

Saoghal na Gàidhlig... The Gaelic way of living in the world

Có th' ann a' Siol Dhiarmaid? A-rèir beul-aithris na Gàidhlig, b' ann an Diarmad mac peathar do Fhionn MacCumhail, ceannard na Féinne, a bha 'na dream luchd-cùim air a' Ghàidhealtachd aig àm cho fad air ais 's gu bheil e doirbh fìor eachdraidh is fionnsgeul a chur às a chèile. Mar a sgrìobh Mac' Ill' Eathain Mac na Ceàrda ann a' MacTalla nan Tùr (d.4): "Bha Diarmad 'na dhuine anabarrach briagha, agus cha ghabhadh e leòn ach air ball beag a bha air bonn a chois." Agus a-rèir aon sgeòil, sin mar a fhuair e bàs is e ann a' tuasaid le torc mór fiadhaich, nuair a chaidh calg puinnseant an tuirc 'na chois.

Co dhìubh no co dheth, tha na Caimbeulaich ag agairt Dhiarmaid mar ghineadair; agus tha Clann MhicDhiarmaid 'na fine dhaibh.

A-nis, 's e sgìre Loch Tatha ann a' siorramachd Pheairt, Alba, fo sgàile Beinn Labhair, dachaidh dhualchasach Clann MhicDhiarmaid. Ach a rèir na chuala mi, às déidh a' chogaidh le Napoleon, thug an Caipitean Ailig MacLeòid a bhùineadh do MhicLeòid na Hearadh, fearann croite do dh'Fhearghas MacDhiarmaid, air an d' thugadh an t-ainm "An Saighdear", agus do dh'fhichead duin' eile, mu'n cuairt air Caolas Scalpaigh na Hearadh. Sin mar a thàinig a' chiad duine air an robh an t-ainm MacDhiarmaid dha na Hearadh, mar a dh'innis Coinneach MacDhiarmaid, Ceap Dauphin, Siorramachd Bhictoria, dhomhs' e.

Ann an 1843, dh'imrich Iain MacDhiarmaid, sinn-sinn-seanair Choinnich, bho Scalpaigh na Hearadh gu Còbh a' Reac (Còbh na Luinge Briste). B' e Moireasdanach a bha 'na mhnaoi, Màiri, agus bha dithis duine cloinn' aca a' tighinn.

Dh'innis Coinneach dhomh mar a ghluais a sheanair Dòmhnall MacDhiarmaid agus a sheanmhair Ciorstaidh (NicDhòmhnaill) ann a' 1876-77 bho 'n Chòbh Bhreatainneach gu Ceap Dauphin, mu chòig mìle chun iar-dheas air Baile Ùr a' Chaimbeulaich. Rugadh Alasdair, athair Chiorstaidh, air dearbh là Blàr Waterloo ann an 1815; thàinig esan a Cheap Breatainn dìreach air bàt' mach á Steòrnabhagh.

B' e an taigh a thog Dòmhnall is Ciorstaidh ann a' Ceap Dauphin an "t-seann dachaidh" 's an d' rugadh Coinneach fhéin, an leanabh mu dheireadh a rugadh aig an taigh 's a' chearnaidh sin.

Bha na peathraichean Mhic Dhiarmaid, Oighrig, Anna Màili is Mairead, an meas a' chiad daoine air na thachair mi nuair a thàinig mi a Cheap Breatainn anns na seachd deicheadan, daoine cho fialaidh, còir 's a ghabhas. Bha an seanair aca 'na bhràthair do sheanair Choinnich, mar a bha am Bàrd MacDhiarmaid a rinn an t-òran "An tè a chaill a' Ghàidhlig".

Cha robh Oighrig agus an duin' aice, Ailig Mac a' Ghobhainn, a-riamh anns na Hearadh. Ach nuair a thàinig iad gu ìre cuimseach sean, thug an teaghlach dhaibh turas a dh' Albainn. Mas do dh' fhalbh iad, thachair gu robh mi a' bruidhinn ri Oighrig agus, le deòirean 'na sùilean, thuir i rium: "Tha mi 'dol dhachaidh!"

Tha cuimhne na muinntir làidir, 's an t-àm a dh' aom fhathast an làthair an intinn nan Gàidheal mar nach robh iad air an t-seann dachaidh 'fhàgail ach an dé.

Who are the Progeny of Diarmad? According to Gaelic folklore, Diarmad was a nephew of Finn McCool, leader of the Fianna, or the Fingalians, an outlaw band in the Land of the Gaels at a time so distant that it's difficult to distinguish true history from myth. As Alexander MacLean Sinclair wrote of him in his book MacTalla nan Tùr (p.4): "Diarmad was an exceptionally handsome man, and he could only be wounded on a small spot on his foot". (Shades of Achilles!) And according to one account, he was killed in a fight with a wild boar when a poisoned bristle entered his foot.

Be that as it may, the Campbells claim descent from Diarmad; and the Clan MacDhiarmaid (spelled variously in English, but usually written MacDermid in Cape Breton), is a sept of the Campbells.

Loch Tay in Perthshire, Scotland, in the shadow of Ben Lawers, is the traditional home of the MacDermids. But apparently, after the Napoleonic War, Captain Alec MacLeod of the MacLeods of Harris, granted to Fergus "The Soldier" MacDermid, and to twenty others, croft land around Scalpay in the Sound of Harris. As Kenny MacDermid of Cape Dauphin, Victoria County, explained it to me, that was how the first MacDermid came to Harris.

In 1843, Kenny's great-great-grandfather John MacDermid emigrated from Scalpay to Wreck Cove, Cape Breton along with his wife Mary, who was a Morrison, and their two children.

Kenny explained how his grandfather Donald MacDermid and his grandmother Christy (MacDonald) moved from Breton Cove to Cape Dauphin, about 5 miles southwest of New Campbellton, sometime in 1876-77. Christy's father Alexander was born on the very day the Battle of Waterloo was fought in 1815; he came to Cape Breton directly by boat from Stornoway.

Donald and Christy built a house in Cape Dauphin, the "old homestead" where Kenny himself was born, the last baby to be born at home on the Cape.

When I came to Cape Breton in the seventies, among the first people I met on the North Shore were the MacDermid sisters, Evelyn, Annie Mae and Margaret, people as kind and hospitable as was possible to find. Their grandfather was one of Kenny's grandfather's brothers, as was the Bard MacDermid who made the song "The woman who lost the Gaelic".

Evelyn and her husband Alec Smith who made their home in Wreck Cove had never been to Harris. When they were on a bit in years, their children gave them a trip to Scotland. Before they went, I happened to be speaking to Evelyn and, with tears in her eyes, she said: "I'm going home!"

Folk memory is strong and the past is still present in the minds of Gaels as if they had left the old home but yesterday.

The Gaelic Way of Living in the World is written by Catriona Parsons and sponsored by...

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