



# Clan MacNeil Association of Australia

Newsletter for clan members and friends.

June 2015

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- Births, marriages and deaths
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## New Member

I was delighted to welcome Peter & Mary McNeil of Cooparoo, Queensland as new members in January. Peter is the elder son of my cousin Ronald McNeil.

In April Richard & Christine McNeill joined us as members. They live in Cheltenham, NSW and we welcome them to our clan family.

## Members and their families who have renewed their membership

During the last 6 months the following people have renewed their membership as it became due. I thank them for their ongoing support for the Clan association.

It is most pleasing to see the ongoing support of our clan families who have continued to align themselves with our clan association.

Rhonda Lark  
Maggie Sullivan  
Louise Berry  
Christine Cooper  
Cliff McNeil  
Marion McNeil  
Glenice Holmes  
Bonnie Williams

Valerie Walters  
Constance Neil  
Geoffery Ellison  
Neil McNeill  
Jennie Strickland  
Valerie Stockings  
Ian McNeill  
Marlene Hogan  
Pat Neil  
Craig McNeil  
Diana McNeil

## Deaths

It is with much regret that I now inform you of the death of Robert Hughes McNeil passed away on 10<sup>th</sup> March 2015.

We offer our deepest condolences to Robert's wife Sharon.



A picture of Robert McNeil (L) with John Palmer (R) at the Clan MacNeil Caboolture gathering in 2013

## Membership

Our heritage should never come to an end. This is a quotation taken from the Council of Scottish Clans and Associations.

*Heritage, language, places, relics, culture, values, ancestry. They can all pass away in a surprised and exasperated heartbeat.*

*Unfortunately there is no governmental*

*'Department of Scottish American Heritage' that will keep our very special culture and history alive and relevant in this forward looking age.*

*How can we know that Scottish heritage will be strong and active for our children's children? For the next thousand years?*

*Forever?*

The organization was founded in 1976 in the USA by Dr. Herbert MacNeal and a handful of other dedicated volunteers for the purpose of supporting Scottish Clan organizations and preserving Scottish heritage.

Today COSCA welcomes all kinds of Scottish American organizations as well as interested individuals to join us in our work to strengthen and energize the Scottish American diaspora and to preserve our Scottish heritage.

In Australia we have the Scottish Australia Heritage Council which is affiliated with COSCA and the Clan MacNeil Association of Australia is a member of SAHC so we have an indirect link with the Council of Scottish Clans and Associations.

Other groups who are affiliated are the Standing Council of Scottish Clan Chiefs and the Clans and Scottish Societies of Canada.

All of our active and financial clan members are to be congratulated for your ongoing commitment to ensuring that the Clan MacNeil heritage and culture is preserved and passed on to our next generation. Our indirect membership in the above global group of societies and associations enables us to keep well informed about plans for communicating our heritage and culture to the wider society of Scottish family descendants and those interested in Scottish history, ancestry and culture.

We are well placed to be kept informed of matters of special interest to us and of interest to our member families. You also know we keep a close relationship with our kindred associations in Canada, New Zealand and the USA.

You will be well aware that the average age of our clan association members is steadily increasing and we all need to look for relations and friends who are a few years younger and might like to join our clan association. The continued success of our association depends on all of us to introduce new younger families to our clan association

## Scottish Families who migrated to Australia and settled in the Manning Valley

In a copy of a current issue of the Clan Donald Society of NSW newsletter the editor referred to the Scottish settlers who migrated to the Manning Valley in NSW.

Many of us may not know where the Manning Valley is located. It lies 3.5 hours drive north of Sydney and is located between Newcastle and Port Macquarie.

The Manning River has Oxley Island at its entrance to the sea and upstream there are the townships of Taree and Wingham.

A little further north is Kempsey, then Coff's Harbour. A further distance north is Grafton and then nearby is Maclean

All of this area was settled by Scottish families. Some years ago Glenice Holmes sent me some information from the MacLeay River Historic Society museum, near Kempsey. The museum holds the photographic glass plate collection of Angus McNeil. The collection is the largest in Australia and chronicles the life in MacLeay from 1897 to 1940.

Jannet McLean born was born in Tobermory, Isle of Mull in Scotland and immigrated with her family to Australia at the age of 3 years on the "Brilliant". On 22 July 1855 she married John McNeil of Red Bank, Manning River near Taree.

John McNeil was born in 1829 in Pictou, Nova Scotia. He immigrated to Australia in 1852 at the age of 23 years.

John & Jannet produced eleven children. Details of their family can be found on the Internet.

Today there are highland gatherings held each year at Wingham and Maclean.

**Bonnie Wingham 27-29 May 2016**

**Maclean 25-26 March 2016**

## Our clan association members who have moved to a new residence

Early in the year Neil McNeill moved from his home in Audrey Street, Balgowlah, NSW to the Sunshine Coast in Queensland. Neil continues to work as a share broker for Morgan's at Alexander Headland.

A link is provided so that you can see Neil with his working colleagues.

[www.morgans.com.au/Branches/QLD/sunshinecoast/About-Us/office-profile](http://www.morgans.com.au/Branches/QLD/sunshinecoast/About-Us/office-profile)

Another of my special friends who many of you will know, Mary Surman has sold her home at Umina Beach, NSW and is building a new home at Emerald Beach, NSW. She is currently staying with friends during the construction phase.

## Norse Celtic Seaway Castles conference to be held on the island of Barra in September 2015

The Islands Book Trust and Historic Scotland are organising a conference to better understand the history of Scottish islands in their wider Celtic and Norse context. Partners for the conference are the Comhairle nan Eilean Sair, or Western Isles Council, the University of the Highlands and Islands and the Macneil of Barra

Our present chief's father carried out personal research on the Norse Celtic seaway castles over some years and generously gave me a copy of his draft report.

This subject is most interesting as the clans living in the islands or western coast line of the mainland built castles to guard the seaways from their enemies and provide shelter for their chiefs and clan families. Many of the castles have a shelter for the mooring of birlinns or galleys.

Kisimul castle fits well in this profile of a seaway castle and in its early days would have been very difficult to invade and capable of guarding the Castlebay area.



Kisimul castle, Castlebay, isle of Barra

The importance of the birlinn or galley to life in the Outer Hebrides has been expressed in song

and music. Examples are "Kishmul's galley" and the "Mingulay boat song".



Dunyvaig castle ruin in Langavulin Bay, Islay

Other important seaway castles on the west coast of Scotland and in the Outer Hebrides were Dunyvaig castle on Islay which was a power base for the MacDonalds of the isles. This provided a sheltered water frontage for their birlinns and was well located for crossing to their lands in Antrim, Northern Ireland or to Dunaverty castle at the foot of the Kintyre Peninsula.

Two other castles also of importance in the Norse Celtic history are Dunstaffnage castle overlooking the Forth of Lorn. It was the home of Clan MacDougall and has a huge curtain wall.

The second is Tioram castle built on and overlooking Loch Moidart and the open sea. It was the home of Clan Ranald and was well positioned near to the islands of Rum, Eigg and Skye. More importantly and further to the north west were the lands of Clan Ranald in South Uist.

These four castles with others such as Castle Sween, Ardtornish and Mingary played an important part in the early times of the Norse Celtic dynasty and the Lord of the isles kingdom.



## Tartan Day in Australia

Tartan day is celebrated on 1<sup>st</sup> July each year in Australia and this is the anniversary of the date when the banning of the wearing of tartan was repealed in the English parliament on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1782. Here are two web links which will provide you with an opportunity to read an article about the Act of Proscription.

[www.rampantscotland.com/know/blknow\\_arbroath.htm](http://www.rampantscotland.com/know/blknow_arbroath.htm)

[WWW.TARTANAUTHORITY.COM/TARTAN/THE-GROWTH-OF-TARTAN/THE-ACT-OF-PROSCRIPTION-1747](http://WWW.TARTANAUTHORITY.COM/TARTAN/THE-GROWTH-OF-TARTAN/THE-ACT-OF-PROSCRIPTION-1747)

In Canada and the USA tartan day is celebrated on 6 April to commemorate the anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Arbroth in 1320. This was a Declaration of Scottish Independence from England to Pope John XXII.

In Adelaide we celebrated Tartan Day with a number of events. Each year the Scottish Associations of South Australia join with the Burnside Library to organize an evening concert of performers and speakers. This is an important event as it attracts a wider audience than our immediate membership.

Other events are held by Caledonian Societies and other Scottish community groups throughout the world.

This is an important time for us all to celebrate our family ancestry and wear the tartan of our clan or family.

While I am discussing Tartan Day it is appropriate that I tell you about my attendance at the Geelong highland gathering. On this occasion Jean Buchanan and I received a number of visitors to the Clan MacNeil information marquee. One visitor in particular was a lady wearing a tartan skirt of the Clan MacRae. In conversation with her we learned that the material was 60 years old and had been passed down through three generations of her family.

The woollen threads had been dyed with organic materials and the tartan cloth was then manually woven. The colours were still bright and it represented a lovely family heirloom.



## News from the Isle of Barra

Items published in the “Guth Bharraidh” weekly newsletter.

### **New aircraft officially unveiled for routes to Barra, Campbeltown and Tiree**

The two new planes that will operate on the Scottish Government’s Public Service Obligation (PSO) routes were officially unveiled by Minister for Transport and Islands, Derek Mackay on Monday.

The 19-seat, twin Otter DHC6-400, twin engine planes were manufactured by Viking Air Limited at the company’s base in Vancouver, Canada. The aircraft will be used on the routes from Glasgow to Barra, Campbeltown and Tiree.

They will now begin the certification process, before entering service later this summer.

Speaking at Glasgow Airport this morning, Mr Mackay said, “I’m delighted to officially unveil these new planes, which are moving ever closer to entering service on our PSO routes to Campbeltown, Tiree and Barra. I look forward to seeing the planes take off in full service later this summer.

### **LIFEBOAT GREETES KAYAKER WITH A WARM WESTERN ISLES WELCOME**

The Isle of Barra Lifeboat adopted the role of a welcoming party yesterday, Wednesday, when it was launched to meet a solo kayaker.

Nick Ray aims to raise thousands of pounds for the RNLI by paddling 2015 miles round all the charity’s Scottish lifeboat stations.

Nick, 51, left the Solway Firth on 1 May and he estimates it will take him between three and four months to kayak to the RNLI’s 47 lifeboat stations.

Barra lifeboat sailed just outside Castlebay and escorted the hardy kayaker in.

Landing on firm ground Nick stated *“It was fantastic being met by the crew of the Barra lifeboat. The weather has been windier than expected for this time of year however I still hope to complete the task by August”*.

Nick will spend a couple of days on Barra before departing and heading north, stopping at Leverburgh and Stornoway before rowing back across the Minch to Mallaig.

His trip is inspired by the account by Brian Wilson of his solo sea kayak journey around Scotland in the 1980s.



Nick Ray arriving in Castlebay, isle of Barra

## Scottish Community events which we have attended in the last 6 months

The beginning of the year events commenced with the anniversary celebrations with the birth of Robert Burns. The anniversary is on 25<sup>th</sup> January.

Many Caledonian Societies celebrate this event with dinners and ceilidhs.

In February the first highland gathering for 2015 was held at Mount Barker in the Adelaide Hills. This year it was held at a new location, the Keith Stephenson memorial park, a lovely grassed area with mature grown trees.

We were fortunate to have a marquee site which provided us with shade from a large oak tree.

We were in fear of very hot weather on the day as the previous day produced a maximum temperature of 39.6 degrees Celsius. Unfortunately this caused some program participants such as highland pipe bands to withdraw.

On the following day the weather was warm during the morning but manageable. However it did reach 35.6 degrees by 3.00 pm.

The trend of daily temperatures in February is presenting a problem to the organisers as the visitor numbers have reduced in recent years. It is difficult to find an alternative date when the daily temperatures are lower as there are many competing events in March / April and later in October

Our marquee site had Clan Donald on one side and Clan Scott on the other. A short distance away was the Clan MacLeod tent.

As in previous years I invited Ken McLean of Clan MacLean to share some of our display space.



Beginning of opening march at Mount Barker 2015



Ken McLean and John McNeil at the Clan MacNeil marquee at the Mount Barker highland gathering, South Australia

On the same weekend the Bendigo Scots Day out was held in Rosalind Park, Bendigo, Victoria. Jean Buchanan and John Whiddon attended and manned our clan information marquee.

Thousands of people descended on Bendigo for the third annual Scots Day Out organised by Golden shortbread and IRN-BRU as the crowd estimated at 6000 across the day savoured the sights and sounds of Scotland in the unique setting of Rosalind Park, the large shady space in the centre of the city.

Ten pipe bands from Victoria and NSW took part in the day's competition and dancers from Scottish Official Board and Victorian Scottish Union performed on two platforms.

This year's shortbread and Athol Brose competitions were judged by a former chieftain Tim Robertson and ex-pat Glaswegian and former Andy Murray tennis partner back in their days in the Scottish junior squad, Melanie McKenzie, now living in Bendigo.

Jean Buchanan defended her shortbread title while Golden City Pipe Band life member Phil Scot retained his Athol Brose crown. Congratulations Jean and we look forward to learning of your recipe and baking process.

The Geelong highland gathering in Victoria was held on Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> March and I travelled over to Melbourne and then to Guildford to stay over this weekend with Jean Buchanan and John Whiddon.

As in the last two years we arranged for a clan MacNeil luncheon to be held on the day before at the RACV Club in Melbourne and I am indebted to Graeme & Robyn McNeil who kindly made the booking for this event.

This is always an enjoyable weekend for me as we renew friendships with new visitors and meet members of our association at the luncheon, then mix with the wider Scottish community and potential new members at the Geelong gathering.

Jean and I met with Heather Jones who expressed a strong interest in becoming a member of the Clan MacNeil association.

The luncheon this year was rewarding for me as I was able to meet for the first time Jane Griffith and Suzanne McKenzie who are the daughters of my cousin Pamela McNeil McKenzie.



The Clan MacNeil luncheon at the RACV Club, Melbourne



Clan MacNeil luncheon at the RACV Club, Melbourne



Highland dancing display at the Geelong gathering



Jean Buchanan at the Clan MacNeil information marquee



John Whiddon at the Geelong highland gathering



Massed pipe bands at the closing ceremony at Geelong gathering

Ian, Robyn and Stephen McNeill went to the Bundanoon highland gathering and represented our clan.



The kilty run at Bundanoon highland gathering

There were activities for both young and old. Here is a picture of some young ladies trying their hand at cossing the caber.



Caber tossing at Bundanoon

Robyn reported from the day- Ian, Stephen and I went to Brigadoon Highland Games on Saturday. The day started out very gloomy and misty with a few short showers quite like Scotland really. It stayed overcast for the whole morning and the crowds seemed to be down on last year, but then the sun came out and so did the visitors and it turned into a really great day.

We did have a couple of new visitors to see us but not a real lot of interest. Ian marched along with the Clan Banner in the parade and I think that Stephen had a photo of him but I am not sure. If he has I will send it to you at a later date.

Actually as a result of attending Bundanoon we were pleased to welcome Richard and Christine McNeill as new members and I am in contact with Stuart Neal who I hope will become a member.

In late April Joy & I flew to Canberra and spent two nights there. On the first day we met with Toni McNeill, our representative for the ACT and with Malcolm Buchanan and Susan Cooke, president and secretary of the Scottish Australia Heritage Council.

It was our first meeting with Malcolm & Susan and presented an excellent time to exchange information with each other.

On the second day we spent our full time with Toni McNeill and John Palmer touring the near countryside and visiting two local wineries. On our last day we visited the Australian War Memorial with Toni & John before driving to Manly where we spent the next week with our daughter Kirsty and her family.

## Coming events

### July

19<sup>th</sup> July Scotland in the park at Logan, QLD

### September

3<sup>rd</sup> September Gathering of the clans at Norah Head, NSW

13<sup>th</sup> September Armadale highland gathering, Armadale, WA

18<sup>th</sup> September Clans on the Coast, Nelson Bay, NSW

### October

10<sup>th</sup> October Canberra highland gathering, Kambah, ACT

### November

**7<sup>th</sup> -9<sup>th</sup> November Clan MacNeil national clan gathering at Beechworth**

15<sup>th</sup> November Combined Societies and clans Kirkin o' the tartan service at St Augustines church, Unley SA

30th November Anniversary of St Andrew's day

### December

5<sup>th</sup> December Daylesford highland gathering at Victoria Park, Daylesford, Vic

### February 2016

14<sup>th</sup> February Mount Barker highland gathering at Mount Barker, SA

## Our next national gathering of the Clan MacNeil Association at Beechworth, Victoria

I am pleased that some of you have already advised me that you will be joining us at the Beechworth gathering in November. However the numbers are still quite small and I would like a further encourage those of you who have not

yet decided to make an effort to join us. At our last gathering in Caboolture, Queensland we had 30 people there and I would like us to be able to reach this number again.

Remember that the national clan gathering is the only event when you can meet other clan families and share our heritage and traditions together.

I am attaching a program for the gathering and I would appreciate hearing from you as soon as possible whether or not you will be coming.

## Clan Donald Australia appoint a new High Commissioner

My very good friend Lachie MacDonald has recently been appointed as the High Commissioner of Clan Donald. I heartily congratulate him on his appointment and I am sure that the clan will prosper under his leadership.

## Genealogy information from Alex Buchanan

### The MacNeil Y-DNA Study: new progress.

In the last few years the discovery of new SNPs (descent-specific markers) on the Y-chromosome has allowed us to follow the trail of the Barra R1b MacNeils more closely than before. This SNP-trail confirms that the Barra R1b MacNeils are not Irish, as traditionally thought, but arrived in Scotland from NW Europe at the time of Viking supremacy in the Hebrides.

Although their R1b SNP marker (L165) is not typically Scandinavian (it's more Germanic), it can be followed from a presumed origin in France, up through Germany, to southern Scandinavia and then across to northern Scotland where it occurs in Orkney and Caithness. Then it can be traced down the west coast as far as Jura and Barra.

As evidence of its journey from Caithness to Barra, the L165 marker is found in the MacDonalds of Caithness, the McDonalds of Sutherland, the Buies of Jura and, of course, the MacNeils of Barra. Comparison of STR markers provides the time sequence, in that order, but putting real dates on these steps is more difficult, it relies on an approximate number of generations inferred from STR differences, so if we allow 25 years per generation, the arrival in northern Scotland was about 1000AD and the arrival in Barra was about 1400AD.

The events leading up to the MacNeil settlement in Barra may well have been connected to the fall of the MacDonalds of Islay, as Lords of the Isles, following the defeat of the Norse at Largs and the subsequent power of the Scottish Crown in the Hebrides.

Two questions remain unanswered: How did they acquire the surname MacNeil and why did they claim descent from Niall of the Nine Hostages? The immediate answer would be that the first chief in Barra was named Neil and that gave rise to MacNeil in following generations, but there are other possibilities. The logical answer to the second question is that this was an attempt to gain prestige at a time when other clans were also concocting origin-stories.

But maybe there is more to it than that, some of the Argyll McNeills carry the SNP marker M222 which is widely thought to represent the Ui Neil of Northern Ireland and therefore they could be descendants of Niall of the Nine Hostages or his kin. The known chiefs of the Argyll McNeills (Torquil of Castle Sween etc) are Norse Viking descendants (not the same as the Barra chiefs), but perhaps the pre-Viking McNeills really were Irish and the scattered M222 McNeills in Argyll are the remnants of this ancient clan.

Perhaps this is where the Barra MacNeils obtained their origin-story. The ancient traditional myths often have a grain of truth in them.



Gravestone carved with a Celtic cross on one side and Norse runes on the other in the Cille Bharra chapel

## Clan MacNeil National Gathering at Beechworth 6-9<sup>th</sup> November 2015

Our clan gathering is being held at the same time as the annual Beechworth Celtic Festival. The festival has an entertaining program of activities and Beechworth itself has an important history in the early days of settlement.

Further information can be found on the following web site link about Beechworth.

[www.beechworth.com/events\\_calendar/beechworth\\_celtic\\_festival.html](http://www.beechworth.com/events_calendar/beechworth_celtic_festival.html)

**Driving to Beechworth is a comfortable** 3 hours north of Melbourne, 4.5 hours south of Canberra and 7 hours from Sydney. It is accessed via Melbourne to Sydney's major highway, the Hume Freeway, and then turning off at Wangaratta (South) or Wodonga (North) for the last 25-30 minute leg. From Adelaide it is an 11 hours drive.

**Program** The program for our gathering will follow the same pattern as in previous years. Families will arrive during Friday 6<sup>th</sup> November and we will join together for an informal evening meal together.

On Saturday morning we will hold our annual general meeting for members in the Old Priory. Following the meeting we will join others to watch the festival parade down the main street and look at other attractions.

Our formal dinner will be held at the Old Priory on Saturday evening.

### **People who have confirmed their intention to attend**

John & Joy McNeil  
Jean Buchanan & John Whiddon  
Toni McNeill & John Palmer  
Ian, Robyn & Stephen McNeill  
Natalie McLeish  
Beth Price  
Marlene Hogan & Christine Jones  
Rhonda Lark, Vicki Bond and Rhonda's brother Robert  
Helen Trochoulis & Mary Surman  
Bob & Lesley Neil

### **Will you come too!**

Joy & I send our best wishes to all clan families and friends of the clan.

*John McNeil*

