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Highland Emigration to the Island of St. John and the Scottish Catholic Church, 1769 - 1774

The history of the early emigration of Scots Highlanders to North America has for a good two hundred years been shrouded in the mists of folk myth and polemic. The Highlanders, of course, have their own version of their movement to North America, one in which they are driven out by evil landlords engaged in a wholesale clearance of the population for sheep pasturage.¹ On the whole, this view—especially the emphasis on expulsion—predominates in both the popular mind and the scholarly literature, notwithstanding some recent efforts of a number of historians of Scotland to call it into question, usually from the perspective of the estate papers of one of the great lairds.² Despite the estate papers—hardly an objective source—one of the great difficulties in cutting through the mythology and cant of Highland history with regard to both emigration and clearance has been the absence of detailed and specific contemporary documentation for particular movements of emigrants. And, it must be emphasized, early Highland emigration was less a general movement than the sum total of a series of relatively independent ventures organized in a few districts of the Highland region.

Most of our information about early emigration consists of reports in newspapers and journals of the time (often wildly inaccurate), a few ship's passenger lists, and a plethora of later accounts by participants or descendants of participants relying on oral tradition.³ As a result, much of the discussion of the dynamics of Highland movement to America relies on generalizations about conditions in the Highlands supplemented by extremely limited specific evidence. It is difficult to find, for example, a single particular case of emigration from a Highland district to North America between 1765 and 1775 which it has been possible to document thoroughly from contemporary participant sources. One emigration venture which can be so documented, however, is that of the 1772 movement of Highland Catholic families from South Uist and Arisaig/Moydart to the Island of St. John in the Gulf of St.

Lawrence (later renamed Prince Edward Island).⁴ The background of this emigration was in some respects unusual, since it was the only known Highland transatlantic movement of the later eighteenth century which was brought about by religious persecution. But the very untypicality of the venture was in large measure a tribute to the successful strategy of those who planned it, particularly Scottish Catholic bishops George Hay and John MacDonald.

Because of the intimate involvement of the Church in the St. John emigration, a substantial body of manuscripts dealing with its background and execution survive in the Scottish Catholic Archives in Edinburgh. These records document a fascinating and complicated story, which adds a good deal to our understanding of the complexities of Highland movement to America in the years before the American Revolution. The documents indicate that the Scottish Catholic Church sought to establish the Island of St. John as a refuge for persecuted Highland Catholics at the same time that it hoped that the very threat of a clearance from below of the population of a major Highland estate would force Protestant lairds to think twice before engaging in policies of harassment. Although the people who emigrated from Uist were plainly being oppressed and threatened by their landlord, they were extremely reluctant to leave their homes; they had literally to be coaxed to make new lives for themselves by their leaders, both spiritual and secular. The lay leadership the Church found for the venture—the MacDonald family of Glenaladale—may have had more complicated motives than religion and its protection in their involvement, but although they always appeared in public as the moving spirits (and Captain John MacDonald later would claim all the credit in memorials to the government), the real motivating force behind this “clearance” were the leaders of the Scottish Church.⁵

Trouble began on South Uist, one of the large islands of the Outer Hebrides, in 1769, when young Colin MacDonald of Boysdale—the island’s principal proprietor and a convert to the Church of Scotland—brought to his estates a Presbyterian schoolmaster “who set himself to corrupt all the young Children that went to him, so far as to force them to eat flesh in Lent & give them the most blasphemous sentences for their copies in writing.”⁶ Led by their resident priest, an Irishman named Wynne, Boysdale’s Catholics withdrew their children from the school. The laird responded by ordering Wynne off his lands and threatening to evict the recalcitrants if they did not renounce their religion and promise under oath to harbour no more priests. Having forced Wynne off the island, Boysdale agreed to allow his tenants one

further year's leases but no more unless they complied with his wishes. Such a policy seemed likely to spread—encouraged as it was by official government statements—to other Protestant lairds with Catholic tenants. Thirty-three families of Catholics were being dispossessed in Eigg, and on Muck the visiting priest was met upon landing, prevented from seeing his communicants, and shipped summarily off the island on the first available boat. The explanation given Father Kennedy by the wife of the Muck proprietor was terse and to the point: "Boysdale's example."⁷

The leadership of the Scottish Church understandably became alarmed by this "general design . . . to root out Religion by discouraging the Catholics all they can."⁸ Catholicism in Scotland had been technically illegal since the sixteenth century, but—especially in the remote Highlands—had never been totally eradicated and at times even flourished. As in England, the Scottish Church was an underground one directly under the supervision of Rome, relying for its survival upon a low profile and tacit toleration by authorities either unwilling or unable to exercise the force to suppress it.⁹ Two Stuart uprisings in Scotland had made the government increasingly suspicious of the seditious dangers of Catholicism, however, and had led to renewed and more successful attempts to impose British authority upon the rebellious Highland clans, many of which were predominantly Catholic. By 1770, the Catholic population of the Highlands had been reduced to approximately 13,000, located mainly in the Hebrides and the north-west mainland, the most isolated corners of the region.¹⁰ Since official policy called for the elimination of Catholicism through Protestant missionary activity (particularly using the schools), it did not seem likely that relief from what the Church saw as violent religious persecution could be achieved through protests or complaints to those in authority.¹¹

As the leaders of the Church discussed and debated the Uist developments in their meetings, only one practical solution suggested itself: that those being oppressed must be encouraged and assisted to emigrate from the Highlands to America. There was hardly complete unanimity on this point, some clerics taking the position that because of the hostility to emigration among Scottish landlords, the Church would further jeopardize its position—particularly outside the Highlands—through public association with any movements of emigration. Those within the Church leadership who favoured emigration were thus forced by their colleagues to keep the Church officially out of any emigration schemes, although no one had any alternative suggestions for relief except appeal to the foreign ambassadors in London.¹²

The two principal advocates of emigration among the Church leadership were Edinburgh-based George Hay, Bishop of Daulis since 1769, and John MacDonald, Bishop of Tiberiopolis, who was in charge of the Highland District in which the persecutions were occurring.¹³ Hay, a former Jacobite surgeon and convert to Catholicism, was a man of enormous energy and ability, fully prepared to keep the faith alive in Scotland by any means necessary. He was quickly persuaded by Bishop MacDonald of the desperateness of the Highland situation. Without some sort of swift and decisive action in response to Boysdale's challenge, an already declining situation could rapidly disintegrate completely. Emigration, MacDonald argued, would not only relieve the Uist people from immediate oppression, but would threaten the Highland lairds where it most hurt: in their pocketbooks, through a depopulation of their estates.¹⁴ Emigration would put the persecuted out of apprehension, and "would also be an effectual way of preventing the like Storms hereafter against such as would remain behind in other estates, since it is certain heretors [ratepayers, i.e., landholders] cannot find their account in pushing their people to such emigrations, but on the contrary would dread them above all evils."¹⁵

In most of the Catholic districts of the Highlands, it should be emphasized, there was at the time of Boysdale's actions little evidence of the later proprietorial policy of removing small tenants in favour of grazing animals (the so-called "clearances"). Encouraged by government, Highland lairds were rapidly moving themselves into the mainstream of British society, a direction which required an increasing revenue to "cut a good figure" in Edinburgh or London and maintain the requisite standard of living. The lairds were raising their rents and taking increasing advantage of other sources of revenue such as that from kelping.¹⁶ But the basic approach of the landlords at this time was to maximize revenue by raising rents, cutting costs, and utilizing extensive labour wherever possible. Loss of population, therefore, meant loss of income. Landlord attempts to raise more money, of course, were producing much discontent among their tenantry, and the movement of the dissatisfied from Scotland to America which had already begun was vigorously opposed by the proprietors.¹⁷ To use the threat of emigration to "gain . . . advantage to our people in general," as Bishop MacDonald put it, was therefore no chimeric strategy in 1770.¹⁸

Particularly unhappy with the changing conditions of the Highlands was the tacksman class, usually composed of cadet branches of proprietorial families who had long served as intermediaries between the laird and his people. This group found itself squeezed between higher

rents and an increasing tendency of the landlords to cut costs by eliminating middle men. Conscious of the criticisms of a Church-sponsored emigration strategy, Bishops Hay and MacDonald needed a layman to front any scheme which they might attempt to implement. They found their lay leader in the person of John MacDonald of Glenaladale. Head of the senior cadet branch of the Clan MacDonald of Clanranald, John had been educated at Ratisbon, Germany, by Benedictine monks and was an ardent and pious Catholic.¹⁹ As Clanranald's chief tacksman, he was also feeling threatened by the winds of change in the Highlands and was casting around for alternative situations to his present precarious position. The motives of the Glenaladale family (John's brother Donald would also become intimately associated with the project), at least partly and probably largely socio-economic, must be carefully distinguished from those of the bishops, who saw the scheme principally in religious terms.²⁰ Moreover, while the Glenaladales were solely responsible for the tactical execution of the project, both its strategic and financial aspects were shared with the men of the Church.

In the summer of 1770, Glenaladale sent brother Donald to America to survey the land situation and find a location for the proposed Highland Catholic settlement there. A younger son of a tacksman family, Donald's position in the Highlands was particularly tenuous; he would always be the family member most willing to take chances in the hopes of a big American killing. While Donald was away investigating the American scene, Bishop MacDonald had already fixed upon a destination in his own mind, and had through intermediaries been in contact with the Lord Advocate of Scotland, James Montgomery, who had acquired extensive holdings on the Island of St. John, a territory about which all Scotland was then hearing very favourable reports.²¹ The talk circulating about the richness of the Island's soil and the mildness of its climate was greatly exaggerated—as was most such information about American conditions commonly circulated in Britain—but the place seemed extremely promising to many Scots at the time. Letters to Montgomery, MacDonald reported, had been sent querying whether “he should be willing to receive our people upon his late acquisition on the Island of St. John and upon what terms.”²²

Although Montgomery had done his very best to keep the knowledge from the public, Bishop MacDonald seemed well aware that the Lord Advocate had himself sent out a recent contingent of emigrants to his lands. If Montgomery's proposal “should seem encouraging,” observed the Bishop, “it might be accepted which would be the more willingly

done, as his Lordship would probably have had it in his power to contribute much towards facilitating the transportation of our emigrants and procuring the necessaries of Subsistence, utensil &c for them."²³ As Montgomery had already done, the Bishop might have added, for a number of emigrants from Perthshire. The choice of St. John's Island and Montgomery was a particularly astute move on MacDonald's part, for as Lord Advocate of Scotland, Montgomery was ultimately responsible for law enforcement, including the penal legislation against Catholics and any moves to limit or control emigration. Should the Lord Advocate agree to sponsor the Catholic emigration from Uist, it would gain a semi-official sanction which might well silence criticism of the project on all sides. Even if Montgomery did not become a patron, the choice of the Island with which he was intimately involved might defuse any efforts he would be pressed to make to prevent the emigration.

For his part, Bishop George Hay was active in "getting proper Intelligence" on the complicated business of American settlement, particularly the thorny matter of finance. His enquiries had indicated that although land in the colonies was "immensely cheap" by Scottish standards, the purchase of a sufficient tract of land in America for the Church's purposes might cost as much as £2000, a sum, he exclaimed to a correspondent, "alass! is not easily got!"²⁴ Although Glenaladale was prepared to borrow on his estate to acquire land, he could not realize enough cash with sufficient speed to make a purchase. Discussions had been held of the possibility of the Church itself advancing Glenaladale the necessary funds, but its chronic shortage of money combined with the continued division among the clergy over the question of emigration made this step impossible. At this point, James Montgomery responded to the overtures made to him. Not surprisingly, Montgomery kept no record of his dealings with the Catholics in any of his extensive papers documenting his Island affairs, and he never mentioned the business in various memorials to government rehearsing his contributions to the Island's development. However, while the Lord Advocate refused to sponsor an emigration, he did offer to sell one of his lots on St. John's to Glenaladale upon generous terms. MacDonald was thus able to obtain from Montgomery lot 36, generally regarded as one of the best 20,000 acre properties on the Island, for £600 in a transaction involving no immediate cash and an open-ended understanding about repayment.²⁵ Although the price would turn out to be extremely high in terms of subsequent developments which greatly lowered property values on the Island, it was a bargain in the 1770 market, and Montgomery had taken some risk in involving himself at all with what he knew full well was to be

a Catholic venture. Moreover, the Church's connections had been responsible for Glenaladale's success with the Lord Advocate.

Even before the arrangement with Montgomery had been settled, Bishop Hay had become extremely enthusiastic about the Island as a destination for Highland Catholics. One problem with the Highlands, he wrote, was that "Numbers fly about to different Countries where they lose their Religion or take on in the Army, which not only has the same effect on themselves, but makes them when they come home, corrupters of others," But on the Island of St. John, not only was there a resident population of French Catholics, but the Highlanders, "being all together in an Island, they would be the easier kept together & Religion the more flourish among them." In the larger sense, recent emigrations from Skye and Argyleshire had shown that the landlords became so alarmed "that they are glad to give any terms to those who remain to keep them from following their example." There seemed "no other way," he concluded, "to get peace for our people but taking the same steps."²⁶ Hay's campaign was gradually weakening the force of the opposition to emigration within the church, although the prospect of raising funds continued to appear dismal. By December of 1770 Hay had been reduced to contemplating the loan to Glenaladale of the Church's emergency maintenance fund for its home missionaries.²⁷

Once MacDonald had concluded his agreement with Lord Advocate Montgomery and at least eliminated the need to provide him with funds for the purchase of land, Bishop Hay was able to turn some of his attention to the question of religious service for the proposed settlement. Mr. Wynne had taken himself out of the picture, returning to Ireland and demanding a £100 annual pension from the Scottish Church to enable him to assist the Uist people to resettle in that troubled land.²⁸ Bishop MacDonald opposed the use of Jesuits in America, preferring to employ secular clergy from the Scots mission and keeping the settlement within the jurisdiction of the Scottish Church.²⁹ Another Irishman named McKiernan seemed the best possibility, although some doubted that his temperament was conciliatory enough for the complicated tasks ahead on the Island.³⁰ In May of 1771, however, much of the rationale for the Church's involvement in the emigration venture temporarily disappeared. Boysdale seemed to have ceased his pressures upon the Uist tenants, and, commented Hay with some amazement, "it is more difficult to make a proselyte now of a Child of only eight years of age, than it was at first to pervert the whole Country."³¹ Such exultation was premature, however. In June Boysdale returned to Uist with a newly-acquired Protestant bride, and the persecutions began again, even more intensely than before.

In the meantime, Glenaladale's attitude had shifted considerably. That he had ultimately acquired the land himself—however much the Church had acted as midwife—and that the Church proved unable to raise or provide funds had, from his perspective, turned the project into a “private affair,” although he was still hoping that the bishops would advance him some money. MacDonald sent his brother Donald to the Island in the spring of 1771 with a small contingent of settlers to prepare the way for a larger body the following year. He made his position clear in a lengthy letter to Bishop Hay later in 1771. Reluctant to become involved with any “threadbare Scheme of Emigration” for Boysdale's tenants, he insisted “since my Concern in the Island of St. John, I found my Intention liable to Suspensions, even from very well meaning persons.” Denying vehemently any intention to “jobb the Affair”—obviously the main charge against him—Glenaladale now hoped that the people and Boysdale could make up their differences, so that his St. John's venture could involve only those in “good circumstances.”³² The thirty-six families on Boysdale's lands were extremely poor and would require constant attention. They would need help to sell their small amount of property and prepare for the voyage, and once in the New World would have to be carefully supervised for years. MacDonald clearly sought to distinguish between his own emigrants, who were pay-their own passages, and those with whom the Church was most concerned. Nevertheless, he accepted the Catholic nature of the project. Turning to the mission on the Island, he indicated his reservations about Mr. McKiernan. Like most of the emigrants, he preferred Father James MacDonald. For himself, he was extremely concerned about the Bishop of Canada's jurisdiction, and would prefer the Island to be directly under the control of the Scots mission.³³

Ignoring most of Glenaladale's disclaimers, distinctions, and implicit threats, Bishop Hay continued to press on with the project. He wrote at great length to Monsignor Peter Grant at Paris describing the religious and economic persecution of Boysdale and other landlords in the Highlands. Rents had risen three or four-fold and the lairds monopolised all commerce on the islands, setting prices for what they purchased from their tenants and always paying in merchandise. In the case of South Uist, Boysdale was using all these standard economic measures to force religious conditions upon his people. Glenaladale could provide the persecuted with land in America, but their very oppressed state made them incapable of paying for their own transportation and Glenaladale could not afford to provide it for them. Pleading for financial assistance from the continent, Hay emphasized the need to bring the Island of St. John under the direct jurisdiction of the Scottish Church:

. . . the plan proposed is to make an entire Catholic Colony to keep up a constant Intercourse with this Country, to have Schools there in common for boys from this &c which plan if it could be brought to bear might turn out to our great mutual advantage, & it would be a constant asylum for all our distressed people—but for this it would be necessary that our people in that Colony should be subject to VV [Vicars Apostolic] here.³⁴

Although he was obviously attempting to sell his scheme abroad, it was developing for Hay a positive and even utopian dimension which went well beyond merely frightening a few Highland lairds.

At this point, Hay found some assistance for his cause outside Scotland. His old patron, Bishop Richard Challoner of London, agreed to help in raising funds. Hay prepared a written memorial, rehearsing Boysdale's acts of persecution and recommending the case of the people of South Uist "to the charity of all well disposed Catholics," in order to provide money "for their passage, provisions, and other necessaries for a new colony" on the Island of St. John.³⁵ Challoner had the memorial printed at his expense in London, and distributed it widely among the Catholic population there, especially in the ranks of the diplomatic representatives of European Catholic states.³⁶ By the end of 1772 enough funds had been collected, mainly at ambassadors' chapels in London, to meet the preliminary estimates of the charges necessary to assist in transporting the thirty-six families on Boysdale's estate. Glenaladale and Bishop MacDonald arranged to go to Uist to settle the final details. The source of the money was to be kept a secret, Glenaladale agreeing that all assistance "is to appear as if proceeding from me."³⁷

The situation encountered on South Uist by the two MacDonalds in February of 1772, described in considerable detail in a bemused letter from Tiberiopolis to George Hay, is extremely revealing of the problems of emigration to America from the Hebrides at this time. Of the families being harassed, one-third had already agreed to new leases before the MacDonalds arrived. The remaining twenty-three families did not have at their disposal the potential capital upon which the venture had been initially costed. At an estimated passage charge of £4 per person (and with two children under 9 years of age paying one adult passage), wrote Bishop MacDonald, not a single family could afford to transport itself, much less finance support in America until they were established. Although the funds raised in England were now hardly sufficient, the bishop had nevertheless unhesitatingly agreed to provide for everyone. Despite this generous offer, the tenants, mainly influenced by the

women, held back. Boysdale spread rumours that they were to be sold as slaves and could not live in such a miserable country as the Island. In the end, only sixteen families agreed to emigrate, and six or seven of those were quite uncertain. A population so poor as to be unable to raise even passage money by selling all their possessions, and under extremely heavy pressure to renounce their cherished religion, was extremely reluctant to grasp the opportunity of "leaving Servitude and the dangers to which they were exposed," even when the funds to do so were being pressed upon them by individuals whom they trusted.³⁸

Had Boysdale offered any concessions, he clearly could have totally halted the Uist emigration in a movement. Even without "tolerable encouragement" to his tenants, Boysdale in the end was able to hold all but eleven families. And he was arguably the worst laird in the Highlands! Clearly more motivation for emigration to America was required than poverty, oppression, threats of eviction, and even religious persecution. Those who left the Highlands in this period were not driven out; they left voluntarily for a better life in America. In terms of the classic formulation of "push-pull" factors in emigration, the Uist case illustrates that push was not the dominant factor in the equation and that less prosperous inhabitants found it difficult to visualize the opportunities which emigration to the New World might open to them. At least for this early period, Highland emigration was not directly caused by exploitation and the infamous clearances.

Bishop Hay fully supported Bishop MacDonald's decision to provide for everyone whatever the cost. And as Glenaladale began to make his final preparations, it became increasingly clear that expenses would be high. Information from Donald, recently returned from the Island, indicated the need for proper provisioning of food, seed, clothing, tools, and farming implements. Most of the previous settlers on the Island had come without proper supplies and could obtain little on the spot. Many had already left, and those who remained accomplished little productive, being fully occupied "in procuring & wanting for these Necessaries at extravagant rates." As a result, Glenaladale attempted to equip and supply the 1772 party as adequately "as the frugality we had in view would admit," carrying tools and sufficient meal for a year.³⁹

The question of the financial expense of Highland emigration to America has always been a murky one, with few details available. Although money was not the sole factor in whether or not one departed from Scotland, there was an obvious relationship between the cost of emigration to the Highlander and his ability to abandon his traditional land. For this 1772 emigration, fairly concrete information is available

to give some better idea of the amount of capital required for emigration, as well as its allocation, at least for those leaving in the years before the American Revolution. Two hundred and ten emigrants departed on board the ship *Alexander* in the spring of 1772 for the Island of St. John. The cost of passage was £3.12.6 per person above the age of seven, for a total of just over £600. Were a return cargo available on the Island—it was not—2.6 per person of the passage money would have been refunded. A full year's provision of meal cost £500, and clothing and utensils added another £400 to the bill. Of the grand total of £1500, about half was borne by the Scottish Church, in loans and grants to Glenaladale, and the remainder by the emigrants.⁴⁰ Even more detailed figures are available for the eleven families from South Uist whose expenses were totally paid by the Church and for whom an itemized account survives.⁴¹ Glenaladale provided axes, spades, hoes, scythes, saws, files, and nails at a cost of £1.16.4 3/4 per family. One hundred and fourteen bolls of meal (and barrels to keep them in) to feed the families for a year, cost £110.8.7, or just over £10 per family. Incidental expenses (portage, cartage, freight) added another £1.10 per family. The full bill was £256.15.9 for thirty-five full passengers worked out to just over £7 per person, tallying almost exactly with the figure per person for the full ship.

A reasonably well-equipped emigration venture to new land in British North America, therefore, would cost a minimum of £30 per family emigrating from the Highlands (the average family size of Highland parties being about four persons), and for particular families could go even higher. This cost did not include £5 for local purchase of a cow (which Glenaladale regarded as a minimum for each family), nor local transportation costs on either side of the Atlantic, since the *Alexander* sailed straight from the Highlands to MacDonald's lot on the Island. Because few Highland families could raise £30 or more in cash, many were undoubtedly deterred from emigration, or—like the *Hector* passengers landed at Pictou, Nova Scotia, in 1774—went underequipped and ill-provisioned, with resultant great suffering.⁴² Reports of such disasters, in turn, would deter further emigration. Few emigrants received the sort of financial assistance provided the *Alexander's* poorer passengers by the Scottish Catholic Church. In short, for an emigration venture which stood any chance of avoiding catastrophe, only prosperous Highlanders needed apply, thus providing further evidence that successful oppression of an impoverished people was not the critical factor in the departures of the 1770's.

As Glenaladale took the *Alexander* from Greenock to the Highlands to collect his passengers, the Church received news from Rome of the fate of its efforts to obtain permission to put the St. John's mission directly under its authority. The Vatican refused to bypass the Bishop of Quebec, and continued the Island under his jurisdiction. A disappointed Bishop MacDonald could only hope that his Canadian counterpart "shall behave so as not to make this restraint so troublesome to us that we may stand in absolute need of an enlargement."⁴³ On the positive side, Bishop Hay's printed memorial had been translated into Italian and presented to the Pope, who "took it much to heart," even charging his nuncio at Paris to protest Boysdale's "barbarities" to the English ambassador there.⁴⁴ In the end, only one Scottish priest accompanied the emigrants to America.⁴⁵ Father James MacDonald departed from Uist at the beginning of May 1772 with Donald MacDonald and sisters Helen and Margaret. Glenaladale himself remained behind to organize further departures and to sort out his increasingly tangled finances.

Both Glenaladale in subsequent statements and later commentators relying largely on his testimony have made the Island settlement (and especially the Uist project) responsible for his financial difficulties. But the contemporary correspondence makes it clear that although he had many times talked of selling his Highland estate to provide funds for the emigrants, thanks to the Church's assistance he had not been forced to do so. MacDonald's financial embarrassment was a result less of the emigration contracting than of the collapse of the Ayr bank in 1772 combined with business losses suffered by brother Donald in a trading venture to the West Indies.⁴⁶ Although his difficulties were not a direct product of his emigration promotions, those schemes led him to attempt to keep his problems a secret to avoid jeopardizing further activities. The veil of secrecy over the source of his emigration funds and over his financial affairs, in which the leaders of the Church collaborated, would ultimately enable Glenaladale to appear publicly as the principal benefactor of the Highlanders at the expense of his own fortune. In 1772, given his financial difficulties, the Church leaders considered further financial aid to him, but were unable to find enough funds really to help.⁴⁷ MacDonald was thus forced to negotiate with potential purchasers of his estate before news of his precarious situation reduced the offers for his land.

But if the Uist emigration was not directly responsible for Glenaladale's money troubles, it and the threat of further removals did begin to force a new attitude on the part of the Highland proprietors,

particularly Boysdale. Astounded to see their poorer tenants financially assisted in emigration, ostensibly by MacDonald of Glenaladale, both Boysdale and Clanranald lowered their rents, lengthened their leases, and promised full freedom of religion for their people. Boysdale explained his two years of hostile and violent behaviour as "sudden fits" for which he was now contrite. Moreover, wrote Tiberiopolis with considerable satisfaction in August of 1772,

It is true indeed the design of Emigrations has hitherto Succeeded to our utmost wish, for those who had not come to open violence were struck with terrour and disclaimed any inclination to persecution, tho' before they shewed manifest symptoms of it.⁴⁸

Such complete satisfaction would be short-lived however, for as news of the situation of the emigrants on the Island of St. John began to trickle back to Scotland, it became evident that resettlement in America was no easy matter.

The *Alexander* had made an easy passage to the Island, the only incident on the voyage being the death of a child. But from their arrival in June, the settlers—especially those from Arisaig and Moydart who had paid their own way—were restive. In Scotland, Glenaladale and Bishop MacDonald carefully studied the letters home, concluding there was "no other cause for their discontent but the Inconveniencies inseparable from such an Affair, . . . that the seeing and trying any Country produces a different Effect from the reading a description of it, & that our Cropt [sic] last year, excepting the Potatoes & Garden Stuffs, was exceedingly bad."⁴⁹ Glenaladale blamed the agricultural problems on bad tillage procedures and three-year old seed which had not germinated. Even the malcontents, he reported, had to admit the Island situation favourable for raising cattle, but doubted that their traditional grainstuffs would flourish. Advance talk of yields as high as 18 - 30:1 was, of course, not born out by reality, and the ubiquitous presence of primary-growth forest over much of the Island was forbidding to anyone from the treeless western Highlands. Many came to doubt they had sufficient resources to subsist and improve their lands.

Discontent seemed to gravitate around Father James MacDonald, whose friends and relations came from the mainland district of the Highlands rather than the Hebrides. The settlers talked eagerly of Nova Scotia, where they had heard they might obtain lands already cleared and ready to plant, hardly the situation on Glenaladale's lot on the Island. In late may of 1773, Father James travelled to Quebec, partly to

see the Bishop and receive both the sacraments and his local authorizations, but also to look into the possibility of new lands in Catholic Quebec for this flock, who were, he wrote, "in a most miserable condition" likely to continue whilst they remained on the Island. "There is," he insisted,

no money, no Cloathes, no meat to be met with there without paying four times the price of it, and it gives me a heart break that my poor friends who were in a tolerable good condition before they left Scotland are now upon the brink of the greatest misery and poverty.⁵⁰

Father MacDonald was obviously not referring to the settlers from Uist, but those from the mainland who had financed their passage but now found themselves with insufficient resources to withstand the difficult years of first settlement. Because their expectations were initially higher than those of the less well-off Hebrideans, their sense of disappointment and disillusionment was far greater. Significantly, they lacked the capital to bring themselves "out of their Captivity," wrote the priest, and would need financial assistance to leave the Island. Such rhetorical flourishes as "misery" and "captivity" demonstrate the difficulty of interpreting Highlander complaints about their situation in America (and in Scotland) without further information. As many observers later commented, the Highland settlers in America always had a tendency to moan, whine, and complain.⁵¹ While Father James undoubtedly accurately reflected the feelings of those he spoke for, their responses were not entirely to be taken seriously.

One point on which all settlers could agree was that Glenaladale himself should come to the Island to take charge of the tiny settlement which was trying to establish itself around Scotchfort. By April of 1773 Glenaladale had arranged the sale of his Highland estate to cousins, and technically was no longer MacDonald of Glenaladale but MacDonald of Tracadie.⁵² Delaying his departure for America while waiting for cash payment on the estate transaction, he missed direct connections to the Maritimes and was forced to sail for Philadelphia, where he intended to winter.⁵³ Rumours among Scots merchants in Pennsylvania of starvation conditions on the Island pushed him on to Boston. In the Massachusetts capital he learned that the earlier rumours were greatly exaggerated. None had starved in his settlement or elsewhere; despite great troubles with seed Donald had planted seven acres of wheat and had continued good success with potatoes and garden produce. In Boston, MacDonald collected a schooner-load of Indian corn, rye and

molasses to take to the Island to see his people through the winter, paying for these goods with a draft upon Bishop Hay and MacDonald.⁵⁴

Glenaladale was undoubtedly accurate in his assumption that the bishops would willingly honour his draft, for a disaster among Highland Catholics upon the Island would have spelled the end to any strategy of employing emigration as a threat against anti-Christian lairds. By autumn of 1774, however, Bishop MacDonald could write to Bishop Hay that letters from St. John's "give sufficient room to hope that undertaking will thrive well enough."⁵⁵ Father James, although "near destroying the affair," had become reconciled to the Island, and the bulk of the people had settled down and become well established. Glenaladale and his people would experience many trials and tribulations over the next few years, but the Scottish Church's first settlement venture in the New World had taken hold.⁵⁶

To complete Bishop Hay's satisfaction, the new missionary priest on Uist reported that Boysdale was quite reformed, even welcoming the clergy into his own family "with utmost civility, and with the deference they are entitled to." Father Alexander MacDonald gave the credit to God for this transformation, observing that He "oftimes permits evil in order to draw good from it."⁵⁷ In Edinburgh, Bishop George Hay undoubtedly nodded assent to Father MacDonald's assessment. But the good bishop also knew that occasionally God needed a helping hand from His servants. Hay sought no public approbation for the assistance, but he and the Scottish Church had played an important, if unsung, role in the development of Highland emigration to America. It is, of course, impossible to confirm the Church's own assessment of the success of its emigration activities. The surviving records are not sufficiently detailed, no laird would ever admit concessions to such pressures even if he consciously recognized them, and the outbreak of the American Revolution completely altered conditions, especially in the New World. But Highland Catholics would continue their movement to North America, and the Island of St. John—although it never became the Catholic colony Bishop Hay had at one point envisioned—was always one of the preferred destinations for Catholic emigrants.⁵⁸ What the St. John's case does demonstrate is that the dynamics of early Highland emigrations were even more complex than has been previously assumed. For at least some of its proponents, American emigration was not simply an escape mechanism from intolerable conditions in the Highlands, but a conscious and deliberate strategy to force the improvement of those conditions.

NOTES

1. See, for example, Donald MacLeod, *Gloomy Memories in the Highlands of Scotland* (Glasgow, 1857), Alexander MacKenzie, *A History of the Highland Clearances* (Inverness, 1883), John Prebble, *The Highland Clearances* (London, 1963), and D. Campbell and R.A. MacLean, *Beyond the Atlantic Roar: A Study of the Nova Scotia Scots* (Toronto, 1974).
2. Especially R.J. Adam, ed., *John Home's Survey of Assynt* (Edinburgh, 1960), and E.R. Cregeen, *Argyll Estate Instructions, 1771 - 1805* (Edinburgh, 1964).
3. The standard modern authorities are Margaret I. Adam, "The Highland Emigration of 1770," *Scottish Historical Review*, XVI (1918/19), 280 - 293; Ian C. C. Graham, *Colonists from Scotland: Emigration to North America, 1707 - 1783* (Ithaca, New York, 1956); Duane Meyer, *The Highland Scots of North Carolina 1732 - 1776* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1957).
4. J. F. S. Gordon, *Journal and Appendix to Scotichronicon and Monasticon* (Glasgow, 1867), pp. 79ff.; J. P. MacLean, *An Historical Account of the Settlements of Scotch Highlanders in America prior to the Peace of 1783* (Cleveland and Glasgow, 1900); *The Scottish Catholics in Prince Edward Island, 1772 - 1922* (Charlottetown, 1922), 1 - 10; Ada MacLeod, "The Glenaladale Pioneers," *Dalhousie Review*, XI (1931/32), 311 - 324; D.C. Harvey, "Early Settlement and Social Conditions in Prince Edward Island," *Dalhousie Review*, XI (1931/32), 448 - 461; Rev. Allan F. MacDonald, "Captain John MacDonald, 'Glenaladale,'" *Canadian Catholic Historical Association Report*, 1964, 21 - 37; Ian McKay, "Glenaladale's Settlement, Prince Edward Island," *Scottish Gaelic Studies*, X (1965), 16 - 24.
5. Petition of John MacDonald, ca. 1798 [to the Privy Council], Public Archives of Prince Edward Island, 2702. Most of the literature listed in note 4 mentions financial assistance of the Church, but only in passing. Even Gordon's *Journal and Appendix* (really a biography of Bishop George Hay based on the material in the Scottish Catholic Archives) does not take full advantage of the documents.
6. George Hay to John Geddes, 13 August 1770, Scottish Catholic Archives, Blairs Letters (hereafter SCA).
7. *Ibid.*
8. George Hay to John Geddes, 11 November 1770, SCA.
9. Alphons Bellesheim, *History of the Catholic Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1887 - 1890), especially volumes III and IV; Aeneas Dawson, *The Catholics of Scotland* (London, Ontario, 1890, I.)
10. Roderick MacDonald, "Catholics in the Highlands in the 1760's," *The Innes Review*, XVI (1965), 218 - 220; "The Highland District in 1764," *The Innes Review*, XV (1964), 140 - 150.
11. See, for example, *An Account of the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge* (Edinburgh, 1774).
13. George Hay to James Grant, 28 February 1770, SCA.
13. For Hay, See Gordon, *Journal and Appendix*. For MacDonald, consult MacDonald, "The Highland District in 1764."
14. Bishop John MacDonald to George Hay, 14 September 1770, SCA.
15. *Ibid.*
16. See my article "Scottish Emigration to the Maritimes 1760 - 1815," forthcoming in Graeme Wynne, ed., *Essays in the Historical Geography of the Atlantic Provinces*.
17. Ian C. C. Graham, *Colonists from Scotland*, 1 - 104.
18. Bishop John MacDonald to George Hay, 14 September 1770.
19. The best biographical sketch is Rev. Allan F. Macdonald, "Captain John MacDonald, 'Glenaladale'".
20. See the letter from Glenaladale to his cousin Alexander MacDonald, 7 March, 1772, reprinted in McKay, "Glenalladale's Settlement," 17 - 20.
21. For Montgomery consult my "Sir James Montgomery and Prince Edward Island, 1767 - 1803," *Acadiensis*, VII (1978), 76 - 102.
22. Bishop John MacDonald to George Hay, 14 September 1770.
23. *Ibid.*
24. George Hay to John Geddes, 12 October 1770, SCA.
25. *Ibid.*: Hay to James Grant, 24 October 1770, SCA; Bshop John MacDonald to Hay, 27 November 1770, SCA; Hay to Peter Grant, 20 December 1770, SCA.
26. Hay to John Geddes, 11 November 1770, SCA.
27. Hay to James Grant, 4 December 1770, SCA.
28. Hay to Peter Grant, 20 December 1770, SCA.

29. John MacDonald Glenaladale to George Hay, 6 July 1771, SCA.
30. *Ibid.*
31. George Hay to Peter Grant, 22 May 1771, SCA.
32. John MacDonald Glenaladale to George Hay, 8 November 1771, SCA.
33. *Ibid.*
34. George Hay to Peter Grant, 25 November 1771, SCA.
35. *Memorial for the Suffering Catholics. In a Violent Persecution for Religion at Present Carried on in One of the Western Isles of Scotland* (n.p., n.d.).
36. George Hay to Charles Cruickshank, 30 January 1772; Hay to Peter Grant, 31 January 1772, SCA.
37. John MacDonald Glenaladale to Charles Cruickshank, 12 January 1772, SCA.
38. Bishop John MacDonald to Charles Cruickshank, 12 January 1772, SCA.
39. John MacDonald Glenaladale to George Hay, n.d., but March 1772, SCA.
40. George Hay to John Geddes, 20 April 1772, SCA.
41. "John MacDonald of Glen'Il to Donald MacDonald Dr. 1772," SCA.
42. George Patterson, *History of Pictou, Nova Scotia* (Montreal, 1877); Alexander Mackenzie, "First Highland Emigration to Nova Scotia: Arrival of the Ship 'Hector,'" *Celtic Magazine*, VIII (1883), 140 - 144
43. Bishop John MacDonald to Charles Cruickshank, 23 April 1772, SCA.
44. George Hay to James Grant, 2 May 1772, SCA.
45. As well as a priest, the party contained a physician (educated at the University of Edinburgh) in the person of Roderick MacDonald.
46. John MacDonald Glenaladale to George Hay, 28 July 1772, Bishop John MacDonald to Hay, 25 August 1772, SCA.
47. Bishop John MacDonald to Hay, 25 August 1772.
48. *Ibid.*
49. John MacDonald Glenaladale to George Hay, 19 January 1773, SCA.
50. Father James MacDonald to John Grant, 9 June 1773, SCA.
51. See, for example, John Fraser to James Stewart, Pictou, Nova Scotia, 8 November 1806, Selkirk Papers, Public Archives of Canada, vol. 56, ff. 14918 - 14920.
52. John MacDonald Glenaladale to George Hay, 16 April 1773, SCA.
53. John MacDonald Glenaladale to Hay, Boston, Mass., 16 October 1773, SCA.
54. *Ibid.*
55. Bishop John MacDonald to George Hay, 25 October 1774, SCA.
56. MacLeod, "Glenaladale Pioneers;" Macdonald, "Captain John MacDonald."
57. Alexander MacDonald to George Hay, 25 September 1774.
58. See J.E. Rea, *Bishop Alexander MacDonell and the Politics of Upper Canada* (Toronto, 1974), and my forthcoming "Scottish Emigration to the Maritimes."