



CLAN LAMONT SOCIETY of NORTH AMERICA



A Short History of Clan Lamont In Cowal

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Cowal, seen from across the Firth of Clyde looks like an island, a different country, here the sun shines longer and brighter. The massed hills and the narrow fjords which slice into their fastness aid this illusion of insularity and isolation. Cowal, in fact, nearly was an island. A little more of the twisting, tilting, scraping and scoring to which it was subjected in the eons of creation and this eastern promontory of the Argyll mainland would have been broken up by salt-water channels linking Loch Fyne with the Holy Loch and Loch Goil. Distant views of the Cowal hills are among the scenic treasures of the Clyde coast. When these hills deepen to purple in the evening and their feet are spangled with myriad's of lights reflected in the water they suggest the gaiety of a Mediterranean coastline. When their tops are sprinkled with snow they acquire a grandeur and remoteness more in keeping with the Northern Highlands than their nearness to the industrial belt of Scotland.

Cowal, which takes its name from Comgall, king of Dalriada and progenitor of one of the four main tribes of that early western kingdom, has the shape of a paw striking with three claws at the island of Bute. On three sides its shores are washed by the waters of the Firth of Clyde, the Kyles of Bute and Loch Fyne, while Loch Riddon, Loch Striven, the Holy Loch and Loch Goil run into its interior. To the north it is almost sealed off by mountains. Cowal still retains the wild beauty of lonely places much as they were in days when the clans settled their differences with blood shed, despite the string of communities, which grew last century and flourished as fashionable holiday resorts in the heyday of 'doon the watter' holidays, and the later-day mansions of merchant princes.

This rugged land was the homeland of the Clan Lamont. Powerful when Scotland was being shaped into a nation, and still a notable clan for some six centuries afterwards. As detached from the mainstream of Scottish history as their native hills are from the surrounding country, and "sweart" to get involved in events which stirred other Highland clans. Twice they sallied forth in force: first to oppose a claimant to the throne and secondly to help a king who was to lose his head. Both campaigns cost them dear.

Tradition ascribes to a chief of the clan the impressive title of 'Great Lamont of All Cowal', but, in what might be termed historic times, the northern boundary of the Lamont lands has been a line from the Holy Loch by Glendaruel to Kilfinan on Loch Fyne. Along the eastern shore of Loch Gilp, an inlet of Loch Fyne, were other lands of the Lamonts.

Around 500 AD, a migration to southwest Scotland from the Irish kingdom of Dal Riata in northern Ireland took place. Our oral traditions and written history state that this invasion was led by the three sons of Erc, the King of the Irish Dal Riata. This action was the start of the Scottish kingdom of Dalriada. During this time it is said that the Stone of Destiny was taken to Scotland by the Gaels that migrated to Argyll, and it became the Coronation Stone of the early Dalriadan kings at Dunstaffnage. Then, in the ninth century, the stone is believed to have been transported to Scone, the capital of the Southern Picts. It is here that the Picts and the Scots became unified in 844 under the direction of Kenneth MacAlpine.

Among the clans that dwelled within this Dalriadan kingdom (including the Outer and Inner Hebrides, and the region of Argyll) were : The Lamonts, The

MacNeils, The MacEwens, The Gilchrists and MacLachlans.

According to Skene, in the Table of the Descent of the Highland Clans, he separates what is known as the Gallgael to give five major clans, from which nine smaller clans are said to have sprung forth. One of these, the Siol Alpin, for instance, is considered the Royal line from which Kenneth MacAlpine came from. Considered the second of these great clans is the Siol Gillebray and within the sphere of influence of this group is clan MacNeil, MacLachlan (including Clan Gilchrist), MacEwen, and Lamont.

The Lamonts, like the MacNeils, MacEwens, MacSweens, and the Gilchrists, are said to descend from the royal line of the O'Neill High Kings of Ireland (who mainly resided in great numbers in Tir Eoghain [Tyrone], northern Ireland). The Lamonts are believed to descend directly from Anrothan O'Neill, who gave up his rulership in Ireland and moved to Argyll. From Anrothan's line came a man named Aodha Alainn O'Neil who had three sons: Gillachrist, Neill, and Dunslebhe. Gillachrist had a son, Lachlan, who is the ancestor of the MacLachlans; Neill, who is the ancestor of the MacNeills; Dunslebhe had two sons, Fearchar, who is the progenitor of the Lamonts, and Ewen, the ancestor of the MacEwens.

From Fearchar came a son named Laumon and it is from him that the Clan Lamont received its name. Some sources say that these same Lamonts were known at one time as MacErchar from Fearchar (as in the original Dal Riata MacErc). It is clear that this clan has very old roots in the Kingdom of Dalriada, evidenced not only by the previous name MacErchar and the tie with the original kingdoms of northern Ireland, but also from centuries

old conflicts with the Clan Diarmaid, or Campbell

In 1235, Sir Laumon, signed a charter granting lands to the Paisley Abbyll This charter is still in existence. Few clans can document their existence at such an early date. Sir Walter Scott refers to Sir Laumon in Antiquary as "Lamon mor ", or the Great Lamont in English.

This Laumon must have been a warrior of great renown for the clan to adopt his name. His forebears claimed descent from the kings of Ireland. He had Norse blood in his veins and his mother may have been a daughter of the great Somerled. Several families of Lamonts, some of them barons who held land direct from the Crown, adopted different patronymics but were styled 'beloved kinsmen' by the chief, and, with the passage of time, they became more closely knit. In the history of the clan written by the late Sheriff Hector McKechnie it is claimed that a Lamont - their arms bore a silver lion rampant - was the ancestor of the Lyons of Glamis.

Laumon's grandson, Sir John, supported the MacDougalls of Lorne against Bruce. The Lamonts of Ardlamont, however, who held their land as vassals of the High Steward in Bute, may have fought in Bruce's bodyguard at Bannockburn. When Bruce was secure on the Scottish throne the Lamont chief suffered with the House of Lorne and the clan's land was claimed by the king's loyal supporter, Campbell, Black Knight of Lochawe. By the end of the 14th century a great deal of the original territory of the clan had been lost ; and thus began a feud between the Lamonts and the Campbells which continued on and off for centuries in spite of considerable intermarriage .

A Lamont seeking to tread in the footsteps of his ancestors must follow the by-ways into the heart Of Nether Cowal to reach the scattered properties once held by the many cadet families, and perhaps it would be better if, like his forebears, he takes to the sea. And where are there finer cruising water than those which encompass the old Lamont lands?

The starting point might well be the Holy Loch now known throughout the world since it became a Polaris submarine

base. The Holy Loch owes its name to a cell established there in the 6th century by St. Mun or Fintan Munna, a disciple of St. Columba. There is a Lamont tradition that an early chief brought home from the Holy Land soil for a burial place on the shore of the loch. The chief who made this pilgrimage may be buried beneath one of the 'crusader stones' in the old church of Kilfinan. Another Holy Loch tradition is that early in the 15th century, when a son of Campbell of Lochawe died in the Lowlands and a great snowstorm prevented his body being carried home, the Lamont chief gave to the Knight of Lochawe "A grave of flags wherein to bury thy son in thy distress". The church of Kilmun passed to the Campbells and became a burial place of their chiefs.

In the 17th century wars of Montrose, Sir John, 14th chief, who had been knighted by King Charles, after much shilly-shallying, joined Argyll's Covenanting army and in the inglorious rout of that force at Inverlochy he and his brother were taken prisoner. He then threw in his lot with Montrose the Royalist general. Archibald, the chief's brother, with Colkitto's fighting Irish, crossed Loch Long in boats provided by the Lamonts and landed at the Point of Strone. After defeating a Campbell force in the heights above the point the Royalist army mustered at Toward and then harried far and wide in the Campbell lands. The Lamonts had their share in this killing and plundering particularly in North Cowal, and they attacked the old tower of Kilmun and the bishop's house in Dunoon.

The old castle of Dunoon, of which scarcely a trace remains above the pier, may have been built by the Lamonts and held by them until the time of Bruce. The castle passed to the Stewarts, and, when it became a royal stronghold the Campbells were appointed its hereditary keepers. John, 10th chief, and the Earl of Argyll were driven out of Dunoon in the Lennox rebellion of 1544 when they fired at the rebel fleet passing down river, and a landing force burned and plundered the town.

Dunoon is a place of grim memory for the Lamonts. There the Campbells carried out one of the massacres which stain their clan's history. In mitigation they could claim they were dealing judicially with

traitors. In 1646 the Campbells made a concentrated attack on the Lamont castles of Toward and Ascog, and, when the garrisons surrendered under guarantee of liberty, ignored the terms of capitulation. The survivors of the defenders were carried in boats to Dunoon and in the church were sentenced to death. About 100 were shot or stabbed to death and another 36 of 'the special gentlemen' of the Lamonts were hanged from a tree in the churchyard and dead and dying were buried in pits. The chiefs and his close kin were hustled away to Inveraray, where some were hanged the chief and brothers being kept prisoner for five years. It was 16 years before the ringleaders of the massacre were brought to justice. The Clan Lamont Society in 1909 raised a monument on the spot where so many met their deaths.

The east coast of Cowal has close links with the Lamonts of Knockdow, sons of the Red Baron, the last Lamont house to remain in the ancestral country. Dunloskinmore, beside Loch Loskin above Kirn, was held for a time by a branch of this family. Innellan was originally a farm feued from Argyll by Lamont of Knockdow and lost about the time of the Reformation. Argyll however made Knockdow baillie of Toward-nuilt land which takes its name from the burn running down from Innellan Hill to the sea at Toward Point. An old tale has it that Argyll offered the Red Baron of Knockdow this land if he would bring to him at Dunoon the head of the Lamont chief. Knockdow found out that the chief was in the habit of riding every day along the Toward shore. By pretending that he had an important message to deliver, he arranged with the chief's chaplain, a Campbell, to signal to him when the chief approached, while he, mounted on his swiftest horse, waited in hiding. When the chief appeared, however, his chaplain shouted to him to run for his life. Lamont galloped to his castle with the Red Baron in pursuit and gaining rapidly. As he reached the castle gate inches separated the two riders. The Red Baron slashed at the chief's head, missed and cut off the tail of the chief's horse.

The Earl of Argyll later settled his dispute with Lamont and ordered Knockdow to forget their arrangement. Knockdow was a match for the wily Earl

and replied that unless he got the land promised to him he would be back within a week with Lamont's head. He secured the land. It was a descendant of the Red Baron who in 1811 provided land and building materials for the erection of Toward lighthouse.

Toward Castle was built in the 14th-15th centuries. Mary, Queen of Scots spent a night there in 1563 during the lifetime of John, 10th chief, who was the son-in-law of the Earl of Argyll. The castle was destroyed in 1646. Sir John, 14th chief, at that time received a letter from Montrose stating that he was commanded by King Charles II who had placed himself in the hands of the Scot's army of the Covenant, then in England, to lay down his arms and ordering the chief to do likewise. This was no easy decision for Lamont as the castle was under attack by a large force of Campbells thirsting for revenge for the part the Lamonts had played in the Royalist campaign of terror in Argyll. Campbell of Ardkinglas, the commander of the attacking force, incidentally, was the brother of Lady Lamont. Most of the cadets of the Campbells were represented among its officers and the Rev. Colin MacLachlan, minister of Lochgoilhead was there in the role of the chosen instrument of divine vengeance. After a fortnight, with the Lamonts cut off by land and sea, the Campbells brought up cannon and bombarded the castle for three days. Sir John agreed to parlay and signed a capitulation which guaranteed that he, his brothers, soldiers, wives and children would be allowed to go free with their baggage. The ink was scarcely dry when the Campbells, with the excuse that 'no capitulation should be kept with traitors to God and his covenant' seized and bound the garrison, ill-treated and killed women and children. pillaged and burned the house and destroyed its plantations. The men were taken to Dunoon and the surviving women and children carried away in boats to beg or starve. The chief's sister, Isobel, stripped to her shift by the covenant soldiery, managed to hide in the coils of her hair her brother's copy of the surrender document with its Campbell signatures, and after years of petitioning, when the political climate no longer favored the Argyll family, succeeded in bringing them to justice. Even after the chief was released by Cromwell two attempts were made on his life to prevent

legal recovery of the lost property. After the Campbells, the chiefs creditors moved in and the Lamonts as a clan never recovered from their support of King Charles.

There is a story that a chief of Clan Gregor in his old age found shelter from persecution at Toward and was buried there. It goes that a son of the chief of Clan Lamont in a quarrel in Glencoe killed the son of Glenstrae, the chief of the MacGregors. Pursued by the dead man's retainers he reached Stronmilchan at the head or Loch Awe where the MacGregor chief had his home. He was given shelter by Glenstrae who, even when he learned that the stranger had killed his son, refused to harm him. Next morning he conducted him to the shore of Loch Fyne but warned him that if he ever set foot on MacGregor territory again his life would be forfeit.

The years passed. Young Lamont was now James, 12th chief of his clan; the MacGregors were proscribed and their chief outlawed. Lamont did not forget the debt he owed and provided a home for Glenstrae and a burial place when he died. According to the parish minister who wrote the Second Statistical Account in the 1840s Glenstrae was buried in the graveyard near the castle and his grave was still known to the local people. Toward estate was sold in 1806 and Castle Toward, successor to the old ruin, was built by Mr. Kirkman Findlay, merchant and Lord Provost of Glasgow. Achavoulin, a ruin in the policies, was the place where the chief and the seven leaders of the Campbell force signed that fatal scrap of paper. It had been in the hands of Campbell vassals since 1536. The Campbell who lived there at the time or the siege was well placed to get the pickings. He even dug up the roots of fruit trees in the orchards and carried away hewn stone to build a house.

Ardyne Point at the mouth of Loch Striven is associated with a raid on the Clyde by Olaf the Black, King of Man, early in the 13th century in which some longships were lost on the Cowal shore. The drowned raiders are said to have been buried beneath mounds near the shore. Ardyne Point was developed in the mid-1970s as a yard for the construction of concrete oil platforms and these were built

platforms which are located in the Frigg, Brent and Cormorant oil fields east of Shetland.

Another Ardyne raid had ill consequences for the Lamonts. When Robert II was staying at the castle of Rothesay three of his courtiers crossed to hunt in Cowal. They molested some Lamont girls and three of the chiefs sons attacked and killed them. Some of the courtiers' hunting party escaped and whatever tale they told the king he refused to accept the Lamonts' account of the affray. The three sons had to flee from their homeland and change their names. A fourth son who had been at the royal court at time also incurred the king's displeasure and apparently never succeeded to the chiefship. The families of the two courtiers were given land at Toward by the king and it was a long time before the Lamonts regained possession.

Killellan, east of the Ardyne Burn, was held by a Duncan McPhadrack in the 15th century who was perhaps one of the cadets of the Coustan family who may have been in Toward before the chief built the castle.

Port Lamont, where the road joins the lochs a reminder that the sea was the main link of this scattered clan. Many Lamonts made their mark at sea in fighting ships and as merchant adventurers.

Halfway up Loch Striven is Knockdow, home of the McGorrie Lamonts, descendants of the Red Baron. Godfrey, son of the Lord of Inverchaolain is recorded in 1431. This family were the last of the cadets to retain to retain their land in Cowal. They prospered in the West Indies and at home while others faded and the head of the house received a baronetcy in 1911. Originally they lived at Inverchaolain.

Knockdow proved that blood ties were stronger than business deals with the Campbells when he and his men helped to defend Toward Castle in 1646. He and his brother were hanged at Dunoon. Knockdow's eldest son was saved at that time by an English officer who was staying at Knockdow and hid the boy in a cave at Ormidale.

Invervegin at the mouth of its little glen was farmed in 1753 by a tacksman

Colin Lamont who set out for Falkirk tryst with sheep and cattle but finding prices poor, drove them across the border to Carlisle where he made a good sale. He fell a victim to the plague which was raging in the town. The owners of his lodgings fled and he was nursed until he died by an old shepherd. He was buried in the 'strangers acre' of the cathedral and his goods were confiscated. The old man, who knew no English, begged and worked his way the long miles back to Cowal to tell Colin's wife that she was a penniless widow.

Across Loch Striven at Couston lived the McPhadrack Lamonts, barons in their own right. They were descended from Patrick who, in 1443, was the Coroner of Cowal and baillie of Glendaruel. He was appointed by Parliament to carry out the first valuation of Argyll. The McPhadrack Lamonts held a strip of country between Ardbeg and Inverneilbeg at Strone with Campbells and MacLachlans breathing down their necks. Four sons of Baron McPhadrack of Couston, with another of the family, met their deaths on the hanging tree at Dunoon. The last of the family moved to Newcastle in the 17th century.

The ferry between Inverchaolain and Couston was an important crossing in the old days and the Lamonts also had an outpost at Rhubodach which controlled the ferry to Bute.

Loch Riddon with its Campbell stronghold on Eilean Greg at the mouth of the loch, separated the east and west Lamont lands. Many of the Clan Lamont met their deaths beneath the walls of that castle. Kames was granted to Sir Colin Campbell in 1290 on condition that he provided two armed men when the army mustered. The Campbells were not then all-powerful in Argyll.

Ardlamont, between the Kyles of Bute and Loch Fyne, belonged originally to another Lamont family who were vassals of the High Steward on condition that they provided a bow-man for the Scottish army. Ewan, son of Findlay of this branch, was slain by the barons of Argyll in 1312 'for friendship with Bruce'. The fine imposed on the barons was used for the perpetual maintenance of a priest to say masses for his soul in the church of St. Finan at South Auchagoyl. Duncan 4th

chief, was baillie of the Steward of Scotland in Kerry, this part of Cowal, in 1356. The Lamont chiefs settled in Ardlamont until the estate was sold in 1893.

The road from Ardlamont Point leads north to Ascog Loch on the far shore of which stands the ruined keep which was the ancestral home of the McInnes Lamonts, the sons of Angus. They were bound to provide a birlinn as escort for the chiefs' galleys when they sailed the firth of Cowal. In 1646, after a three-day battle against the Campbells on the moor above the loch the Lamonts withdrew to the castle. The defenders were persuaded to surrender when their chief was brought beneath the walls by his captors. Seven Lamonts from Kerry were hanged at Dunoon including the 80 year old Auchenshelloch while young Ascog and Auchagoyl, after trial, were hanged in Inveraray.

The road which strikes west to Loch Fyne leads to Stillaig, gifted by the chief to his son in 1554. Lamont of Stillaig in 1689 was appointed to carry certain duties of the office of Justiciary of the Western Seas, 'to hold courts and discern between fisher and fisher'. Loch Fyne herring as far back as that time had a ready market, and the first Lamont burgess of Glasgow was a John Lamont, fisher. Melldalloch, near the loch was the home of John Lamont, one of the earliest merchants of the clan, whose descendants moved across Loch Fyne to Glassary.

Inveryne, beneath its little hill, was the original seat of the Lamont chiefs, but only some mounds mark its site. A tradition of the old castle relates that the Lamonts captured 15 leading men of the Campbells and imprisoned them in an upper room the window of which was considered to be too high above the ground for any attempt at escape. The Campbells began to sing and the Lamonts gathered at the foot of the stair to listen. Meanwhile the prisoners were busy making a rope of their blankets. One by one they squeezed through the window and slid to the ground. At last only the best singer remained to entertain his warders until with a 'Well as you are all in bed I might as well join you' he too made his escape. The old church at Kilfinan became the burial place of the

Lamont chiefs. Their vault dates from the 17th century

Lindsaig, to the north, was held of the Crown by the Ardlamont family. Nearby at Achnaskioch lived the McLeas or Leitches, hereditary physicians to the chiefs. They were turned off their land and McLea is said to have prophesied that the chiefs legitimate line would die out. This prophecy, like all good Highland curses, came to pass in time.

Auchagoyl - the name was later changed to Otter -- was part of the church lands of Kilfinan. It was held by descendants of the parson of Kilmodan. Walter Lamont, brother of Auchagoyl who was hanged at Dunoon, a professional soldier, was put in command of some of the Marquis of Athol's troops in Cowal during the abortive rebellion of the Earl of Argyll in 1686. The Lamonts made the most of this opportunity to pay off old scores against the Campbells. Otter Ferry was the old link between Cowal and Glassary across Loch Fyne. James Black, son of the innkeeper at Cat Otter Ferry was 'the most audacious smuggler in all that country'. He was caught off Greenock in 1747 in his yawl along with another commanded by an Angus Lamont in both of which casks of foreign spirits were found. The Blacks were the hereditary standard bearers of the Lamont chiefs.

Across Loch Fyne are more places with Lamont associations. Stronabach, the modern Strone, above Minard was a cattle farm owned by a son of the Ascog family.

Between Loch Fyne and Loch Gilp, the point which looks south to the Arran peaks, known as the Aird of Ardcalsmaig, was the seat of the Lamonts of Silvercraigs, originally a branch of the Ardlamont branch. The Lamonts of Silvercraig were the guardians of Callum's Skeir, a rock to the south-west of Eilean Mor, one of a group of islands off the point on which, traditionally, was inscribed the Lamonts' titles to their land. Their territory stretched from Dippin, near Lochgilphead to Achnaba on the west shore of the inlet of Port Ann. Robert of Silvercraigs married a Campbell of Otter and he was on Argyll's side at Inverlochy. After imprisonment he returned to Glassary to see his home destroyed by

Colkitto's army. He, however, was one of the defenders of Ascog Castle, but was rescued by his brother-in-law who went specially to save him and his son. He was an honorary burghess of Glasgow and the city later acquired his land.

North of Loch Gilp, to the east of the low-lying ground through which the Crinan Canal and the main road passes, stands Monydrain. seat of the McSorley family, descended from Angus, son of Duncan, who signed the charter of 1235. Angus confirmed that charter in 1270. The McSorleys were barons in the 16th century. Achahoish on the hillside, and Fernoch on the outskirts of Lochgilphead were included in their land and they feued Auchinbreck. This branch of the Lamonts. proud of a lineage as ancient as that of the chiefs. held aloof from the rest of the clan. Colkitto treated them as enemies and their leader at that time was a friend of Campbell of Ormsary who led the Campbell attack on Ascog. The old line died out about the middle of the 18th century and another family took over. These lands were sold in 1873.

To complete this tour one must again cross Loch Fyne and follow the hill road to Glendaruel which the Campbells appear to have got through marriage in 1360. The glen got its name from a battle between Norse and natives in the 11th century when the blood of the slain is said to have turned the burn red. Around Garvie at the top of the glen the Blacks lived. The road to the Holy Loch round the head of Loch Striven to Glean passes Garrochoran once held by the Lamonts. The McLucas sept lived in Glen Lean and it is said they were driven out of Dunoon by the Lamonts.

Six centuries of the history of a far-scattered clan were enacted within this circuit.

