches were needed for priests in established Catholic communities, such as the Glengarry Highlanders, or newer and more dispersed Catholic communities such as the Wyandot at River Canard.<sup>99</sup> For instance, because of the variation in the realities faced by worshippers, Macdonell slightly altered the Easter Eucharist's rules. According

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<sup>96</sup> Alexander Macdonell, *Alexander by the Grace of God, and the Approbation of the Holy See, Bishop of Kingston, to all the Catholic Clergy of Upper Canada, Health and Benediction*, (Kingston: s.n., 1833), 4.

<sup>97</sup> Macdonell, *Alexander by the Grace of God*, 4.

<sup>98</sup> Macdonell, *Alexander by the Grace of God*, 4-18; Johnson, *Developments in the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland 1789-1829* 175; Gourlay, "Subject to Authority," 166.

<sup>99</sup> Waron, Chief at River Canard, Isidore, Chief at River Canard, and Thomas Split Log, Chief at River Canard to Bishop Macdonell, Amherstburg, U.C. 24, June, 1828, Archives of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Toronto (ARCAT), MAC06.01.

to the Church, Roman Catholics had to go to confession and receive Holy Communion at Easter time. Considering the overstretched ecclesiastical jurisdiction and the potential accompanying trouble of attending a Church service in the largely rural colony, Macdonell acknowledged that Easter communion could be delayed in Upper Canada. He similarly offered adaptations to the sacrament of extreme unction, which could now be administered long before death as priests might only be able to visit distant parishioners once a year.<sup>100</sup>

Bishop Macdonell continued to shape the province's church when outlining the feasts for Upper Canada's Catholics. His flock would no longer follow the Lower Canadian practice of eating meat on Saturdays between Christmas and the purification. Instead, Macdonell's guidelines followed those of the Scottish model, offering no exceptions for consuming meat on a Saturday regardless of the time of year.<sup>101</sup> Further adaptations were similarly offered to fasts for those in laborious agricultural jobs, who, in the case of needing to eat to maintain the energy for their demanding occupation, could instead give up swearing, lying, drinking, and frequenting taverns. In each instance, the changes offered by Bishop Macdonell took the colony's unique situation and environment into consideration when structuring Upper Canada's Catholic Church.<sup>102</sup>

Adaptations, however, were not made towards the Bishop's stressed importance on an early Catholic education. Like his Scottish counterparts across the Atlantic, Macdonell hoped to create a schooling system that would allow the colony's Catholic youth to be theologically in line with the Scottish Roman Catholic Church and Macdonell's conservative Catholicism.

Furthermore, Macdonell thought that similar to the Scottish Church, building as many schools as

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<sup>100</sup> The Sacrament of Extreme Unction is a blessing for the physical and spiritual health of a seriously ill individual.

<sup>101</sup> Macdonell, *Alexander by the Grace of God*, 11-12.

<sup>102</sup> Macdonell, *Alexander by the Grace of God*, 4-16.

possible was the key to graduating priests familiar with and friendly to the Bishop's way of thinking. Having already built St. Raphael's Parish and the College of Iona seminary in Glengarry earlier in his colonial tenure, the Bishop turned to the closest city to continue the Church's institutional presence in Upper Canada. In Kingston, the Bishop funded the construction of a chapel along with a sizable school known as Regiopolis College, effectively rendering the city the Catholic heart of the colony.<sup>103</sup> Macdonell believed that Regiopolis College would provide him with the clerical resources, namely aspiring priests suitably trained, to support Upper Canada's burgeoning Catholic population. Alongside having an accessible pool of clergy to draw upon, the Bishop thought it essential that they were born and raised in the colony, and not merely shipped in from Europe or the United States. This vision was exemplified by the forty Upper Canadian trained clergymen throughout his tenure.<sup>104</sup> Their upbringing, Macdonell argued, would make them more in tune with the provincial population and lifestyle to help maintain guidelines he had established for the colony's Catholic Church.<sup>105</sup>

Regiopolis College was simply the beginning of the Bishop's bid to establish a Catholic education system in Upper Canada and ensure the propagation of Catholicism throughout the colony. Along with training priests for his flock, Bishop Macdonell wanted to offer an education to local Roman Catholic youth to prevent the spread of American influences in the colony, a goal shared by the British and Upper Canadian governments and political elites. Unfortunately, Upper Canada's schooling system had failed to prove useful to the majority of the colony's population since its foundation, let alone Macdonell and the province's Roman Catholics. While discussions

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<sup>103</sup> Rev. Alexander Macdonell to Bishop J.O. Plessis, September 20, 1808, Archives of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Toronto (ARCAT), MCG01.09. Regiopolis College served as both a college and a seminary.

<sup>104</sup> MacLean, "The Highland Catholic Tradition in Canada," 97.

<sup>105</sup> Rev. Alexander Macdonell to Bishop J.O. Plessis, November 19, 1808, Archives of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Toronto (ARCAT), MCG01.10; Macdonell of Greenfield, *A Sketch of the Life of the Honourable and Right Reverend Alexander Macdonell*, 40.

about the importance of establishing an effective colonial school system to counter American influences in Upper Canada had been held in the late eighteenth-century, no real effort had been made to establish it, let alone a mirroring Catholic school system.<sup>106</sup> The problem in securing a more comprehensive education system for Upper Canadians stemmed from disagreements between appointed legislative councillors and elected members of the Assembly about funding. Because of this standoff, schoolhouses had been difficult, bordering on impossible to build. Until 1815, there had only been one grammar school built in each district, for a total of eight, and even these schools had garnered a reputation of only benefitting the well-to-do colonists.<sup>107</sup>

Fresh off his 1820 appointment onto the legislative council, Anglican Archdeacon John Strachan had noted the apparent problem with Upper Canada's schooling system following the War of 1812 and took action.<sup>108</sup> Strachan set about pursuing a Protestant stranglehold in Upper Canada, seeking to turn the colony into a predominantly Anglican society. To the Archdeacon, this meant bolstering the political, educational, and Anglican institutions of the province, but most importantly, it meant a rejection of American influence.<sup>109</sup> Wasting no time, Strachan began a complete dismantling and restructuring of the colony's education system, securing not only substantial funding for new schoolhouses for the lower classes but further removing both

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<sup>106</sup> Simcoe worried that without a robust colonial education system, the children of upper-class families would be drawn to the United States. As Lieutenant-Governor's argued, this would lure the prospective future "Gentlemen of Upper Canada" across the American border, and his colony would not be able to maintain the "liberality of the British Government" he believed was essential to the province's survival. On this issue, see Craig, *Upper Canada*, 25.

<sup>107</sup> Craig, *Upper Canada*, 55; R.D Gidney and W. P. J. Millar, *Inventing Secondary Education: The Rise of the High School in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990).

<sup>108</sup> G. M. Craig, "Strachan, John," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 9, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003–, accessed May 1, 2020, [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/strachan\\_john\\_9E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/strachan_john_9E.html).

<sup>109</sup> Curtis Fahey, *In His Name: The Anglican Experience in Upper Canada, 1791-1854* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1991), 61-62.

American teachers and books.<sup>110</sup> They were swiftly replaced with Anglican and Presbyterian priests, essentially rendering Upper Canada's public schools Protestant institutions.

While Bishop Macdonell had no complaints in Strachan's efforts to remove American influence throughout the young colony, he struggled to see the benefit of the only alternative being a state-sponsored Protestant education system.<sup>111</sup> Although he had built a handful of Roman Catholic schools, the Bishop believed that the Upper Canadian government should provide more support. He, therefore, continued to push for funding, stressing the need for Catholic clergy and schoolmasters fluent in Gaelic for his Highlanders, and an accompanying anti-American sentiment for the Upper Canadian Government's benefit.<sup>112</sup> Seeing no charity coming from the majority Protestant legislative or executive councils, however, the Bishop was forced to take matters into his own hands and worked hard to secure funds from his Upper Canadian flock to educate the local Catholic youth. In the end, Macdonell annually spent a minimum of £300 helping to pay for scholarly housing, food, and travel for young Upper Canadians and his future priests. On top of this, the Bishop committed a further £450 towards the purchase of books for Roman Catholic educations.<sup>113</sup> Understanding the strictly male presence in Upper Canada's newly established Catholic education system, Macdonell also built a further extension onto the College of Iona. This new wing was designated as a school for girls to ensure they likewise had a chance to learn not only Catholic tenets but essential literacy skills, including

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<sup>110</sup> Craig, *Upper Canada*, 182.

<sup>111</sup> Rev. John Strachan to Bishop Alexander Macdonell, February 24, 1836, Archives of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Toronto (ARCAT), MAB53.04.

<sup>112</sup> Bishop Macdonell to Rev. William MacDonald, January 10, 1827, Archives of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Toronto (ARCAT), MCA19.06; Toronto Petition to Bishop Macdonell to remove American priest in Sault Ste. Marie, September 24, 1834, Archives of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Toronto (ARCAT), MAC24.01; Craig, *Upper Canada*, 48.

<sup>113</sup> Macdonell, *A Short Account of the Emigrations from the Highlands of Scotland to North America*, 13.

reading and writing. Bishop Macdonell did not, however, limit his vision of Roman Catholicism in Upper Canada only to his existing flock.

Over the course of his time in Upper Canada, Bishop Macdonell promoted, financed, and oversaw the religious conversion of Indigenous People by the Catholic missionaries he sent to Penetanguishene and Manitoulin Island.<sup>114</sup> Under the Bishop's instructions, funds were given to two clergymen, who were subsequently sent to the Manitoulin Island Indian Reserve in hopes of converting members of the Wiikwemkoong Band to Catholicism.<sup>115</sup> Although an act of colonialism, conversions would have been highly valued by the British Government in the mid-nineteenth century. The Bishop understood how much these efforts might be valued to the Colonial Office and believed the Government had good reason to further fund and increase the scale of these conversions.<sup>116</sup> Despite being in line with the Government's views, however, these potential funds were never released and Macdonell's envisioned augmented conversions were never realized.

During his tenure as Bishop of Regiopolis, Macdonell had overseen a fundamental transformation to Roman Catholicism in Upper Canada. From the buildings erected throughout the province, to the provincial Catholic education system, to his Scottish-based diocesan guidelines, Macdonell had succeeded in establishing a future for Upper Canada's Catholics in line with his vision for the colony. Although at the margins of a Protestant colony, Roman Catholicism had carved its path into the Upper Canadian enterprise. Bishop Macdonell's

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<sup>114</sup> Rev. William O'Grady to Bishop Macdonell, February 17, 1830, Archives of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Toronto (ARCAT), MCA21.02.

<sup>115</sup> John S. Marsh and Bruce W. Hodgins, *Changing Parks: The History, Future and Cultural Context of Parks and Heritage Landscapes* (Toronto: Natural Heritage, 1998), 69.

<sup>116</sup> Bishop Alexander Macdonell to Lord Durham, 14<sup>th</sup> June 1838, Kingston, Upper Canada, Alexander Macdonell fonds, MG24-J13M, R6109-0-5-E.

influence and power was growing, evidenced not only with his Roman Catholic flock but also in his provincial political dealings.

Developing Upper Canada's Roman Catholic Church and its accompanying education system were not, however, Bishop Macdonell's only colonial concern, as evidenced by the attention he paid to the province's Scottish culture. In November of 1818, Macdonell used his position as a political and religious leader to acquire a charter to open up an Upper Canadian Branch of the Highland Society of London. The original Society had been founded half a century earlier in the imperial capital, with the explicit goals of "preserving the language, martial spirit, dress, music and antiquities of the Ancient Caledonians."<sup>117</sup> Paramount to the Highland Society was the Gaelic language, which had been disappearing not only in the Scottish Highlands but in Highland communities throughout the British Empire. The fear of linguistic loss was the inspiration behind the society's secondary goals of establishing Gaelic schools for the promotion of the Gaelic language and literature.<sup>118</sup>

The Highland Society of London's goals were just as crucial to the Upper Canadian branch when they held their inaugural meeting at Glengarry's St. Raphael's Parish. In this initial session, chaired by Macdonell, Upper Canada's Highland Society's members moved to adopt the rules of the London branch. The Highland Society likewise followed the lead of their founding branch when establishing bi-annual meetings, one on the second Monday in January and the other on the eighteenth of June, to celebrate the British victory at the Battle of Waterloo.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Minutes from the first meeting of the Highland Society of London, Upper Canadian Branch, held at St. Raphael's Parish, Glengarry Upper Canada. 10<sup>th</sup> November 1818, John McGillivray Family Collection, 1781-1909 ("Highland Society Papers"), MG24 I 3 6.

<sup>118</sup> Minutes from the first meeting of the Highland Society of London, Upper Canadian Branch, held at St. Raphael's Parish, Glengarry Upper Canada. 10<sup>th</sup> November 1818, John McGillivray Family Collection, 1781-1909 ("Highland Society Papers"), MG24 I 3 6.

<sup>119</sup> Minutes from the first meeting of the Highland Society of London, Upper Canadian Branch, held at St. Raphael's Parish, Glengarry Upper Canada. 10<sup>th</sup> November 1818, John McGillivray Family Collection, 1781-1909 ("Highland Society Papers"), MG24 I 3 6.



While working to protect and promote their traditional language and culture, the Highland Society and its new Vice-president Alexander Macdonell, continued to show their loyalty and appreciation to the British Empire.<sup>120</sup>

While membership was expensive, the fees collected by the Highland Society were immediately invested into the reestablishment and adaptation of Highlanders' cultural practices rooted in the Gaelic language.<sup>121</sup> To aid in its perpetuation, a Gaelic school was established in Glengarry County, with the Society's subscription funds being further used to hire Gaelic scholars, dictionaries, and grammar books, as well as copies of *The Works of Ossian*, the collection of historic Gaelic poems. Local students who mastered these Highland linguistic skills were able to compete in poetry competitions hosted by the Society, where cash prizes were offered to the best Gaelic poems and songs composed in the county.<sup>122</sup>

If poetry was not the strength of certain Glengarries, they were instead able to participate in other competitions hosted and created by the Society to put their traditional skills to the test against fellow Highlanders. Some of these activities related to the invention of traditions mentioned earlier and were popular at the beginning of the nineteenth century. This included bagpiping competitions, as well as competitions for the best dressed Highlander, which would have certainly featured the tartan whose manufacture was also funded by the Highland Society.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Minutes from the first meeting of the Highland Society of London, Upper Canadian Branch, held at St. Raphael's Parish, Glengarry Upper Canada. 10<sup>th</sup> November 1818, John McGillivray Family Collection, 1781-1909 ("Highland Society Papers"), MG24 I 3 6.

<sup>121</sup> Rulebook of the Highland Society of London, Upper Canada Branch, John McGillivray Family Collection, 1781-1909 ("Highland Society Papers"), MG24 I 3 6.

<sup>122</sup> Minutes from the Highland Society, John McGillivray Family Collection, 1781-1909 ("Highland Society Papers"), MG24 I 3 6.

<sup>123</sup> Minutes from the Highland Society, John McGillivray Family Collection, 1781-1909 ("Highland Society Papers"), MG24 I 3 6, 32-34.

These competitions were reminiscent of Highland culture but were not cultural traditions that had been commonly found in the Highlands. To the onlooker of the Glengarry Highlanders, however, this did not seem to matter. When naturalist John Goldie came through the Highland settlement in 1819, he noted the considerable difference between Glengarry's inhabitants and those of nearby counties. Specific to his observations were the habits and customs of the Highlanders, which he described as the same "habits, customs, etc., of Highlanders in Scotland."<sup>124</sup> While perhaps not identical to those of the Highlands, these practices, instructional tools, and competitions created by the Highland Society allowed Bishop Macdonell to foster the Scottish tradition that was central to his vision for Upper Canada.

In Macdonell's eye, throughout their transatlantic journey, the Glengarry Highlanders had repeatedly shown their loyalty to the British and Upper Canadian Governments. Loyalty, however, did not offer the same appeal to every Upper Canadian as it did to Macdonell. Beginning in the late 1820s, the seeds of political dissent were sprouting along the St. Lawrence and shores of Lake Ontario. Harvesting this growing opposition was William Lyon Mackenzie, a member of the House of Assembly from 1828 to 1836 and Toronto's first mayor in 1834-35. Taking a stand against the political exclusivity practiced by those wielding the majority of the colony's power, namely the Family Compact and unofficial members such as Macdonell, Mackenzie sought out change, joining the momentum of Britain's recently passed *Reform Act* of 1832 and American Jacksonian democracy.<sup>125</sup> In late 1837, William Lyon McKenzie believed the time had come for action to achieve the changes he longed for. Following in the rebellious

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<sup>124</sup> John Goldie, *Diary of a Journey through Upper Canada and some of the New England States, 1819* (Toronto: Wm Tyrrell & Co., 1897), 8.

<sup>125</sup> Frederick H. Armstrong and Ronald J. Stagg, "Mackenzie, William Lyon," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 9, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003–, accessed May 1, 2020, [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/mackenzie\\_william\\_lyon\\_9E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/mackenzie_william_lyon_9E.html).

footsteps of Lower Canadian Patriots who rose into a rebellion in November of 1837, Mackenzie declared independence on the 27th of the same month.<sup>126</sup>

Since departing their northern homeland in 1792, Bishop Macdonell believed the Glengarry Highlanders had aligned themselves with the Crown and acted loyally to defend the British Empire. He therefore would not have been surprised when two thousand men from Glengarry rushed to volunteer for Upper Canada's defence, allowing the county to muster together several units. These relatively substantial enlistment numbers, approximately one-fifth of the county's population, meant that the Glengarry militias could afford to spare troops from defending Upper Canada and even sent two corps of their armed Highlanders to help put down Lower Canada's Rebellion.<sup>127</sup> Although a few Catholics did join Mackenzie's cause, including several outliers from Glengarry, they were in the clear minority among their fellow Highlanders and were soon shunned from the tightknit community.<sup>128</sup>

As the Upper Canadian Rebellion continued over the following year, notably through repeated republican raids from the United States, Bishop Macdonell sought to reaffirm and reinforce the loyalty that the Glengarry Highlanders had displayed throughout the insurrection and correspondingly delivered an address to his flock in early November 1838. Speaking to their recent and ancestral achievements, Macdonell stated that "The loyal and martial character of the Highlanders is proverbial."<sup>129</sup> To drive home his point, he called upon fabled Highland heroes,

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<sup>126</sup> Michel Ducharme, *The Idea of Liberty in Canada during the Age of Atlantic Revolutions, 1776-1838* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014), 172.

<sup>127</sup> Lt. General Sir. John Macdonell, 10<sup>th</sup> March 1838. Kingston, Upper Canada, Alexander Macdonell fonds, MG24-J13M, R6109-0-5-E; MacLean, "The Highland Catholic Tradition in Canada," 98.

<sup>128</sup> A. Manahan, Esq, M.P.P., February 24<sup>th</sup>, 1838, Kingston, Upper Canada, Alexander Macdonell fonds, MG24-J13M, R6109-0-5-E; Rev. Joseph Maria Burke to Bishop Macdonell, February 29, 1838, Archives of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Toronto (ARCAT), MAB05.07; Rev. Hugh Henry Fitzpatrick to Bishop Macdonell, June 11, 1838, Archives of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Toronto (ARCAT), MAB19.01.

<sup>129</sup> Alexander Macdonell, *The Address of Bishop Macdonell to Inhabitants of the County of Glengarry*, November 1<sup>st</sup>, 1838. Kingston, Upper Canada, Alexander Macdonell fonds, MG24-J13M, R6109-0-5-E.

including famed Jacobites such as the Marquess of Montrose and Bonnie Dundee, citing their “adherence to honor and principle.”<sup>130</sup> The character of Highlanders past, the Bishop argued, had secured “the confidence of a liberal and discerning [British] Government,” which in turn had been passed down through generations to the Highlanders he addressed.<sup>131</sup> To those he addressed, furthermore, Macdonell praised their actions throughout their transatlantic journey. He recounted their success and loyalty in defence of Upper Canada at the battles of Queenston Heights, Lundy’s Lane, and Ogdensburg, which the Bishop said had entrenched the name of the Glengarry Highlanders into Canadian history.<sup>132</sup>

Just as those hearing his address had good "reason to be proud of such ancestors," Macdonell believed that Britain had good reason to be proud of the Glengarry Highlanders.<sup>133</sup> He further stated that they had re-established the military reputation of their Highland ancestors across the Atlantic. As Macdonell remarked, through their loyalty, honour, and principle, they had carved their way into a thriving and stable existence in the British Empire and Upper Canada. As their ancestors had done before them, the Highlanders had sided with the force to which they were loyal; in this case, it was with the colony's Government against the reformist incursions and the “preservation of the Canadas”.<sup>134</sup>

After a final failed republican invasion near Prescott, Upper Canada, the Rebellion had come to a decisive head at the Battle of the Windmill in November 1838. Reformers and members of the American Hunters Lodge had been holed up inside a local windmill, and

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<sup>130</sup> Macdonell, *The Address of Bishop Macdonell to Inhabitants of the County of Glengarry*. The Marquess of Montrose and Bonnie Dundee were prominent leaders of Stuart Forces in the Wars of the Three Kingdoms (1639-53) and the Jacobite leaders in the 1689 Jacobite Uprising, respectively.

<sup>131</sup> Macdonell, *The Address of Bishop Macdonell to inhabitants of the County of Glengarry*.

<sup>132</sup> Macdonell, *The Address of Bishop Macdonell to inhabitants of the County of Glengarry*.

<sup>133</sup> Macdonell, *The Address of Bishop Macdonell to inhabitants of the County of Glengarry*.

<sup>134</sup> Macdonell of Greenfield, *A Sketch of the Life of the Honourable and Right Reverend Alexander Macdonell*, 39, 40; Macdonell, *The Address of Bishop Macdonell to inhabitants of the County of Glengarry*.

following a successful siege by Upper Canadian forces, were marched as prisoners to Kingston. Once in the city, the leaders of the capitulated forces were sentenced to death, forty lower-ranking rebels were exiled to Australia, Britain's burgeoning penal colony, while the remaining captives were pardoned and released.<sup>135</sup> These punishments marked the end of the year-long republican invasions that had followed the 1837 Upper Canadian Rebellion. As evidenced by Macdonell's speech at the end of the rebellion, the quelled insurrection saw Upper Canada continue to be a loyalist colony as part of both the British Empire and the Bishop's vision for the province.

In late May of 1838, John George Lambton, more commonly known as Lord Durham, was appointed Governor-General of British North America. Following the Upper and Lower Canadian rebellions, Durham was tasked by the British Government with leading an inquiry into the causes of the rebellions and make recommendations to prevent a relapse. To aid in this mission, he was given more power than any preceding colonial governor. The British Government believed that this expanded authority was vital to solving the political crises of Upper and Lower Canada.<sup>136</sup>

Following his arrival in Lower Canada, Durham began his tour of the Canadas by listening and speaking to those he thought necessary to help with his inquest. Although not on the Governor-General's prepared list of interviews, Bishop Macdonell wrote to Durham to inform him of the wishes and needs of Upper Canada's Roman Catholic population, with particular attention given to the Glengarry Highlanders.<sup>137</sup> In making his case, Macdonell spoke

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<sup>135</sup> Donald E. Graves, *Guns Across the River: The Battle of the Windmill, 1838* (Prescott: The Friends of Windmill Point, 2001), 193-194.

<sup>136</sup> Craig, *Upper Canada*, 254-255.

<sup>137</sup> Bishop Alexander Macdonell to John George Lambton, Earl of Durham, June 22, 1838, Archives of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Toronto (ARCAT), MAA07.07.

to the loyalty of the province's Catholic Highlanders, retelling their role in extinguishing both the Upper and Lower Canadian rebellions. Furthermore, the Bishop appreciated the loyalty of Upper Canada's Catholic laity and attributed their support of the province to the efforts of his appointed clergy. Macdonell was quick to compare his flock to the province's Protestant settlers.<sup>138</sup> The leaders and ranks of Upper Canada's rebels were stocked with Anglicans, Presbyterians, and Methodists. They had been getting so much financial and political support just to bite the hand that fed them, while the loyal Catholics were still on the periphery of provincial affairs.

As well as showing the state-of-affairs as seen by the Bishop, his letter also allowed a glimpse into his imagined future for Upper Canada. Macdonell laid out a vision where the Roman Catholics would have easy access to places of worship and education. Although Macdonell had already erected several churches and seminaries around Upper Canada, this paled compared to what the colony's Protestants had been able to construct. The Bishop once again pointed to the clergy reserves as the problem and the solution. Those who had access to the reserves continued to spend the Government's money while showing little appreciation for its ready availability. These funds, Macdonell argued, if shared with Catholics, would see parity and contentment between Upper Canada's denominations resulting in the continuing loyalty of the colony's Roman Catholics central to his provincial vision.<sup>139</sup>

In April 1839, Lord Durham's report was published in British North America, leaving Bishop Macdonell largely disappointed.<sup>140</sup> The report was missing any mention of his requests as Durham's proposed future held little relating to Upper Canada's Catholics. There was no new

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<sup>138</sup> Bishop Alexander Macdonell to Lord Durham, 14<sup>th</sup> June 1838, Kingston, Upper Canada, Alexander Macdonell fonds, MG24-J13M, R6109-0-5-E.

<sup>139</sup> Bishop Alexander Macdonell to Lord Durham, 14<sup>th</sup> June 1838, Kingston, Upper Canada, Alexander Macdonell fonds, MG24-J13M, R6109-0-5-E.

<sup>140</sup> Craig, *Upper Canada*, 259.

clergy reserve access nor funding for priests, parishes, or schools to support Upper Canada's Catholics.<sup>141</sup> The report instead called for the unification of Upper and Lower Canada alongside the introduction of a form of responsible government. Macdonell had attempted to ensure further funding for his vision of a Highland future in Upper Canada; this time, however, he failed in his role as a broker.

The following year, Bishop Macdonell made a trip back to Scotland with his undying hopes of securing funds for Upper Canada's Roman Catholic Church that he could not secure through Durham's report.<sup>142</sup> The Scottish Highlands that he would have seen were likely starkly different from those he had grown up in and left behind with his fellow emigrants in 1792. Westminster's Acts that had targeted the Highlanders over the preceding half-century had worked hard to successfully integrate the north of the British Isles. The fields once tended by Highlander clansmen were full of sheep, no longer peat covered landscapes, but instead, dominated by grass-filled pastures for grazing. Bishop Macdonell would have heard likely English at every turn and Gaelic on a decline throughout the north of Scotland.<sup>143</sup> He would also have had more trouble finding Catholics to recruit to his Upper Canadian ranks as Protestant policies had seen a rise in Presbyterianism throughout the Highlands.<sup>144</sup> Everything from the landscape, the language, and the religion would have been barely recognizable to Bishop Macdonell. Shortly following his arrival, the priest came down with pneumonia after getting caught in the rain and passed away just days later, aged 77.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> *Lord Durham's Report*.

<sup>142</sup> Account by Reverend Æneas Macdonell Dawson, in Macdonell of Greenfield, *A Sketch of the Life of the Honourable and Right Reverend Alexander Macdonell*, 51.

<sup>143</sup> Michael Hechter, *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development* 2nd Edition (New York: Routledge, 1999), 196.

<sup>144</sup> Hechter, *Internal Colonialism*, 169.

<sup>145</sup> Copy of letters from Hon. Anthony Manahan, M.P.P. to Dr. Thomas Rolph, Rev. William Reid, and the Earl of Gosford, January 21 to February 1, 1840, Archives of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Toronto

## Conclusion

Over the first half of his life, Bishop Macdonell had acted as a leader and a middleman for the Glengarry Highlanders, which saw him travel throughout the British Isles and across the Atlantic Ocean. This work as a broker helped elevate Macdonell's stature in Britain, Upper Canada, and the Roman Catholic Church. From his ensuing positions in the colony's political and religious ranks, Macdonell promoted and advocated in favour of increased privileges for both himself and the communities he represented. While not always successful in his role, he had helped implement several aspects his vision of a Highland future in Upper Canada, rooted in Roman Catholicism, loyalism, and Scottish tradition.

Nearly two centuries after his death, thousands of people continue to annually come to the farmer's fields of Glengarry, Ontario, for the Highland games. Here they speak Gaelic, attend Roman Catholic masses, and compete in traditional Highland athletic events. It is clear that generations later, the lingering impact of Alexander Macdonell's Upper Canadian vision continues to live on in contemporary Glengarry. This notion would perhaps not come as a surprise to those who lived alongside Macdonell, as evidenced by the epitaph they placed on his headstone, which reads "Though dead, he still lives in the hearts of his countrymen."<sup>146</sup>

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(ARCAT), MCD01.01; Account by Reverend Æneas Macdonell Dawson, in Macdonell of Greenfield, *A Sketch of the Life of the Honourable and Right Reverend Alexander Macdonell*, 52.

<sup>146</sup> Macdonell of Greenfield, *A Sketch of the Life of the Honourable and Right Reverend Alexander Macdonell*, 55.



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