

SIR RODERICK “RORY” MACLEOD, 13th CHIEF

1562-1626: SIR RODERICK “RORY” MACLEOD, 13th CHIEF (1595)

Roderick “Rory” MacLeod was born 1562, the second son from the marriage of Tormod and his first wife, Giles Julia MacLean. Of Rory Mor’s domestic life, and of his methods of governing his clan we know nothing, but the general impression left by the traditions is that he was a kind man and a wise ruler, who was loved by all who knew him.

Nearly half the original inheritance of the family had been wrested from Rory’s forebears by the MacDonalds, and were, *de facto*, (In fact) in their possession, but under the Charter of 1542 they were, *de jure*, (lawfully) MacLeod property. Rory was untiring in his efforts to recover them. Several letters were written to the King in 1615 to partitioned for their rightful return. Apparently the King did not interfere, and the dispute was submitted to arbitration. The lands were assigned to MacDonald, who was ordered to pay a large sum of money for them. Sir Rory was placed in possession of Sleat until he had paid himself the amount due out of the rents. Besides arranging these great and difficult matters with remarkable skill and address, Rory managed his estate exceedingly well and in his time its value advance by leaps and bounds.

By the time that Rory began to govern the land in 1590 the old feud with the MacDonalds of Clan Ranald had come to an end. Hence forth Rory was on excellent terms with Clan Ranald. Rory and Donald Gorme MacDonald, tired of inaction at home, went to Ireland, each of them taking five hundred men, to assist the Red O’Donnell in his struggle against the troops of Elizabeth. Nothing much came of the expedition, but it got the Chiefs into trouble with the Government. Elizabeth complained, and James, anxious to not to do anything to limit his succession to the English throne, ordered the two Chiefs to come home.

But then in 1601 there broke out a war between MacLeods and Donald Gorme MacDonald. They had been on friendly terms to go together to Ireland, and in an attempt to make peace Rory offered the hand of his sister to Donald Gorme Mor MacDonald. The marriage itself was subject to a contract called a handfast. In a handfast arrangement, a man and woman lived together as man and wife for up to a year and a day. If, during this

period, the woman bore a male child to be heir, then marriage would result. If not, then both parties returned to their respective families.

There was always smoldering hostility between the two clans on account of the claims of the MacLeods to *Donald Gorme's* estates. This was brought to a head by a deadly insult which *Donald* offered to *Rory*. After a year and a day, *Margaret MacLeod* had not borne a child, male or female. Furthermore, at some point during this year, she had lost the sight in one eye. *Donald MacDonald*, having no further use for *Margaret MacLeod*, decided to send her back to her brother. He tied her, facing backwards, onto a one-eyed horse, led by a one-eyed servant and followed by a one-eyed mongrel dog, and sent all four back to Dunvegan Castle. *Rory* was furious. He declared that if there had been no bonfires to celebrate the marriage, there should be some very fine ones to celebrate the divorce.

Rory MacLeod, incensed by the insult to his sister, and ultimately to himself and his clan, once again declared war on the clan *MacDonald*. He gathered his clan, and carried fire and sword into Trotternish devastated the Trotternish peninsula in the north of Skye, which prompted *MacDonalds* to attack MacLeod land in Harris. They also by invaded Harris, where they killed great number of people and carried away many cattle.

The battle of Carinish 1601: The MacLeods then invaded North Uist to recover the cattle and other effects that had been placed there for safety. *Rory* sent 40 men under his cousin *Donald Glas MacLeod* to seize goods that the locals had put for safety in the Trinity Temple at Carinish. As the raiders ate breakfast in the church, they were surprised by twelve MacDonalds led by *Donald Mac Iain of Clan Ranald*, who led the MacLeods into an ambush. Only two MacLeods survived the Battle of Carinish; *Donald MacLeod* was among the dead. *Rory* believing that large forces were at hand, withdrew from the island and went to Harris meditating vengeance. The raids were carried out with so much inveteracy (persistence) that both clans were brought to the brink of ruin, and many of the natives of the devastated districts were forced to sustain themselves by killing and eating their horses, dogs, and cats. These battles became known as the Wars of the One-Eyed Woman.

A fortnight after the battle of Carinish a terrific gale sprang up, and *Donald Mac Iain of Clan Ranald*, who was on his way back to Skye to report his victory, was forced to seek shelter at Rodel in Harris Rowdell Harbor, where *Rory* was then living. *Rory's* page alone knew of the strangers arrival. He was wondering how he should tell his master the unwelcome news, when *Rory* rose, opened the lattice, looked forth on the howling

tempest, and said, “*Ah, If my worst enemy, Donald Mac Ian Vich Shamuais were here tonight, I would not refuse him shelter.*” The page saw his opportunity, and told **Rory** of Donald’s presence. **Rory** welcomed his guest with the best grace possible. At supper he had much ado to restrain his followers, especially when one of the **MacDonalds** said, “*Ah, a fortnight ago we were fighting at Carinish*” But no outbreak occurred during the meal. **Donald** refused **Rory’s** offer of a bed in the house, and went with him men to sleep in a barn. This barn **Rory’s** men set on fire, unaware that as the gale had let up, the MacDonalds had decided to sail away. The **MacDonalds** saw the flames as they were going out of Loch Rowdell, and were infuriated by the treachery of their host. (Which was done without **Rory’s** knowledge or approval.)

The feud continued to escalate, causing a lot of suffering among the people. **MacDonald** decided to end it with a decisive battle. **Rory MacLeod** went to seek the assistance of Archibald Campbell, 7th Earl of Argyll. **MacDonald** took the opportunity to launch an all-out invasion of northern Skye. The cattle seized in this attack were driven south to a traditional refuge for raiders. **Alexander**, the Chief’s brother, caught up with the **MacDonalds**. They joined battle late in the day and continued well into the night. The MacLeods were defeated, with the capture of **Alexander MacLeod** and 30 of his kinsmen. However, they inflicted heavy damage to the MacDonald’s also.

The Privy Council now intervened to end the feud. **MacDonald** was ordered to surrender himself to George Gordon, 1st Marquess of Huntly, and **Rory MacLeod** was to surrender to the Earl of Argyll. **MacDonald** agreed to release his prisoners, and the end of the feud was celebrated with three weeks of feasting and festivities at Dunvegan Castle. Aside from a brief flare-up in 1603, that was the end of violence between the two clans.

Rory started out his reign in good favor of the King, however, his invasion of Coigeach and Loch Broom in the company with Torquil Dubh MacLeod, and failing to appear before the Council and produce the titles to his estates as ordered to do by the Act of 1597, put him in bad stead with the King. But by 1609 when James ordered all the Chiefs to meet at Iona, under the presidency of Bishop Knox, **Rory** attended and was again restored to the King’s favor. There the Chiefs agreed with the new rules laid down by the King. The 10 rules were:

1. *War between the clans was forbidden.*
2. *Each Chief must send some of his kinsmen to reside in the south as hostages for his good conduct.*

3. *Each Chief was to be held responsible for the malpractices of his clansmen.*
4. *Each Chief must appear annually before the Council in July to answer for his doing during the previous year.*
5. *The Chiefs' households were restricted to 6 guards and one galley.*
6. *The churches must be repaired and new ones built.*
7. *The Chiefs, and all owners of sixty or more cattle were to send their children to the south for education.*
8. *The consumption of liquor was to be curtailed.*
9. *The Chief was forbidden to receive "sorners" (roving warriors for hire) in his territory.*
10. *Hand fasting was forbidden.*

Gradually but quickly clan feuds came to an end, agriculture began to revive, cattle, the staple product of the country, began to be exported, and a state of prosperity was brought about in a short time, which only a few years before had seemed impossible.

In 1613 **Rory** undertook the long journey to London to see King James, by the King's own invitation. The King knighted him, and on June 1, 1613, he wrote three letters to the Council in Scotland. In the first he says Sir **Rory** has complained of the wrongs that were inflicted on him by the men of Knoydart, and ordered them to take steps for the punishment of the malefactors. In the second he commends Sir **Rory** to the "special favor of the Council." In the third letter the King appointed him as a "Justice of our Peace."

Little is known of Sir **Rory**'s latter years except that he was exceedingly prosperous, and highly looked up to, respected, and loved. In 1623 he was made a Burgess of Edinburgh, a remarkable honor for a Highland Chief to receive. He was surrounded by a retinue of pipers, harpers, jesters, and bards. The pipers were MacCrimmons.

In 1626 he went on some business or another, to Fortrose, which was then known as the Cononry of Ross, and which was the great legal center of the Highlands. There he must have been taken ill, and there he died and was buried beneath a stone on which his coat of arms are cut and his name inscribed.

Rory married Isabel daughter of Donald MacDonald, 8th of Glengarry. Little is known of her. She lived 30 years after **Rory**'s death. They had 5 sons and 6 daughters:

1. John "Iain Mor" MacLeod,
14th Chief (1595-1649)
2. Moire, who Married John of
Moydart. (1596-1660)
3. Margaret who married Hector
MacLean (1598-1650)
4. Donald MacLeod, "of
Greshornish" (1601-1619)
5. Mary who married Sir Lauchlan MacLean of
Duar (1605-1660)
6. Sir Roderick Rory MacLeod "of
Talisker" (1606-1675)
7. Sir Norman MacLeod, "of
Bernera" (1614-1705)
8. William MacLeod, "of
Hamer" (1617-1698)
9. Daughter who married Lauchlan MacLean of
Coll (1620-1690)
10. Janet who married John MacLeod of
Rasay (1624-1700)
11. Florence who married Donald MacSweyn of
Roag (1626-1726)