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Scottish Emigration to the Maritimes 1770-1815: A New Look at an Old Theme

Between 1760 and 1860, in one of the greatest migrations in human history, millions of inhabitants of the British Isles left the land of their birth to make new homes overseas. At its height in the 1850s over 300,000 people per year participated in this mass exodus and relocation. The vast bulk of the emigrants were from England and Ireland, although perhaps 10 per cent were Scots, mainly from the urbanizing and industrializing Lowlands. In their choice of initial destination in the years after 1815, when better statistics are available than earlier, twelve of every twenty British emigrants selected the United States, while four of twenty went to British North America and three in twenty to Australia and New Zealand.¹ Over this century of mass movement the migration of Scots to the Maritime provinces does not measure large. But before 1815, in the years when the British government and ruling classes agreed that emigration was pernicious and prior to their acceptance of the “shovelling out of paupers” as official and unofficial policy, Scottish — mainly Highlander — immigrants to the Maritimes constituted one of the principal components of the exodus which departed from Britain in defiance of public attitudes. Joining the Yankees and the surviving Acadians, the Scots Gaels by 1815 formed a third major ethnic community in the Maritime region. And like the Loyalists and Acadians, the Highlanders have perpetuated their own mythic version of their departure and subsequent history, in which the term “Clearances” figures prominently. By “clearance” most Scots understood a policy on the part of the large landed proprietors of Scotland willfully to displace people with grazing animals, especially sheep. Those displaced were left homeless, and were forced to emigrate to North America.²

1 These figures are derived from tables printed in Helen I. Cowan, *British Emigration to British North America* (Toronto, 1967), pp. 288-93.

2 Much of the written tradition about clearances and emigration may be credited to the writings of Donald MacLeod, a Strathnaver stonemason who bitterly attacked the lairds from Canadian exile in two books: *History of the Destitution in Sutherlandshire* (Edinburgh, 1841), and *Gloomy Memories of the Highlands of Scotland* (Glasgow, 1857), subtitled “a faithful picture of the extirpation of the Celtic race from the Highlands of Scotland”. As a victim, MacLeod lacked historical perspective and ran all emigrations, clearances, and sufferings together in a powerful indictment of the ruling classes. His views of the Highlander as passive victim have been perpetuated in such works as Alexander MacKenzie, *A History of the Highland Clearances* (Inverness, 1883), and the best-selling book by John Prebble, *The Highland Clearances* (London, 1963).

While there can be little doubt that the early Highland emigrants had a difficult time both in Scotland and in British North America, it is worthwhile to distinguish the period before 1815 from the years which followed. After 1815 British attitudes toward emigration did change, and in Scotland the Clearances were in full swing. Many were driven out.³ But the later history of Highland development and North American emigration should not be read automatically back into the earlier era, chiefly because such an approach makes the Highlanders out to be far more passive victims than they were. Before 1815, the landlords were not driving the people from the Highlands to America. They were changing traditional practices, but were desperately attempting to prevent those affected from emigrating. In this effort the lairds had the full support of the British government. As a result, the Scottish exodus of this early period was as much a voluntary removal from below as a forced clearance from above. To some extent, the Highlanders were masters of their own destiny.

Because of the uncertainties of war, the dislocation of shipping during hostilities, and the fluctuations in the Scottish economy (especially in the Highlands), Scottish emigration was not a steady flow in the years before 1815. Instead, it was heavily concentrated in four periods: 1770-1775, 1790-1793, 1801-1803, and 1805-1811. All but the last of these periods were times of peace, and the momentum of each wave of emigration was halted by the onset of active warfare, concluding with the War of 1812. Although careful and continuous records are lacking for ports of embarkation and ports of arrival and many smaller vessels probably sailed clandestinely or unreported, certain trends are discernible from the fragmentary evidence available. As Tables I and II indicate, after 1775 Scottish emigration to North America decreased, and did not ever recover its pre-Revolution volume in the years before 1815. Equally significantly, the destination of Scottish and particularly Highland emigrants shifted dramatically after the American Revolution. Before 1775, less than 10 per cent of the emigrants went to provinces which were to remain within the British Empire. By 1801-1803, perhaps as many as 80 per cent of the emigrants were heading, at least initially, to British North America, although initial and ultimate destination were not always identical, since many of these immigrants moved on to the United States. Most of those leaving directly for the United States were probably Lowlanders departing in small numbers on regular passenger sailings from the Clyde and Liverpool.⁴ The Scots also demonstrated a fairly steady preference for an initial destination of Prince Edward Island; Nova Scotia, mainly Pictou, received most of its pre-1815 migrants in the opening

3 James Hunter, *The Making of the Crofting Community* (Edinburgh, 1976), pp. 39-49, 73-87.

4 See table I. In the absence of decent American figures, this generalization is hardly well-documented. But none of the contemporary literature for the period 1801-1803 in Scotland mentions emigration to the United States, and a careful check of the Clydeside customs records indicates that few passengers were carried to the United States in these years. Had there been a substantial outpouring of Lowlanders, one would have expected to find some trace of it.

TABLE I MIGRATION OF HIGHLAND AND LOWLAND SCOTS TO NORTH AMERICA, 1760-1815

Period	Destination		Origin	
	British No. America	13 Colonies	Highland	Lowland
1763-1775	1,100	20,000	11,000	10,000
1776-1789	1,100	1,000	1,500	600
1790-1793	1,800	1,000	2,300	500
1794-1800	100	no data		100
1801-1803	7,000	1,000	7,000	1,000
1804-1815	3,000	no data	2,500	500

years of the nineteenth century. Indeed, after 1803, the Island began to receive secondary migrants from Pictou, completely reversing an earlier tendency to move from the Island to the mainland.⁵

Finally, there was a marked change over time in the geographical origins of the emigrants. Before 1775, the movement to North America had been fairly evenly divided between Highlanders and Lowlanders; by the early nineteenth century it came predominately from the Highlands. Although only 10-12 per cent of the Highlanders in the first wave of migration of 1770-1775 went to the Maritimes, those Scots moving into the region were from the outset almost exclusively Highland in origin, and remained so until 1815. Increasing agricultural prosperity, industrial expansion, and British policy forbidding the emigration of skilled artisans all combined to account for the temporary decline of Lowland emigration to North America, while the proverbial if perverse loyalty of Highlanders to the British Crown helps explain their preference for the British colonies, especially after American independence.⁶ As one Scots settler wrote to his mother in 1783, "It's an impossibility for any loyal subject to remain (or any to return) in the United States for any one that's found in the country is . . . inhumanly dealt with by its ungovernable mobs and encouraged by their rulers".⁷ American hostility to loyal Scots may have declined, but memories of it remained alive. Moreover, a fair number of Scots, again mainly

5 "List of Shipping Inward, 1801-1809", Provincial Archives of Prince Edward Island [hereafter PAPEI].

6 Ian Graham, *Colonists from Scotland: Emigration to North America 1707-1783* (Ithaca, New York, 1956), pp. 150-83.

7 James Brownlie to his mother, 14 September 1783, Hamilton of Dalzell Muniments, bundle 445, Motherwell Public Library.

TABLE II: EMIGRATION OF SCOTS TO BRITISH NORTH AMERICA, 1770-1815

Period	No. Ships	P.E.I.	Canada	Nova Scotia	Red River	Origin		
						Western	High & Is.	Highl.
1770-1775	11	763	200	180		903	100	140
1776-1789	5		820	260		670	350	60
1790-1793	9	881	240	650		1771		
1794-1800	2	14		100			14	100
1801-1803	37	1594	1461	3864		6468	451	
1804	5	223	102	100		425		
1805-1811	19	1280	19	276	30	10666	194	145
1812-1814	3				233	20	213	200
1815	8		700	326	84	500	40	400
Totals	100	4755	3542	5756	347	11823	1362	845
		3542				1362		
		5757				845		
		347				370		
							14400	

14400 of which 11823 or 82.4% from Western Highlands and Islands

Source: All known passenger sailings to the provinces of British North America recorded in newspapers, books, manuscripts, customs records, local and family histories.

Highlanders who did most of the military service overseas, came to the Maritimes with the Loyalists, providing a basis of friends and family connections upon which further immigration could build. Disbanded soldiers have not been included in the figures of Table I, but the resettlement of Scots Loyalists in the Maritimes after 1783 helped redress the unfavourable balance of the earlier emigration. Although in 1770-1775 most Scots had departed for provinces which would rebel, by 1785 a large number of these people had found their way to the loyal provinces of British North America, especially the Maritimes.

The statistical basis for any analysis of early Scottish emigration is complex and unsatisfactory. As has already been observed, no government agency on either side of the Atlantic was consistently responsible for recording the departure or arrival of Scots, and even the gross figures of Tables I and II must be derived from a variety of less than ideal sources.⁸ On the other hand, a number of detailed passenger lists for particular vessels have survived. Regrettably from the standpoint of the Canadian historian, the only relatively complete run of such lists — for the years 1774-1775, when the British government did require customs officers to produce detailed records — document a movement almost entirely to the thirteen colonies.⁹ Moreover, even these nominal listings, generated by a government demanding to know the ages, occupations, former places of residence, and reasons for emigration for all emigrants, are extremely difficult to analyze and aggregate. The most common failing of the 1774-75 lists is that they do not clearly identify family groupings, often listing women (as was the common practice in the countryside) by their maiden names and omitting children who were not paying passengers. In addition, the lists vary greatly in the specificity of occupation, place of residence, and reasons for emigration. Whole shiploads are described collectively as having decided to leave Scotland “in order to procure a Living abroad, as they were quite destitute of bread at home”.¹⁰ Women’s occupations are typically omitted, and servants accompanying wealthier emigrants are often not so specified.

8 As well as in newspaper and magazine reports, emigration data is to be found in: Records of the Highland Society, Edinburgh; Customs Records for Scottish Ports in the Scottish Record Office [SRO], Edinburgh; Customs Records for Prince Edward Island, 1790-1810, in PAPEI; [Edward S. Fraser of Reelig], “On Emigration from the Scottish Highlands & Isles”, manuscript in the National Library of Scotland [NLS], Edinburgh; Home Office Papers on Scotland, in the SRO; Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Cape Breton, and Canada Colonial Office Papers in the Public Record Office [PRO], London; Treasury Papers (especially T. 47/12) in the PRO; Nova Scotia, Cape Breton, Prince Edward Island, and Canada State Papers in the Public Archives of Canada; the Public Archives of Nova Scotia; and PAPEI. It should be noted that although a small number of Scots made their way to both New Brunswick and Newfoundland before 1815, no cumulative data is available for these provinces and they have been omitted both from the statistical tables and the discussion following.

9 T. 47/12, reprinted by Viola Root Cameron as *Emigrants from Scotland to America, 1774-1775* (Baltimore, 1965). Further references will be to the more accessible Cameron transcripts.

10 *Ibid.*, pp. 25-7

Nevertheless, these 1774-75 lists give us our most intimate, detailed, and complete glimpse into the early Scottish emigration to North America, and are far more revealing than the scattered and less thorough lists surviving for the years after the American Revolution. Table III is based upon both the 1774-75 listings and the more random later ones, employing those lists for which comparable information on family units, age, and occupation could be calculated.¹¹

As the table indicates, Lowland emigration was different from its Highland counterpart in other more profound ways than its declining incidence after 1775, its tendency to go to the United States, and its increasing use of regular passenger routes at major seaports. The latter two aspects were obviously related, since most regular shipping from North Britain went to American cities like New York and Philadelphia in this period.¹² Fewer Lowland emigrants than Highlanders had been employed in agricultural occupations — many were skilled artisans — and Lowlanders tended to migrate alone rather than in the larger families and/or communities the Highlanders preferred. On the whole, the single migrant tended to be significantly younger than the individual travelling at the head of a family, a point somewhat obscured by aggregation in the tables. As for the Highlander, he emigrated in family groupings from the outset, and the table indicates how little change in the overall patterns occurred before 1815. The figures probably underestimate somewhat the size of the extended Highland families emigrating during this period, since relatives and servants accompanying the family unit are not typically so indicated in the passenger lists.¹³

A detailed examination of two representative passenger lists illustrates more clearly the differences between the Lowland and Highland emigration. In February 1774 the vessel *Commerce* collected at Port Greenock 214 passengers for New York. Most were from Paisley and Glasgow.¹⁴ These passengers included 118 adult males in sixteen trades (all females were merely listed as "spinsters"), of whom only thirteen in three trades were connected with agricul-

11 Out of the 1774/75 listings, the following ships' rosters have been included in Table III: *Commerce*, *Bachelor of Leith*, *Adventure of Liverpool*, *Gale of Whitehaven*, *Ulysses*, *Magdalene*, *Diana*, *Marlborough*, *Countess of Dumfries*, *Friendship*, *Glasgow Packet*, *Christy*, *Lovely Nelly*, *Friendship* (1775), *Jackie*, *Isabella*, *Georgia*, *Chance*, *Christy* (1775), *Jupiter*, *Lovely Nelly* (1775), *Commerce* (1775). These lists were chosen because comparable data could be aggregated from them. Subsequent rosters include: *Lucy*, *Jane* and *British Queen* (lists in *Oban Papers*, *Scottish Catholic Archives*, Edinburgh); *Draper* (list in RH 2/4/87, ff. 63-4, SRO); *Dove of Aberdeen* (list in *ibid.*, ff. 73-7); *Sarah* (list in SRO *ibid.*, ff. 66-71); various ships (list in *Melville Papers*, Ms. 1053, ff. 104-5, NLS); *Commerce* (list in *ibid.*); *Clarendon* (list in PAPEI).

12 This assertion is based on analysis of the Port Greenock customs records for 1800-1803 (CE 60/1/28-29, SRO), which indicates that over 60 per cent of sailings departed for New York and Philadelphia in these years.

13 Cameron, *Emigrants from Scotland*, pp. 1-5.

14 RH 2/4/87, ff. 66-71, SRO.

TABLE III: HIGHLAND AND LOWLAND PATTERNS OF EMIGRATION TO NORTH AMERICA BEFORE 1815

Origins	Dates	No. Lists	Total Passenger ship total	Average no. Heads families	Average family size/ ship	Average age heads family	% accom- panied children	% accom- panied person families	Average family size- multiple occupa- tions	% in non-agri- cultural occupa- tions	
Lowlands	1774-5	15	905	60.33	560	1.61	24.8	24.7%	20.35%	4.07	80.72%
Highlands	1774-5	6	561	93.50	181	3.09	32.4	35.7%	62.0%	4.47	33.7%
Highlands	1790-1808	9	1338	148.6	396	3.37	30.94	34.7%	65.1%	4.65	7.9%

Source: Passenger lists detailing nominal data, 1774-1808

ture. There were 140 heads of families including seventy-seven males and thirty-four females travelling alone. Only forty-five children below the age of sixteen were aboard. The twenty-nine multiple-person families emigrating averaged 3.55 persons each, and the average family size for the entire vessel (including those travelling unaccompanied) was 1.55. The average age of the heads of families was 23.18 years. In June 1801 the vessel *Sarah* cleared Fort William for Pictou, Nova Scotia, with 350 passengers from the Western Highlands. The eighty-nine adult males represented only six occupational designations, and only two of these individuals (one blacksmith and one tailor) were not in agricultural pursuits. There were ninety-four heads of families on the *Sarah*, including only thirteen males and nine females travelling unaccompanied, and 151 children below the age of sixteen. The seventy-two multiple-person families averaged 4.55 persons each, and the average family size for the entire vessel (including those travelling alone) was 3.7 per family. Unfortunately, ages were not given on this listing.

Over the last third of the eighteenth century the Highland pattern of emigration to British North America solidified. The family-oriented nature of the movement, combined with the relative isolation of the Highlanders, led to a preference for vessels chartered by themselves or through contractors. Charters were less expensive, and before 1803 particularly, they offered families special fare arrangements. Since spring was the most favourable time to sell their livestock and property to raise the cost of passage, late spring sailings were regarded as more desirable. Migration to the Maritime region before 1815, therefore, tended to be a late spring/early summer movement of unskilled agrarian Highlanders who clustered with their families in isolated communities of friends and relations. Contemporary observers were virtually unanimous in characterizing the potential emigrant population as highly resistant to change. Surveyor John Blackadder wrote of the Uist people in 1799 that they had "a spirit for rejecting new Modes of Improvement, and an independent cast of mind which will not be bound down (as the Farmers in other Countries generally are) by Covenants in leases to do what other people think right for them to do, if they do not think the thing proposed right themselves".¹⁵ Many agreed with Blackadder that it was sudden change which produced emigration in the Highland districts. When the relatively high incidence of Roman Catholicism and Gaelic language usage among those departing is added to their other distinctions, it is clear that the early Maritime emigration of Scots was of a traditional and conservative people, singularly well-equipped to preserve their culture in the New World.

How did such a traditional and conservative people come to take the innovative and uncertain step of crossing the Atlantic to make new lives for themselves? The usual answer to this paradox insists that the Highlanders were

15 "Memorandum per Mr. John Blackadder Land Surveyor May 1799", RH 2/8/24, SRO.

displaced persons, forced to leave their homes by the policy of the large landed proprietors of northern Scotland, who wilfully displaced people for grazing animals, usually sheep. Certainly the “clearances”, as this policy has always been labelled, do explain much of the post-1815 migration, when the Highlanders became passive victims without control over their own destinies. But they do not really explain the earlier flow of population to North America, and particularly to the Maritimes.¹⁶ In the years before 1815, most emigrants to North America came from the Western Highlands and Islands, a region not of agricultural depopulation but of increasing overpopulation. Moreover, the British government, reflecting the articulated needs of the ruling classes of Scotland in this period, consistently and firmly opposed any loss of manpower through emigration. The Highlands were clearly changing, but the people were not so much being forced to leave by their landlords as choosing to leave against the wishes of their superiors. If estates were being depopulated, it was by clearance from below rather than from above.

After the Highland support for the pretender Charles Stuart in 1745, the second uprising in thirty years, the region was deliberately integrated into Great Britain and the British Empire. The old clans and the traditional society surrounding them were broken down at the top, and the Highlands exposed to the contemporary world. The government wanted no recurrence of the raising of a clan army in the North on behalf of Stuart pretenders. It abolished the chieftans’ hereditary rights to hold their own independent courts, and proscribed the practice of wardholding — the attachment of the obligation of military service as a condition of tenancy. The old clan chieftans were converted into proper British landed proprietors, and encouraged to modernize their holdings, principally by streamlining their operations and shifting to a money rental. To increase income from rentals, more rather than fewer tenants were desirable. With the traditional relationship between laird and people under attack, the Highlander found himself without the old security of place at the same time that he was subjected to new conditions and offered new opportunities.¹⁷

The new opportunities were particularly evident in military service. In both

16 Published material on the pre-1815 flow includes: Ian Graham, *Colonists from Scotland*, esp. pp. 185-9; Margaret I. Adam, “The Highland Migration of 1770”, *The Scottish Historical Review*, 16 (1919), pp. 280-93, and “The Causes of the Highland Emigrations of 1783-1803”, *The Scottish Historical Review*, 17 (1920), pp. 73-89; George R. Mellor, “Emigration from the British Isles to the New World, 1765-1775”, *History*, n.s., XL (1956), pp. 68-83; D.M. Sinclair, “Highland Emigration to Nova Scotia”, *Dalhousie Review*, XXIII (1943/44), pp. 207-20; Colin S. Macdonald, “Early Highland Emigration to Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island from 1770-1853”, *Nova Scotia Historical Society Collections*, XXIII (1936), p. 41-8, and “West Highland Emigrants in Eastern Nova Scotia”, *Nova Scotia Historical Society Collections*, XXXII (1959), pp. 1-30; and D. Campbell and R.A. MacLean, *Beyond the Atlantic Roar: A Study of the Nova Scotia Scots* (Toronto, 1975), esp. 7-35.

17 A.J. Youngson, *After the Forty-Five: The Economic Impact on the Scottish Highlands* (Edinburgh, 1973), pp. 1-46; Graham, *Colonists from Scotland*, pp. 1-90. For a contemporary

the Seven Years War and the War of the American Rebellion, the Highlands provided the British Army with a number of soldiers vastly disproportionate to its population. In both wars the North American theatre was a central focus of British military activity, and many of the Highland regiments served there.¹⁸ The Highlander's first mass exposure to the world outside his glen or island thus involved an introduction to the open society of North America, a wilderness country with vast tracts of land available for the taking and with obvious agricultural potentialities. Many contemporaries recognized the dangers. "Conquest", wrote "Grampicola" in the Edinburgh *Weekly Magazine* of 1773, "the child of successful war, hath an obvious tendency to depopulate the victorious mother country".¹⁹ After both wars, officers and common soldiers in North American service were offered land grants in the New World, including lands in Nova Scotia and the Island of St. John. More Highland officers than common soldiers took advantage of the grants, which for officers were large enough to encourage subdivision for sale to emigrants. Indeed, since land grants to officers were substantial, and because the many officers who were younger sons of Highland lairds or tacksmen had little to look forward to at home, it was initially the officer class — part of the traditional Highland leadership group — which became involved in North America and emigration. Nearly half of the Island of St. John was granted to former officers, many of them from Scotland.²⁰ Much of the region around Pictou was granted to men from the 84th Regiment (The Royal Highland Emigrants) in 1784. From the outset, former officers with landgrants to settle in the Maritimes were among the most active emigrant contractors.²¹

New conditions in the Highlands after the "45" developed most quickly in the Western highlands and Islands region, especially in the counties of Inverness, Argyll, and Ross. Most of the Highland emigrants to the Maritimes before 1815 came from this region, where increasing population led to intense competition for continually smaller parcels of land inadequate to support a family. While precise population figures are unobtainable, all modern demographic research points to a substantial increase of population in northwestern Scotland in the second half of the eighteenth century. One scholar has recently computed the

view, see *The Present Conduct of the Chieftains and Proprietors of Lands in the Highlands of Scotland* (n.p., 1773).

18 J.P. MacLean, *An Historical Account of the Settlement of Scotch Highlanders in America* (Cleveland and Glasgow, 1900), pp. 196-230; John Prebble, *Mutiny* (London, 1975).

19 Grampicola, "Of the Prevailing Spirit of Emigration", *The Weekly Magazine, or Edinburgh Amusement*, 22 (1773), p. 205.

20 See my "British Colonial Policy and the Island of St. John, 1763-1767", *Acadiensis*, IX (Autumn 1979), p. 8.

21 Including such men as Colonel Robert Stewart on the Island of St. John, several MacLeans from the 84th Regiment, and especially Major Simon Fraser, known in the Highlands as "Nova Scotia" because of his continued interest in Highland emigration to that province.

average annual compounded rate of population growth in the Hebrides during these years at 0.97 per cent; on the adjacent mainland it was 0.56 per cent.²² Despite emigration, the overall increase of population between 1755 and 1801 was 56.2 per cent on the Islands, and 29.3 per cent on the mainland. Here, in the region supplying the vast bulk of the early Maritime Scots emigration, one finds not eviction by landlords for sheep, but a proprietorial encouragement of continued subdivision.²³ As holdings became smaller, those upon them became increasingly dependent upon imported meal for their survival, and bad harvests were catastrophic. The outside meal was financed out of non-subsistence activity: by sale of cattle, by cash remitted to the region by those working in the Lowlands or fighting in the army, and especially on the Islands, by income from kelping.

The rise of the kelping industry undoubtedly accounts to a considerable extent for the higher rates of population growth on the Islands relative to the mainland, since the industry provided a regular supplement for those on inadequate holdings and encouraged both larger families and subdivision. The profits of the kelping industry to the proprietors in the region not only deflected them from a policy of clearance, but led to vocal and active opposition to emigration, especially in the early years of the nineteenth century. Kelping was a form of cottage industry in which the landlords merely acted as middle men, marketing a crop gathered and processed by tenants and subtenants on shores where — typically — the laird reserved the kelp rights to himself in his leases. Kelp-making extracted from seaweed an alkaline ash used in making soap and glass, and flourished in the Hebrides in the period 1760-1815, exactly coinciding with the emigration era under discussion, because normal British supplies of alkalines from the Baltic were insufficient and often reduced or eliminated by warfare. Some kelp was cast on shore, but normally the weed had to be cut by hand in tidal waters, the harvester often standing up to the waist in ice-cold water for hours on end. Then it had to be hauled to a kiln, where it was reduced by burning to one-twentieth its original weight. Finally the burnt kelp was hauled by the harvesters to the point of shipping. Only at this stage did the laird enter the operation, collecting the burnt kelp at his wharf for sale to merchants from Hull or Liverpool.²⁴

The price the proprietor received for "his" kelp rose from £2 per ton in 1750 to £10 per ton in 1800 and £20 per ton in 1810. Since he never paid his tenants more than £3 per ton for manufacture (and usually less), and expended but

22 M.W. Flinn, "Malthus, Emigration and Potatoes in the Scottish Northwest, 1770-1870", in L.M. Cullen and T.C. Smout, eds., *Comparative Aspects of Scottish and Irish Economic and Social History 1600-1900* (Edinburgh, 1977), p. 48.

23 *Ibid.*: Hunter, *The Making of the Crofting Community*, pp. 6-33.

24 Malcolm Gray, "The Kelp Industry in the Highlands and Islands", *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, IV (1951), pp. 197-209.

another £2 per ton for shipping and handling, profits — with almost no direct involvement or overhead — could be enormous, as much as 400 per cent in a year of high prices.²⁵ Because of the extensive labour involved and the shortness of the season when the weather was sufficiently dry to permit open kiln fires and sufficiently warm so that harvesters could withstand the water temperature, few tenant families could make more than four tons of kelp in a year. The system obviously encouraged larger families and subtenancy, for more hands was one way to increase income. Another way to improve income, of course, was to pay less rent and receive more payment for kelp from the landlord, and tenants attempted to strike better bargains. But tenant efforts to increase income, in a sense, counterbalanced one another. With a limited supply of land, larger families and more subtenants ultimately meant additional competition for leases, in which the kelp payment was stipulated as an important part of the rental agreement. Overpopulation resulted in a fierce bidding for land and leases, which kept rentals up and kelp payments down. Tenants who demanded better terms could find themselves without lands in the new setts (the process by which entire estates were regularly reallocated to tenants), obviously evicted but hardly “cleared” in the classic meaning of the term. The lairds should have been pleased to get rid of the discontented, but their continual complaint was that emigration most affected accommodated tenants rather than the dispossessed.²⁶

In the continual struggle with the proprietors over land, leases, and kelping contracts, emigration was not merely a possible alternative for those left without land, but virtually the only bargaining weapon the settled population could employ for dealing with their lairds. An extensive and systematic depopulation of the region through emigration, which would mean that the landlords were no longer in full control of the bargaining situation, was the abiding fear of the great kelping lairds like Clanranald, Lord Macdonald, the Earl of Seaforth, and the Duke of Argyll. In the 1770s and again in the 1800s when the population not only threatened a mass migration but actually began one, the lairds and their factors responded with feverish hostility to the exodus. Conditions were improved on the kelping estates while emigration was a serious threat.²⁷ Although such a bargaining weapon was never systematically organized or planned, it would be a mistake to view the popular response to and use of emigration as anything less than deliberate and calculated. Some people, especially among the Roman Catholic leadership, were prepared to encourage

25 Youngson, *After the Forty-Five*, pp. 136-8.

26 See, for example, the remarks of the Highland Society's Third Committee on Emigration, 25 March 1803, in Sederunt Book, III, p. 647, Records of the Highland Society, Edinburgh.

27 See, for example, Hector Macdonald Buchanan to Robert Brown, 25 June 1802, Duke of Hamilton's Muniments, Lennoxlove [National Register of Archives (Scot), Survey 332], Bundle 12, SRO; Minutes of Sederunt of Clanranald's Tutors, 20 March 1804, 17 January 1806, GD 201/5/1233/40, 42, SRO.

emigration as an intentional device to improve conditions on the Islands, and many tenants threatening to leave were quite aware of what they were doing.²⁸

Scots alarmists, of course, tended to view any emigration as disastrous, and that of 1801-1803, for example — less than 10,000 from a population in excess of one million — was often seen as the beginning of a general “depopulation of the country”. In part the over-reaction was caused by the contemporary view of emigration as an epidemic disease which could easily spread, and in part because some Highland districts did lose large numbers of people. Arguments against Highland emigration always began by bemoaning the loss to Britain of its “Bravest and most steady Soldiers”.²⁹ After the French Revolution Highlander backwardness even became a positive boon, since they were, as one anonymous writer observed, “the only considerable body of Men in the whole Kingdom who are as yet absolutely Strangers to the levelling and dangerous principles of the present Age, and therefore they may be *safely* trusted indiscriminately with the knowledge and use of Arms”.³⁰ Ironically, the same attributes which had made the Highlanders such feared and detested Jacobites eventually made them attractive Hanoverians, for they were uncontaminated by the “profligacy, sedition, & atheism of modern philosophy”.³¹ But beyond the military arguments were economic ones. Despite Adam Smith, late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century British and Scottish economic thinking was still fundamentally mercantilistic.³² People were as much a national asset as coal or iron; “labouring hands” were an important natural resource. To permit them to leave for North America, where they might be employed against the mother country, as during the American Rebellion, was obviously bad policy.

For those Scottish economic thinkers who concentrated increasingly on Highland development in their writings, this loss of population was particularly pernicious. Almost to a man those Scots who advocated Highland improvement were anti-imperialists, intensely hostile to the overseas empire. Nor was this attitude surprising. For them, limited resources of manpower and investment had been deflected in the past from one under-developed area (the Highlands) to another (North America), and American independence had demonstrated the error of the preference.³³ From their standpoint, British North America could only be settled at the expense of Scotland, and especially the Highlands, for both

28 Bishop John MacDonald to Bishop George Hay, 14 February 1772, Blairs Papers, Scottish Catholic Archives, Edinburgh; Tenants Sollops to Captain Allan Cameron, 27 May 1803, GD 221/30, SRO.

29 “State of Emigration from the Highlands of Scotland, its extent, causes & proposed remedy London March 21, 1803”, p. 7, NLS.

30 “Plan for raising Sixteen Thousand Men for Internal Defence by embodying the Highland Clans”, February 1797, Acc. 4285, NLS.

31 “State of Emigration”, p. 8.

32 Youngson, *After the Forty-Five*, pp. 47-66.

33 See, for example, James Anderson, *Observations on the Means of Exciting A Spirit of National*

regions were in contention for the same pool of capital and population. In their perception of a competition between underdeveloped Scotland and underdeveloped North America, the economists and polemicists were undoubtedly accurate. In their conviction that Scotland and the Highlands could be converted into a satisfactory substitute for North America, that proper public and private policies could make the North competitive, they were on far less substantial ground. Most obviously, Scotland did not have North America's vast abundance of natural resources. But the confidence of the Highland developers was based upon other dubious assumptions as well.

One point upon which all Highland improvers and emigration opponents — the two stances became increasingly indistinguishable — could agree was that what the Highlands needed was full employment. As a result, over the period from 1770 to 1800, a fully-integrated programme of Highland development was gradually worked out by a number of economic writers headed by men like James Anderson, John Knox, and Sir John Sinclair.³⁴ These men attempted to work from realistic principles. They admitted most of the soil of the region was not prime arable land, and for this reason emphasized its conversion to sheep pasturage and flax plantation, thus providing raw materials for textile manufacturing. They noted that the waters around northern Scotland were rich in fish, an asset not then adequately exploited. A scattered population teetering on the brink of starvation in a semi-pastoral state, dependent on optimum growing conditions (often not experienced) to feed itself, could be moved into fishing and manufacturing villages on the coasts, and the glens turned over to sheep. Communications were difficult in the North, and gradually everyone became an advocate of roadbuilding and obsessed with the need for canals at Crinan (bypassing the Mull of Kintyre) and through the Great Glen between Fort William and Inverness. The building of roads and canals would provide temporary employment, and when completed, the economic boom resulting from the new transportation facilities would absorb the construction force.³⁵

The "Highland Improvement Programme" based on the construction of roads and canals, which won parliamentary support and approval in 1803, obviously assumed a mobile and highly adaptable work force. Highlanders were to abandon their homes for the new villages, and shift from their traditional undisciplined and pastoral way of life to fishing and manufacturing pursuits. In the various schemes for the creation of employment, one job was assumed equal to another — whatever and wherever it was — so long as it promised to provide

Industry (Edinburgh, 1777); John Knox, *A View of the British Empire, More Especially Scotland* (London, 1785).

³⁴ Youngson, *After the Forty-Five*, pp. 67-119.

³⁵ *Ibid.* See also A.R.B. Haldane, *New Ways Through the Glens* (Edinburgh, 1962); Jean Lindsay, *The Canals of Scotland* (Newton Abbot, 1968); A.D. Cameron, *The Caledonian Canal* (Lavenham, 1972); James Handley, *The Navvy in Scotland* (Cork, 1970).

a livelihood. Until Lord Selkirk's book in 1805, no writer on the Highlands bothered to ask whether the proposed new employment was suitable for the population, or whether Highlanders might prefer to maintain their old agricultural and basically pastoral ways.³⁶ The most advanced economic thinking in Scotland at that time did not allow for a social dimension. Full employment for an expanding population was the goal, and if the people objected to the means, it was generally accepted that they might have to be coerced. As political economist John MacCulloch later wrote:

It is easy to string words together and to write pathetic nonsense . . . The attachment [to their lands] of the wretched creatures in question was a habit; the habit of indolence and inexperience, the attachment of an animal little differing in feelings from his own horned animals. Had it been even more, they were children; unable to judge for themselves, and knowing nothing beyond the narrow circle of their birth. As children, it was the duty of their superiors to judge for them, and to compel them, for their own advantage . . . As they could not have increased on the spot, they must have starved and emigrated. They were starving and emigrating. They have been introduced to fresh wealth, to a new creation of wealth, on the sea shores.³⁷

It is in this context of rational economic planning that most of the so-called "clearances" of the period before 1815 must be viewed.

The larger landed proprietors engaged in "improvement" sought to convert their infertile glens to sheep pasturage and to transfer their displaced tenants to small crofts and villages on the coasts, where they could find new and more remunerative employment. Emigration to land-rich British North America thus offered the displaced Highlander (still a small minority before 1815) a chance to maintain his traditional way of life, a point Selkirk argued so persuasively in his book on the Highlands. In this early period the Highlander was not abandoned to his fate; he was offered what the planning experts of the day almost unanimously regarded as a better way of life. By the same token, the Highlander exposed to clearance often departed for North America — against the advice of the best contemporary economic thinking — to avoid modernization, not because he had been neglected or was necessarily materially worse off for his eviction from his traditional lands.³⁸

36 Compare, for example, Alexander Irvine, *An Inquiry into the Causes and Effects of Emigration from the Highlands and Western Islands of Scotland, with Observations on the Means to be Employed for Preventing it* (Edinburgh, 1802) with Selkirk's *Observations on the Present State of the Highlands of Scotland, with a View of the Causes and Probable Consequences of Emigration* (Edinburgh, 1805), esp. pp. 44-106.

37 John MacCulloch, *The Highlands and Western Isles of Scotland* (London, 1824), IV, p. 112.

38 For the best illustration of the lengths cleared Highlanders would go to avoid modernization, see

Whether from the kelping estates of the Hebrides or the glens of the North, the early Highland emigrant came to the Maritimes with a purpose. The kelping industry would die after 1815, as alternative and less expensive alkalines became available, and clearing landlords would give up on the unsuccessful notion of coastal relocation. Later emigration from the Highlands might have been, as Scottish historians have always maintained, of the evicted, unemployed, impoverished, and superfluous. But in the years before 1815 emigration was a conscious decision by a proud people who were reasonably successful economically in their traditional environment. In those days before assisted emigration, most families had to pay their own passage, and the very poor and downtrodden quite simply could not afford the freight. The cost of passage, which at around £4 per adult passenger varied little in the years before 1803, was only the beginning of the total expense, for now equipment and livestock were needed, and money was required for living expenses until land could be cleared and first crops harvested in the new country. There are few detailed figures on the amount of capital required, but in one Highland emigration venture financed totally by the Roman Catholic Church, for which careful records were kept, the bill worked out to £7 per person or £30 for a typical family. These figures did not include either the local purchase of livestock or local transportation costs to and from seaports.³⁹ Emigrants could arrive in the Maritimes "destitute", as did 650 Highlanders at Pictou in 1791.⁴⁰ But these people had financed their own passages, and so had been reasonably well off by Highland standards. Only the more affluent could raise even the capital to pay passages through sale of stock and possessions; it was estimated that the poorer elements of the population could not expect more than £5 for the sale of a family's worldly goods.⁴¹

For the really poor, possibilities for emigration to America were even more limited than for those able to raise passage money. The only emigration options open to the bottom ranks of Highland society were either indentured servitude or fortuitous involvement in one of the occasional partial assistance schemes, such as those organized by John MacDonald of Glenaladale in 1772 and by the Earl of Selkirk in 1803. Indentured service had a bad reputation in Scotland due to its many abuses, particularly in the plantation regions of the southern

my "Lord Selkirk's Highland Regiment and the Kildonan Settlers", *The Beaver*, outfit 309.2 (Autumn 1978), pp. 16-21.

39 See my "Highland Emigration to the Island of St. John and the Scottish Catholic Church, 1769-1774", *Dalhousie Review*, LVIII (1978), esp. 520-1.

40 *Report on Canadian Archives* 1894 (Ottawa, 1895), p. 476.

41 [Rev. P.B. Homer], *Observations on a Short Tour, Made in the Summer of 1803, to the Western Highlands of Scotland* (London, 1804), p. 113. John Lane Buchanan, in his *Travels in the Western Hebrides: From 1782 to 1790* (London, 1793), compared the lot of the Hebridean subtenant (or scallag) with that of the African slave — to the slave's advantage! See p. 195 ff. Buchanan maintained that "it is only people of some property, and that not inconsiderable, who can afford" (p. 29) to emigrate.

colonies. As one young Scots servant in Virginia warned his parents in 1768, schemes involving indenture were not to be considered “unless it be your own desire to be bought and sold like cows or horses and to work along with common slaves”.⁴² Indentured servants to the Maritimes — and they were not uncommon on the Island of St. John before 1775 — were not maltreated *as servants*, but did suffer from the primitive conditions of first settlement; it was difficult for those in Scotland to make fine distinctions about the causes of suffering.⁴³ In any event, after the American Revolution the use of indentured labour was not common practice in British North America. Moreover, the potential employers of indentured servants wanted mainly able-bodied males, and were not interested in responsibility for large families, while most Highlanders refused to emigrate except in family groups, as the recruiters for the Canadian regiment in 1803-04 and Lord Selkirk in 1813 discovered to their dismay.⁴⁴ A few young men were taken out under indenture, but mainly to serve as craft apprentices rather than as field hands. The poor obviously could not calculate to emigrate, but had to be prepared to leap at any opportunity available. Such chances did not come often; and rarely would the less affluent Highlander have been able to take advantage of them. Typically he was committed to some way of survival such as subtenancy or militia service which tied him down and made emigration an impossibility, even when contractors were in his area looking for likely candidates.

Some Highlanders undoubtedly made their way into the Lowlands where they earned sufficient money to pay for passage from the Clyde, but most of these people are lost from the record. Roman Catholic Bishop George Hay reported early in 1792 that in Glasgow

. . . all who were able to pay their freight would not be kept from America, especially after the good accounts sent from those who went last year [the “destitute” 1791 arrivals], who, upon their landing in Nova Scotia, got a whole year’s provision allowed them, and so much land for each family; but . . . the poor people who could not pay their freight, nor go to America, were greatly to be pitied . . .⁴⁵

42 John Cullen to his parents, 20 October 1768, Hamilton of Dalzell Muniments, Motherwell Public Library. For the general question of indentured servitude in America, see Abbot Emerson Smith, *Colonists in Bondage: White Servitude and Convict Labor in America 1607-1776* (Chapel Hill, 1947).

43 On the early troubles on the Island of St. John, consult David Weale, ed., “Dairy of William Drummond”, *The Island Magazine*, no. 2 (1977), pp. 28-31, and my “Sir James Montgomery and Prince Edward Island, 1767-1803”, *Acadiensis*, VII (Autumn 1977), esp. pp. 80-4.

44 For the Canadian Regiment, consult Prebble, *Mutiny*, pp. 443-7, 452-3, and for Selkirk my “Lord Selkirk’s Highland Regiment”.

45 George Hay to John Geddes, 21 February 1792, Blairs Letters, SCA.

But Father Alexander McDonell, the resident priest in Glasgow, observed in 1794; "Since I came to Glasgow, I have seen upwards of six hundred Catholics, men, women and children from various parts of the Highlands, spread over the whole face of this country in quest of scanty subsistence A recital of the sufferings of this miserable people since the fatal stagnation took place in trade would sear your very soul. I have at this instant a list of scores of them unable to get labour and destitute of every necessary of life".⁴⁶ Conditions in Lowland cities were not necessarily an improvement over those on emigrant vessels, as many Highlanders found to their dismay. Those who criticized emigrant contractors for their treatment of passengers, however, did not extend their humanitarianism to Scotland's slums.

From the outset of Scottish emigration, the role of the emigrant contractor was an ambivalent one, particularly when he dealt with Highlanders. Detested and opposed at every turn by lairds and government officials, the emigrant recruiter was considered in the same category as the "crimps" who toured the countryside enticing young men into military service in distant and often fatal climes. Indeed, the same men frequently engaged in both activities on a bounty basis. Forced to operate furtively most of the time, the contractor has left little record of his operations, except criticism by everyone when things went wrong. He clearly overcrowded his vessels, often ill-provisioned his passengers, and occasionally experienced fierce outbreaks of epidemic disease on board his ships. In his defense, it must be remembered that he was under extreme pressure from his Highland clientele to keep passage rates down, and emigrant voyages to the Maritimes, especially before 1805, frequently returned to Britain in non-productive ballast since few cargoes were available for loading at the emigrants' destination. Moreover, the bad diet of the voyage was often supplied by the passengers themselves, who cut costs by doing their own provisioning whenever possible. Finally, much of the sickness on board was a result of the passengers' own behaviour, particularly their tendency to huddle below deck as they did in their huts in winter, thus exacerbating disease in the confined and cramped conditions of an overseas voyage.⁴⁷ In the beginning of the nineteenth century a new species of contractor arose who had little stake in settlement and simply viewed emigrants as another kind of cargo to be carried profitably overseas. Such a man felt no sense of responsibility for the passengers during or after the voyage. He operated with few scruples, and his documentable excesses soon led to demands for government regulation of the emigrant trade.⁴⁸

46 Alexander McDonnell to George Hay, 12 February 1794, Blairs Letters, SCA.

47 For one lengthy analysis of the business by an experienced contractor, containing many criticisms of the passengers, see Captain John MacDonald to _____, n.d., PAPEI.

48 See, for example, First Report of the Committee of the Highland Society on Emigration, 8 January 1802, Highland Society of Edinburgh Sederunt Books, III, pp. 441-4, and *Report from the Committee [of the House of Commons] on the Survey of the Coasts, &c of Scotland, Relating to Emigration* (1803).

The resultant legislation, hastily passed without debate by Parliament in May 1803, was received quite paradoxically in Scotland. While the Highland lairds applauded the Passenger Vessel Act — as it was often called — for its humane concern about the health and well-being of the exploited Highlanders, the objects of all the altruism and humanitarianism bitterly condemned the legislation as an ill-disguised effort to halt their departure for North America by greatly increasing the cost of passage.⁴⁹ As Lord Selkirk pointed out in 1805, the weekly food minimums required by the Act — particularly for meat — bore no relationship to the standard diet of oatmeal and water which never bothered the humanitarians when consumed on their own estates. The net effect of the legislation was not only to require better conditions of treatment for Highlanders at sea than they had ever enjoyed at home, but to enforce standards far superior to those the government provided for Highlanders when it transported them as soldiers.⁵⁰ The Act, whatever the pious pronouncements of public rhetoric, was privately acknowledged by the ruling classes of Scotland as an attempt to halt emigration until the effects of the Highland improvement programme of 1803 could be felt.⁵¹

From the standpoint of subsequent emigration, the 1803 legislation had the anticipated result of raising the price of passage fairly substantially, perhaps as much as doubling the cost of the voyage to the Maritimes. But it did not halt emigration. Instead the Act pre-selected the most affluent and ambitious class of Highlanders for voluntary emigration, the people who were most likely to be successful. Vessels remained available in some abundance for transporting emigrants after 1803, mainly because the sudden burgeoning of the North American timber trade altered the entire pattern of British shipping to the Maritimes. Before 1805, most emigrant vessels had been contracted principally for that purpose. After 1805, timber ships carried emigrants to the Maritimes as an alternative to sailing from Britain in ballast. The principal goal of the voyage was timber, not people. As a result, while passage rates were higher than before 1803, they were not raised as much as the designers of the regulatory legislation had intended. Although it has been argued that the provisions of the Act were never enforced, and hence it had little impact, available customs records of Highland ports indicate that the legislation did receive more than token compliance.⁵² It simply was not effective, except to dash the hopes and dreams of the very poor and possibly to reduce the capital available for the survival, in the

49 Consult my "Settlement by Chance: Lord Selkirk and Prince Edward Island", *Canadian Historical Review*, LIX (1978), pp. 170-88.

50 Selkirk, *Observations*, pp. 148-56.

51 "Settlement by Chance", pp. 185-6.

52 Oliver Macdonagh, *A Pattern of Government Growth 1800-1860: The Passenger Acts and their Enforcement* (London, 1961), p. 62. For an example of enforcement, see John Reid and James Robertson to Customs Commissioners, 25 May and 14 June 1811, CE 86/1/2, SRO.

Maritimes and elsewhere, of those who continued to leave the Highlands.

Once the emigrant had defied his landlord and the government, arranged passage for himself and family, and arrived in the Maritimes, he still felt the sting of public hostility to his departure. There were a number of reasons for the primitive conditions of underdevelopment and lack of planning in eastern Nova Scotia, Cape Breton, and Prince Edward Island, but a principal one was official ambivalence towards the region as refuge for British — and especially Scottish — manpower needed at home. Britain wanted its Maritime provinces populated, but not at the expense of the mother country. As Lord George Germain wrote to Governor Patterson of the Island of St. John in 1781, "I must not encourage you to expect that any measure for inviting Emigrants from the British Dominions in Europe will meet with much Countenance here".⁵³ Initially, the Island was intended to be settled by Foreign Protestants or those Britons already resident in North America for at least two years; other settlers such as Highlanders did not legally fulfill the terms of the grants to the proprietors. Nova Scotia had earlier been subjected to similar government direction, and there was no policy at all for Cape Breton. Of the Maritime provinces, New Brunswick enjoyed the best initial planning and financial support, but only because of the Loyalists, who received most of the best lands. Scots, especially Highlanders, were never attracted there directly from the mother country in great numbers, although many settled in the province with the disbanded regiments. Foreign Protestants — mainly Germans — were never a successful proposition, and except for the Loyalists, the American Rebellion ended the flow of emigration from the American colonies.⁵⁴ Unable to people its loyal North American provinces by criteria originally conceived for a quite different Empire, British policy towards them drifted aimlessly. It was at best unconstructive and at worst positively inhibiting.

In the many-stranded web of factors which retarded the early development of the Maritime region under British control, one clear thread is the failure of the British government to take the lead in providing proper assistance and support for immigrants on a regular basis. Most observers recognized that the region operated under significant disadvantages in attracting new settlers. But while Highlanders genuinely preferred the Maritimes, and could easily have been encouraged to migrate there, before 1815 the government in London adopted an attitude which even discouraged private developers like Lord Selkirk. When in the years after 1815 a new attitude towards Scots emigrants emerged in Britain, and they were deliberately exported in great numbers, they arrived in provinces where land and economic resources had been improperly managed — even

53 Lord George Germain to Walter Patterson, 28 February 1781, CO 226/7, f. 239, PRO.

54 W.P. Bell, *The Foreign Protestants and the Settlement of Nova Scotia* (Toronto, 1961); M.L. Hansen and J.B. Brebner, *The Mingling of the Canadian and American Peoples* (New Haven and Toronto, 1940).

squandered — for decades. Recovery of control over development was virtually impossible.

At the same time, it should be acknowledged that the absence of development on Cape Breton, around Pictou, and on Prince Edward Island, was a positive feature for most of those Highlanders drawn to these regions in the early formative period. These were not demoralized refugees, but a people who saw British North America as a positive alternative to their situation at home. They sought most of all a chance to be left alone to continue their traditional way of life. Instead of seeing their ancestors as exploited victims, modern Gaels should lionize them as early rebels against economic planning and unconsidered modernization. The Highlanders were sensible enough to recognize that the more populated and organized jurisdictions of the New World would not encourage the maintenance of the old ways. They were a people well equipped to preserve their cultural identity, and predisposed to resist both urbanization and industrialization. And in the wilderness regions of the Maritimes they managed to replicate most of the features of the pastoral and independent existence they had long enjoyed, minus the worst problems of landlord oppression, military service, and religious persecution.⁵⁵

55 Campbell and MacLean, *Beyond the Atlantic Roar*; Rev. George Patterson, *A History of the County of Pictou Nova Scotia* (Montreal, 1877); Charles W. Dunn, *Highland Settler: A Portrait of the Scottish Gael in Nova Scotia* (Toronto, 1953); Donald MacKay, *Scotland Farewell: The People of the Hector* (Scarborough, 1980).