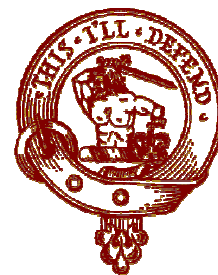


MacFarlane's Lantern

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Arrochybeg to Australia (The story of MacFarlane pioneers. Part One)



Omeo Plains, Victoria, Australia

Photo: Wikipedia

As we delve further into our Clan's history, we come across more and more references to those clan folk who were settled along the eastern shores of Loch Lomond. Thus, our lead story in this issue concerns two MacFarlane brothers from the small farm of Arrochybeg, Buchanan parish, Stirlingshire, who were among the many Scots that migrated to Australia during the mid-19th century and contributed greatly to the development of this huge country.

James (b.1796) and Duncan (b.1798) MacFarlane were the sons of Walter and Marjory MacFarlane (nee Colquhoun) who farmed Arrochybeg, beside Loch Lomond. Walter (1755-1836) was a seventh generation direct descendant of Andrew Dubh MacFarlane, 2nd Laird of Gartartan, Gartmore, Stirlingshire, which, in turn, linked the family to the main line of MacFarlane Barons of Arrochar and to the ancient Earls of Lennox - by all accounts a pedigree to be proud of.

Walter and Marjory's other children were daughters Christian (b.1785), Janet (b.1800) and sons Donald (b.1787), Lewis (b.1789), John (b.1791) and Walter (b.1793) -- this then was the family all born at Arrochybeg. Daughter Christian married local boy Duncan Mitchell and produced four sons and four daughters. Her sister Janet married a man named Archibald McIntyre. However, we are here mainly interested in the sons James and Duncan and their lives in separate states of Australia: with James in Victoria and Duncan in South Australia, and each doing his own thing. Whether or not they occasionally met or even communicated with each other by mail is not evident. As the story unfolds, we shall learn of other family members who later migrated to Australia.

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Beginning with James MacFarlane, we find him on record as having come to Australia on the ship *Triton*, arriving at Sydney in February 1824, then aged 28 years – there are also indications that he had some seagoing experience. For the next ten years nothing is heard of him, although there is reference to him in 1834 running cattle at a place which came to be known as Macfarlane’s Flat on the Gippsland side of what later became the Victoria/NSW border – no doubt using skills already known to him from his Scottish roots. Let’s face it, MacFarlanes have a long history in cattle dealing – clandestine or otherwise – to the extent that our rallying pibroch (Togail nam Bo = Lifting the Cattle) says it all!



The Stockman. Watercolour by S.T. Gill, 1854

Various documents, most of which reiterate the same story, and none of which gives any indication as to what he looked like physically. In 1835 he is one of a party led by another Scot, George McKillop, which crossed the mountains from Monaro, NSW, arriving at a site near Lake Omeo, where MacFarlane established a cattle station, reputed to be the first in Victoria. Thereafter, our James is reported as having returned to Monaro for the purpose of bringing cattle to his new location. However, In the absence of any real information about his physique, the fact that he drove cattle such great distances over what was then largely uncharted mountainous bushland would require a rugged constitution and a fair degree of intelligence; his days as a sailor may also have given him additional navigation skills. Apart from all that, he had to become an accomplished horseman.

It seems other members of his extended family joined James in Gippsland. One report states that his nephew Walter Mitchell (his sister Christian’s son, born 1814) came to Australia with him on the *Triton*. If this is so, then the lad would only be ten years of age; yet we have evidence of a Walter Mitchell arriving in 1838 on the ship *Minerva*, which spent a considerable period in quarantine at Sydney.

Of course, it is possible that young Walter went back to Scotland for a while and later returned to Australia on the ship *Minerva*. He was one of the sixteen cabin passengers, none of which fell ill with typhus, but nevertheless had to spend several weeks at the quarantine station. Interestingly, a medical report lists two unmarried steerage passengers: “**Malcolm McFarlane, age 23, shepherd**” and one “**Edward Thomson, age 25, miner**” both of whom had recovered from typhus and were released on 7th April 1838. Malcolm (1814-1899) was the son of James’s brother John who had married a Violet McGlashan and settled at Lochgoilhead, Argyllshire.

Edward Thomson however appears yet another family member and may be a nephew-in-law to James McFarlane. A notation in the quarantine list refers to him as being released “**with Mr. Walter Mitchell to go to Mr. James McFarlane.**” The family connection here might be via James’s older brother Walter who married a Catherine Thomson.

Although, it seems strange that two family members sailed steerage whilst the other, by then possibly a more affluent cousin, Walter Mitchell could afford cabin accommodation. In any event all three finally reached uncle James McFarlane in Gippsland, who now owned a cattle station called Omeo B and seemingly other property, including a flour mill.



The Drover Painting by Walter Withers, 1912

Before ending our interest in the *Minerva* (1838) it is noted that there were other MacFarlanes listed among the steerage immigrants namely: **John “McFarlane, 28, ploughman/farm servant; Isabella McFarlane, 22, farm servant (wife?); and Robert McFarlane, 23, blacksmith; Agnes McFarlane, 17, embroidress (wife?).**” We have not yet discovered if these clansfolk are related to the Arrochybeg lineage. We do have a report that the above-named Malcolm McFarlane had a younger sister, Marjory, who came to Australia and is said to have died at Glenmaggie, Victoria, 1899.

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From the foregoing, it seems that cattleman James McFarlane had plenty of family support during his lifetime in Victoria. However, we can find no proper biographical account on his life, only tantalizingly brief references to his movements.

In 1836 and again in 1840 his name appears in Inveralochy as proprietor of “*Gouldbourne Flour Mill, operated by horses.*” In 1838 he is in some kind of partnership with another Scot named Lachlan Macalister, and at which time another intrepid cattleman explorer, Angus McMillan, arrives from Scotland, allegedly on the *Minerva* (although his name does not appear in the quarantine list) carrying papers for one “*Captain Lachlan Macalister*”, He thereafter became an employee of the partnership.

By 1858, James McFarlane appears to have cattle runs at **Omeo, Glenmaggie** and **Hayfield** (now Heyfield). The last-named property was where Malcolm McFarlane settled around 1841. And in that year his uncle James was advertising in Melbourne that he has cattle for sale from Omeo.

The favourite breeds of cattle came to be Hereford and Aberdeen Angus, also crosses and a few Black Polls. They were usually butchered at about five years old and weighing 1000lbs.

The McFarlane family in Gippsland assisted in the exploration of this wide territory. By 1839 wealthy landowners in New South Wales had become interested in the Gippsland region and funded various exploratory schemes. The aforementioned Angus McMillan became a key figure in this great work when, aided by acquired Aboriginal knowledge, he finally blazed a trail from the hinterland southwards to the coastal region. He was followed by the noted Polish explorer/scientist, Count Paul Strzelecki who, it seems, used McMillan’s hard-won route for which he later accepted official credit!

James MacFarlane, a truly enigmatic figure, died on the 27 July 1860 in the Prince of Wales Hotel, Melbourne, although he does not appear to have been buried in this city. He never married, and most of his property was divided among family members, including his brothers Lewis and Walter and other in-laws. The death certificate shows that he lived 35 years in Australia (17 in NSW and 18 in Victoria).

We would like to learn a lot more about James MacFarlane and we shall keep watch for further information – perhaps some of our members can add to the foregoing brief account of this elusive clansman? If so, please get in touch.

In the next issue of ‘Lantern’ we move our attention to South Australia for an account of the life of Duncan MacFarlane, the other member of the Arrochybeg family, who was among the very first pioneer settlers in this part of Australia.

To be continued.

‘Calum Curamach’