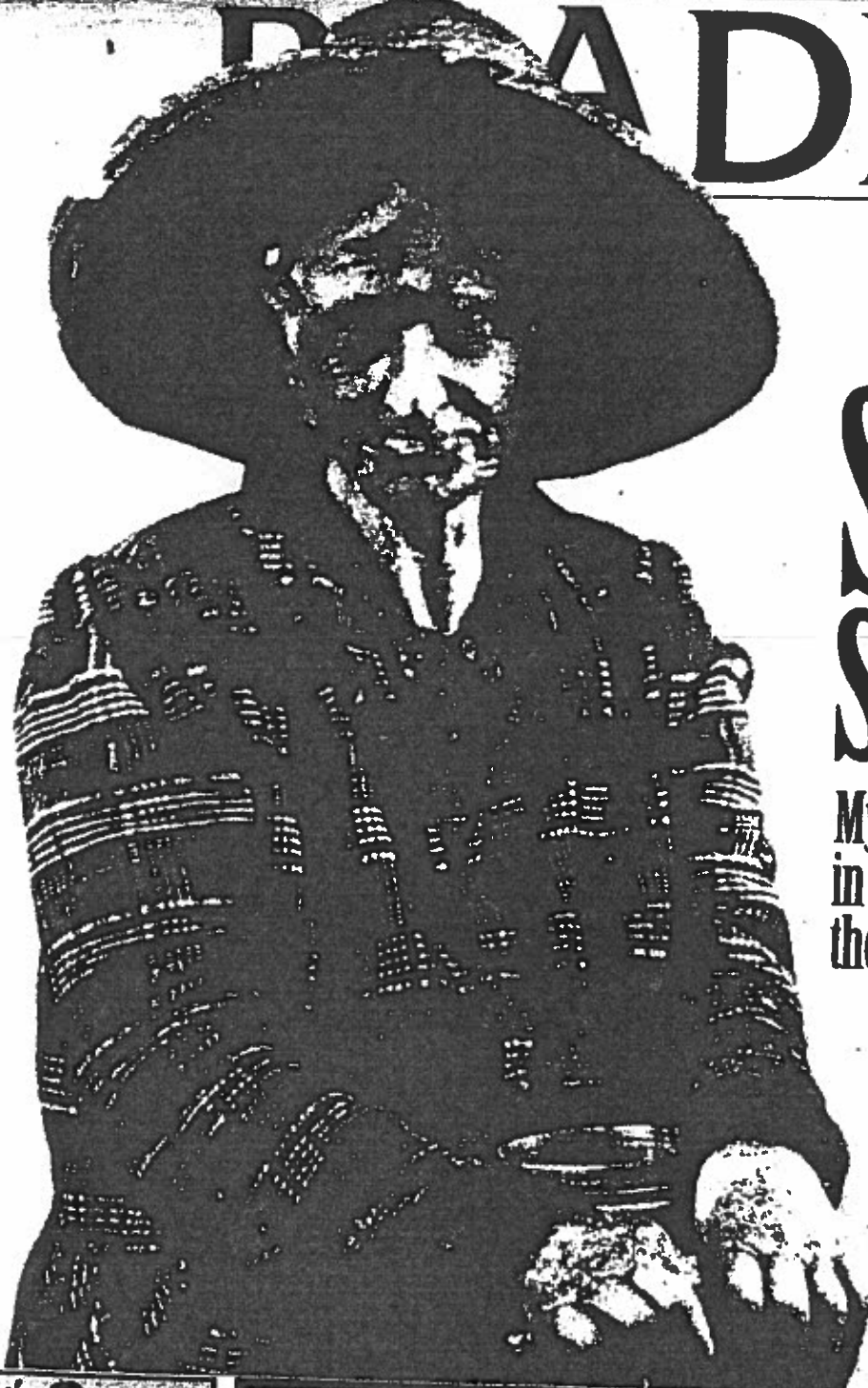


The New Brunswick

READER



■ Inside Saturday's
New Brunswick Reader



■ **Sole survivor**
Mysie MacDonald showed strength living alone in the woods

Sole. SURVIVOR

Mysie MacDonald lived alone in the woods, outlasting all the other Scottish settlers

It's Draperies
& Vinyl
tters
In Sale
0020
rect, Saint John

INSIDE

A Saturday insert to the
TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL

- ◆ Fishing through ice 6
- ◆ Technology changes so fast 9
- ◆ Herb Curtis column 11
- ◆ Sightings 18
- ◆ Books 20



Sarah Mallory-Wright
(506) 692-5000

THERE FOR YOU
THROUGH ALL
OF LIFE'S CHANGES
WE LIVE WHERE
YOU LIVE®

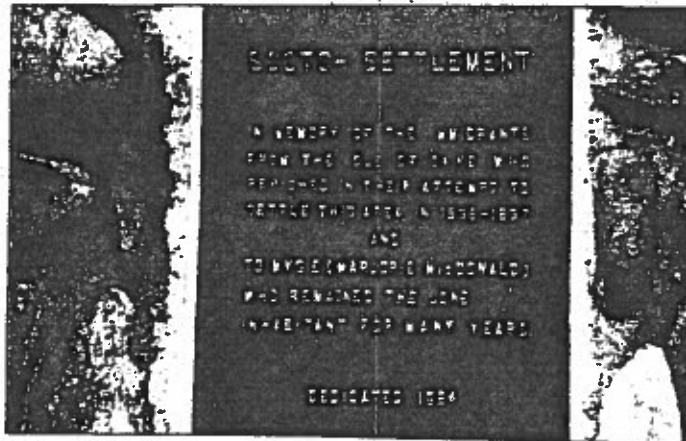


MEET A GREAT NEIGHBOUR
STATE FARM IN THE™
Providing Insurance and

Sole survivor

Mysie MacDonald lived alone in the woods, outlasting her fellow Scottish settlers

by Sharon Bird Anderson



Sharon Bird Anderson

Above left and right, a plaque was placed on this monument made from river stone to honour the immigrants from the Isle of Skye - including Mysie MacDonald.

In 1890, Mysie MacDonald, her dead brother slung over her shoulders, walked barefoot approximately 11 miles from her home in the deserted Old Scotch Settlement to the Catholic Cemetery in Stanley.

After her brother was buried, Mysie, became the last remaining inhabitant a community founded by Scottish settlers. She lived alone in the woods for 16 years, becoming famous for her self-sufficiency and eccentricity. She trapped mammals, fished, picked nuts and made jams. Perhaps it was because of her strength that she was feared by some. Rumours spread that she was a witch.

It is undeniable that she had a stubborn will to live, and knew how to make use of her wild surroundings. She was a survivor in every sense of the word.

Mysie, born Margory MacDonald, was eight years old when she and her family entered the wilderness of New Brunswick in 1836. After a six-week sail to Saint John, another boat took the settlers from Saint John to Fredericton. The settlers then travelled north through dense forests to Scotch Settlement by horse team. A recorded 45 Scottish families, mostly from the Isle of Skye, came to the Stanley area that year. (Another 15 families from

England also settled in the area now known as English Settlement.)

Many of the immigrants were fishermen who had no skills as farmers and woodsmen. They were ill prepared to establish a community.

Like many, the MacDonald family was attracted to Canada by the NB and NS Land Company advertisements. Officials were so anxious to establish new communities that they advertised land and other services at unbelievable prices. Norman Nicholson, an agent for the company, offered free passage to Canada for families. However, once the ship was 40 miles out to sea, he forced the settlers to sign documents that

would see them reimburse him for their passage in two to three years. Nicholson promised 100-acre plots of land with five acres cleared and crops ready for harvest upon their arrival - along with comfortable cabins to live in. Medical attention was to be available during the voyage as well as in the community once settled in Canada.

These promises led the Scottish immigrants to believe that their transition to the new country would be easy. However, when they arrived in November, their log cabins were without windows, doors, floors, or moss chinking in the walls. The settlers complained until they received 2,500 board feet of lumber in order to finish their drafty cabins. No crops had been planted.

During the first Canadian winter, 48 out of 121 men, women and children in Scotch Settlement starved or froze to death. The dead included Mysie's father. Those who were ill received no medical attention. The first doctor arrived in the fall of 1837, stayed only a short time and it was June of 1841 before a replacement doctor appeared in the area.

Some Scottish families gave up and moved into Stanley or farther away where supplies were more accessible. A few remained in Scotch Settlement but only for a short time.

The 1861 census shows Mysie still lived with her family. The census lists Mysie as well as her mother, widow; her brothers James, farmer; Donald, trapper; and Charles, general labourer. Mysie would be 33 years old.

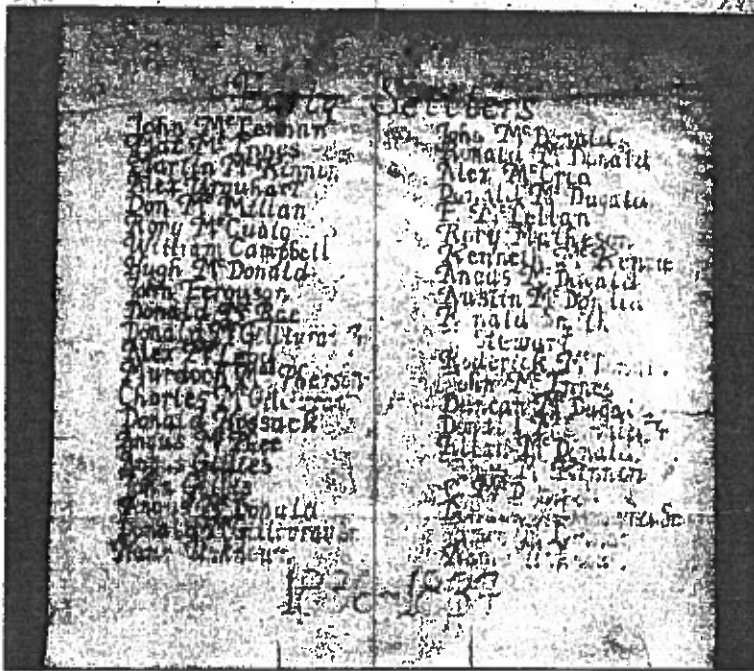
Rumour has it that Mysie was listed as an "idiot" in that year's census but research through the Provincial Archives found no such comment. Some suggest that Mysie was ill during the census taking, and may have been delirious when the census official came to call.

There seems to be little story regarding Mysie until her family members died and she was left alone. Whether rumour or fact, a legend surrounds this incredible woman. It is clear she was determined to survive.

In an era when people weren't always aware of how easily disease could be spread, Mysie was smart enough, when rapping at a neighbour's, to bring her own rap and spoon carved from some sort of stone.

Winalow Jones, who grew up in the area and is now in his eighties, recalls the small cabin Mysie constructed near Tay Falls. She lived here while working on local farms pulling weeds, thinning turpines, hoeing, or cutting logs. She fixed pieces of birch bark around the building much like shingles to act as protection against the wind.

All those interviewed confirm that this eccentric lady never begged for anything



Sharon Bird Anderson

The 42 men who brought their families to Old Scotch Settlement in 1836 are listed on this framed sheet of paper, located in the Old Scotch Settlement Cemetery.

but always worked for her handouts, often taking home in her knapsack food or provisions. On one occasion after a day of hard work, she carried home a pig's head that she would use to make headcheese.

Through generations, Mrs. Spillman's family related the story of Mysie working in a field turning up soil. As two men

approached Mysie, shouting obscenities at her, she stood holding her curved knife for them to see. They gave up their prank quickly.

While Mysie may have been somewhat dependent on the nearest communities of Woodlands and Tay Falls for some provisions, she was mostly self-sufficient.

Locals had a hard time besting her to the nearby fishing hole first thing in the morning. Pulling her crayfish (trout) carefully from among the submerged rocks at the river's bottom, she proudly took her catch home. The deep hole in the bend of the Tin Kettle Stream is still nicknamed Mysie's Fishing Hole.

Mysie not only cut her own firewood and logs as needed, but also made brooms. Using lengths cut from small trees, she whittled the thin strands on one end. Near the top of the strands, she wrapped snare wire to keep them from breaking. After peeling the bark from the remainder of the wood, she cut the entire piece an appropriate length, which included a smooth handle. Always barefoot in the summer, she walked from the Nashwaak River to the Miramichi River to barter or sell her brooms in exchange for goods that she needed. Jones remembers Mysie's stiff wooden broom used in his grandfather's barn.

The hour-long walk that she made to Woodlands during the summer months, she also travelled by hand-made snowshoes in winter. Trapping for food and furs, she exchanged these for supplies on her once-a-week trek into Woodlands for supplies. Steve Davidson's family describes Mysie wrapped in furs and sleeping in a pork barrel to keep warm while waiting to begin her journey back to Scotch Settlement.

While some grew accustomed to her presence, others felt she brought evil. On more than one occasion, people accused her of witchcraft. Her knack for accurate fortune-telling caused some to become suspicious. They reasoned that she couldn't know what would happen unless she had cast a spell on them. Two men did not heed Mysie's advice and turned back in the direction they had come. Part of their wagon fell apart as they started down Stanley Hill; the wagon flipped and killed one of the two men.

Jean Spillman, who lives in Nashwaak Village, recalled her grandfather's fear of Mysie. Sitting in his grandmother's kitchen, Mysie had come to visit and he remembered her unkempt hair and long fingernails which, due to lack of scissors, were never trimmed.

The positive medicinal effects of Mysie's Labrador Tea, made from the native plant, caused people to condemn her for suspected potions even though they were beneficial.

Mysie gathered berries or hazel and beech nuts in the wilderness to eat and often sold some at nearby stores. When she ventured onto private property, she wasn't always welcomed. It is rumoured that she barely escaped with her life after trespassing on one neighbourhood farm as the owner took shots at her.

The woman of Old Scotch Settlement was the last to remain there. With all the

Mysie's tea

Preparation for one cup of tea:

Use one to two teaspoons of crushed Labrador Tea Leaves brewed with hot water for five to six minutes. Do not boil. May sweeten with honey.

Good for flu, cold or other ailments.

- Labrador Tea Plant (*Iedum groenlandicum*) is found in spruce forests and is more common in wet sites such as bogs or along brooks
- Prefers acidic soil
- Included in moose diet
- Strong aromatic leaves can be made into herbal tea or used as regular table tea
- High vitamin C content
- Ingredient in folk medicine used by natives

■ Medicinal qualities: used externally for skin disorders, internally to stimulate nerves and stomach, to cure coughs and hoarseness.

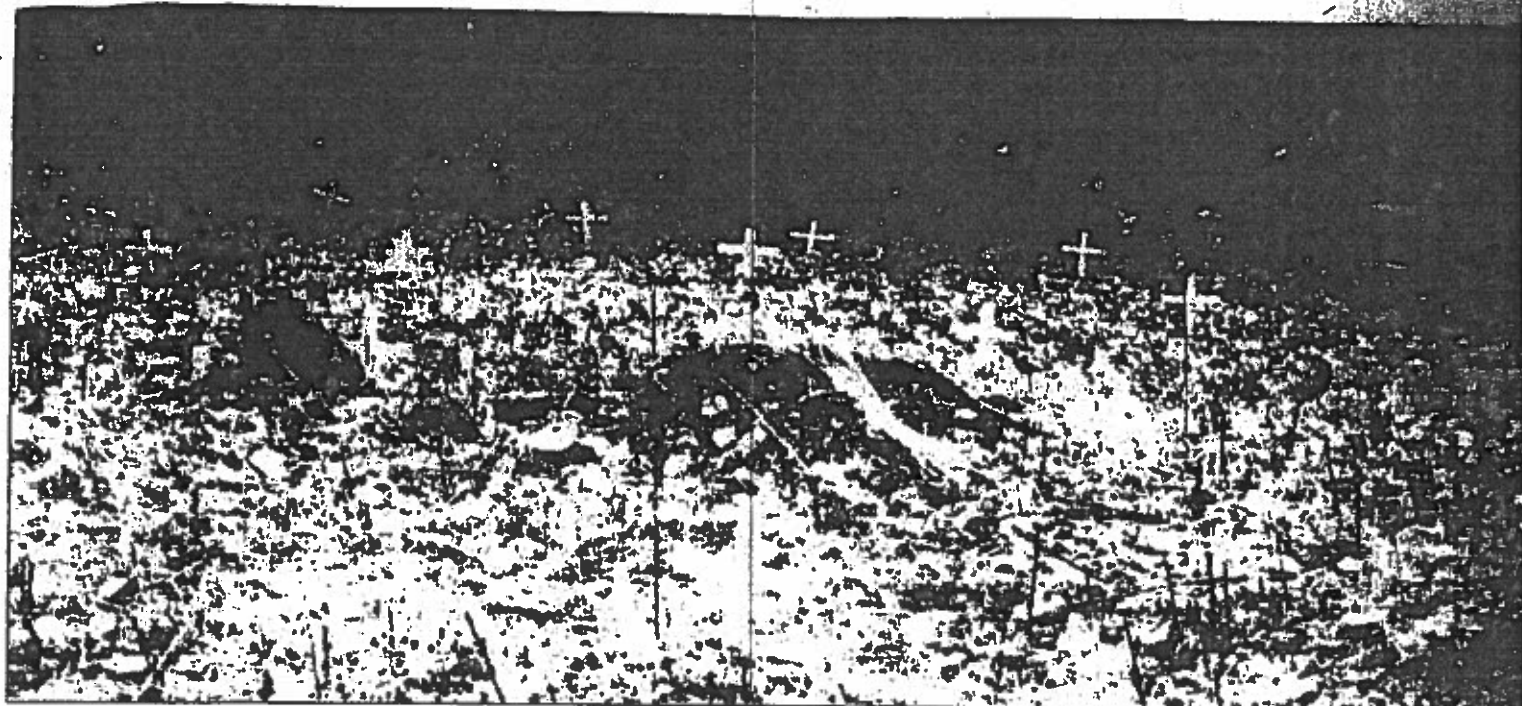
Please note that the Reader does not encourage use of any wild plants without first consulting those knowledgeable in the field. Some plants are highly poisonous.

Information confirmed from the following references.

■ <http://www.rock.org/earl/bwca/nature/shrub/iedum.html>

■ <http://www.labrador-tea.com>

■ *Wildflowers of America*, Crown Publishers Inc. New York, 4th printing, 1984. H.W. Right and New York Botanical Garden.



Children from the Stanley school made and painted 48 white crosses and donated them to the Old Scotch Settlement Cemetery.

Sharon Bird Ande

conveniences of today, one could not possibly imagine the helplessness Mysie and her people must have felt those first winters. In less than six months, 48 people died an agonizing death. The survivors, many themselves ailing, dug shallow graves among huge granite rocks. Husbands and wives buried spouses; parents buried their children; siblings aided in the burial of siblings.

One hundred and sixty eight years after

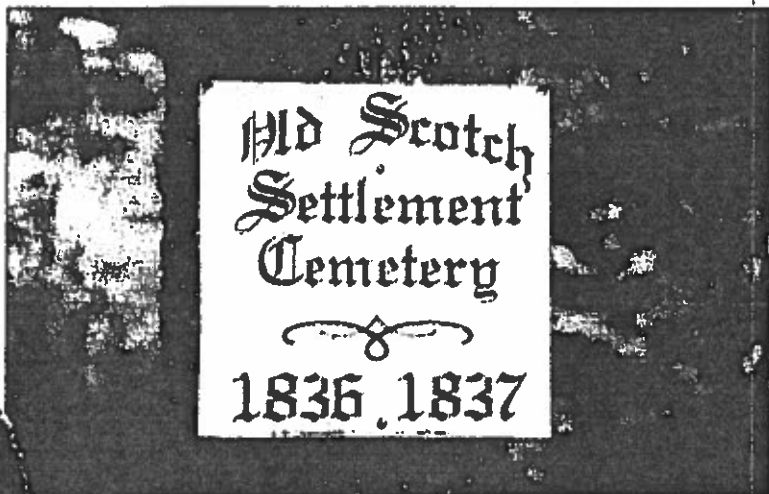
the MacDonalds and other Scottish settlers arrived in the New Brunswick wilderness, little remains of their community. Guided there by Sarah and Vernon Wilkins, I saw the hollowed ground cellars built across from each other on the Old Stanley Road. They were almost unrecognizable. Mounds of collapsed rocks that once stood in the corner of their dwellings as fireplaces lay covered with many years' growth of moss. A short

distance away, in an area only inhabited by wildlife, is the small cemetery where a river stone monument stands as tribute to those who endured hardship and sorrow. Attached to a tall maple tree behind the monument is a list of the 42 men who brought their families to the area in 1836. Many of the family names are still common in York County.

Nearly 100 years after Mysie's death in 1906, the Old Scotch Settlement

community may be gone, but Mysie's kind end lives on through people in awe of her unbelievable strength.

If anyone has further information on MacDonald's or other families that lived Old Scotch Settlement, please e-mail Sharon Bird Anderson apaws@nbnet.nb.ca This settlement is not to be confused with the Scotch Settlement in Mactaquac, N.B.



Sharon Bird Anderson

Sign is posted near the path leading to the Old Scotch Settlement Cemetery.

Citizens restored Old Scotch Settlement Cemetery in 1984

In 1984, as part of a Bicentennial project, a group of local citizens took it upon themselves to restore the Old Scotch Settlement Cemetery. Countless hours were spent clearing mature trees that grew up through shallow graves. People used metal bars and prodded the ground in order to determine where the graves were among the huge, granite rock formations.

Valley Forest Products donated an area of 10 acres surrounding the cemetery site that would not be harvested. Many volunteers donated time and materials to construct a monument from river stone complete with Celtic cross. Valley Forest Products donated a plaque for the

monument honouring the Scottish settlers and Mysie MacDonald.

Children from the Stanley school made and painted 48 white crosses and donated them to the cemetery. A dedication ceremony included dignitaries from local communities and Fredericton, church representatives and citizens who paid special tribute to the almost forgotten settlers. To add a flavour of old Scotland, Donald Fraser and his daughter played Scottish tunes on bagpipes for those in attendance.

Volunteers continue to maintain the "calm" (burial ground) on a regular basis in order to preserve a piece of area history.

— Sharon Bird Anderson