The earliest published history of the Clan MacNab, appears to have been by Sir Robert Douglas of Glenbervie in the “Douglas Baronage” for which he was collecting material in 1768 when he wrote to John Macnab of Bovain for information concerning his family. At least this is what the Rev. William A. Gilles states in his book “In Famed Breadalbane.”

The earliest one that I have been able to locate was printed in “The Clans of the Highlands of Scotland: Being an account of their Annals, Separately & Collectively, with delineations of their tartans and family arms. Edited by Thomas Smibert, Esq. Edinburgh; Published by James Hogg, Glasgow; David Robertson, London: R. Groombridge & Sons 1850. This account is largely about Francis, the 16th (here labeled as 12th) chief, and does not mention his nephew and successor Archibald. It is presented here as printed with a few minor changes in spelling.

This account, can be found at from Google Books, (https://books.google.com/books?id=LScAAAAAQAAJ&pg=PA50&lpg=PA50&dq=brooch+of+lorn&source=bl&ots=3WaxZT6inD&sig=nWWYsBarwELCI4W8DYMdE1nyUBY&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjD0si9gdzSAhXKRSYKHeEsDXg4FBDoAQgbMAE#v=onepage&q=macnab&f=false)

Clan Macnab: Pages 152-159

The Clan Macnab has most frequently been represented as a branch of the great Macdonald family; but it does not appear that there exists any evidence for the assumption, saving that such was a common tradition. From their comparatively central position in the Highlands, as well as other circumstances it seems much more likely that they were of the primitive Alboionic race or a shoot of the Siol Alpine. The Macnabs were never very numerous but they continued to be a well-marked and distinct sept for many centuries—much more so than the majority of the tribes of the north of Scotland; and they remained fixed in a particular locality up to the end of the eighteenth century. Sadly diminished, however, were their numbers and possessions at that period; and at this day, though branches of the line of the chiefs must probably yet exist, the Macnabs now own not one foot of their ancient territories, excepting, we believe, the burial-place of their house, at a ruined priory situated on an island on Loch Tay. This part of their property was not alienated, we believe; and most probably because it was not marketable. But what individual party has a right to call the old aisle his own, is a point perhaps not easily to be settled. On the western shores of the loch above mentioned, lay their main possessions, once by no means inconsiderable.

The founder of the Clan Macnab seems to have been of the clerical profession, like the founders of the septs of Macpherson and Ross. There is nothing improbable in this supposition, as already stated, since celibacy was long opposed by the Christian clergy of Scotland. The name of Macnab gives a strong color to the story, since Mac-anaba means clearly the Son of the Abbot. Some call this abbot the abbot of Dunkled. Others say that an abbey in Glen Dochart, a vale through which the Dochart runs into Loch Tay, was under the charge of the priest in question; and, if such was the case, in all probability the temporalities of this religious house laid the basis of the estates of his descendants. It was in and around Glen Dochart that they were ever located. In the reign of David I (AD 1124), they are heard of under their permanent designation of Macnabs.

A manuscript account of the family, which now lies before us, relates that the clan had become a considerable one on Loch Tay in the time of Alexander III, the natives of the region having doubtless enrolled themselves, whether of the Macnab blood or not, under the banner of the lords of the district. During the Bruce and Baliol contest which followed the death of Alexander III, the Macnabs joined the party of Baliol along with the Lorn MacDougalls, and fought against his rival at Dalree, as Barbour relates. when Bruce prevailed they suffered like his other opponents. Their lands were ravaged, their houses burned, and all the family writs destroyed. Gilbert of Macnab, however, reconciled himself to the Bruces in the times of the next generation, and received charters under the great seal, from David II of the “lands of Bovain, in the barony of Glen Dochart, county of Perth.” This deed bore the date of 1336.

Finlay Macnab, son of Gilbert, has usually been accounted he second undoubted laird of the line. His grandson, Finlay, lived in the times of James III and IV, and appears to have been in favor as a loyal subject, since charters were passed under the great seal, adding Ardchyle, Duinish and other lands to the estate of Bovain. But his grandson, the sixth Laird of Macnab, was by no means so fortunate, and appears to have begun that career of bonding and mortgaging which ended in the ruin of the house. And to whom did he grant such obligations? It is the old story—to the Campbell’s of Glenorchy, now become the most powerful neighbors of the Macnabs. The MS in our hands states, that Finlay Macnab of Bovain and of that Ilk, alienated or mortgaged a great part of his lands to the Baron of Glenorchy, as appears by a charter to “Colin Campbell of Glenorchy, his heirs and assignees whatever, according to the deed granted to him by Finlay Macnab of Bovain,24th November, 1552, of all and sundry the lands of Bovain and Arcdchyle, &c., &c.; confirmed by a charter under the great seal, from Queen Mary, dated 27th of June 1553.” As only certain portions of the preceding documents are here quoted, it may be that Macnab reserved to himself a power of repayment and recovery. But it would have served as little as it did in many other and similar cases of mortgages to the Campbell’s.

The son of this unlucky laird, also named Finlay Macnab, lived in the reign of James IV; and in his time a singular incident occurred, affecting the question of his genealogy. Our authority states briefly that he “entered into a bond of friendship and manrent with his cousin, Lachlan Mackinnon of Strathwardel, whereby they became mutually bound to stand by and defend each other. Dated 12th July, 1606. Douglas gives this deed more fully. According to him, and narrates that, “happening to foregaddre togedder with certain of the said Finlay’s friends in their rooms, in the Laird of Glenurchay’s country, and the said Lauchlan and Finlay having come of one house, and being of one surname and lineage, notwithstanding the said Lauchlan and Finlay this long time bygone oversaw their awn duties till uthers in respect of the long distance and betwixt their dwelling places, quhairfore baith the saids now and in all time coming are content to be bound and obleisit, with consent of their kyn and friends, to do all sted, pleasure, assistance, and service that lies in them ilk ane to uthers: The said Finlay acknowledging the said Lachlan as ane kind chief, and of ane house: and like the said Lauchlan to acknowledge the said Finlay Macnab, his friend, as his special kinsman and friend.”

It was before admitted, that the MacKinnon’s really appeared to be of the true MacAlpin stock, of which the MacGregor’s form the type, as it were; and here is a circumstance which tends to assign a similar origin to the Macnabs. The favorite family name of Finlay may also be traced to Fingonlay as its root, Mackinnon being properly Madfingon. But on the origin of Gaelic names it is impossible to pronounce with certainty.

John Macnab, the eight Laird, made a really distinguished figure in the Montrose wars, though by no means to the improvement of his already shattered estates. He fought with his clan at Kilsyth, and was subsequently chosen by Montrose to garrison the castle of Kincardine against General Leslie. Straitened for provisions, and resolved not to surrender, Macnab made an effort to pass his foes by night. He accordingly issued from the castle, in the darkness with his three hundred men, sword in hand. Like a brave sea-captain who is the last to leave his sinking ship, Macnab gave the first chance of escape to his followers, and all got safely off, save himself and one other person. They were sent to Edinburgh Castle, and duly condemned to death; but the chief found his way out before the fatal day—only to perish, however, at the battle of Worchester, AD 1651. During his career of loyalty, the commonwealth forces sacked and burned the dwellings of his clan, destroyed his effects and papers, and sequestrated his estate. The Glenorchy family, on the pleas of having suffered by the Macnabs, obtained actual possession of the relics (remains) of the family property.

The widow of Macnab, in her own name and that of her son Alexander, represented her grievances so strongly to General Monk, that he rebuked his subordinates severely. In a letter addressed to Captain Gascoigne, the officer stationed in Macnab’s house at Finlarig, the general tells him that his orders did not sanction the injuring of any of the Macnabs who were living peaceably, or the molesting of Lady Macnab in any way. He ordered her to be permitted to retain all that she possessed and otherwise gave directions for her kind treatment. This letter of Monk is extant.

When the restoration (of the monarchy) took place, of course Alexander, now Laird of Macnab, petitioned Charles II for redress, and succeeded in recovering a considerable share of that part of the estate which was free from purely legal claims. But the family was surrounded by overgrown neighbors and the successors of Alexander chanced not to be men qualified to revive the fortunes of the house. John, grandson of Alexander, succeeded to a dilapidated property, and his final heir, Francis, twelfth Macnab of that Ilk, did not improve matters. He was the last laird of the direct male line, and withal one of the most eccentric men of his time. He calls for a full notice ere we close the story of the Macnabs.

Francis Macnab of Macnab, who died a little more than thirty years ago, was one of the oddest characters of his day in various respects. More anecdotes have been told regarding his eccentric sayings and doings, than in any case that has occurred during the last century.

Francis Macnab, as far as his worldly status was concerned, would have appeared to English eyes simply as the proprietor of a small and much encumbered estate In Perthshire. In Scotland, however, he had the additional and much higher honor of being the chief man of an ancient family forming one of the Highland clans, though not one of the most numerous. He was Macnab of that Ilk, or Macnab of Macnab, or, by a more modern and les elegant style of designation, the Laird of Macnab—the personal center of a little district peopled chiefly by men of his own name and all of whom from the gentleman to the cottager, looked up to him with a kind of filial veneration. His estate was situated at the head of Loch Tay, in the neighborhood of the beautifully placed village of Killin; but it was latterly a mere shadow of what it had been a few hundred years ago. The subject of this notice was for nothing more remarkable than a proud sense of his dignity as the chief of the Macnabs. His neighbors, the Campbell’s and Grahams, though infinitely exceeding the Macnabs in wealth and influence, he regarded as comparatively mere mushrooms; nor was he willing to own that even his sovereign was in any respect his superior.

He was a man of gigantic stature and proportions, and vast strength, and, whether seen in the Highland garb amongst his native hills, or in the habiliments of a British gentleman of the eighteenth century upon the streets of Perth or Edinburgh, he never failed to be beheld with some degree of wonder.

His mental facilities sere also vigorous; but a defective education, the prejudices incidental to his position in society and perhaps some constitutional peculiarities, had given him a strong cast of eccentricity, insomuch that almost everything he said or did was peculiar. Though possessing little book lore, he was extensively informed, and, though a humorist, he displayed on most occasions no small degree of tact and shrewdness. He had all the warmth of heart, and at the same time all the irritability and wrathfulness, of the Scottish mountaineer. It was the custom of his age to indulge much in dinning, and Macnab was eminent even in that day for his great powers as a bacchanalian. Take him for all in all, he was such a man as can scarcely ever be seen again for he united peculiarities which are now for the most part obsolete—the flaming pride of the old Highland gentleman, the loose and rough habits of the bon-vivant of sixty years ago, and a homely mode of expression now never heard in his grade of society; all these being in addition to many whimsicalities and humors quite his own.

It will doubtless surprise an English reader to be informed that any untitled man in these islands should object to having the word Mister prefixed to his name. Yet such is the case with the Highland chiefs, and such was particularly the case with Macnab. A Highland chief is styled by the name of his family alone, an so far did our friend the laird carry this point, that, hearing a stranger ask for him one day at his door as Mr. Macnab, he ordered him not to be admitted, but the next day, when the gentleman, having in the meantime been tutored, inquired for Macnab, he was not only shown in, but met with a most cordial reception. He would remark, “There are mony Maister Macnabs; but may the auld black lad hae me if there’s ony but ae Macnab.” On this subject, a clever reporter of some of the laird’s humors has given us some curious illustrations. “It was quite enough,” we are informed, “to put him in a frenzy, to dignify with the title of chieftain any one, however high in title or fortune, who he thought had no claim to that super-imperial rank.” The narrator of this anecdote had a narrow escape from the overwhelming indignation of the genuine Gaelic worthy. It occurred after dinner, the good laird being a little mellow—for as to being drunk, oceans of liquor would have failed to produce that effect, at least to the length of prostration. The party on whose account the chief’s bile was so powerfully excited was indeed blessed with an infinitely more lofty and sonorous cognomen than himself. If it did not indisputably stamp the owner as an ancient feudal baron, an ignorant Lowlander might well be excused for thinking so. We shall suppose it to be Macloran of Dronascandlich—a name trying enough, certs, for the utterance of any common pair of jaws. Thus commenced the unlucky querist: -- “Macnab, are you acquainted with Macloran, who has lately purchased so many thousand acres in---shire?” This was more than sufficient to set the laird off in furious tilt on his genealogical steed. “Ken wa? –the paddock-stool of a creature they ca’ Dronascandlich, wha no far bygane dawred to offer siller, sir for an auld ancient estate, sir; an estate as auld as the flude, sir—a dealaulder, sir—siller, sir, scrapit tegither by the messerable devil in India, sir; not in an offisher or gentleman-like way, sir—but making cart-wheels and trams, sir, and barrows, and the like o’ that wretched handywark. Ken him sir? I ken the creature weel, and wha he comes frae, sir; and so I ken that dumb tyke, sir—a better brute by half than a score o’ him! And wha was his grandfather, sir, but a puir wabster in Glasgow? That was the origin of Dronascandlich, sir, and a bonny origin for a Highland chief—ugh?”

Pride being a leading element in his character, it affected all his ideas. He not only was proud of his own lineage and name, but of whatever he was connected with, from his clan or his county neighbors up to his countrymen at large. When the local militia was raised in 1808, he held rank in one of the corps raised in his county, and soon after, being in Edinburgh, he thought proper to apply to the store keeper in the castle for the supply of arms require by the men. Overlooking the formally correct name, which was the Fourth Perthshire Local Militia, he asked for the arms of the Bredalbane Corps, to which the storekeeper answered that he did not know of such a corps. Hereupon Macnab, in high contempt, but with more coolness than might have been expected, replied, “My fine little storekeeper, that may be; but you may be assured we do not think a bit the less o’ oursels for your not knowing us.” In proportion as he thought much of his own countrymen, he thought less of some other nations; and it appears that he had in particular contracted a great contempt for the Russians. A gentleman having on one occasion spoken approvingly of Russian heroism, the laird burst forth into a frenzy. “Haud you there, sir—haud you there sir; ye have said a great mair than ye can mak amends for, were ye to live as lang as auld Methuselah. It’s doonright blasphemy! What, sir, wad ye ever, in ae breath o’ your unhallowed jaws even our glorious lads o’ the hill and the heather, whilk are a marvel to the hail warld, to the oily bastes o’ Russians? A ween cannibals, meeseerable wretches, wha, till they cam west, had naething to crem their reaving gude-for-nothing kytes wi’ but stinking, straded whales, or an orra scalgh, whilk was a perfect godsend to them. Bonny vivres, ugh! I min weel the time about twenty year bygane, a cheeld ca’ Admiral Siniavin, or some other sic name, cam into the Firth wi’ a squadron o’ these monsters amang men. Dootless it was a veesitation for our sins. Whatever they laid hand on, was momently turned into ulye. I was ae day taking a dander alang Leith shore, when I saw ane of the loathsome brutes gang into a kanler’s shop, and buy a bawbee bap, and spying a barrel o’ ulye, in he dreeps the bap sookit it as ye wad do a jergonel peer. Sune after, a’ the lamps in Leith Walk and ither places gade out, withoot ony reason. A’ the folk were bumbazed about it, and auld wives thocht that Sathan was playing cantrips wit the lichts. Some were knockit doon, and ithers got off wi’ their pockets turned inside oot. And what was the cause o’ a’ this hobbleshow, think ye? What! But the oily bastes o’ Russians. They were catched speeling up the lamp-posts and taking oot the cruizes and drinking the ulye, wick and a’. What think ye noo o’ your Russians sir?—are they o’ ony use on Gods’s earth, think ye, but to burn like tar-barrels in a general illumination?”

Reared in a little district where his word was law, and where habits of violence and private warfare were scarcely yet extinct, Macnab was not disposed to be very scrupulous in the use of his powers, whether personal or otherwise. The knowledge of his immense strength, and his recklessness in using it, in general kept him free of provocation; but on one occasion a thoughtless person, who was but slightly acquainted with him, had the misfortune to incur his wrath in a dismal manner. The Laird was a regular attendant on the Leith races, at which he usually appeared in a rather flashy-looking gig. On one of these occasions he had the misfortune to lose his horse, which suddenly dropped down dead. At the races in the following year, a wag who had witnessed the catastrophe, rode up to him and said, “Macnab, is that the same horse you had last year?” “No, py Cot!” replied the Laird, “but hi’s tha same whup;” and he was about to apply it to the shoulders of the querist, who saved himself by a speedy retreat. Of the laird’s literary attainments, some anecdotes have found their way into the jest-books. In one of these he is represented as laying the blame of certain orthographical errors with which he was charged on one occasion, to the badness of his pen, triumphantly asking his accuser “Wha could spell with sic a pen?” Of a piece with this, and indicating a somewhat similar degree of intellectual culture, was his going to a jeweler to bespeak a ring similar to one worn by a friend of his which had taken his fancy, and which was set either with the hair of Charles Edward, or some other member of his family, the latter circumstance of course constituting its chief value. “But how soon,” said the jeweler, whom he was for binding down to a day for the completion of the work, “will you send me the hair?” –“The hair, sir!” replied Macnab fiercely; “py Cot, sir, you must give me the hair to the pargain!”

Macnab had an intense antipathy to excisemen, whom he looked on as a race of intruders, commissioned to suck the blood of his country: he never gave them any better name than vermin. One day, early in the last war, he was marching to Stirling at the head of a corps of fencibles, of which he was commander. “The pencil might,” says an anecdotist, “but the pen never can, adequately portray the grand picturesque and magnificent appearance of the glorious Celtic chief. Goliath of Gath, Alexander, Caesar, all heroes, ancient and modern, nay, what must be an august spectacle, the grand Mogul enthroned on the back of his elephant—all dwindle into insignificance before the great Macnab. He bestrode a mighty steed of raven blackness, whose flowing mane, and long and busy tail had never summered under the dilapidating operation of the ruthless shears. His ample jacket was composed of tartan, adorned with massy silver buttons. And down his breast depended gracefully the belted plaid. On his head was the Highland bonnet, surmounted by waving lofty plumes, which added fearfully to his gigantic height. His puissant limbs were encased in no constraining habiliment; no, gentle reader; the ancient philabedg formed his sole nether covering. His warlike hand sustained an enormous claymore, flashing lightning to the sun’s rays, and clearly indicating its owner’s ardor for immediate conflict.”

In those days the Highlanders were notorious for incurable smuggling propensities’ and an excursion to the Lowlands, whatever might be its cause or import, was an opportunity by no means to be neglected. The Breadalbane men had accordingly contrived to stow a considerable quantity of the genuine “peat reek” (whisky) into the baggage carts. All went well with the party for some time. On passing Allon, however, the excisemen there having got a hint as to what the carts contained, hurried out by a shorter path to intercept them. In the meantime, Macnab accompanied by a gillie, in the true feudal style, was proceeding slowly at the head of his men, not far in the rear of the baggage. Soon after leaving Alion, one of the party in charge of the carts came running back and informed their chief that they had all been seized by a posse of excisemen. This intelligence at once roused the blood of Macnab. “Did the lousy villains dare to obstruct the march of the Breadalband Highlanders?” he exclaimed, inspired with the wrath of a thousand heroes; and away he rushed to the scene of contention. There, sure enough he found a party of excisemen in possession of the carts. “Who the devil are you?” demanded the angry chieftain. “Gentlemen of the excise,” was the answer. “Robbers! Thieves! You mean; how dare you lay hands on his Majesty’s stores? If you be gagers show me your commissions.” Unfortunately for the excisemen, they had not deemed it necessary in their haste to bring such documents with them. In vain they asserted their authority, and declared they were well known in the neighborhood. “Qy, just what I took ye for; a parcel of highway robbers and scoundrels. Come, my good fellows,” (addressing the soldiers in charge of the baggage, and extending his voice with the lungs of a Stentor.) “prime!—load--!—“ The excisemen did not wait the completion of the sentence; away they fled at top speed towards Allon, no doubt glad they had not caused the waste of his Majesty’s ammunition. “Now, my lads, said Macnab, “proceed—your whisky’s safe.”

Like many other proprietors of large but unproductive estates, the Laird of Macnab was often under the necessity of compromising his dignity by granting bills for his various purchases. These bills for many years were always discounted at the Perth bank, and when due, he no more dreamed of putting himself in the slightest degree out of the way by honoring his scraps of paper, conformably to the established rules of trade, than paying the national debt. In fact, it would have been a dangerous experiment to have hinted to him the propriety of what he considered a most degrading and un-chieftain-like practice. The directors of the bank, knowing their money to be sure, humored him, as being a character of no ordinary description. His acceptances were therefore never (strange to say) noted or protested; indeed, such an impertinent procedure on their part might have brought down like a torrent the furious chief and a score or two of his gillies to sack great Perth.

Unluckily for him, one of “thae bits o’ paper” found its way to the Stirling bank, an establishment with which the laird had no connection. Agreeably to his auld use and wont, ha gave himself no trouble about the mater. It was in due course noted and protested, of which due intimation was sent to him. The laird treated these various notices with the most sovereign contempt. He was, however, effectually roused, by the alarming information that a writ of horning and caption had been taken out against him, and that, in consequence, a clerk belonging to the bank, accompanied by two messengers, would proceed on the following Friday to Achlyne House, for the special purpose of taking him into custody. Even this dire communication the laird received with unruffled composure.

On that “pretentious morn” which threatened him with “Durance vile,” he took aside an old woman who had been long attached to the family and who was highly regarded by her master for her shrewdness as well as fidelity. “Shanet,” said he, “there are three land-loupers, a clerk, and two limbs o’ Satan in the shape o’ messengers, coming ower the hills the day frae Stirling, to tak; me awa bodily, and to clap me within the compass o’ four stane wa’s; and for what, think ye?—a pitiful scart o’ a guse’s feather. Deil cripple their soople shanks! It sould ill become me to hae ony hobbleshow wi’siclike vermin; so I’ll awa up to ma lord’s (Earl of Breadalband’s) at Taymouth, and leave you, my bonny woman, to gie them their kail through the reef.” Having thus primed the old lady, he departed.

The transaction now recorded having occurred upwards of half a century ago, it is proper to mention that the line of travelling between Stirling and Achlyne was of a most rugged and toilsome description, and only passable by pedestrians. The clerk and his legal myrmidons, therefore, did not reach the place where they expected their prey till it was nearly dusk. The ancient carline had been long on the outlook, and going to meet them she invited them into the house in the most couthy and kindly manner. “O, sirs,” quoth she, “ye maun be sair forfoughen wi’ your longsome travel. Our Hieland hills are no for them that hae brecks on, I recon. Sit doon, sit doon, and pit some meat in your wames, for atweel they maun be girnin’ and warmling like knots o’edders. The laird’s waa to see freend, and will be back momently. What gars ye glower at that daftlike gate, sirs? There is what ye’re wantin’ in that muckle kist, in bonnie yellow goud, fairly counted by his honor this blessed morning’. Wha wad hae thocht ye wad hae been sae longsome in coming up here—chields like you, that are weel kent to be greedy gleds after the siller. But bide ye till the laird comes in, and ye will get what ye want.” So saying, she spread before them a plentiful store of mountain delicacies, not forgetting a plentiful supply of glenlivet; and, in short she put them beyond the power of proceeding further in their business that night, and they were fain to stay under Janet’s care till the morning. The clerk, in respect of his gentility, was bestowed in an apartment by himself; the messengers were put in another containing a single bed for their accommodation. One of the latter worthies, feeling towards the morning, his entrails scorched with that intolerable heat consequent on mighty over-night potations, got up in quest of some friendly liquid. To aid him in his search, he opened the window-shutter—when the first object which saluted his astonished organs of vision almost petrified him into stone. The sight indeed was rather alarming—a human figure dangling in the winds of heaven from a branch of an ancient oak in the front of the house.

As soon as the wrenched minister of the law had recovered what small sense he possessed, he made a shift to stagger to the bedside, and roused his brother in tribulation, who, when he beheld the horrid spectacle was assailed with the most dreadful agonies of terror and consternation. To add to their miseries, the door was locked. Bells there were none in the Highlands in those days, but they stamped and kicked on the floor with dreadful energy and clamor. After keeping the poor wrenches in a state of unspeakable terror for a space of time which appeared to them an eternity, the old woman unlocked the door and presented a visage in which were expressed all the united horrors of countenance attributed to the infernal furies. “What the fould fiend gars ye mak sie a din for?” shouted the ferful beldam. Quaking in every limb, the only words their lips could give utterance to were, “What’s—what’s that on the tree?” “What’s that on the tree!” cried the carline, in a dismally hollow and elrich tone of voice; “it’s the bit clerk body frae the bank o’ Stirling, that cam here last night to deave the laird for siller—we’ve taen and hangit him puir elf.” The effect of this appalling disclosure was electrifying. Fear added wings to their speed, and the terrified brace of messengers never looked behind them for the first ten miles on their road to Stirling.

Now, what almost frightened into convulsions two such exquisitely sensitive personages as messengers are in general, was a bundle of straw, artificially stuffed by Janet into some ancient garments of the laird’s, which she had suspended in the manner described. The innocent clerk, during all this stramash, was quietly reposing in his bed; and if he dreamed at all of suspensions, it was that of the writ of horning and caption. When he got up, he was surprised at the non-appearance of his companions, nor could he extract the smallest information on the subject from trusty Janet. Being therefore deprived of his legal tools, no other resource was let for him but to “plod homewards back his weary way.”

To conclude: so tremendous an account did the messengers’ give of their expedition, that no temptation could have induced twenty of them to venture on a similar errand, unless backed by a regiment of a thousand strong.

Many anecdotes could be added to these, to illustrate the character of this extraordinary man; but our limits forbid. The laird of Macnab, with all his oddities, ceased to exist on the 25th of May, 1816, when he had reached the age of eighty-two.

The chief cadets of the Macnab line, mentioned in old works, are the Macnabs of Acharne, Newton, Cowel, and Inchewan. A branch also settled in Jamaica; and one of some consequences exists in Canada, to which appertains the present Sir Allan Macnab, knighted for his active loyalty during the last popular disturbances in Upper Canada. This branch has claims, we believe, to represent the family.

**MACNAB OF BOVAINE** Taken from the Redbook of Scotland volume 5 page 553

**ORIGIN**. The name of MacNab Mhac an Aba means in Gaelic “son of the Abbot” and signifies a descent, real or believed, from such a high-ranking churchman. Clan tradition states their eponymous to have been an 8th-century Abbot of Glen Dochart and it is there that the Clan at least by the 14th century were settled and possessors of quite extensive lands. A John de Glendochart who appears as witness to a charter by Malduin, Earl of Lennox, in 1138 is claimed as an ancestor of the Clan as is Malcolm de Glendochart who set his seal to the Ragman’s Roll in 1296 and the MacNabs are said to have been closely related to the MacDougalls of Lorne and, consequently, Angus MacNab the then Chief aligned with them in their pro-English support during the Wars of Independence which ravaged Scotland in the last years of the 13th and the first half of the proceeding centuries.

The murder of his relation by marriage, the Red Comyn, solidified this support and it is said that the Lorn Brooch, one of the Clan’s prized trophies, was wrenched MacNab from the Bruce at the battle of Dalrigh in 1306. It is known that a Gilbert received a charter for the lands of Bovaine from King David II in 1336 and is the first confirmed ancestor of the family and is, thereby enumerated its first established Chief. He, likely, was grandfather of,

**ALEXANDER MACNAB OF BOVAINE** had a charter for the lands of Ardchoiletir, Innermonechele, Bothemeghan, and Dovinche, in the Barony of Lochdochart, from Robert, Duke of Albany, to himself and to John MacNab his son and their heir’s male in around 1398 and *d.* by 16 December, 1407. He was father of,

1. John Macnab of Bovaine, *(see below).*

2. Patrick MacNab, styled as brother to John MacNab when witness to a Precept in favor of the said John for the lands of Bovaine, on 16 September, 1407.

**JOHN MACNAB OF BOVAINE** included in a charter for the lands of Ardchoiletir, Innermonechele, Bothemeghan, and Dovinche, in favor of his father in 1398 and had a Precept for infeftment in the lands of Bovane, Ardchoille, Duffince, the office of Farbalschip of the lands of Auchlyne, as heir to his deceased father on 16 December, 1407. He was father of,

**FINLAY MACNAB OF BOVAINE,** had a Notarial Instrument executed narrating that he had appeared in the Chapel of St. Martin, in the parish church of Perth, at 9 o’clock and claimed damages against Edana de Abercromby who was then absent on 24 August, 1450, and had issue,

**PATRICK MACNAB OF BOVAINE,** succeeded to these lands and for which he granted a Charter to Finlay MacNab, his son and heir on 1 January, 1487. He m*.*  Marion, daughter of Duncan Campbell, son of Charles Campbell, *d.* at Auchlyne in 14882 and was father of,

**FINLAY MACNAB OF BOVAINE,** had a Charter for the lands of Bovaine from his father on 1 January, 1487, and *d.* by 6 July, 1499. He was father of,

**JOHN MACNAB OF BOVAINE,** had a Precept as heir to his deceased father in the lands Bovaine on 6 July, 1499, and was father of,

**FINLAY MACNAB OF BOVAINE,** succeeded his father and had a Tack of the lands of Killin and Craignavie for the space of five years from William, Prior of the Charterhouse in Perth, on 20 February, 1510. He *m.* by 18 January, 1523, to Mariota Campbell, (she *d.* at Perth on 9 July, 1526,) when he infeft her in his lands of Ewer and Leyrkane, *d.* on 13 April, 1525, and was buried at Killin. He was father of,

1. Patrick MacNab, styled as eldest son and heir of Finlay MacNab of Bovaine when he appears as witness with his father to an Instrument of Sasine for the lands of Finlarig in favor of Duncan Campbell of Glenorchy on 9 June, 1508, and *dsp* prior to 11 December, 1524, when his brother John is styled as eldest son and heir to his father.

2. John MacNab of Bovaine, *(see below).*

**JOHN MACNAB OF BOVAINE,** had letters of bailiary from his father for the space of one year on 11 December, 1524, in which he is styled as his son and heir and to whom he was retoured heir in the lands of Bovaine on 11 July, 1525. He *m.* to Ellen Stewart, *d.* by April of 1559 and was father of,

1. **FINLAY MACNAB OF BOVAINE**, succeeded his father and resigned the entire extent of his lands held of the Crown in favor of his father-in-law Sir John Campbell of Glenorchy, to be held in future from the said Sir John, as superior, on 3 November, 1552, and by his own heirs, whom failing, by the said Colin Campbell and his heirs and for which he had a new infeftment from Sir John Campbell on 8 April, 1559. He *m.* to Katherine, natural daughter of Sir John Campbell, 5th of Glenorchy, (*c/m* 13 March, 1548, with subsequent Dispensation dated 16 April, 1548,) and *dsp* prior to 20 July, 1574.

2. Alexander MacNab of Bovaine, *(see below).*

**ALEXANDER MACNAB OF BOVAINE,** , served heir substitute to his brother Finlay MacNab in all of his lands of 8 April, 1559, and as heir of whom in the lands of Bovaine he had a Precept of Clare Constat on 20 July, 1574. He was infeft in the lands of Bovaine, and others, to be held by himself and his heirs male exclusively, failing whom, by Patrick Campbell, third brother of Duncan Campbell, fiar of Glenorchy, and the heirs male of his body, failing whom, by Archibald Campbell, fourth brother of the said Duncan Campbell, and the heirs male of his body, failing whom, on 22 July, 1574. He had issue,

1. Finlay MacNab, of Bovaine, *(see below).*

2. Patrick MacNab, granted a renunciation of a wadset over the 2 merklands of Bovaine to his brother Finlay MacNab on 16 December, 1613, and is said to be ancestor of the Newton branch of the family.

**FINLAY MACNAB OF BOVAINE,** styled apparent of Bovaine when witness to an Instrument of Sasine for the lands of Ardkeanknochan in favor of Sir Duncan Campbell, of Glenorchy, on 2 April, 1595, and *m.* firstly by 3 November, 1613, to Katherine, natural daughter of Sir Duncan Campbell of Glenorchy, and had issue; and secondly to a daughter of Patrick Graham, 3rd of Inchbraikie, by whom he had further issue.

He was father of,

1. John MacNab, of Bovaine, (see below).

2. Duncan MacNab, who was father of, 2a\'7d Duncan MacNab,

3. Katherine MacNab, m. to John Gibson, in Benmore, (c/m 24 February, 16252).

4. John Ban MacNab, who acted as bailie and servitor to James Campbell, of Lawers, and m. to Janet, daughter of this Sir James Campbell. He was k. while commanding the Garrison of Garth in 1645 and had issue,

5. Patrick MacNab,

6. Finlay MacNab,

7. Donald MacNab,

8. Alexander MacNab,

9. A daughter, *m.* to John Dubh MacFarlane, son of the Laird of MacFarlane.

**JOHN MACNAB**, the eldest son by his father’s second marriage who is said, at their father’s behest to have led his brothers in the raid on the MacNeishs at their Island stronghold at Port (now St. Fillans) on Loch Earn and to there have massacred the inhabitants almost to a man. Clan tradition states that he led 300 men to the ill-fated battle of Worcester in 1651 and was *k.* vitae patris in an exchange with Covenanting troops near Killin in 1653. He *m.*  by 15 October, 1633, to Mary, daughter of Duncan Campbell, 4th of Glenlyon, (she *m.* secondly to Malcolm MacGregor, Tutor of MacGregor,) when his father infeft her in a liferent of the lands of Kinnell and was father of,

1. Alexander MacNab of Bovaine, (see below).

2. Patrick MacNab, who dsp.

3. Archibald MacNab, who dsp.

4. James MacNab, in Auchessan,

5. Margaret MacNab, m. to Gregor MacGregor of Ruskich.

6. Agnes MacNab, m. to John Campbell of Achalader, and had issue.

7. A daughter, *m.* to John MacGregor.

**ALEXANDER MACNAB OF BOVAINE,** , to whom the family’s forfeited lands, excluding those of the Castle of Eillanran were restored by Campbell of Glenorchy on 21 November, 1654. He *m.* to Elizabeth, daughter of Duncan Menzies of Weem, ( *c/m* 14 November, 1662. She *m.*  secondly to Duncan Campbell, son of Mungo Campbell of Kinloch,) and was father of,

1. Robert MacNab of Bovane, (see below).

2. John MacNab, who dsp prior to 23 January, 1689.

3. Jean MacNab, who dsp.

4. Agnes MacNab, who *dsp*.

**ROBERT MACNAB OF BOVAINE,** , *m.* firstly to Jean, daughter of Robert Campbell, 5th of Glenlyon, and secondly at Killin on 20 October, 1697, to Anna, daughter of Sir John Campbell, 10th of Glenorchy, (she *d.* at Glendochart on 6 September 1765). He was father of,

1. John MacNab of that Ilk, (see below).

2. Archibald MacNab, attained the rank of Major general in the army on 19 October, 1781, and d. at Edinburgh on 2 January, 1790, leaving no issue.

2. Robert MacNab, c. at Killin on 6 July, 1710.

3. Colin MacNab, c. at Killin on 25 July, 1714.

4. Alan MacNab, c. at Killin on 5 October, 1715, and d. on 9 March, 1735. He was buried in the church of Tarland in Aberdeenshire.

5. Duncan MacNab, c. at Killin on 22 August, 1717.

6. Mary MacNab, m. to John Campbell, 2nd of Ballieveolan, ( c/m 16 March, 1720,) and had issue.

7. Elizabeth MacNab, c. at Killin on 3 August, 1710.

8. Christian MacNab, *c.* at Killin on 22 August, 1717, *m.* to Allan Stewart, 1st of Innerhadden, and had issue.

**JOHN MACNAB OF BOVAINE,** , *b.* in 1698 and succeeded his father. He attained the rank of Major in the army and was taken prisoner at the battle of Prestonpans and confined to the Jacobite garrison at Doune Castle under the charge of Gregor MacGregor of Glengyle, nephew to Rob Roy. He *m.* to Jean, sister to Francis Buchannan of Arnprior, (she *d.* on 20 April, 1789), *d.* at Kinnell on 19 February, 1778, and was father of,

1. **FRANCIS MACNAB OF BOVAINE**, *b.* in 1734 and succeeded his father. He is the best known of all the chiefs of the Clan Mhac-an-Aba and of whom countless stories and traditions abound. Although dying without lawful issue in Callander on 25 May, 1816, he did have a number of natural children one of whom was, 1a) Allan MacNab, who attained the rank of Lieutenant in the army.

2. Robert MacNab, (see below).

3. Elizabeth MacNab, m. at Haddington on 29 September, 1750, to Richard Miller.

4. Christian MacNab, *m.* to Colonel Donald Campbell, 3rd of Ballievoulan, ( *c/m* 17 December, 1759,) and had issue.

**ROBERT MACNAB**, infeft in the lands of Easter Torrie on 1 August, 1789, and is then styled as brother to Francis MacNab of MacNab. He practiced as a doctor and *m.* at Kilmadock on 5 January, 1782, to Anne Murdoch with whom he was infeft in the lands of Bovain and Margleg on 27 January, 1783, and is then styled as son of John MacNab of MacNab. He *d.* at Killin on 8 June, 1814, and had issue,

1. Archibald MacNab, *c.* at Killin on 15 February, 1783, and *d.* in infancy.

2. Archibald MacNab of Bovaine, (see below).

3. John MacNab, a twin with Archibald who was born on 15 February, 1784.

4. Jean MacNab, b. on 8 December, 1782.

5. Anne Maule MacNab, c. at Kilmadock on 12 June, 1787, m. at Edinburgh on 28 July, 1811, to Robert Jameson, Advocate, and *d.* at Edinburgh on 4 October, 1814.

**ARCHIBALD MACNAB OF BOVAINE,**  *b.* on 15 February, 1784, and succeeded his uncle on his death in 1816. Although a reasonable amount of the MacNab lands remained they were heavily burdened by his late uncle’s many years of extravagance and by his lack of willingness to ever condescend to settle overdue accounts. Archibald settled at Kinnel House and turned his attentions to how he was to rescue what was a very desperate financial position. After several failed schemes the final blow came in 1823 when he was informed of a legal writ of foreclosure being issued against him and the inevitable humiliation of the messengers and bailiffs calling. He immediately fled to Leny House, the home of his cousin Hamilton Buchanan, where he was advised to go to Canada and search out his fortune well away from the stories of his bad debts. Turning his back on his wife and children, he landed there with his servant Dugald MacNab to hatch a grand scheme to restore his fortune through a somewhat over-the-top and heavily caricatured impression of a Highland Chieftain of note and repute and a series of cons the worst of which he perpetrated on his Clansmen from back home in Glen Dochart.

His plan was simple; he would expend what limited resources were available to him in coveting and garnering the support of as many Government officials and social “somebodies” as quickly as he possibly could before it became too apparent that he was not the well-hee led Chief he made out to be. Off he stepped from the ship, Dugald, the faithful retainer, and a local they quickly pressed into their service by the name of MacNee, a piper, to begin a charade of epic proportions.

At length he managed to obtain a grant of 81,000 acres of land in the valley of the Ottawa River at Madawaska on the understanding that it was to be settled with Clans folk from back home which he renamed MacNab. He wrote to his cousin Hamilton Buchanan requesting that he act as agent back in Scotland and find and place onboard a ship those willing families with a proven track record of being hard-working and industrious. Twenty-one families embarked for the initial settlement and at the end of their long journey they were met by Archibald playing every part the Highland Chieftain in dress and in manner with piper playing as they came ashore. From that promising start it went quickly downhill for the settlers.

Empty were the promises made by Archibald of their being looked after until reaching their new homes and being given suitable subsistence until able to till the soil and fend for themselves. Instead, he immediately began his maltreatment. He charged them over-inflated costs for their passage fees to Canada, all of were three-times the actual cost, which they had to pay off with interest and he offered them contracts which bound them to pay him rents when in actual fact none were due and certainly not to an individual who, contrary to the version of the truth he passed around the settlers, did not own the land but was merely Government agent of. And so the debacle continued for some years, his behavior becoming all the more outrageous until at length it came to court and over spilled firstly into full media exposure then an official Government inquiry which left his reputation and character in complete ruins to the point at which he became compelled to leave and settle elsewhere.

In his exile he received correspondence from Margaret Robertson, his estranged wife, who offered him a house at Rendall, in Orkney, and an income of £100 per annum which he accepted. Life, though, in the remote north was not to his liking and when he took on a mistress from Lancashire with whom he made a bigamous marriage and who soon after fell pregnant. The local population’s displeasure at them was such that they removed to Lanion, France, where he ended his days in vastly reduced circumstances on 12 August, 1860.

He *m.* at Killin on 22 November, 1806, to Margaret Robertson, (she *d.* at Florence on 20 June, 1868,), and was father of,

1. William MacNab, b. at Edinburgh on 26 January, 1813, and d. at Pisa on 23 November, 1833.

2. Alexander MacNab, d. at Edinburgh on 20 May, 1828, aged 11 years.

3. Sarah Ann MacNab, b. at Edinburgh on 3 November, 1807, and d. at Florence on 19 January, 1894. Upon her death the Chiefship of the Clan became contested by a number of individuals with the Lord Lyon King of Arms pronouncing in favor of the Mullion and Arthurstane branch said to descend from John MacNab, younger brother of John min MacNab, younger of Bovaine. This researcher, however, has yet to find proof of this link and, resultantly, an account of that particular family, and several other cadets, has been reserved for a future edition of this work to allow for important research to be completed.

4. Margaret MacNab, *d.* at Florence on 31 January, 1834, aged 18 years.

By a mistress, Catherine Fisher, whom he briefly resided with in Canada, he had a son,

5. Allan Francis MacNab,

And by Elizabeth Marshall he was father of,

6. Anne Elizabeth MacNab, *c.* on 16 June, 1858, and *m.* to Edward Jones.

This account of the Clan Macnab was published in “The Scottish Nation, or the Surnames, Families, Literature, Honors and Biographical History of the People of Scotland” by William Anderson, printed in 1863 by A. Fullerton & Co of Edinburgh. A copy of this work can be found on the Electric Scotland website at: <http://www.electricscotland.com/history/nation/macnab.htm> where it is described as a 3 volume publication with around 750 pages per volume. To go to the website follow the link given above.

The most interesting part of this early history is the author’s explanation of the origin of the surname as MacNab-Eyre meaning the seat of justice, or justice-place in the territory Macnab. And Macnab itself as a territorial name – from Nab, a round-headed height or cone after the mountain now called Ben Mor (or great head) which is conspicuous all along the glen of the Dochart (see the map of Glen Dochart). As the early origins of the Macnabs are poorly documented – this seems as good an explanation as the usual one – that the Macnabs are the descendants of the abbot of Glendochart – children of the abbot. The author borrowed much of his account about Francis, the 16th chief (here numbered 12th), from “The Clans of the Highlands of Scotland by Thomas Smibert, as presented on the preceding pages. The account is presented as found in the original with some minor changes in spelling. The footnotes are my own additions. David Rorer

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“The Scottish Nation, or the Surnames, Families, Literature, Honors and Biographical History of the People of Scotland”

MACNAB, the name of a clan anciently located in the district of Breadalbane, Perthshire, the badge of which was the common heath. The Clan-an-aba or the Macnabs are erroneously held to belong to the Old Celtic race, or primitive Albionic stock of Scotland, which were among the clans included under the general denomination of Siol Alpin, of which the clan Gregor was the principal. The chief, styled Macnab of that Ilk, had his residence at Kinnell, on the banks of the Dochart, and the family possessions, which originally were considerable, lay mainly on the western shores of Loch Tay. In the reign of David I (1124-1153), the name was, it is said, Macnab-Eyre, and signified the son and heir of the abbot. According, however, to the view taken in this work of the prefix Mac, as being no more than a contraction of “magnus” (great), and this legend cannot be admitted, although it has been stated that the founder of this clan held the dignity of abbot of Glendochart.

From the frequent use of the words “of that Ilk,” in the charters of the family of Macnab, it would appear, notwithstanding the received tradition as to the derivation of the name, that the origin of it is territorial or from land. There is not an instance in Scottish history where the words “of that Ilk” are employed; in which this is not the case. And if the form of the name be given correctly as Macnab-Eyre, the source of the territorial designation may with great probability be conjectured. The Gaelic word for heir is not Eyre, but Oighre. It is only an adaptation of its sound to the common English word heir, which is from the Latin word Hares. The word Ayre or Aire, a term of frequent use in early Scottish annals for the site, rather occasional than permanent, of a court of justice, is a corruption of the Norman-French Oyer, to hear. Macnab-Eyre may, therefore, be held to mean the seat of justice, or justice-place, in the territory Macnab, and is so stated in the private histories of the family. Tradition points, however, at a priory where the burial place now is placed[[1]](#footnote-1). Whether there ever was an abbot of Glendochart may well be doubted, yet there is every reason to believe that the abbots of Dunkeld held, as abthanes – (that is, abbot--thanes, a secular title, defined by Ducange, as abbates qui simul erant Comites – justiciary power over this portion of Perthshire. It seems, therefore, at least probable that Macnab-Eyre was the name given to the occasional seat of justice of some kind or other. The precise site of the lands bearing this particular name is now unknown, yet as in early times lands and districts received names from conspicuous natural objects lying in or near them, as Carrick, in Ayr, from the carrick or craig of Ailsa lying in the firth opposite to that district; so Macnab, the great Nab or Nob, may not improperly be held to mean the district around or near the mountain now called Benmore, (or great head,) which is conspicuous all along the glen of the Dochart, and very near its source. The occurrence of Nab in topography to designate a round-headed height or cone is familiar in Scotland and the north of England.

The Macnabs were a considerable clan before the reign of Alexander III When Robert the Bruce commenced his struggle for the crown, the baron[[2]](#footnote-2) of Macnab with his clan, joined the MacDougals of Lorn, and fought against Bruce at the battle of Dalres. Afterwards, when the cause of Bruce prevailed, the lands of the Macnabs were ravaged by his victorious troops, their houses burnt, and all their family writs destroyed. Of all their possessions only the barony of Bowain or Bovain, in Glendochart, remained to them, and of it, Gilbert Macnab of that Ilk, from whom the line is usually deduced, as the first undoubted laird of Macnab, received from David II, on being reconciled to that monarch, a charter, under the great seal, to him and his heirs whomsoever, dated in 1336. He died in the reign of Robert II.

His son, Finlay Macnab, styled of Bovain, as well as “of that Ilk,” died in the reign of James I. He is said to have been a famous bard. According to tradition he composed one of the Gaelic poems which Macpherson attributed to Ossian. He was the father of Patrick Macnab of Bovain and of that Ilk, whose son was named Finlay Macnab, after his grandfather. Indeed, Finlay appears to have been, at this time, a favorite name of the chief, as the next three lairds were so designated. Upon his father’s resignation, he got a charter, under the great seal, in the reign of James III, of the lands of Ardehyle, and Wester Duinish, in the barony of Glendochart and county of Perth, dated January 1, 1486. He had also a charter from James IV, of the lands of Ewir and Leiragan, in the same barony, dated January 9, 1502. He died soon thereafter, leaving a son, Finley Macnab, fifth laird of Macnab, who is witness in a charter, under the great seal, to Duncan Campbell of Glenorchy, wherein he is designed “Finlaus Macnab, dominus de eodem,” &c., Sept. 18, 1511. He died about the end of the reign of James V.

His son, Finlay Macnab of Bovain and of that Ilk, 6th chief from Gilbert, alienated or mortgaged a great portion of his lands to Campbell of Glenorchy, ancestor of the marquis of Breadalbane, as appears by a charter to “Colin Campbell of Glenorchy, his heirs and assignees whatever, according to the deed granted to him by Finlay Macnab of Bovain, 24th November, 1552, of all and sundry the lands of Bovain and Ardchyle, &c., confirmed by a charter under the great seal from Mary, dated 27th June, 1553.” Glenorchy’s right of superiority the Macnabs always refused to acknowledge.

His son, Finlay Macnab, the seventh laird, who lived in the reign of James VI, was the chief, who entered into the bond of friendship and manrent with his cousin, Lauchlan Mackinnon of Strathordell, 12th July, 1606. This chief carried on a deadly feud with the Neishes or M’Ilduys, a tribe which possessed the upper parts of Strathearn, and inhabited an island in the lower part of Lock Earn, called from them Neish island. Many battles were fought between them, with various successes. The last was at Glenboultachan, about two miles north of Loch Earn foot, in which the Macnabs were victorious, and the Neishes cut off almost to a man. A small remnant of them, however, still lived in the island referred to, the head of which was an old man, who subsisted by plundering the people in the neighborhood.

One Christmas, the chief of Macnab sent his servant to Crieff for provisions, but, on his return, he was waylaid, and robbed of all his purchases. He went home, therefore, empty-handed, and told his tale to the laird. Macnab had twelve sons, all men of great strength, but one in particular exceedingly athletic, who was called for a byname, Iain mion Mac an Appa, or “Smooth John Macnab.” In the evening, these men were gloomily meditating some signal revenge on their old enemies, when their father entered, and said in Gaelic, “The night is the night, if the lads were but lads!” Each man instantly started to his feet, and belted on his dirk, his claymore, and his pistols. Led by their brother John, they set out, taking a fishing-boat on their shoulders from Loch Tay, carrying it over the mountains and glens till they reached Loch Earn, where they launched it, and passed over to the island. All was silent in the habitation of Neish. Having all the boats at the island secured, they had gone to sleep without fear of surprise. Smooth John, with his foot dashed open the door of Neish’s house; and the party, rushing in, attacked the unfortunate family, every one of whom was put to the sword, with the exception of one man and a boy, who concealed themselves under a bed. Carrying off the heads of the Neishes, and any plunder they could secure, the youths presented themselves to their father, while the piper struck up the pibroch of victory.

The next laird, “Smooth John,” the son of this Finlay, made a distinguished figure in the reign of Charles I, and suffered many hardships on account of his attachment to the royal cause. After the battle of Alford in 1645, he joined the army of Montrose, with his clan, and was of great service to him at the battle of Kilsyth. He was subsequently directed by Montrose to garrison his castle of Kincardine, and he continued there until besieged by General Leslie, when, their provisions failing, he endeavored, with 300 men, to make his escape, during the darkness of the night. Marching out, sword in hand, they all got off, except Macnab himself and one of his men, who were sent prisoners to Edinburgh. Macnab was condemned to death, but escaped the night pervious to the day on which he was ordered for execution. He was killed at the battle of Worcester in 1651. During the commonwealth, his seat at Eilan Rowan was burned, his estates ravaged and sequestrated, and the family papers again lost. Taking advantage of the troubles of the times, his powerful neighbor, Campbell of Glenorchy, in the heart of whose possessions Macnab’s lands were situated, on the pretence that he had sustained considerable losses from the clan Macnab, got possession of the estates in recompense thereof.

This chief of the Macnabs married a daughter of Campbell of Glenlyon, and with one daughter, had a son, Alexander Macnab, ninth laird, only four years old when his father was killed on Worcester battle-field. His mother and friends applied to General Monk for some relief from the family estates for herself and children. That general made a favorable report on the application, but it had no effect. It was directed to Captain Gascoigne, governor of Finlarig, and was in the following terms: “I do hereby declare, that it was not intended by my order for repairing the laird of Glenurchy’s losses by the Macnabs out of their estates, that the same should extend to the molesting or intermeddling with the estates of any of the Macnabs who live peaceably. And forasmuch as I understand that the widow of the laird of Macnab hath lived peaceably, you are hereby authorized, and I desire, in case any vexation be offered to the outing or dispossessing of the said widow and her children of the said lands, or anything that belongs to them, under color of the said order, to preserve the rights that to them belong, as if the said order had never been made, and to enter and receive them into their lands; and this favor also is to be extended for Archibald Macnab of Archarne. Given under my hand and seal at Dalkeith, 18th January, 1654.

(Signed) S. S. George Monk.”

After the Restoration, application was made to the Scottish Estates, by the Lady Macnab and her son, for redress, and in 1661 they received a considerable portion of the lands, which the family enjoyed till the beginning of the present (19th) century, when they were sold.

By his wife, Elizabeth, a sister of Sir Alexander Menzies, of Weem, baronet, Alexander Macnab of that Ilk had a son and heir, Robert Macnab, tenth laird, who married Anne Campbell, sister of the earl of Breadalbane. Of several children only two survived, John, who succeeded his father, [as 11th laird] and Archibald. The elder son, John, held a commission in the Black Watch, and was taken prisoner at the battle of Prestonpans, and, with several others, confined in Doune Castle, under the charge of Macgregor of Glengyle, where he remained till after the battle of Culloden. The majority of the clan took the side of the house of Stuart, and was led by Alistair Macnab of Inshewan and Archibald Macnab of Acharne. They were mostly incorporated in the Duke of Perth’s regiment, of which Alexander Macnab of Dundurn was the standard bearer. The others joined a body of Breadalbane men under the command of Campbell of Glenlyon. The younger son, Archibald, obtained in 1740 a commission as ensign in the Black Watch (now the 42d Highlanders[[3]](#footnote-3)), on its embodiment, and served in Germany with that regiment. In June 1745 he was appointed captain of Loudoun’s Highlanders, and in 1757 he distinguished himself at the battle of Fellinghausen. Under General Wolfe, he was present at the battle of Quebec. He served also throughout the American Revolutionary war, and on its termination was promoted to the rank of lieutenant-general and appointed Colonel of the 41st Welsh Regiment. He died in Edinburgh in 1791, and was buried at Killin.

John Macnab, the 11th laird, married the only sister of Francis Buchanan, Esq. of Arnprior, and had a son, Francis Macnab of Macnab, 12th laird, who died, unmarried, at Callander, Perthshire, May 25, 1816, in his 82d year. One of the most eccentric men of his time, many anecdotes are related of his curious sayings and doings. He was a man of gigantic height and strong originality of character, and cherished many of the manners and ideas of a Highland gentleman, having in particular a high notion of the dignity of the chieftainship. He left numerous illegitimate children. There is a fine full-length portrait of him, in the uniform of lieutenant-colonel of the Breadalbane volunteers, by Sir Henry Raeburn, in the Breadalbane collection of paintings at Taymouth-castle.

The only portion of the property of the Macnabs remaining is the small islet of Innis-Buie, formed by the parting of the water of the Dochart just before it issues into Loch Tay, in which is the most ancient burial place of the family; and outside there are numerous gravestones of other members of the clan. The lands of the town of Callander chiefly belong to a descendant of this laird, not in marriage.

Archibald Macnab of Macnab, nephew of Francis, succeeded as 13th chief. The estates being considerably encumbered, he was obliged to sell the property for benefit of his creditors. Many of the clan having immigrated to Canada about the beginning of the nineteenth century, and being very successful, 300 of those remaining in Scotland were induced about 1817 to try their fortunes in America, and in 1821, the chief himself, with some more of the clan, took their departure for Canada. He returned in 1853, and died at Lannian, Cotes de Nord, France, Aug. 12, 1860, aged 83. He left a widow, and one surviving daughter, Sophia Frances.

The next Macnabs by descent entitled to the chiefship are believed to be Sir Alan Napier Macnab, Bart., Canada; Dr. Robert Macnab, 5th Fusiliers, and Mr. John Macnab, Glenmavis, Bathgate.

The lairds of Macnab, previous to the reign of Charles I, intermarried with the families of Lord Gray of Kinfauns, Gleneagles, Inchbrace, Robertson of Strowan, &c.

The chief cadets of the family were the Macnabs of Dundurn, Acharne, Newton, Cowie, and Inchewen. Of one of the latter family the following exploit is related. In 1745, a party of soldiers, sent from the castle of Finlarig (which means the field or plain of Fingal) to burn the house of Coire Chaorach, near Benmore, were watched, on their march, by Macnab of Inchewen. After setting fire to the mansion, they commenced their return to Finlarig, when it was observed that the fire had gone out. One of them was ordered back to rekindle it, but was shot by Macnab from his place of concealment. On this, the rest of the party rushed down to the river, but other three fell victims by the way. Macnab then retreated to the rocks above, whence he fired, and killed three more of the redcoats. The others then gave up the pursuit. His rifle came into the possession of Mr. Sinclair, tenant in Inverchaggerine. It is four feet long, and in the stock there is a recess for a supply of bullets. It was at one time used by the Gaelic poet, Duncan M’Intyre, when one of the foresters of Lord Breadalbane, and is praised in his classic poem of ‘Beinn Dourain.’ Mr. Sinclair possessed also the celebrated bottle, long in use at Kinnell, which could hold nine gallons, and was known to many of Macnab’s friends as ‘the Bachelor.’ (See New Statistical Account of Scotland, vol. x. page 1089.)

Sir Allan Napier Macnab is descended from the Dundurn branch. His grandfather, Robert Macnab of Dundurn, Perthshire, was cousin-german of John Macnab of Macnab, capt. 42d Highlanders. He married Mary Stuart of Ardvoirlich, and his eldest son, Allan Macnab, lieutenant 3d dragoons and principal aide-de-camp to General Simcoe, 1st governor of Upper Canada, married Anne, youngest daughter of Capt. William Napier, commissioner of the port of Quebec, of the family of Lord Napier, and had a son, Sir Allan Macnab, baronet of Dundurn-castle, Canada West, born Feb. 19, 1789; colonel of militia in Upper Canada, member and some time speaker of the legislative assembly of Upper and Lower Canada, and prime minister of that province; knighted July 14, 1838, for his efforts in putting an end to the rebellion there; created a baronet Feb. 5, 1858. Sir Allan married in 1821, Elizabeth, daughter of Lieutenant Daniel Brooke; issue a son (born in 1822, died in 1824), and a daughter. His wife having died in 1825, he married, 2dly, in 1831, Mary, eldest daughter of John Stuart, sheriff of Johnstown district, Upper Canada; issue, two daughters.

The elder, Sophia, born July 5, 1832, married in 1855, William Coutts, Viscount Bury, M.P., eldest son of earl of Albemarle

A branch of the family of Macnab settled in Jamaica.

Portrait of Archibald Macnab 13th and last chief of the house of Bovain, from a daguerreotype taken at Saratoga, United States of America, in 1848.

**Sir Allan Napier MacNab 1798-1862**



Member of Canada’s Parliament 1830-1857

First Premier of the United Canadas 1854 – 1856

Great-Great Grandson of Robert Macnab 14th Chief

Sir Allan’s life and career are detailed in “Sir Allan Napier MacNab” by Donald R. Beer, published with the assistance of the Ontario Heritage Foundation, Ministry of Citizenship and Culture and the Corporation of the City of Hamilton, by the Dictionary of Hamilton Biography of Hamilton, Ontario. The picture is from a painting by John Partridge, showing Sir Allan as Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, 1844-7, held in the Public Archives of Canada.

In 1855 his daughter Sophia Mary MacNab married William Coutts Keppel, 7th Earl of Albermarel. Sophia and William had ten children and their youngest son The Hon George Keppel, married Alice Edmonstone who became the last and said to be the most glamorous mistress of King Edward VII.

Alice and Colonel Hon. George Keppel are the great-great grandparents of Camilla Rosemary Shand, better known by her married name of Parker-Bowles. Today she is Her Royal Highness the Princess of Wales and Countess of Chester, Duchess of Cornwall, Duchess of Rothesay, Countess of Carrick, Baroness of Renfrew, Lady of the Isles, Princess of Scotland, though at her own request she wishes to be known as “HRH The Duchess of Cornwall” and most importantly the wife of the Prince of Wales.

One day a descendent of the chiefs of the Mac-an-aba may be Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.

**Sir Allan and the Laird of MacNab** (from Appendix B of “Sir Allan Napier MacNab” by Donald R. Beer)

The years 1849-50 were remarkable for the virtual ending of one significant motif in Sir Allan’s personal life, his long, lively, and tortuous relationship with Archibald, the Laird of MacNab. This charming, bibulous chieftain had always impressed his Canadian-born kinsman. However, during the early 1840’s the laird’s tyrannical and criminal conduct toward the clients of his Ottawa valley settlement had intruded into the political arena and threatened embarrassment. It was probably a relief to Sir Allan, therefore, when in 1843, Archibald fled the settlement. Sir Allan was only too happy to provide him with a cottage in King Street, Hamilton. Archibald bore himself; it is said with a military swagger. Proud and unrepentant, he became a striking figure around the growing city in the latter part of the decade. He was not as consistently or extremely poor as his often been imagined. Aided by the gift of a small estate and income from his estranged wife, the laird had by 6 January 1849 built up a substantial credit balance with Sir Allan. Their complicated financial dealings revolved around promissory notes, bank stock, land, rents, diamonds and labor. Undoubtedly the chief’s assistance was of great value to Sir Allan in getting the latter through the economic crisis of 1849. Sir Allan’s inability to repay the debt must have contributed substantially to the state of poverty into which the other now fell.

When Archibald decided to remove to Europe, the time for a financial settlement had clearly come, and it was then that the two men fell out. It is now impossible to tell who was the more to blame. Neither was scrupulous and the sum involved was large – nearly £1,300 at one stage. The laird went to court using Sir Allan’s former partner John Hatt as his counsel. Judgment was given in favor of the plaintiff. On 14 January 1852 Sir Allan signed a note for £939-19-6, which was to have been the final settlement and presumably the end of their relationship. However, the note was protested for lack of funds and the matter dragged on for at least another eight years. Long before then Archibald had gone. On the eve of his departure one of his letters to Sir Allan had been returned unopened. Sir Allan also failed to keep an appointment with him. ‘I have already suffered more than enough,’ the chief wrote bitterly, and he ordered Hatt to close all transactions. The next day, 17 November 1850, he quit Hamilton.

To one as conscious as Sir Allan of his clan traditions it must ultimately have seemed a sad parting. Years later the two re-established contact, and Sir Allan extracted from his now seedy kinsman the gratifying declaration that, but for lack of a male heir, Sir Allan would have inherited the chieftainship.

Between 1845 and 1847, Robert Ronald McIan painted and published a series of illustrations, under the sponsorship of The Highland Society of London, depicting the dress, tartans, arms, armorial insignia and occupations of the Scottish Highlands. This illustration, taken from that series, depicts a gentleman of the Clan MacNab during the 18th century.



The figure wears a broad bonnet with the single eagle feather of a gentleman. A Laird would have had two feathers the Chief three. Displayed with the feather is the badge common to all the clans of the Soil Appin, a sprig of pine needles.

The coat and waistcoat are supposedly of the style worn about 1715, the later being usually longer than the coat. The coat sleeves seem to be a bit short though the cuffs could be turned down.

The ample plaid is the so-called belted plaid, a single uncut length of cloth, about 12 or 13 yards or so of material. The belt was laid out on the ground and the plaid laid out and pleated over it. The wearer lay down on the plaid, wrapped it and the belt round his body, overlapping the sides of the plaid in front, buckled the belt and stood up. The rest of the plaid was then left to hang down behind or caught up at the left shoulder with a broach as shown. In bad weather it could be pulled up over the head like a cloak, though that would seem difficult with the coat and waistcoat depicted. The plain deerskin sporran is almost hidden by the folds of the plaid.

His hair is tied back in a club. The hose are probably thick homemade stuff and his otherwise plain shoes have metal buckles.

Scottish pistols were not carried in a holster but instead had a long hook, on the side opposite the lock, for hanging from a belt. This gentleman has two such pistols hanging from a narrow shoulder belt and probably also a musket, but that is not shown. He is holding a basket hilted broadsword, which was hung from the broad shoulder belt, and a round target or shield, traditional weapons of the Highlands.

This illustration is from a reprint of “The Highlanders of Scotland” containing the watercolors by Kenneth MacLeay. The print depicts two Killin lads, Robert MacNab and Donald MacNaghton.



Robert MacNab: Born 1822, at Killin, on the Marquis of Breadalbane’s property. His father, Robert MacNab, was formerly Inspector of Military Roads, and afterwards a builder; his wife’s name was Mary Gilmore; he died in 1840 aged 67.

Robert MacNab is a builder at Callender (sic). He married, in 1853, Isabella Neilson, from Edinburgh, and has three daughters.

Robert’s grandfather was John MacNab, and his grandmother Janet Stewart. Robert’s great -great grandfather, Peter MacNab, was Laird of Acharn, near Killin, and fought at the battle of Culloden, in 1745 (sic), on the Stuart side. He was a standard-bearer, and retained the broken flag-staff after the battle. It has been handed down from father to son, treasured as a family relic, and is now in Robert MacNab’s possession. It is made of very tough ash, and measures seven feet in length.

Donald MacNaghton Born in 1812, at Ardonaig, in the parish of Killin. His father, Finlay MacNaghton, was salmon fisher to the late Marquis of Breadalbane for forty years. He thatched the summer-houses at Auchmore with heather on the occasion of the Queen’s visit there in 1842. Finlay married Catherine McIntyre, and died in 1860, leaving six sons, of whom three are in America.

Donald MacNaghton was a shepherd for three years when very young; but is now a weaver, living at Ardchoyle, in Glen Dochart. He married, in 1838, Christian, daughter of Robert Hunter, of the parish of Kilmadock, and has ten

children. Donald’s grandfather was John MacNaghton, and his grandmother Janet Stewart.

Victorian author Amelia Murray MacGregor separately recorded detailed notes on various of the portraits and here is what she had to say about: Robert MacNab and Donald MacNaghton. The men wear the MacNab and MacNaghton clan tartans. The cuffs of MacNab's tunic are of an uncommon, almost military pattern. His boots seem out-of-place with his otherwise formal outfit. His bonnet has a rare design on the lower edge, and a red patch with a pinked border behind the cap-badge. MacNaghton wears what may be a shooting medal, and an unusual pattern on his socks. The background shows Ben More and Stobinian (Stob- an-Ean) , from Glen Dochart, Perthshire.

MacLeay painted the men in Perthshire, and MacNab was paid two guineas to compensate him for being absent from his building business for a week while he was sitting to MacLeay at Callander. The addenda notes to the 1874 edition of The Highlanders names the second sitter as John McNaghton and states that he was supposed to have been robbed and murdered in Glasgow in 1868, and his body found four months later in the Clyde

1. The island of Inch Buie in the river Dochart at Killin [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This is incorrect, the chief does not have a title – he did hold a “barony” which any large estate in Scotland is called, but that does not confer the title of baron which is not used in Scotland. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See the book Legends of the Black Watch by James Grant [↑](#footnote-ref-3)