



# Alexander Fraser

*The Last Laird  
of MacNab. An Episode  
in the Settlement  
of MacNab Township,  
Upper Canada*

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# THE LAST LAIRD OF MACNAB.

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## CHAPTER I.

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### THE FLIGHT.

It was a genial evening in 1823. The sun was casting long shadows from the glorious old pines of Leney woods, and the baronial mansion of Dr. Hamilton Buchanan reflected in gorgeous splendor the last rays of the setting sun. A horseman had just fastened his pony at the outskirts of the park, nigh to the Callender road, on the Loch Earn side of the village; and now on foot, and enfolded in a tartan plaid so as almost to conceal his person, was threading the mazes of the wood, and stealthily approached the house of Leney. This was Archibald MacNab, the last chieftain of the MacNabs, who had that morning, for the last time, left his paternal estate of Kennell, on the banks of Loch Tay to take refuge with his cousin, the last Buchanan of the ancient house of Arnprior. Their mutual grandfather, Buchanan the Chief of Arnprior, had been beheaded at Carlisle for participation in the rebellion of 1745; and he it was whom Sir Walter Scott took for his *beau ideal*, in the person of Fergus MacIvor, in his elegant romance of "Waverley." The estate of Leney was all that was left to the Buchanans out of their immense property, as the Arnprior estates were

confiscated to the Crown for high treason on the part of their Chief.

The affairs of MacNab were at the time we write, 1823, thought to be involved beyond extrication—his estate mortgaged to the Earl of Breadalbane—and even now the officers of the law were on his track to enforce on his person, by arrest, a decree of the Court of Session, in order to get possession of the title deeds of the Dochart and Kennell estates, and deliver them to MacNab's unrelenting creditor, John, Earl of Breadalbane. By a postern gate he entered the noble halls of Leney, and was there met and welcomed by his cousin. Their meeting was most affecting. There stood the last representatives of two of the most ancient houses in Scotland: Kennell and Arnprior. Both had suffered for Charles Edward—both had lost kindred, lands, and prestige for Prince Charles; but now both were in different circumstances, the last Chief of the MacNabs was humbled: no more was

"The haughty MacNab, with his grants beside him,  
And the lions of Dochart close by his side."

He was dejected, impoverished, ruined; while Dr. Hamilton was wealthy, and able and willing to assist his unfortunate and once-powerful kinsman. At that period, MacNab was in the prime of manhood, as he had just passed his forty-second year. With a melancholy countenance and with aspect of despair, he unfolded all his griefs to his relative. About ten days previously, the Court of Session had given the Decree and granted a Caption. To disobey was to forfeit his liberty till compliance was made to

the order of the highest civil tribunal in Scotland. To obey was to lose every opportunity of redeeming his estate and to throw away forever any chance of reclaiming it. Long and anxious was the consultation between the two gentlemen; at length it was resolved that the Chief should start for America from an English port, found a settlement, retrieve his lost fortunes, and return to his native land in better times. Hard was the struggle; at length his resolution was taken, and everything was prepared for his departure by next day's afternoon mail.

In the meantime, the King's messengers with the writ of caption had gone to Kennell, and finding that their prey had escaped, betook themselves to Callender, a village two miles distant from Leney House. In passing through Glen Ogle, they heard that MacNab had passed through early in the afternoon, and naturally supposed that the Chief was at Leney. Arriving at Callender at four in the morning, they rested to take some refreshments before proceeding to their more disagreeable task. Fortunately for MacNab, the principal of the King's messengers, a person named Watt, was well known to John McEwan, the head waiter of McGregor's Hotel, who at once suspected their errand, as the Chief's affairs were a common topic of conversation through Perthshire. While they were taking their bread and cheese and whiskey he despatched a stable-boy named Scobie, by a short cut to Leney House, to apprise MacNab of his danger. He roused up Dr. Hamilton's butler, and told him his errand. The butler instantly hurried to the Chief's bedroom. MacNab having been roused out of a deep sleep, and hearing of the impending danger, at once jumped out of

bed, drew on his underclothes, threw a plaid over his shoulders and escaped to the glen in rear of the Leney House, by the back door. Just as he was making his hurried exit, the King's messengers from Stirling thundered at the front entrance. Dr. Buchanan (who was generally called Dr. Hamilton on account of adopting this surname when he came into possession of the Burdovie estate) rushed to the windows. The officers demanded admission. Hamilton sternly refused. They attempted to break the door open. The doctor levelled a double-barrelled gun at their heads, and threatened to shoot the first man who attempted to enter. The messengers at once desisted, slid the ring of their batons from one end to the other, swore that they were deforced, and threatened to bring the whole civil powers of Perth and Stirling to their assistance. Dr. Hamilton jeered and laughed at them. At length they departed, vowing vengeance against all parties concerned. Chief MacNab lay closely concealed in the glen all day. Provisions and clothes were sent to him, and at night he again stealthily entered Leney House. A spy had been left in close proximity to the park to watch proceedings, and he saw what had taken place. He was on his way to inform his employers that the bird was trapped, but just as he cleared the park gates and entered the Callender road, the unfortunate spy was seized by four sturdy Highlanders, gagged and blind-folded, and carried to a lint-mill near Loch Labuig, and there kept a close prisoner for forty-eight hours. He was well used and well fed until his period of incarceration had expired. In the meantime, two faithful servants of Dr. Hamilton had prepared the coach and horses for a long journey. These two



were Peter MacIntyre, who died in 1868 at the Calabogie Lake; and John Buchan, who also came to Canada, and for many years resided at Point Fortune, a respectable and wealthy farmer. At midnight, MacNab being well provided with funds and necessaries, bade farewell to his cousin of Leney, and set out for Dundee with Buchanan and MacIntyre. Every precaution was taken on the road; but it was needless, for the officers of the law were calmly sleeping at the head inn of Callender, expecting to hear from their spy, little Johnny Crerar, if anything unusual occurred. The Chief arrived safely at Dundee, took shipping for London, thence to Quebec; and the first news Lord Breadalbane and his messengers heard of him was in the public journals of Montreal, of a great dinner and ovation given in Montreal by the *upper ten* to Highland Chieftain MacNab. The decree of the Court of Session had no power in Canada; consequently MacNab was free. We may as well state that Watt remained round Callender for two days, searching for little Johnny; at length the spy appeared, and informed them of all that had occurred. There were no telegraphs in those days, and they believed the Chief was still in Scotland, and they made frequent excursions to Kennell; and they were only undeceived in their suppositions when the news of MacNab's safe arrival on the other side of the Atlantic reached them. Watt, the celebrated King's messenger, was for once outwitted and completely non-plussed.

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### THE M'NAB IN CANADA.

From Montreal McNab went to Glengarry, and saw the Highlanders there, and remained with Bishop McDonnell for a fortnight. It was that venerable prelate—the emigrant's friend, without any distinction as to creed—who first spoke to him of the Ottawa. He was really the friend of distressed humanity, whether of a Catholic's or Protestant's type. He put into philanthropic exercise Queen Dido's maxim:

"Tros, Tyriusque mihi nullo discrimine agetur."<sup>[1]</sup>

A patriot, a Christian, a loyalist, ever ready to help the distressed, we shall seldom "see his like again." Having received a good deal of valuable information from the Bishop, McNab proceeded to Toronto (then York), and entered into negotiations with the Government respecting the settlement of a township on the Ottawa. The Government there informed him that a township had been lately surveyed, adjoining Fitzroy, by Mr. P. L. Sherwood, containing about 81,000 acres. It was a large township, and consisted of thirteen full concessions and four broken ones. It was not yet named, and if he undertook the settlement, McNab could name it after himself, and proceed forthwith to occupy it. They gave him a map of the township, which the Chief immediately named McNab, after himself and his clan. Fancying he had all at once tumbled into an El Dorado, without seeing the place, or knowing anything about the facilities the township afforded, McNab at once agreed to the terms of the Government, which were as follows:—He

addressed a letter to Sir Peregrine Maitland, then Lieutenant Governor of the Province, offering to settle a township near Glengarry with his clansmen, and found a Highland Settlement of like loyal character as that which existed on the banks of the St. Lawrence. He had received his inspiration from the venerable Bishop McDonnell, and thus put it in practice. The following answer was given to his application; and as this is the basis of the attempt to establish the feudal system in Canada, and the misrepresentations founded upon it, by which many of the unfortunate settlers were harassed and oppressed, we direct particular attention to it:—

[copy.]

*Report of a Committee of the Honourable Executive Council on the Application of the Laird of McNab for a grant of Land.*

Executive Council Chamber, at York  
Wednesday, 5th November, 1823.

Present: The Hon. James Baby, Presiding Councillor;  
the Hon. Samuel Smith, the Hon. and Rev. Dr. John  
Strachan.

To His Excellency, Sir Peregrine Maitland, K.C.B.,  
Lieut.-Governor of the Province of Upper Canada, and  
Major-General Commanding His Majesty's Forces  
therein, &c., &c.

May it Please Your Excellency:

The Committee, of the Executive Council to which Your Excellency has been pleased to refer the letter of

the Laird of McNab, dated York, 15th Oct., 1823, proposing upon certain conditions to settle a township of land with his clansmen and others from the Highlands of Scotland, most respectfully report, That a township of the usual dimensions be set apart on the Ottawa River, next to the township of Fitzroy, for the purpose of being placed under the direction and superintendence of the Laird of McNab for settlement. That the said township remain under his sole direction for and during the space of eighteen months, when the progress of the experiment will enable the Government to judge of the propriety of extending the period. That patents may issue to any of the settlers of said township, on certificate from the Laird of McNab stating that the settling duties are well and duly performed, and his claims on the settlers arranged and adjusted; or patents may issue to Petitioner in Trust, for any number of settlers, certified by him as aforesaid; the fee on each patent to be One Pound Five Shillings and Fourpence, sterling. That the conditions entered upon between the Laird of McNab and each settler be fully explained in detail, and that it be distinctly stated that such have no further claim upon the Government for Grants of Land; and that a duplicate of the agreement entered into between the Leader and the settlers shall be lodged in the office of the Government. That the Laird of McNab be permitted to assign not less than One Hundred Acres to each family or Male Twenty-one years of age, on taking the oath of allegiance, with the power of recommending an extension of such grant to the

favorable consideration of His Excellency, the Lieut.-Governor, to such families as have means, and are strong in number, and whom it may be deemed prudent to encourage. That an immediate grant of 1,200 acres of land be assigned to the Laird of McNab, to be increased to the quantity formerly given to a Field Officer, on completing the settlement of the township. That the old settlers pay the interest on the money laid out for their use by the Laird of McNab, either in money or produce, at the option of the settler; and that the settler shall have the liberty to pay up the principal and interest at any time during the first seven years.

All of which is respectfully submitted.

(Signed,) James Baby.

Before leaving this part of the subject, it may be as well to state that after repeated trials and applications, it was not till 1841 that the settlers procured a copy of the above document. The Government until then was composed of members of the Family Compact, and they determined to keep settlers in the dark, and to allow the Laird of McNab to do as he pleased. Although the above is the only official document on record, there was a private understanding between the Chief and the Government to the effect that the Chief was to have for his own use and benefit all the timber growing on the township of McNab. There was some unaccountable delay after the passing of the above Order in Council before the Chief proceeded to the importation of immigrants, owing to the survey of the township not being exactly completed, and the assignments to and selection of

certain lots by P. L. Sherwood, Esq., who had made the survey, and whose remuneration was to be made in lands on the survey, and not in money. After the lands had been selected by Mr. Sherwood, he assigned them to Billa Flint, of Brockville, and they were marked on the diagram as not open for settlement. This having all been arranged to the satisfaction of all parties, in the autumn of 1824, McNab wrote this letter to Dr. Hamilton:

Kennel Lodge,  
On the Banks of the Ottawa, }  
10th Aug., 1824.

My Dear Leney,—From my last letter you will have gleaned what my intentions are, and of the progress I have made. Now I am happy to inform you that all my arrangements for settlement are complete. The township of McNab has to-day been handed over to me by Sir Peregrine, and it contains 80,000 acres of fine, wooded, arable land—and upwards. You will send out to me, according to your offer, twenty families, at first. Give them three months' provisions, and make each head of a family, before you give him a passage ticket, sign the enclosed bond, which has been specially prepared by the Attorney-General..... I will meet the settlers in Montreal, and see each one on the land located to them, and will provide for their transport to their lands. They should embark early in April, and I should feel obliged if you would personally superintend their embarkation at Greenock. Now I am in a fine way to redeem the estate at home, and in a few years will

return after having established a name in Canada, and founded a transatlantic colony of the clan.

The preparations can be all made this winter for their emigration, and I shall be fully prepared to receive them. I have a large log house erected close to the banks of the Ottawa, which, as you will see by the heading of this letter, I have called after my estate on Loch Tay, &c., &c.

(Signed)McNab.

Immediately after the receipt of this letter, Dr. Hamilton, of Leney, set to work to procure a band of emigrants to go to McNab in Canada. In January, 1825, the following heads of families signed the bond prepared by the Canadian Attorney-General, and witnessed by D. McLaren, Banker, Callender—James Carmichael, Donald Fisher, Peter Campbell, Peter Drummond, James Robertson, Alex. McNab, James McFarlane (Kier), Duncan Campbell, James McDonald, Donald McNaughton, John McDermid, John McIntyre, Peter McIntyre, Donald McIntyre, James McLaurin, Peter McMillan, James Storie (Dumbarton), James McFarlane (Crief), Alexander Miller, Malcolm McLaren and Colin McCaul.

The terms of the bond were that every adult bound himself—£36 for himself, £30 for his wife, and £16 for every child, with interest, either in money or produce.

On the 19th of April, 1825, the McNab settlers, amounting in all—men, women and children—to eighty-four souls, embarked at Greenock in the ship *Niagara*, for America. After a speedy and prosperous voyage they safely landed in the city of Montreal on the 27th day of May, and

were there met by the Chief and his piper, James McNee, and Mr. Miles McDonald, who boarded the vessel in due form, and with a Highland welcome congratulated the settlers on their safe arrival.

Preparations were now made for conveying the settlers to the place of their destination. At that time there were but few steamers, and the mode of travelling was difficult and hazardous. The only means of transport on the rivers and lakes were by "batteaux"—a species of large barges,—and the only steamboat that was then to be found on the Ottawa was the old *Union*, which plied between Hawkesbury and Hull. The necessary number of batteaux were got in readiness at Lachine, and the settlers having arrived at the latter place with their baggage, embarked, and after a voyage of two or three days' duration landed their living freight at Point Fortune. Here Mr. McLachlin, father of the late Daniel McLachlin, of Arnprior, took the contract of bringing the baggage to Hawkesbury. The settlers with their families performed the journey on foot, and Mr. McLachlin drew the baggage up on ox carts and sleds. There were but few horses in those days. At length they got safely on board the *Union* and steamed up for Hull. This part of the voyage took two days and a night in its accomplishment—a journey that can now be made in a few hours. On the evening of the second day they arrived at Hull. There was no city of Ottawa then—no Bytown. The site of the present seat of Government of the Dominion of Canada was a dense, unbroken forest, an uncultivated wild, a pathless wilderness, where the bear and the wolf roamed uncontrolled, and the