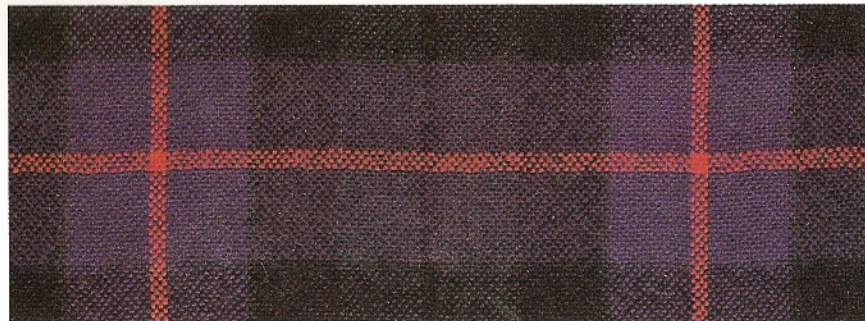


Ancient Morrison



Modern Morrison



Ancient Red Morrison



Modern Red Morrison



CLAN
MORRISON

COMPILED BY
Alan McNie

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CLAN MORRISON

*Condensed from History of the Morris(s)on Family
Leonard Morrison, 1880*

The Island of Lewis, on the west coast of Scotland, is undoubtedly the place where the family originated, though its founder was probably of Norwegian origin.

In regard to the origin of the family, the following evidence is presented. In Captain Thomas's "Traditions of the Morrisons", an extract is made from a "Description of the Lewis by John Morisone, Indweller there", written presumably between 1678 and 1688, wherein he says, "The first and most ancient inhabitants of this countrie were three men of three several races, viz. Mores, the son of Kennanus, whom the Irish historians call Makurich, whom they make to be son to one of the kings of Norway, some of whose posteritie remains in this land to this day. All the Morrisons in Scotland may challenge their descent from this man."

Another tradition, preserved in the branch of Morisons which settled in Nottingham, New Hampshire, is to the same effect, and points in the same direction. This branch of the family emigrated from Scotland to Ireland, at the time of the siege of Derry, 1688, and to Nottingham, N.H., in 1727. This statement is from Hon. Robert Morrison, of Northwood, N.H., a former mayor of Portsmouth, N.H., who received it in the early part of the 19th century, from an

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Page 1 Explanation:

The illustrated tartan is Ancient Morrison. The water colour rendering is of the northern tip of the Isle of Lewis. The motto on the crest badge means, Castle Eistein.

Research regrettably cannot be undertaken by the publisher. A non-profit organisation, The Scots Ancestry Research Society, 3 Albany Street, Edinburgh, undertake research for an agreed fee.



Cape Wrath, near Durness

aged relative whose birth dates back to 1750. While giving him words of admonition, this aged person said, "Maintain the honor and integrity of of your family, for the Morrisons come from the best blood of Scotland; they are descended from the royal family." Royalty amounts to nothing, and only that man is truly royal who makes himself so by a noble life and heroic deeds.

This evidence is adduced to show the ground there is for belief in the consanguinity of the different branches. The reader will not fail to notice the striking similarity of these traditions, coming down for two centuries through different channels. We know of no intercourse between the Morrisons of New Hampshire and the Morisons of Scotland since the emigration of the former in 1688. The traditions here and the traditions there were separate and independent. The streams, one on this side of the Atlantic and one on that side, ran unmingled for two hundred years, and yet they retain in their essential parts the same current of tradition.

These traditions all point in the same direction, and establish beyond reasonable doubt the common origin of the family, and Lewis as its early home.

There is no authoritative manner of spelling Morison. It has been found spelled in many different ways, such as Maryson, Moreson, Moryson, Morreson, Moorison, Morrisson, Morson, Morisown, Morisone, Morison, Morrison, Murison and Morrowson.

In early days, the family in Scotland, England, Ireland and America almost invariably spelled their name with one *r*; thus, Morison. This was the customary orthography till about the year 1800, when the change to Morrison became general in Scotland, England, Ireland, and America, and has continued to the present time. The family in Londonderry, N.H., followed the general custom.

Norman Morison, Esq., of Stornoway, Island of Lewis, Scotland (a descendant of the Hereditary Judges), writes, "Our family, and indeed the Lewis families, wrote their name with one *r*; thus, Morison." George Cruikshanks, Esq., of Scotland, writes, August 30, 1879, "The Morisons of Bognay, from whom I suppose you are descended, always spelled their name with one *r*, and I may say they are almost the only family in Scotland who do so."

Morison is the original mode of spelling. It comes nearer the

supposed derivation of the name, and appears to be the correct orthography.

Regarding derivation of the name, Nathaniel Holmes Morison, LL.D., Provost of the Peabody Institute of Baltimore, Maryland, writes as follows, under date of February 24, 1880: "I examined this point, the origin of the name is simply son of *Moor, More, Mhor, Muir, Moir, Mor*, and that this variously spelled name comes from the Gaelic word *mhor*, or *mor*, signifying 'renowned, famous, a mighty one'. The mere fact that the Moors and Morrisons have a common crest, three Moors' heads, is strong presumptive evidence in its favor, and shows that there was a connection between the two families."

Under date of March 11, 1880, he writes, "If the name is derived from the Gaelic *mhor*, or *mor*, as I think it is, it must have been formed from that word *after* the persons bearing the name of Moor, etc., had ceased to be Gaels, and become either Norsemen or Saxons, and used one of these languages. The Gaelic for *son* is *mac*. while *son* is both Norse and Saxon. It is clear to my mind that, like Johnson, Allison, and many other names, this name means the son of somebody, — whether of Mary, Moore, or Maurice can hardly be asserted with confidence; but the fact that the Morr, and not the Morrises, have the same crest as the Morrisons, plainly points in that direction for the ancestry of the name. The name as originally written in Saxon, or in Saxon-English, would be Moores-son, or Mores-son; of if the *h* of the Gaelic were retained, Mhores-son, the Saxon genitive, our possessive, being *es*. This is by far the most regular, the most simple, the most natural, and taking the crest into account, the most probable origin of the name. 'The Saxon language was well established in England and the Lowlands of Scotland in the ninth century. In Norse, the name would be Moors-son, Mors-son, Mhors-son, the genitive being formed in *s* without the *e*.' "

A letter communicated to the "Athenaeum", in March, 1866, contained some account of the Lewis Clans founded on oral tradition. Since then I have collected much additional information concerning them, either from printed books and MSS., or from notices supplied to me by residents on the island.

In the letter to the "Athenaeum" it is stated, on the authority of those around me, that time out of mind Lewis had been inhabited

by three confederated clans, the Macleods, the Morrisons, and the Macaulays. This statement is confirmed in a "Description of the Lewis, by John Morison, indweller there," which is inferred to have been written between 1678 and 1688. The "Indweller" states: "The first and most ancient inhabitants of this countrie were three men of three several races, viz. Mores, the sone of Kennanus, whom the Irish historians call Makurich, whom they make to be son to one of the kings of Norovay, some of whose posteritie remains in the land to this day. All the Morrisons in Scotland may challenge their descent from this man. The second was Iskair MacAulay, an Irishman, whose posteritie remain likewise to this day in the Lews. The third was Macnaicle, whose only daughter, Torquile, the first of that name (and sone to Claudius the son of Olipheus, who likewise is said to be the King of Norway his sone), did violently espouse, and cut off immediately the whole race of Maknaicle, and possessed himself of the whole Lews, and continueth in his posteritie (Macleod Lews), during thirteen or fourteen generations, and so extinct before, or at least about 1600."

Such was the tradition of the origin of the ruling families in the seventeenth century, and it is first to be noted that the writer uses "Irish" and "Irishman", where we should now write "Gaelic" and "Gael".

Of the Morrisons, it is strange that the "Indweller", himself a Morrison, should have ignored what he would have called the "Irish" name of his clan, which is from *Gill-Mhuire*, i.e. servant of Mary; from *Gille*, i.e. a servant, etc., and *More*, i.e. Mary. A Morrison in Gaelic is *Mac Ghillemhuire*, sometimes shortened to Gillmore, Gilmour; or translated Morrison, Maryson; or reduced to Milmore, Miles, Myles. The Morrisons are a numerous clan in Lewis, where, in 1861, they numbered 1402, or one fifteenth of the whole population; in Harris there were 530, equal to one seventh of the inhabitants. These numbers indicate a domination in the island of many centuries.

There is no real tradition of their original settlement in Lewis, except that the founder was the inevitable son of the King of Lochlann; but one remarkable genealogy of Macleod makes Gillemuire to have been the father of Leod; and before Raice (Rooke) and Olbair (Ulf?) the Hewer, we have another Gillemuire. It is added that *Ealga fholt-*



Macaulay by Mclan

alainn, i.e. Ealga of the Beautiful Hair, daughter of Arailt Mac Semmair, King of Lochlainn, was the mother of Gillemuire.”

I learn from Mr Skene that the serfs or tenants on lands belonging to a church or monastrey dedicated to the Virgin would be called the Gillies of Mary; hence the origin of the name; but in process of time it is evident that such names as Gillemuire were used as proper names, and without any reference to office or employment. Although Petrie says that no Irish churches were dedicated to the Virgin before the twelfth century, there are notices of Maelmaire, son of inbith, at A.D. 919, and of Maelmuire, son of Eochaidh; abbot-bishop of Armagh, at A.D. 1020 Nor, although the name is Gaelic, is it to be inferred that the possessor was of pure Gaelic descent, but rather that he was one of the Gall-Gael, or mixed race of Northmen and Gael who peopled the towns and shores of Ireland and the western islands and coasts of Scotland. For Maelmaire, sister of Sitric, King of Dublin, is on record *circa* 1066; and, before the conquest of Ireland, in 1130, Mac Gille Maire, son of Allgoirt of Port Lairge (Waterford), the best foreigner (*Gall*) that was in Eirinn, was slain.

In Ireland there was a Clan MacGillemuire settled in Lecale (*Leth-Cathal*), County Down. On July 7, 1244, Henry III requests, among others, that Mac Gillemuri himself, and with his forces, will join the Justiciary of Ireland about to depart for Scotland:—

The King to (Mac Gillemuir). Thanks him for the good service he is prepared to render. As Alexander, King of Scotland, has made peace, (Mac Gillemuri) may return to his own country, but the king prays he may be ready for service the ensuing summer.

The chief of the Clan Morrison, whose dwelling was at Habost, Ness, was hereditary judge or brieve (*Breitheamh*) of Lewis, and continued to hold the office till the beginning of the seventeenth century. The only record of his judgeship is that given by Sir R. Gordon, who, under the rubric of “What the office of a Breive is among the islanders, states that “The Breive is a kind of judge amongst the islanders, who hath an absolute judicatorie, vnto whose authoritie and censure they willinglie submitt themselves, when he determineth any debatable question betuein partie and partie.” In former times there was a brieve in every island, and he had one eleventh of every subject that was in dispute, but from whom there was an appeal to

the chief judge in Islay. Very exaggerated notions remain of the extent of the jurisdiction of the Brieve of Lewis.

It is probable that the Brieve in Lewis represented the *log-maor* of Norse domination, and that in the progress of time the office changed from that of law-man or speaker-of-the-law at the *ping*, or popular assembly, to that of *Dómandi*, or administrator of justice. In the Isle of Man the *Deemster* held an office of great antiquity. He was judge in cases of life and death, as well as in the most trifling contentions. His presence, whether in house or field, on horseback or on foot, constituted a court; his decisions were guided either by what he could remember of like cases, or by his sense of justice, and this *lex non scripta* was called “breast-law”. On assuming office he swore that he would administer justice between man and man as evenly as the back-bone of the herring lies between the two sides of the fish. Wherever the deemster was present, the aggrieved party could lug his opponent before him. The plaintiff placed his foot upon that of the defendant, and held it there till judgment was pronounced. Both in Lewis and in Man the decision seems to have been accepted without reserve.

On the 29th May, 1527, King James addressed a letter to “Oure Breff of Inuerness”, where “breff” is synonymous with “sheriff”; from whence it may be inferred that the *vice-comes* of Skye, named in the Chronicle of Man, was the brieve of that island. How the office of law-man was abused under Scottish tyranny in Shetland may be seen in Balfour’s “Oppressions”; but in Lewis, owing to its remote situation, the brieve appears to have exercised his ancient jurisdiction without interference. It is very doubtful if ever a brieve of Lewis could have spoken a word of English, and as the Scots Acts of Parliament have not been translated into Gaelic, the decisions of the judge can never have had any relation to them. Before the utter confusion into which the country fell towards the close of the sixteenth century, the brieve of Lewis, like the bard of Clanranald, may have received some education in Gaelic; but in any case we have ample proof that he exercised his office most unsparingly, for there are few islands or districts in which the *Cnoc na Chroiche*, or Gallows Hill, is not a conspicuous feature. With the judge, says Dr MacIvor, perished the different records of the Lewis, and of the countries over which he had



jurisdiction, except a few memoranda, or rather scraps, retained by some of the judge's descendants who escaped the fury of the Macleods.

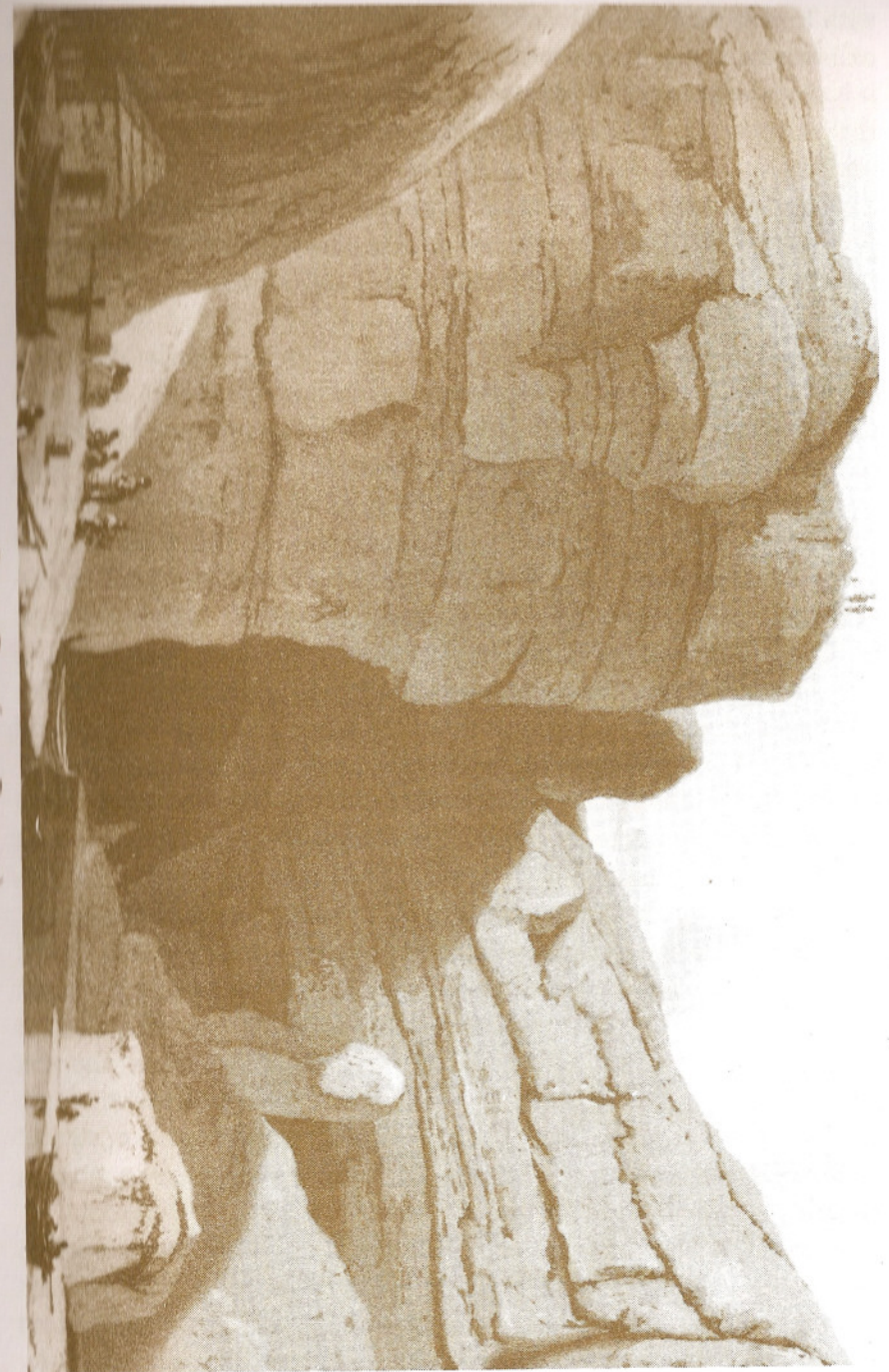
The "Indweller" is only partially correct in stating that Kennanus Makurich, i.e. Cain Macvurich (*Cathan MacMhurich*), was the first Morrison in Lewis; for the current tradition throughout the island is that the heiress of the Morrisons, having determined she would only marry with a Morrison, Cain, who was a Macdonald from Ardnamurchan, passed himself off for a Morrison, became husband of the lady, and consequently brieve also. The Harris Morrisons claim to be of the original stock. The North Uist historian of the Sleat Macdonals (Hugh Macdonald) states that "Reginald married a brother's son of his grandfather's to an heiress of the name of the Morrisons in the Lewis"; and that Reginald was killed by the Earl of Ross in 1346.

It is further stated that Angus Oig, of Islay, married a daughter of Guy O'Kaine in Ireland; and this is confirmed by MacFirbis, who writes that the mother of John Mac Angus of Islay was *Aine*, daughter of *Cumhaighe O'Cathain*. In this way the name of Cain has been introduced – if it was not there before – into the Clan Macdonald, and through them it has been continued as a family name among the Morrisons to the present day.

The conclusion to be drawn is that Kennanus Makurich, i.e. Cain Macvurich, who was adopted into, and from whom descended the leading family of the Morrisons of Ness, was the son of Murdo, son or rather grandson, of John the Bold, founder of the family of Ardnamurchan; and that the marriage took place not long before 1346.

I am told that the badge of the Morrisons is "drift-wood", of which a great quantity is driven upon the west coast of Lewis. The Lewis word for drift-wood is *sgoid*; hence, in derision, a Morrison will be told that he has a "skate" (*sgait*, Gae.) for a baby.

Besides the district of Ness, the Morrisons were dominant in the district of Durness, in Lord Reay's country. The tradition of their settlement there is that Ay Mac Hormaid (*Aodh Mac Thormoid*), a Morrison from Lewis, who was a handsome and good-looking fellow, went for a cargo of meal to Thurso, and there married the daughter (or the sister) of the Bishop of Caithness, who bestowed upon the young couple the whole of Durness, with Ashir. Ay Morrison "brought over



Smao Cave (near Durness)

with him from Lewis a colony of no less than sixty families, mostly of his own name, to whom he gave lands upon his property; hence it is that the name of Morrison is prevalent in these parts, for though the property has fallen into other hands, the stock of the inhabitants remains.

In 1518, Mac Ian of Ardnamurchan was killed; the Uist historian says that he fled for the space of a mile, but was overtaken by Mr. (i.e. the Master or Heir) Allan Morrison, and killed by the Laird of Raisay.

In 1546-47, March 22, there is a remission to "Rorie McCleud of the Lewis," and some of his clan, for treasonable assistance given to "Mathew, formerly Earl of Lennox," among whom is "William M'huceon," probably a son of the brieve.

In 1551, July 23, Patrick Davidson is paid £10 by the king's treasurer that he may go to the Lewis to charge "M'Claude of the Lewis and Huceon of the Lewis to come to my Lord Governor (Arran) at the aire at Inverness." This is Huceon Morrison, brieve or judge of Lewis, who was indirectly the cause of the ruin of the *Siol Torquil*.

The Mackenzie faction, having failed to gain Lewis, left the Morrisons exposed to the vengeance of the Macleods for their treachery to Torquil Du. The oligarchic Sir R. Gordon cannot imagine that the ties of blood should be superior to fealty to a chief. About this time the Morrisons fortified themselves in Dun Eystein, at Ness.

Dun Eystein is a natural stronghold at the north end, or Ness, of Lewis, in the townland of *Cnoc Aird*, to which the Morrisons were wont to retire when hard pressed or in times of war. It is a flat, cliffy island, of a somewhat oval shape, about 75 yards long and 50 yards broad, and is separated from the mainland by a narrow, perpendicular ravine, through which the sea flows at high water. The ravine is between 30 and 40 feet broad, and the same in height. The remains of a strong wall follow the edge of the cliff on the landward side of the island, and through the wall there are said to have been squints or loopholes for observation and defence.

Towards the northeast corner of the island is a dūn or castle, sometimes called *Tigh nam Arm*, or the House of Arms, now but 4½ feet high. The outside of the dūn is an oblong square, 23 by 18 feet; and the basement is nearly solid, for the central area, which is of an

oval shape, is only 6½ by 4½ feet, and there is no appearance of any doorway. The entrance or doorway was no doubt at the height of the first floor, similar to a dūn in Taransay. The walls are of dry-stone masonry, but that is no proof of age in this part of the country. When exploring the ruins, the Rev. M. Macphail, who made the above measurements, found a small piece of flint, fragments of charcoal, and a strip of leather such as was used for making brogues.

There are the remains of huts upon the island; and on the south sides is a flat ledge, called *Palla na Biorlinn*, or the Ledge of the Galley or Birlin, whereon tradition tells that the Morrisons used to haul up their boat.

There is no tradition of the Eysteinn who gave his name to the dūn; it is a common Norse name.

Many sanguinary battles, still recounted by tradition, were fought between the Macleods and Macaulays on one side, and the Morrisons on the other. At last the Morrisons were forced to leave Lewis, and take refuge with that branch of their clan which was settled in Durness and Edderachyllis, in Sutherland, where still, in 1793, the natives were all, except a few, of the three names of MacLeay, Morrison, or Macleod.

At that time there lived on *Eilean Shiandaidh* (pronounced Eleñ Handa), i.e. Sandey or Sand Island, one of the family of Assynt Macleods, named Little John MacDonald Vic Ilucheon, a man of low stature, but of matchless strength and skill in arms. He and the brieve, John Morrison, met accidentally in a house in Inverkirkaig in Assyant. Being in one room and of contrary factions, presently they fell to fighting, when, although the Brieve had six men, and John of Sandey but four, the Brieve and five of the Morrisons were killed without any loss on the side of the Macleods. Sir R. Gordon suggests that God deprived the Brieve and his company of the courage or ability to resist; but it must not be forgotten that this same John of Sandey had been previously defeated at Carloway, in Lewis, by the Morrison faction.

Among the numerous islands on the coast of Edderachyllis is one called *Eileen a Bhrithheimh*, or Judge's Island; for after John Morrison had been slain, his friends in Lewis came in a galley to bring home his corpse; but contrary winds arising, they were driven to this island, where they found it convenient to disembowel the body and bury the



Edinburgh Castle

intestines, and on the wind changing they arrived in safety at Ness.

Malcolm Mòr MacIain, who now succeeded to the chieftainship of the Morrisons, sought for John of Sandey, in order to revenge the death of his father, when both parties met by chance in Coygeach. They fought; but John of Sandey, besides killing most of the opposite party, took Malcolm Mòr himself prisoner, and carried him to Tormod Macleod in Lewis, who caused him to be beheaded. This was between 1601 and 1605.

As noted above, those of the Brieve's descendants who had escaped the fury of the Macleods took refuge with the portion of their clan that was settled in Lord Reay's country. When the Mackenzies had gained possession of Lewis, the relatives of the Brieve returned and established themselves again at Ness. According to tradition, John the Brieve, who was killed at Inverkarkaig, had four sons, Allan, Donald, Kenneth and Angus. A fifth was Malcolm Mor, who was beheaded at Stornoway. Allan and two others are said to have been killed in a sea-fight by Neil Macleod, and their heads were probably taken by Neil Macleod to Edinburgh, where he himself was afterwards hanged. Of Donald we appear to have authentic record; for in a commission of Fire and Sword, dated 24th June, 1630, granted to "Rorie McKenzie of Cogagh, Tutor of Kintail," and others, against the remaining members of the Siol Torquil, "Donald McIndowie (Donald Macillevore) Brieff" is included, and this is the last notice I have found of the *Brieve* of Lewis.

Donald, along with some Macleods, is described as having been concerned in the first rebellion against the Gentlemen Adventurers; but it is difficult to understand why a Morrison, whose clan had suffered so severely for having favoured the Mackenzies, was included in the commission of extermination. It is repeatedly affirmed that the Morrisons assisted the Mackenzies to reduce Lewis, but a slight explanation is offered by one of the bards, who states that the "Soldier of Kintail promised part of Kintail to Donald, but never gave it."

Towards the end of the seventeenth century, the whole of Lewis formed but two parishes, Barvas and Ey (Stornoway). The minister of Barvas was the Rev. Donald Morrison, who must have been born about 1620; he was a grandson of the judge, was bred an Episcopalian minister, but conformed to Presbyterianism. He was personally known

to Martin, and supplied that invaluable writer with information about North Rona. Mr Donald helped to suppress the sacrifice to *Shony* about 1670, and died before 1700, in his eighty-sixty year. He was succeeded in Barvas by his son, the Rev. Allan Morrison.

When Mr Donald was minister of Barvas, his brother, Rev. Kenneth Morrison, was minister of Stornoway; he joined with his brother in suppressing the sacrifice to *Shony*, and informed Martin of a singular method which he saw practised in his own church for exorcising the second sight from a "Maid". He also conformed to the Presbyterian Church. Mr Kenneth was a highly gifted man, and well suited to repress the turmoils in Lewis which then existed between the Papists and Protestants; for he used to walk from his manse at Tong to the church at Stornoway with his sword at his side, and when preaching he had two men standing with drawn swords at the door of the church.

The Papists received great encouragement from John Mackenzie of Assynt (who was a Papist), Laird of Kildun, and uncle of William, Earl of Seaforth. They kept Mr Kenneth so much on the alert that he never went to bed without having his sword lying by him. On one occasion the Laird of Kildun was so exasperated against the minister that he sent six stout men to bring Mr Kenneth by force to Aignish, where he then resided. The men arrived at the manse just as Mr Kenneth had gone to bed; his wife suspected some evil design, and informed her husband. He merely told her to send them upstairs if they had any business with him. They were brought to his room, and on his asking them what they wanted, they told him that the Laird had bid them take him to Aignish. He replied, "Oh, very well; let us first drink the Laird's health, and then I will go with you." To this there was no objection. Now Mr Kenneth had a very large "dram-horn", which was only used on particular occasions; and it was now produced. The men drank the Laird's health and then that of his lady. His Reverence then asked them to drink his own health. By this time the men were so exhilarated that they would drink anybody's health. But John Barleycorn was master of them, and they were soon unable to move hand or foot. Mr Kenneth then made his own men bind them with ropes of straw, carry them to the boat, ferry them to Aignish, and lay them in the passage leading to the Laird's room. The Laird

was restless from anxiety, and rose early to learn what success had attended his adventure, and, on going out, stumbled over one of his drunken men. They could give no account of how they came there, nor why they were bound with straw in so ridiculous a manner. The Laird said this was black Kenneth's doing, and that he had practised some trick to bring them to that condition; but that they should be thankful to Mr Kenneth for not having left them on the shore within reach of the flood.

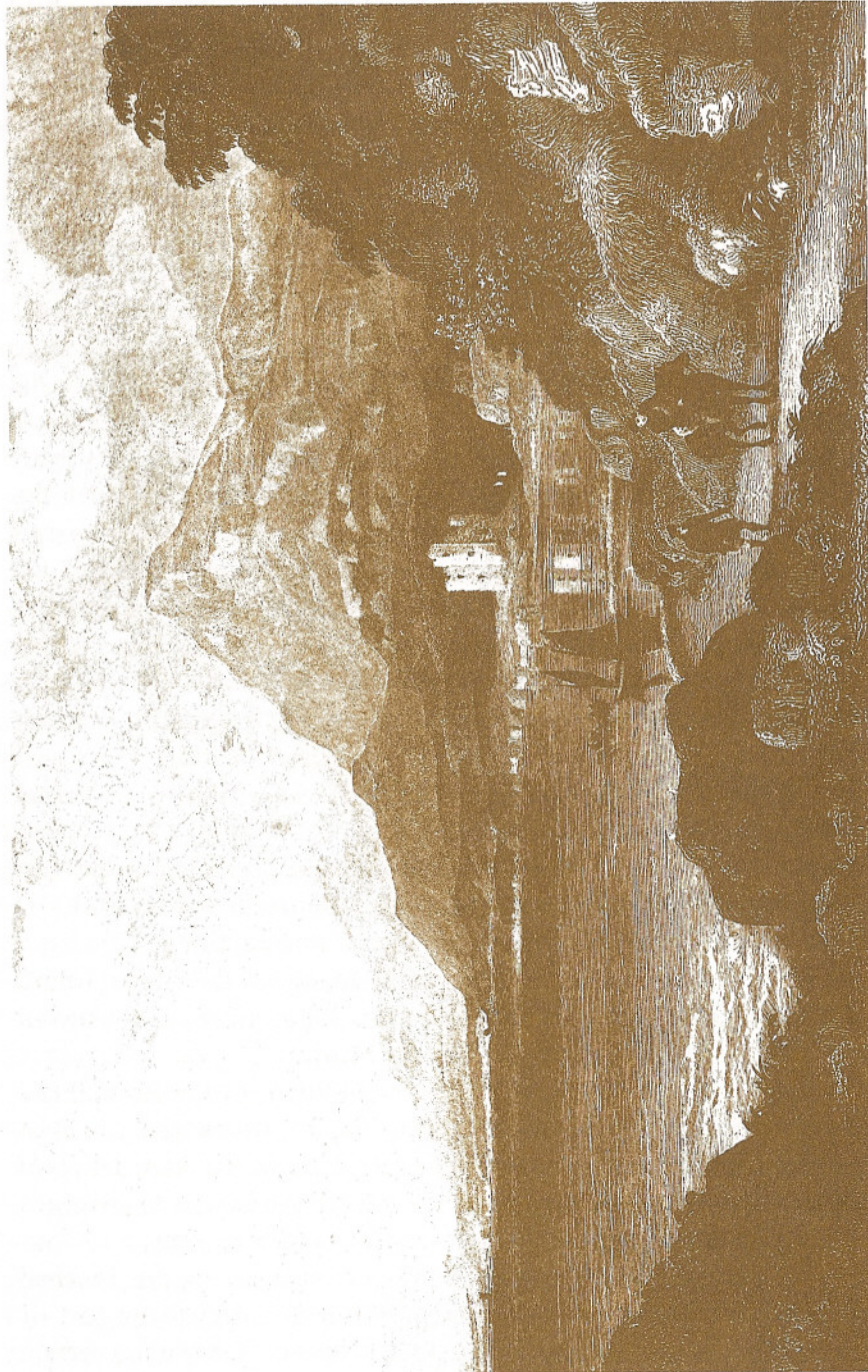
The clemency of Mr Kenneth softened in some degree the anger of the Laird, for shortly afterwards he wrote to Mr Kenneth to come to Aignish to have a discussion on the merits of their respective creeds. Mr Kenneth was kindly received, and after dinner the discussion took place. Mr Kenneth seems to have advanced his arguments with moderation, and illustrated them with amusing stories, by which the Laird was induced to assert that he would more minutely examine into the doctrines of his Church. From that time the Laird moderated his zeal for the Papists, and lived on good terms with Mr Kenneth. 11

The Rev. Kenneth Morrison was a good poet, as some of his productions in the Gaelic language sufficiently attest. The Rev. Aulay Macaulay, minister of Harris, married a daughter of the Rev. Kenneth Morrison.

Mr Kenneth was succeeded as minister of Stornoway by his second cousin, the Rev. Donald Morrison, whose pedigree is thus given: Donald MacRorie Vic Angus Vic Allan *Mhic a Bhreitheimh*; i.e. son of the Brieve (John Morrison). Mr Donald must have lived till 1747, when his successor, the Rev. John Clark, was admitted.

In 1653, Murdo Morrison, son of Allan, son of the brieve (John), was tacksman of Gress. He had three sons, John, subsequently known as the tacksman of Bragar, Allan and Murdo.

On the 10th August, 1653, Colonel Corbett, of the Roundhead army, took possession of the peninsula on which the town of Stornoway now stands; and having had the arms of the place delivered up to him, he fortified the point and left Major Crispe as governor of Lewis, with six companies of soldiers, two great guns, and four sling pieces. On 31st January, 1654, a strange report reached Edinburgh, that Seaforth had with 1,400 men stormed the fort of Stornoway and taken it. But on the 14th February, 1654, more certain



Ardvrack Castle

information arrived there, and “the business of Lewis was thus: Norman (*recté* John) Macloud (of Rasy, and nephew of Seaforth), with four or five hundred men, landed in the Lewis Island (at Loch Shell), and after three or four days staying at some inaccessible places in the isle, fell upon our soldiers who lay at Stornoway out of the fort, and killed two twelve of them; but a party out of the fort beat them thence, relieved the remainder of the men, removed the goods into the fort, and burnt the houses.” On 21st March, news arrived at Dalkeith, that “the garrison of Lewis had made slaughter of the country people that joyned with Seaforth, and they have also slaughtered some of the garrison; the old natives (Macleods) joyned with our men against the rest of the country, so that these divisions cause great devastation in those parts.”

This account is corroborated by the “Indweller”; but the patriotic antiquists now tell a very different story, which need not be repeated here; except that John, the future tacksman of Bragar, being on good terms with the officers of the garrison, spent the night previous to the attack in drinking with them; and after observing where the sentinels were posted, and the weakest part of the defence, returned to Gress. His brother Allan had been employed in collecting the Lewis men. The attack was made at night in two columns, Seaforth marching by the lands of Torry, and Rasay by Bayhead. The result is stated above.

To his various other talents, John Morrison of Bragar seems to have added that of engineer; for Seaforth having – about 1600 – undertaken the siege of the castle of Ardvrack, belonging to Macleod of Assynt, and finding he made but little progress, sent for John Morrison, who, having gone over the ground, recommended that four hundred raw cow-hides should be made into bags and stuffed with moss. The bags were placed in a line and raised to the height of a man, and from the shelter of this rampart the besiegers fired upon their assailants without receiving any damage themselves. Some say the Mackenzies placed the wives of the Macleods upon the top of the rampart; at any rate, the castle was quickly surrendered.

Many a wild and impossible story has been invented from the shadowy remembrance of the tragedies of the seventeenth century, of which the following is an instance: –



MacLeod by M clan

Neil Macleod, called in the legend *Odhar*, i.e. dun, the uncle of Torquil Dubh Chief of Lewis, attacked the Morrisons on the Habost moor, but was defeated. Neil sent to Harris for assistance, and came again to Habost; but the Morrisons had taken shelter in Dun Eystein. The Macleods arrived at night and marched to Dun Eystein, when one of the Morrisons, unaware of the presence of an enemy, came out of the hut. An Uig man shot an arrow – *Baobh an Dorlaich*, literally, the Fury of the Quiver, the last arrow of the eighteen that should be used – at him, and he was struck by the arrow, which passed through his body. The wounded Morrison cried for help; the rest came out, and Allan, the eldest, and by far the bravest, of them sprang across the ravine which separated Dun Eystein from the adjacent cliff, and loudly demanded that the assassin should be given up to him. The Macleods denied all knowledge of the deed; but Allan reproached them with cowardice, and said, “If you have come to fight, you ought, according to the laws of war from the creation of the world, to have waited till there was light enough to see each other.” He then asked Neil for his *Leigh*, i.e. Doctor, to attend the wounded man. Neil, after some hesitation, consented; Allan took the *Leigh* under his arm and leaped back across the ravine with him into the dun. The wounded man died, however. The Morrisons fled from Dun Eystein to the mainland, whither Neil pursued; but the Morrisons had seen Neil crossing the Minch, and, slipping out from among the islands, tried to get back to Lewis. The Macleods ascended a hill, espied the briever’s birlin, and gave chase. There were only Allan Morrison and his two brothers in the boat; so Allan Mor, who was very strong, set his two brothers to row against himself, and composed and sung this *iorram* or boat song, with which the Ness fishermen still lighten their toil.

The chorus, “*Nailbh i’s na-ho-ro*” is repeated after every line: –

Iomair a Choinnaich fhir mo chridhe;
 Iomair i gu laidair righinn;
 Gaol nam ban og’s gradh nighean.
 Dh’iomrain fein fear mu dhithis,
 ‘S nam eiginn e fear inu thri.
 Tha eagal mor air mo chridhe
 Gur i biorlinn Neil tha’ tighinn,
 No eathair Mhic Thormaid Idhir.



Macdonell of Glengarry by *McIan*

'S truagh nach robh mi fein's Nial Odhar
 An'lagan beag os ceann Dhun Othail;
 Biodag nam laimh, is e bhi fodham, –
 Dhearbhinu feinn gun teidheadh i domhain;
 'S gun biodh fuil a chleibh 'na ghabhail.

Chorus: "Na liv ee,'s na-ho-ro;" words have no meaning.

Row, Kenneth, man of my heart;
 Row with vehement might;
 The darling of damsels, and the beloved of girls.

I myself could row against two;
 And may be against three.
 There is great fear on my heart
 That it is Neil's barge that is coming.
 Or the boat of the son of dun Thormod.

It is a pity that I and dun Neil were not
 In a small hollow above Dun Oo-ail;
 A dirk in my hand, and he beneath.
 I would be sure it should go deep,
 And that the blood of his breast should flow down his reins.

Neil overtook the Morrisons a short time after they had passed Dun Othail (pro. *Dun Oo-ail*), where they fought desperately. Neil attacked them on one side, and the Harris men, in a second boat, on the other. Allan engaged Neil's party and killed nearly all his men, when Neil exclaimed, "My men, something must be done, or the monster (*biast*) will not leave a head on the shoulders of any one of us." They fastened a sword to the end of an oar, therewith to stab Allan, who, when he saw it coming, made such a desperate blow as to cut the oar in two, but striking into the gunnel of the boat his sword stuck fast, and before he could extricate it the Macleods closed round him, and both himself and his two brothers were killed. They were buried in a small hollow a little above Dun Othail.

The history of the family of the Hereditary Judges is not closed with the death, nearly three centuries ago, at Inverkarkaig, of Judge John Morison, the last Brieve of Lewis, and the loss of the chieftainship; nor is it closed with the completion of the interesting and valuable pamphlet of Captain Thomas.

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The record of this remarkable family is one of thrilling interest and an air of romance still lingers about the descendants of the Brieve of Lewis. In various walks of life, in peaceful scenes, in foreign climes, they are as celebrated as were their ancestors in the feuds and bloody dramas of the past. In Lewis, the Fatherland, in Canada, Australia, and the United States, their record can be traced. In the field of discovery, in politics, in the conflicts of arms, in business and mercantile life, their history is one of progress, and their record is one of honor.

Morrison Country

DETAIL MAP OVERLEAF

The map used below and overleaf is intended basically as a pictorial reference. It is accurate enough, however, to be correlated with a current map. The clan boundaries are only marginally correct. No precise boundaries were kept in early times and territories were fluctuating frequently.



