

Flora MacDonald's Winter in Windsor

Sorrow and loss, pride and gain are part and parcel of the Scottish Legacy in the land which we call Nova Scotia, New Scotland.

I have been told on good authority – it appears on bumper-stickers – that “God made the Scots a wee bit better,” a sentiment with which some might agree, whether with or without *té Breag*, a wee dram of the creature, while others might take exception. But we cannot overlook the role of the Scots/Irish in our Maritime and local history.

We meet in the town of Windsor, acknowledged as “The Home of Sam Slick,” if we are to believe the bill-boards on our highways, and we meet, of course, in the gateway to the Valley also celebrated on the bill-boards and in the tourist literature as “The Land of Evangeline.”

With respect to the first, “The Home of Sam Slick,” we have to say, no, not so, either fictionally or in reality. The literary creation of Thomas Chandler Haliburton, who rightly may claim Windsor as his home, Sam Slick is the fictional “Yankee peddler,” who provides an amusingly satiric and not always complimentary view of the pioneer realities of early nineteenth century Maritime society and culture with all of its pretensions and follies, prejudices and biases. A source of amusement, especially to the literate and chattering classes of England, Sam Slick is certainly not of Windsor born.

Just as fictitious, but with a greater degree of romantic interest, is the heroine of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem *Evangeline*, a poem which has caught the imagination and continues to exercise a power upon all who imagine themselves as displaced and disenfranchised by the ubiquitous and imperious decree of whatever “powers-that-be.” But it is altogether a fiction, pleasing and heart-rending as it may be.

Both are the creations of the nineteenth literary imagination, the one local and earlier in the century, the other mid-century and out of New England; both imbued with a sense for the power of a story and the ability to tell it well and poetically with all of the license of a poet and a novelist. But the reality?

To some extent, the reality lies in the fiction and the power of fiction, the power of a well-told story, the power of sympathetic character and the power of wit and humour. But over and against such fictional identities, important as such things are, stands another story, a real story about a real heroine, and one whose name has somehow managed to escape our notice almost entirely. Certainly, it adorns no bill-board; a forlorn plaque alone speaks to its poignant reality; the odd notice and passing remark appear in some of the historical literature. There is, too, a paucity of historical evidence and yet what we have is sure. Flora was here!

Windsor is, quite literally, the winter stopping-place of Flora MacDonald (1722-1790). Now it would be a bit of a romantic stretch or a satiric comment, more akin to Longfellow's *Evangeline* and Haliburton's *Sam Slick*, to call Windsor, the winter-castle of Flora MacDonald! And, yet, what a story it is! A story that illumines so much of the story of the Scots, and their contribution to our Maritime and Canadian identity.

So where are the billboards and festivals highlighting the historical reality of Windsor as, at the very least, "the winter-home of Flora MacDonald," heroine of the Jacobite cause, who had given sanctuary and aid to Bonnie Prince Charlie on the run after the debacle at Culloden, and then, paradoxically, a loyalist exiled from North Carolina to Windsor on her way back to the Isle of Skye?

For, that is the story or, at least, as put into a wee dram, that is to say, a distillation or an abridgement of the story. It is a story that illumines the global realities and complexities of our country in the early days of its settlement and at the time of its coming to be; a story that speaks to an earlier global world about which we have forgotten much and are, perhaps, all the poorer for our ignorance.

Over the last decade or so, there have been a number of books that call attention to the distinctive contributions of peoples and nations to the making of our contemporary world and the understanding of ourselves. They go a long ways towards providing a larger vision and a more critical perspective about our world and day that is the counter to our easy indifference, our dismissive arrogance or our romantic nostalgia for the past. They encourage a kind of thoughtful awareness that belongs to the maturing of the understanding about contemporary identity.

There is, for instance, Thomas Cahill's *How the Irish Saved Civilisation*, the first in 'the Hinges of History' series that also includes *The Gift of the Jews* about ancient Israel, *Sailing the Wine-Dark Sea* about ancient Greece and *Desire of the Everlasting Hills*, about early Christianity. Not to be outdone, there is also *Sprezzatura; 50 Ways Italian Genius Shaped the World* by Peter D'Epiro and Mary Desmond Pinkowish. What, then, of the Scots? Well, there is Arthur Herman's *How the Scots Invented the Modern World* and, to be even more specific, there is as well James Buchan's *Capital of the Mind: How Edinburgh changed the World*.

These latter two books on the Scots are especially important for Canadians of Scottish descent, it seems to me, because of the measured account that they give of the sea-changes in eighteenth century Scotland that have contributed so much to our world, not least of all in Canada. What appears to be loss and sorrow results in pride and gain.

And in a way, the real story is one that we see again in our own time, the story about what is passed on in and through the passing away of traditional ways of life. In such stories, identity is both forged and found, remembered and celebrated. Forty-five,

meaning 1745, the famous year of the beginning of the last and short-lived Jacobite revolt, marked the end of the Highland clans in their medieval feudal form and the beginning of changes that would allow for new hopes and new life, albeit, for some, in a new world and a strange land. But even there, they would contribute so much.

The Jacobite revolt is one of history's great lost causes but it is not, for all of that, without great charm and interest. Jacobus is the Latin for James and refers to the Stuart monarchy in the United Kingdoms of Scotland, Ireland and England. The first Stuart was James VI of Scotland who succeeded the last of the Tudors, Elizabeth I, to become James I of England in 1603. The struggles between King and Parliament that emerged during the reign of James's son, Charles I, led to the English Civil War, Charles' captivity and execution at the hands of Oliver Cromwell's Parliamentary army, and the subsequent period known as the Interregnum (1645-1660). The restoration of the Stuart Monarchy in 1660, first with Charles II and, then, with James II, lasted until the constitutional crisis, occasioned in part by James II's embrace of Catholicism, which led to the so-called Glorious Revolution of 1688 with William of Orange and Mary coming to the throne (1688-1702). Mary was James II's daughter.

Following William and Mary, Queen Anne, the second daughter of James' reigned from 1702-1714. Both Mary and Anne were childless. The Hanoverian succession, against which the Jacobite revolts of the 18th century were mostly directed, refers to George I, the son of the Electress Sophia, one of two protestant descendents from Charles I, who came to the throne in 1714. His mother, Sophia, had had married Ernst August of Hanover, hence the adjective, Hanoverian. But, from 1688 until 1745, there were a series of attempts to reinstate the Stuarts, known collectively as the Jacobite uprisings or rebellions, 1715, 1719 and 1745 and which included various 17th century battles as well, namely, Killiecrankie and Dunkeld (1689), Boyne (1690), Aughrim (1691).

Charles Edward Stuart was the grandson of James II, and the son of the Pretender to the throne, as some would term it, James VIII of Scotland, James III of England, as others would have said. The Jacobite revolt of 1745-1746 was the rather rash but exciting attempt on the part of Charles to return the monarchy to the Stuarts. The Highland clans were by no means united in their religious and political loyalties and even those who supported the Stuarts, upon hearing in the spring of 1745 Prince Charles' idea of launching a campaign in Scotland, a place where he had never previously set foot, and essentially arriving without troops or resources, regarded it as a "mad enterprise." And yet it was not without its excitement. Some of the clans reluctantly agreed to support him, mostly out of a sense of honour.

There were some surprising initial successes. Edinburgh fell before the Highlanders without a fight. Success at Prestonpans, in a battle that was over in three minutes, made Charles, Master of Scotland, as it were, on September 21, 1745. These

events were testimony to the fierce and honest valour of the Highlanders as well as to the disarray and disorder of the English under General Jonathan Cope. But, for Charles, this was but the beginning and, as it turns out, the beginning of his undoing and the undoing of many a Highlander as well. He started southward, marching into England and coming within 130 miles of London by December 4th, stopping, finally, at Derby. Coming towards him by that time were three armies totaling 30,000 men. Charles' force numbered barely five thousand.

Arthur Herman points out, however, that even if Charles had succeeded in reaching London, quite improbable in the extreme as that might have been, and had re-established the Stuarts, it would be the Scots and not the English who stood to lose the most. Why? Well, from the standpoint of the clansmen who supported Charles, there was the realization that "having a Stuart at Whitehall was not, and would never be, the same thing as having a Stuart at Holyrood;" their interests would be completely swallowed up in a sea of competing interests in Great Britain. Securing the Stuart position in Scotland was one thing, in England, quite another. They firmly, and with real dour scotch determination, withstood all efforts to persuade them to go any further and insisted on retiring back to Scotland immediately. Thus began the retreat from Derby.

But it was not just the Highlanders who were ambiguous about the Stuart ambitions; there was also the growing middle class of Scotland who had experienced the benefits of the union with England and were expecting the prospects of further prosperity. The return of the Stuarts seemed, particularly to the merchants of Glasgow, to be a return to an old Scotland of poverty and misery. In other words, there had been a cultural sea-change that had been taking place in Scotland in the half-century or so since 1688.

These were things that Bonnie Prince Charlie, perhaps, never fully understood. The retreat from Derby was a dismal affair that exhausted the spirits and the resources of the Highland army. In such a dismal state, they arrived at Culloden House, the home of Duncan Forbes, a man who had foreseen the folly of the whole enterprise. The house overlooks Drum Mossie Moor. It would be the sight of the last stand, one which the folly of honour would compel the Highlanders to enter, utterly hopeless as it was and as they knew it to be. The Battle of Culloden took place on April 17th, 1746. It was a colossal slaughter and a total rout and was followed by the most despicable forms of retribution upon prisoners and non-combatants by the English forces.

Only one event, perhaps, stands out as worthy of commemoration. Among the Duke of Cumberland's English force was a Major James Wolfe. Coming upon a wounded and bloodied highland officer, the twenty-one year old Charles Fraser, Cumberland asked him to whom he belonged. "To the Prince," he said defiantly. Cumberland then ordered Wolfe to shoot him on the spot. Wolfe, "to his everlasting

credit,” as Herman puts it, refused to do so. Unfortunately, Cumberland bade another do it, who did.

There are the great ironies. Wolfe fought against the Highlanders at Culloden in 1746 and yet Wolfe would have within his expeditionary force at the Battle of the Plains of Abraham in 1759, Highland regiments. About them, he wrote on the eve of the battle, “‘twould be no great mischief” if the Highlanders were to be the first to fall. This becomes the title of Alistair MacLeod’s great novel, *No Great Mischief*. A novel which, like his short stories, explores the question about what is passed on in the passing away of traditional ways of life, wanting us to appreciate the struggles of souls and communities in their coming to terms with the things that really matter.

Bonnie Prince Charlie escaped captivity at Culloden and this is where his story intersects with Flora MacDonald. Knowing the risk and not having any great and overwhelming commitment to the Stuart cause (she was, after all, a Presbyterian), she gave him shelter and putting him in the guise of a servant girl, the famous ‘Betty Burke,’ assisted in his being spirited out of the country to France. It was not without cost to her; she was imprisoned first in Dunstaffnage Castle and, then, in the Tower of London until she was freed by the 1747 Act of Indemnity. Returning to Skye, she married, three years later, Allan MacDonald of Kingsburgh. Together they would emigrate to North Carolina in 1774, only to be caught up in another political struggle, the American War of Independence and to find themselves displaced once again and sent into exile. Hence her stay in Windsor at Fort Edward, awaiting transport to Skye in 1779. Even that journey was not without adventure.

A remarkable woman of great courage and determination, she was a part of some of the defining moments of the 18th century global world and caught the interest of those of her own times as well as those who came after her. She was visited in 1753 by Samuel Johnson, one of the great men of letters in the 18th century, during his journey to the Hebrides. He was obviously greatly impressed by her, noting that she was “a woman of middle stature, soft features, elegant manners and gentle presence” and suggesting that “her name will be mentioned in history, and if courage and fidelity be virtues, mentioned with honour.”

Fully recognizing the poverty of Scotland, a poor land which was increasingly unable to support a growing population, Johnson also had the perspicacity to recognize that something can be lost in the spirit of a people when all is reduced to economic interest, what he called becoming “totally commercial.” He wondered whether “it be necessary to preserve in some part of the empire the military spirit.” Such observations and speculations give us pause about the nature of the interplay of social, economic and political concerns as well as the role of the spiritual and the religious. Such questions are part of the legacy of the Enlightenment, something to which the Scots have contributed in no small measure as intellectual leaders.

It is another Scott, Sir Walter Scott, the inventor of the modern historical romance, who also contributes greatly to a critical respect for the past and, no doubt, as well to the heroic and romantic status, posthumously, of Flora MacDonald. Recognising the inevitability and the importance of the social changes that had transpired in his own time and yet also sensing an attendant loss, he made the effort to recover a sense of the past through the writing of historical fiction, particularly a series of novels about Scotland called the Waverley novels, named after the first one. The heroine, by the way, is named Flora. The day was coming, he felt, when “the pibroch may sound through the deserted region, but the summons will remain unanswered.” But through literature we may hear and respond to the voices and calls from the past. They become part of our present.

The endeavour was neither nostalgia nor an attempt to return to the past but rather to celebrate it and appreciate its value and worth. More than romantic longing for a remote past, Scott endeavours to retain all aspects of the past and to do so with a remarkable kind of detachment and critical distance. It isn't a matter of siding with or against the Jacobites, with or against the Highlanders. It is about appreciating the richness of the past. Something of that endeavour, it seems to me, also belongs to our Canadian writers, particularly those who are alive to the Scottish legacy, writers like Alistair MacLeod, certainly, but also those like Margaret Laurence.

Margaret Laurence's novel *Stone Angel* is set in the fictional town of Manawaka, Manitoba. Her heroine is Hagar Currie Shipley. Her father, a successful merchant despite set-backs and betrayals, is proud of his Highland ancestry and insists on imparting the identifying marks of a world that is past and gone to his children and yet which lives on in the determination to succeed. His instructions to his children are about the rallying cry of the Clanranald MacDonalds and about the clan motto “Gainsay who dare.” And in the last of the Manawaka novels, *The Diviners*, Morag Gunn comes to terms with her identity, in part, through the recollection and recreation of the songs and stories of Piper Gunn, songs and stories about leaving Scotland and coming to a new land and a new world. Through the sorrow and the loss, there is pride and gain.

The continuing legacy of the Scots remains with us, “gainsay who dare,” indeed and perhaps, just perhaps, through our remembering of the Scottish connection here in Windsor, God will make us all “a wee bit better.” In the story of Flora MacDonald romance and reality meet, it seems, and they meet in a winter in Windsor long ago.

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