

AN OUTSIDER OPENS THE RESEARCH AND DISCOVERY OF THE RAASAY MACLEODS IN AUSTRALIA

This article is the first of many in an unfolding history of the fortunes of the line of Torquil MacLeod of Raasay, the family which emigrated to Australia. It has a few errors; but the tale is true in its direction.

It is worth listing here for its initial discovery and what it subsequently allowed historians to reveal.

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Clan MacLeod – the Australian Connection by Tony Pope.

As an author, Wallace MacLeod is an editor's delight, providing manuscripts on a computer disc and hard copy, and responding quickly and good humouredly to editorial queries.

"In a sense we are all exiles from our father's land. My people came from another shore beyond the Atlantic to the New World in 1839, without a word of English – banished, it seems, by their own chief, who hoped to find fewer cares and greater profit in raising sheep. Four years later, by a sort of tragic retribution, this same chief had to sell his patrimony to a wealthy stranger, and then in 1846 he exiled himself to Nalang, South Australia."

Where, and what is Nalang, I wondered: a town, past or present, or a sheep or cattle station? With a little help from my friends, I found out and gradually pieced together a fascinating story, the Australian connection.

Clan Macleod. In the 13th century, Leod, son of King Olaf the Black, acquired the islands of Harris, Lewis, and part of Skye, off the bleak west coast of Scotland. His sons Tormod and Torquil were the founders of the two main branches of the clan. Tormod inheriting Harris and Skye, and Torquil gaining Lewis. Later, a cadet acquired the island of Raasay, between Skye and the mainland. The chiefly family of the MacLeods of Lewis was wiped out in the early 1600s, and the chieftan of the cadet branch at Raasay inherited the title of Chief of Clan Torquil.

The Chief who banished Wallace McLeod's ancestors in 1839 was John MacLeod (c1806-1860), 13th of Raasay. John had three younger brothers: James (1813-1844), Loudoun Hastings (1820-1868), and Francis Hector Goerge (1820-after 1867). Instead of going to Canada, these three emigrated to South Australia in 1839-1840 and took up land in the infant colony. James settled in what was to become McLaren Vale, on property he called 'Rona', after a small island off Raasay. Loudoun took up land near Wellington on Lake Alexandrina, and Francis (generally known as Frank) chose property at McLaren Flat.

Nalang In August 1845, after the death of James, Loudoun and several other Scottish migrants explored south and south-east of Wellington, crossing what is now known as the Ninety Mile Desert, and located a strip of good land just west of the Victorian Border, around what is now Bordertown. They divided the land between them, into three properties, for which they obtained 'occupation licences' in 1846. Loudoun MacLeod secured 117 square miles of sheep grazing land, and called the property Nalang. Later he developed a taste for city life, and moved his brother Frank in as manager.

The township of Bordertown (which is actually 20 kilometers inside the border) was surveyed in 1852 when a halfway stop was established by Inspector Alexander Tolmer for the escorts conveying gold from the Victorian goldfields to Adelaide. The Nalang homestead is located about 5 km. south of the town.

As Wallace mentions in his paper, in 1846 (*the father*) the chief, John MacLeod, also migrated to Australia. It is not clear when he came to Nalang, but he died and was buried there in 1860. I would suggest it was after mid – 1852, that John and Frank, came to live at Nalang, because of an event at that time which is recounted without mention of any MacLeod but Loudoun. This is an anecdote from the Adelaide Stock and Station Journal of 22 December 1926, by Rodney Cockburn:

“On the night of July 9, 1852, Loudoun Macleod was aroused from his sleep by cries of distress from the wurley of his native servant Jenny (sic), who had served him faithfully for six years. He found that the occupants of the wurley had been assailed by ten Glenelg River blacks, who had murdered Jemmy and a 10-year old boy, and had endeavoured to carry off the former’s lubra. There were ten spears in Jemmy’s body. MacLeod immediately dispatched a messenger to the Scott’s station, and got in touch with the gold escort. Next morning MacLeod, John and Charles Scott, John Binnie, a police corporal, and two native trackers set out after the offenders, and after 35 miles on horseback, came up with five of them on Henry Jones’s Binnun run. The blacks tauntingly challenged the whites to fight, and a spirited encounter with guns and spears ensued. One spear passed through MacLeod’s hat, another denuded the bark of a tree where the Scotts were posted. Later three of the natives stood their trial in the Supreme Court, and were sentenced to death – Pot Pouch, alias Teapot, Ballycrack and Crackingyounger.

John MacLeod was buried at Nalang, not far from the homestead. His grave is still there; the tombstone has fallen and broken, but has been reconstructed in a horizontal position over the grave and set in concrete. It reads:

IN MEMORY OF
JOHN MACLEOD, Esq
OF RASAY AND
CHIEF OF THE CLAN
TORQUILE
WHO DIED JUNE 61860
AGED 55 YEARS

picture to stick here

The property had passed out of the possession of the MacLeods by 1870. After the death of his wife in 1867, Frank MacLeod took his children to Tasmania, where the hereditary chiefs of Raasay still reside.

Loudoun died in 1868, in a city – but I was unable to determine for certain whether in Melbourne or Adelaide.

Nalang passed through several hands, with much of the lands being resumed by the government. In the early 1900s it was purchased by the ancestors of the present owners, Bill and Jenny Hunt, who have recovered most of the original land, and who live in, and care for the heritage listed homestead, built by the MacLeods in 1857. Bill and Jenny were gracious hosts to my wife and I when we called there to check out the Australian connection.

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