

Alexander Fraser

*Nova Scotia:
The Royal Charter
of 1621 to Sir
William Alexander*

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PREFATORY NOTE

The Charter herein reproduced was copied from David Laing's volume, published in 1866, by the Bannatyne Club, Edinburgh, and has been compared with copies which have appeared at various times in other publications. In checking the original and the translation, the invaluable assistance of Professor David Duff, M.A., University of Toronto, was cheerfully given, and I have also to acknowledge with thanks my indebtedness to the technical staff of the Ontario Department of Mines for supervision in the preparation of map No. 3, page 21.

A. F.

Toronto, 1921.

TRANSACTIONS OF THE ROYAL CANADIAN INSTITUTE. VOL. XIV, PLATE 1.



Sir William Alexander, Earl of Stirling

NOVA SCOTIA:

THE ROYAL CHARTER OF 1621

By Colonel Alexander Fraser, LL.D.

The study of historical origins rarely lacks in interest. In so far only, as we are able to study the development of a country from its beginning and through the various stages of its growth, can we obtain a true and adequate historic perspective of it. In the Royal Charter granted in 1621 to Sir William Alexander lies the origin of Nova Scotia as a Province, and of its name. On the conditions leading up to this grant, and consequent upon it, as well as on the Charter itself, I have been asked to give you, this evening, a short address.

At the outset a few words are due to the grantee of the Charter, whose name is perpetuated in the threefold character of statesman, colonizer, and man of letters. Only the other day the first volume of a new edition of his poems appeared from the Manchester University Press under the able editorship of Kastner and Charlton. In neither character, however, did he achieve first-rate distinction; nevertheless, time and circumstance combine to preserve his name to the world, while his connection with Canada will be of perennial interest.

William Alexander was born at Menstrie, a small property beautifully situated in the parish of Logie, near the famous

Ochil Hills, between four and five miles distant from the historic town of Stirling. The date of his birth is uncertain. It has been placed at 1567, 1580 and more recently at 1570. The family was reputed to be of ancient lineage deriving from the Macdonalds of the Isles through the MacAllisters of Loup, Argyllshire. This is doubted by Laing, and having regard to the tendency in those times to construct fanciful genealogies, the caveat may be justifiable; on the other hand, the careful historians of Clan Donald concede the MacAllister descent. A sentimental interest would thus attach to the early connection of Macdonald blood with Nova Scotia now so largely inhabited by the descendants of the Highland clans. The Alexanders were of the class known as the smaller barons who held their lands of the great crown vassals. Their hereditary patrons were the Earls of Argyll, and William Alexander, having passed through the grammar school of Stirling (Thomas Buchanan, a nephew of the celebrated George Buchanan, being rector), and through either St. Andrews or Glasgow University (both are mentioned) and Leyden, travelled abroad in France, Spain and Italy with the young Earl of Argyll—afterwards a powerful Scottish noble—who later introduced him to Court. He was appointed tutor to Prince Henry of Scotland, and before long won the personal favour of King James.

Nowhere was the expected death of the eccentric Elizabeth awaited with more interested anxiety than in Scotland in whose ancient royal house lay the succession to the English throne. James, more eccentric than the English Queen and almost equally famous, was feverishly waiting for the news, and when he crossed the border (in 1603),

many of his countrymen were in his train, among them the poet-tutor of Prince Henry.

James' accession touched two great eras in British history. The full-orbed splendour of the Elizabethan age was lingering in the west, and the rosy-fingered dawn of the epochal seventeenth century gleamed above its glorified eastern horizon. The genius of Milton and Shakespeare reigned over the republic of letters; the chivalry of Sidney and Raleigh still touched the imagination of fashionable men and women; Drake, Cavendish and Gilbert gave zest and ardour to maritime enterprise; and the wealth of Ormus and of Ind waited on the galleons of the awakening nations; while the skill of the master-artists in political intrigue was exercised under the influence of the dominant Cecil, and was already taking the form of what was to be a binding tradition. Into this current of affairs, in the vigour of mature manhood, Alexander was drawn, with exceptional opportunities of observing and learning. He learned well. His rise in London was rapid. He became a gentleman extraordinary of Prince Henry's private chamber; Master of the Household and received, in 1609, the honour of Knighthood. The Prince died in 1612 and in the year following Alexander was selected to be one of the Gentlemen Ushers of the Presence to Prince Charles, afterwards Charles I., and in 1614 was appointed to the difficult and onerous office of Master of Requests, the duties of which brought him into delicate and close relations with not a few of his influential fellow-countrymen. With some of them he made useful friendships which he turned to account when his most promising opportunity arrived.