

**Donald McLean, Prince Charlie's Pilot:  
by Alexander MacLean Sinclair (1840-1924)**

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**THE ISLAND OF TIREE**

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**PRINCE CHARLES'S PILOT**  
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Shortly after the Battle of Culloden, a French brig anchored in Gott Bay, in Tiree, and sent a boat ashore. The officer in charge of the boat seized the first man he met—Neil MacFadyen—and asked him to pilot the ship to Lochnanuagh, which is about twenty miles north of Ardnamurchan Point. Neil told the officer that he had no acquaintance with the coast, and was consequently unable to do as required. At the same time he pointed to the place in which Donald MacLean lived, and informed him that Donald was thoroughly qualified for the work he desired to have done. The officer then seized Donald, who offered to go with him and pilot the ship to Lochnanuagh on condition that on the way back he should be landed at Tiree.

The officer took Neil MacFadyen with him also, as he was afraid that if he left him he would report the ship's destination and purpose. Donald MacLean piloted the ship safely to Lochnanuagh, where Prince Charles and his retainers were taken on board. The brig sailed immediately and headed by the north of Coll towards Barra. The captives now saw that there was no intention of landing them on Tiree. When they were near a cluster of islands at the east end of Coll, they got into a boat which was lying at the stern of the brig. They cut the tackling, lowered the boat, and rowed off with all their might. When they left, there were only two men on the deck of the brig, the steersman and the lookout. All hands, however, were soon called up. The Frenchmen fired several shots; but as the night was very dark they did not hit the runaways. The Tiree men pulled round to the south of Coll, and landed at Port na Luinge. To their great disappointment and annoyance, MacLean of Coll took the boat from them, and kept it for himself. When they landed at Tiree they were told that they were in danger of being arrested.

Donald MacLean was taken by a friend and hidden in a cave at Vault—a small rocky, uninhabited island on the north side of Tiree. He lived there for nine months. His hiding place

was known to a number of his friends, who were in the habit of visiting him on very dark nights. When hard pressed for food he would go in the night time to the house of an old friend in Tiree. He would scratch gently at the window, get admitted, and have his wants supplied. To prevent the young people in the house from knowing what was going on, there was no light struck, neither was there a word spoken. The authorities paid frequent visits to his father's house at Ruaig: sometimes they would enter it twice during the same night. Donald's health at last began to fail. His father advised him to give himself up to the Government. As he was unwell and tired of living alone in a cave he agreed to this proposal. His father went with him to Tobermory. On the way they passed the Tiree Packet, which was bearing information to the effect that all below the rank of captain had been pardoned. But this was a state of matters which was unknown to them. When they got to Tobermory Donald gave himself up to the Government authorities. He was immediately drafted into one of the Highland regiments. One of the MacLeans of Drimnin happened to be an officer in the regiment. Through the influence of this officer Donald obtained his discharge after two year's service.

Chambers informs us in his "History of the Rebellion of 1745-46" that two French vessels arrived in Lochnanuagh on September 6th, 1746, and sailed for France on Saturday September 20th, with Prince Charles and 130 of his followers. The act of indemnity to the poorest of the followers of Prince Charles was passed in June, 1747. It follows then that Donald MacLean lived in the cave on Vault from the end of September, 1746, to the end of June, 1747—just nine months as the tradition states. Donald was born about 1726. He had three sons, Lachlan, Charles, and John. He died at Ruaig. John, his youngest son, was born in 1771. John lived and died at Ruaig. He left three sons, Malcolm, Lachlan, and Donald. Malcolm lived at Ruaig, and was succeeded there by his son Allan. Donald was a merchant and manufacturer in Glasgow. Of Neil MacFadyen I can give no account. There may or may not be descendants of his in existence.

A. MACLEAN SINCLAIR

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*Transcribed March 2008 by Vicki Morgan  
of Brandon, Manitoba, Canada, a great-  
great-great-granddaughter of Donald  
McLean, Prince Charlie's Pilot of 1746.*

Editor's Notes:

1. No date or masthead is on this clipping, but if written by Sinclair, then likely published before his death in 1924.
2. Handwritten notation: "**1997.60**" at the top of the article.
3. Handwritten notation: "**1746**" in the margin next to MacFadyen in Line 5.
3. At the end of the article there is the following handwritten notation: "***written by Alexander MacLean Sinclair, born 1840 in Canada. He was a grandson of John MacLean Bard of Coll, who was Lair [sic] Alexander MacLean.***"

Alexander Maclean Sinclair was named in memory of this Laird of Coll who was his grandfather's patron. Rev. Alexander MacLean Sinclair is best known for his book, *The Clan Gillean*, a definitive history of the Clan MacLean published 1899.

4. Genealogy of Alexander MacLean Sinclair (1840-1924): born in Glenbard, Nova Scotia, Canada, was the son of John Sinclair (1797- 1875) of Sutherland and Tiree-born Christy McLean (1809-1887) who emigrated to Nova Scotia in 1819 with her parents: Tiree-born Bard John McLean (1787-1848) and Isabel Black (1786-1877) of Lismore. The Bard was the son of Allan McLean and Margaret McFadyen of Caoles, Tiree, a descendant of the MacLeans of Ardgour.