

## The Pioneers of Hopetown, on the Baie Des Chaleurs

*This is from the original text which was given to me by Shelagh McRae during our visit to Manitoulin Island Victoria Day Weekend, 2000. I chose to transcribe it almost verbatim (I added a few commas and periods).*

*Karen*

Ila McKellan

Of the present residents of Hopetown in the Province of Quebec, the family name of McRae, by far out numbers any other of either the English or French speaking, notwithstanding the fact that far more bearing that name have left Hopetown to make their homes in almost every province of Canada and many have emigrated to the United States, and a few to other countries also, and have been very prolific, especially in the male sex.

The ancestor of this name - Duncan McRae was born in Dundee Scotland in 1739 or 1740 of Highland Scotch parents, his father being a North Sea fisherman, made a living for his family at home, until Duncan was 17 years old, then war between England and France, ruined the fishing business, living conditions became poor that starvation seemed certain, and he Duncan being the oldest of all the family and a big young man for he grew to be six feet six inches tall, he was the first to leave the parental abode and seek a living elsewhere. His first decision must have been to travel South and he arrived in Edinburgh and the first thing he saw there was a regiment (or more) of his own race in drill or training, and while standing watching them, he was noticed by an officer who invited him to join them, with the promise of good clothing and plenty to eat, which no doubt was a great temptation to him, anyway he did join them and became a soldier and after being trained he eventually became one of General Wolfe's army.

But while training in Edinburgh he met a young lady of nearly his own stature, she measuring six feet four inches, and it must have been on account of them both being so tall that they became attracted to each other, but she being of a higher class and well educated and a trained singer and knowing that their meetings would not be approved of by her parents they had them clandestine in a park mostly, until he was transported over to Nova Scotia to help in the taking of Louisburg in 1758 and then up to Quebec in 1759 where he became acquainted with two life long friends one of them came to Hopetown with him, Donald Ross, the other took his homestead in Port Daniel, Angus McDonald (his old home was still standing on the west side of Port Daniel Mountain until a few years ago) and the Grandmothers have told us it was this mountain that attracted and held Uncle Mac by its base, ten miles away from his friends (for he was always Uncle Mac to any McRae or Ross long after his death). At the battle for Quebec, Sep't. 13th, 1759, Duncan McRae was severely wounded, in the side or hip and for a time the surgeons and doctors thought his cure hopeless and he was given to a friendly French family on the Levis or South shore of the St. Lawrence, who was paid to nurse him until he died or recovered, with the regular visits of the British doctors going to dress his wounds. But contrary to expectations, he did recover sufficiently to go home to Scotland on the first ship he could get a passage on and although he never regained his health completely and was a cripple all his life, and suffered with palsy, or some similar disease for many years before his death at a good old age of over eighty years.

He again found his lady friend, Margaret Agnes McIntosh, still a spinster and they were secretly married and took passage on a ship coming to Quebec in 1761 where McRae again met his two soldier friends, Ross and McDonald. We do not know if the two friends returned to Scotland or not after the war was over, or how long they remained in Quebec after McRae returned there, but it could not have been long before they had a chance to take passage to the place they were all agreed previously to make their home (Gaspé). They called at and may have spent some time in and about Gaspé Basin in 1758 or 1759 and having caught fish in or not far from this basin their intention was to fish for a living there, but finding it too inconvenient for that business in Gaspé they decided to look for another place and sailing up the Baie des Chaleur, McDonald whose home in Scotland was at the foot of a mountain, when he sighted Port Daniel Mountain, said there boys is my future home, right on the southwest side of that mountain and there he did settle, cleared up a nice farm and remained there until the great creator called him away. But his two friends sailed on ten miles farther West to the mouth of the little river where they ran in and tied up their fishing boat to the top of a large spruce tree that had blown out by the roots on the West side of this river and lay stretched more than halfway across. This river later on they named Hopetown River as Ross had been born and grew up in a place called Hopetown in Scotland and no doubt had many fond memories of his childhood home. And it was no doubt, while in reverie on the old home and boyhood friends and relations on one fine Sunday summer morning, he carved with a pocket knife the name Hopetown in the largest pine he knew of so it would remain an often reminder of dear ones he had left, and being close to the trail that all persons who must pass through this the district where he and McRae settled, they began to say, passing by Hopetown, as they still say today, and the little river also, where they first tied their boat, remained Hopetown River until the French Canadians began to settle East of it in what is now called St. Godfrey, they named it, Riviere Nouvelle, but as there is another river up the bay farther they gave the same name to, we still call it the same old English name.

But these two men were not the first of the race to settle in the district between the little Hopetown and Paspebiac just about one half mile West of the place they squatted they found another Scotch family named Astles living already, but the land they took being too wet for grain or potatoes to grow in they moved to New Carlisle, but before they did move two of their girls married McRae's sons and the other to Ross.

McRae, because of his wounds or the affects of same and the disease he suffered with, and until he moved from Gaspé, had been receiving some kind of assistance, as a pension, and free medical treatment from his home British government, and doctors on the frigates or warships, when any of them came to Gaspé harbour, and when he moved up the shore he soon came to realize that he couldn't live long in a forest with a young family coming, to be cared for without assistance and as Gaspé was the only port where British ships could be expected the three soldier friends found it necessary to make two, three or more expeditions there in their fishing boat, the first open season for sailing taking the fish they caught and cured for sale or barter for salting provisions with them, and it was on one of these trips that they found a frigate in Gaspé, the captain and surgeon were very kind to them, McRae in particular and sailed up to see where they were living, with him on board as pilot, his two friends bringing their own boat. The frigate remained two weeks off the little river at Hopetown, the doctor giving free medical treatment to anyone who needed it and



could go aboard, he also left all kinds of medicine with McRae's wife with books on how to treat diseases with the use of it. He McRae, they the captain or admiral, invested with the first office of British law, in or about the Baie Des Chaleurs and he always went by the name of this office thereafter the Grand-sire or Visor which he held all his life, and his youngest son, Farquhar, also inherited and held until an old man. This officer had authority to judge all cases of the law, besides to marry, christen or baptize, bury, and judge all local disputes, and received a salary sufficient to live on.

But as grandfather would say - when amusing us young ones with these stories, (it was really Granny - his grandmother - who was the grand-visor or judge, when it came to the case of law for having the best education- she had to read and study the law books, left to her husband and explain to him their meaning as to British justice and fair play) but by the other stories told to us, there was better justice dispensed by her dictation than we can expect today, (for she was a very religious, God fearing Christian and looked up to as a real saint by her children, and grandchildren). And to sing none could ever equal granny in their estimation. She had left a younger brother at home by the name of Peter, and he was the one he spoke more about than anyone else, although she did not name any of her three sons after him, she requested and two of her grandsons were named Peter McIntosh and each generation since, have one or more by the same name, long after she was laid away at the age of 96 years, yet still healthy in eye, sight, body and mind until the last. Her people in Scotland never knew where she was until her three boys Duncan, John and Farquhar and two daughters Anna Bell and Barbara were all grown-up. But the old grand-vixe did not have such a good reputation, as to a temper, he was a tiger when vexed and he had no education, except what his wife learned him, yet she did learn him to read at least. They were sober, thrifty folks and gathered enough to be comfortable in their latter days. The first cow to be brought to the Baie Des Chaleurs was for them, it was brought from Quebec to Gaspe in a schooner, and they went down and brought her up in their old fishing boat in the fall and early next spring and just before she freshened while grazing close to the edge of the cliff the soft ground gave away from under her feet and over the cliff she fell and killed herself.

Without a doubt there were more great-great grandsons of this couple who went over seas for the world war from Canada than of any other family name, and one of them who gave his life for his country right after, wrote that little poem that many have stated had more to drawing the U.S.A. into the war as our ally than anything else. (In Flanders Fields). His grandfather was born in Hopetown, Quebec three of this same clan. Of the ten young McRaes two volunteered and went overseas from Hopetown between 1914 and 1918, three of them never returned. (Killed in the battle, two were brothers, Robert and Farquhar, sons of John P.D. McRae and Wesley, son of Duncan McRae.) But there are far more descendants living in Niagara Falls, Ontario than are in Hopetown now, and again in London, Guelph and Toronto, there are a dozen or more in each town. Then quite a few of them live in the prairies and in the city of Vancouver, besides who went away each decade and remain away without writing. If all were gathered back in the old home town now it still might be worthy of the old name it was given, Hopetown. Donald Ross who raised a large family, the descendants of his have been the leading citizens in the place he settled, such as Mayors and Councillors. Nearly all of both families belong to the United Church, this church was built on the property the first Ross settled on.

Another pioneer who came to the same place, Richard Mauger, came out on the C.R.C. Ships about 1790 or 1795. He was a ship's carpenter of no mean ability who could draft, plan and build a ship himself. He built two ships on the beach at the mouth of Hopetown River, 100 tons each, and named the last one, Fr..... from Brittany in France. He was a jersey, and a member of the Church of England, his forebearers were from Brittany in France. He married twice, first wife was Elizabeth Bowers (?) of New Carlisle, she died a young woman, second wife was a French girl, Marie Loisel and raised a large family, sons were John, Charles, Richard and Robert and many of his great, great grand children live at the coast at St. Adelaide de Pabos, Shigawake, Hopetown and Paspébiac, some are in Niagara Falls, Port Colborne, Ont. and Hoquiam, Wash. U.S.A.

Another pioneer, a friend of those already mentioned was Thomas Enright, he was Colonel of an Irish regiment in Nova Scotia, he took claims on lands in Port Daniel, Shigawake and Hopetown.

Another pioneer named William Owen Powers, another man from Ireland, who left his namesakes in Hopetown, he took his claim of land west of the farm Donald Ross took and it is still in possession of his great grand children, although many of them have gone away west and live in Illinois, Wisconsin, Michigan and Ontario.