

tory, and strong relations developed between the two clans.

The relationship was so strong that MacRaes were often Constables of Eilean Donan Castle, a MacKenzie fortification, and MacRaes often garrisoned the castle. The MacKenzie Chief also held the title Earl of Seaforth, and the MacRaes, having no land of their own and no Chief, rented land from Seaforth. They also provided warriors for the MacKenzies' power struggles with the MacDonalds and other squabbles. As late as 1777, MacRaes provided many of the recruits for the Seaforth Highlanders, Britain's 78th Regiment of Foot. Thus Seaforth served almost as Chief of Clan MacRae. It was in response to Seaforth's call that the MacRaes marched off to the Battle of Sheriffmuir in 1715. The battle was a defeat for the Highlanders and the Jacobite cause, but it was a disaster for Clan MacRae: their gallant stand stalled the English right, but it also produced the "58 widows of Kintail." Perhaps because of those losses, the MacRaes did not, as a clan, take part in the 1745 Jacobite Rising. Even so, following the crushing defeat at Culloden in 1746, the Highlanders' world turned upside down, even that of clans that weren't present.

The aftermath of "the '45" brought English oppression to the Highlands, the banning of Highland heritage such as the bagpipes, tartan and kilts, and the fraying of the Highland way of life. Many began to leave the Highlands in this period, most often for British North America. Probably the greatest number of MacRaes landed in Eastern North Carolina, although large groups also settled in Virginia, New Jersey and Upstate New York.

The exodus from the Highlands accelerated in the 1790's with the introduction of sheep into the Highlands and the brutal Highland Clearances. Most of these later emigrants went to lands still loyal to the British crown. Today, the greatest number of MacRaes is in either the United States or Canada, but the greatest density of MacRaes is in Australia and particularly in New Zealand. In their new lands, they have thrived. They've been farmers and businessmen, entrepreneurs, doctors and lawyers and everything from a Governor to a movie star to the developer of the Speedo swimsuit.

A Clan Without a Chief

The last male heir to the Earldom of Seaforth died in 1815, and the MacKenzies sold all their holdings in Kintail during the 19th century. With the MacKenzies gone, some MacRaes felt that, as a proper clan, they should have a Chief and, around the turn of the 20th century, began to seek to have a Chief declared. But Chiefs are not elected. The post is hereditary; when the line of descent lapses or is unclear, the proper Chief must be recognized by a gathering of the clan's most prominent members, a *derbhfhine*. The right to the Chief's arms must then be officially recognized by a Scottish official, Lord Lyon King of Arms. The Clan MacRae Society of North America was founded, in part, to explore the history of the Clan and investigate who might properly be recognized as Chief. Although some MacRaes hold that our 15th century progenitor, Black Finlay, Son of Christopher, was Chief, there is no evidence that clansmen ever recognized Finlay or his descendants as Chief.

The Chiefship of a Highland clan is closely connected to the clan's symbols. The clan crest and motto are derived from the Arms of the Chief. For MacRaes, the crests for sale commercially are either from the arms of Alexander of Inverinate (above) or from the arms of John of Conchra (at right), Inverinate and Conchra referring to two large estates in Kintail and the families that controlled them. For both, the motto is

"Fortitudine," a Latin word that translates as "by strength" or "with courage." Unfortunately, just as with Black Finlay, there is no evidence that clansmen ever recognized either man as Chief, and with great regret the Society has suspended the search for a Chief. That leads to a further complication.



Under Scottish law, a coat of arms belongs to an individual – there is no such thing as a "Family Coat of Arms" – and ordinary clansmen have the right to display only the crest from the Chief's arms. Neither Inverinate nor Conchra qualify as Chief so MacRaes, strictly speaking, have no right to wear a crest unless it is from their own arms. To avoid this awkward situation, the Clan MacRae Society sought, and was granted, its own corporate coat of arms with accompanying crest. The motto adopted is Latin: *Ex uno ad plures*, or "From one to many," a proper sentiment for "the Scattered Children of Kintail."



The badge of the MacRaes, in ancient times attached to their bonnets for identification, is the fir club moss. Their battle cry was "Sgurr Uaran" (pronounced "Skoor Ooran!"), the name of a beloved mountain peak in Kintail.

Eilean Donan Castle

Eilean Donan Castle, so closely associated with Clan MacRae, was destroyed during the Jacobite Rising of 1719 and lay in ruins until 1912. At that time the islet of Eilean Donan was purchased by a British Army Officer, Lt. Col. John MacRae-Gilstrap, a descendant of the Conchra MacRaes. MacRae-Gilstrap commissioned Farquhar MacRae, a well-known contractor and stone mason, to rebuild the castle. Today it stands proudly at the confluence of Lochs Alsh, Duich and Long.

Said to be the most photographed castle in Scotland, it welcomes all visitors, and especially MacRaes.

The Clan MacRae Society
Of North America

The Clan MacRae Society of North America was established in 1973 with Hugh MacRae II as its first President. In coming together those MacRaes hoped to honor and to maintain their Highland heritage, to encourage the study of the history and traditions of the MacRaes, to facilitate genealogical studies of and by MacRaes and to provide a vehicle for interactions among the Scattered Children of Kintail. The Society originally encompassed both the United States and Canada, but in 2001, a Clan MacRae Society of Canada was organized and joined those of the U.S., of the United Kingdom and of Australia and New Zealand. Communication and cooperation is maintained among all these societies. Today, the Clan MacRae Society N.A. has a website and a Clan Society genealogist who will offer help to members of the Society. We also publish a newsletter with information about MacRae doings and historical and general interest pieces. We have underwritten the republication of Alexander MacRae's *History of the Clan MacRae* and sponsored historical research. A number of our Commissioners are enthusiastic keepers of clan tents at games and festivals all over the United States and show our tartan and our heritage proudly. The Grandfather Mountain Highlanders Pipe Band has performed and competed successfully in both the U.S. and Scotland. The Society provides

some financial support for the band and takes great pride in their kilts of MacRae tartan. The Society has also given assistance to



the organizers of several MacRae Tours of Scotland.

A General Meeting of the Society is held each year, most often in conjunction with the Grandfather Mountain Highland Games in July. For information about the Society, contact President Dean McCraw at 912-596-8624 or email dean.mccraw1@gmail.com.

*Clan MacRae is online at www.macrae.org and on Facebook as **Clan MacRae Society of North America!***

Also of Interest: A selection of MacRae tartans can be seen at www.scottishtartansgiftshop.com

DNA tests, results and interpretation: www.familytreedna.com/public/MacRae

Eilean Donan Castle: www.eileandonancastle.com

Blades by Mike McRae



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Clan MacRae: The Wild MacRaes

In English, the Gaelic name MhicRath may be rendered in any of the following ways:

Cra, Crae, Craith, Cratty, Craw, Cray, Cre, Crea, Creath, Creay, Cree, Creith, Graith, Grath, Graw, MacAra, MacArra, MacCarra, MacCra, MacCrach, MacCrae, MacCraith, MacCrary, MacCrate, MacCraw, MacCray, MacCre, MacCrea, MacCreath, MacCreay, MacCree, MacCrie, MacCrow, MacCroy, MacGraith, MacGrath, MacGraw, Machrae, Machray, Machrie, Mackray, Mackre, Mackreath, Mackree, MacRa, MacRach, MacRae, Macraith, Macrath, Macraw, MacRay, MacRe, MacRea, Macreath, Macree, Macrie, MacWray, MacWreath, Magraith, Magrath, Makre, McCra, McCrae, McCraw, McCray, McCrea, McCreath, McCree, Mcgrath, McGraw, McRa, McRae, Mcraith, Mcrath, Mcreath, McRee, Mcrie, Ra, Rae, Raith, Rath, Raw, Ray, Rea, Reay, Ree, Reath, Rhea, Rie, Wray, Wreath

Some families use "Mac" and others "Mc," but there is no actual distinction between the spellings, and other variants such as M'CRA and even WARMACK are also seen.

History of the MacRaes

"Rath" translates as "grace" or "good fortune" and "mhic" as "son of" or "from." So "Son of Grace" may have originated in the church with a priest or holy man, or "From Good Fortune" may have been attached to a man who was simply thought lucky. Since the name appears to have arisen in several places at different times, it most likely carried both meanings. A MhicRath is first recorded in Ireland in AD 448, but in continuous use, the name MacRae appears in Scotland in the 1200's in the region of Clunes, west of Inverness. Sometime after 1300, the MacRaes left Clunes for unknown reasons. One group moved the short distance to Braham and the Black Isle, but a larger group moved westward to Kintail. These movements carried the MacRaes into MacKenzie terri-