

MacDonald, Allan ^[1]

MacDonald, Allan

by James M. Clifton, 1991

d. 1792?

See also: [MacDonald, Flora](#) ^[2] (from the *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*)

Allan MacDonald, of Kingsborough, Scotland, was one of the most important Scottish Highlanders to serve the king's cause in North Carolina and elsewhere during the American Revolution. The husband of the famed [Flora MacDonald](#) ^[2] (heroine of the escape of Charles Edward Stuart, Bonnie Prince Charlie, the Young Pretender, to France following the Battle of Culloden), he had suffered with many others of his homeland the breaking up of the vast clan holdings and the enforced loyalty to the House of Hanover. In 1774 Allan and Flora arrived in North Carolina, where he bought two plantations in [Anson County](#) ^[3].

With the approaching [Revolution](#) ^[4], MacDonald was one of the first to come to the aid of Governor [Josiah Martin](#) ^[5] in his clashes with the [Assembly](#) ^[6] and the local Patriots. As early as 3 July 1775 he journeyed to [Fort Johnston](#) ^[7] (at the mouth of the Cape Fear), to which Martin had fled from the capitol at New Bern, and proposed to the governor that he raise a battalion of "the good and faithful [Highlanders](#) ^[8]" from among those who had recently come to the Upper Cape Fear. Later in the month, Allan's brother Donald and his son-in-law, Donald McLeod, arrived in the colony from Massachusetts, sent by General Thomas Gage to recruit men for a battalion of the Royal Highland Emigrant Regiment. Over the next several months these three enlisted Highlanders and Regulators from the backcountry in a force that eventually numbered about 1,600 for a march to Brunswick to join an expedition heading south led by Sir Peter Parker and Sir Henry Clinton. Joined together, these forces were intended to crush the rebellion in North Carolina.

Highlanders willingly joined the cause (300 in the battalion being formed for the Highland Emigrant Regiment, the rest in the governor's militia), encouraged by Martin's generous land grants of two hundred acres, remission of arrears in [quitrents](#) ^[9], and twenty years of tax exemption. Also, those in the militia were to receive the same pay as regular soldiers and liberal compensations for the use of any equipment such as horses or wagons, and they would not have to fight outside the colony. Moreover, most had entered the colony too recently (some as late as 1775) to feel any commitment to the rebel cause. Regulators embraced the king's cause more slowly; in the end only 130 joined the expedition. The Loyalist force, commanded by [Donald MacDonald](#) ^[10] as brigadier general with Donald McLeod as major and second in command and Allan MacDonald as captain, finally assembled on 18 Feb. 1776 a few miles below Cross Creek (now [Fayetteville](#) ^[11]), actually three days later than Martin's planned rendezvous at Brunswick, for its march to the sea to join the larger force from the North. However, the Patriots in the area became aware of the Loyalist activities and raised their own forces in retaliation, commanded by James Moore, colonel of the First North Carolina Regiment from the Wilmington District. By 18 February Moore had 1,100 men at Rockfish Creek (a few miles to the south of MacDonald's camp), with more on the way from the New Bern District commanded by [Richard Caswell](#) ^[12].

What followed was a series of small-scale movements, complicated by the necessity of crossing several streams, with the Loyalists trying to get through to the coast (Donald MacDonald's main concern was to deliver his Highland battalion to Clinton) and the Patriots trying to stop them. At [Moore's Creek Bridge](#) ^[13] (the last stream before Wilmington), the deciding action of the campaign took place. The Patriots (Richard Caswell's forces of 800 from New Bern plus Alexander Lillington's 150 minutemen from the Wilmington District dispatched there by Moore) removed the planks from the bridge, leaving only the log stringers, and entrenched themselves on the east bank. Arriving at the scene and observing the difficulty of the situation, the Loyalists (in a council of war, led on by the younger officers and over the opposition of Donald MacDonald) nevertheless chose to attack. This they did on the dawn of 27 February to their own decimation. McLeod, John Campbell, and a few others leading the attack actually got across the bridge, to be killed later; a number were killed before they got that far. Within three minutes the Loyalists were routed. The Patriots left their entrenchments, quickly relaid the bridge, and gave chase to the main Loyalist force, capturing both Allan and Donald MacDonald (who had been too ill to direct the attack), several other officers, and about 850 soldiers, plus 13 wagons, £15,000 in gold, and about 800 rifles and muskets and 150 swords and dirks. In the fight about fifty of the Loyalists had been killed or wounded; only two Patriots were wounded (one of whom died four days later).

The regular soldiers, on their capture, were paroled and allowed to return to their homes on their oaths not to take up arms against the Patriot cause in the future. However, the officers were not treated so generously. Allan, his brother Donald, and the others were transported first to New Bern and then to the Halifax jail as prisoners of war. From there Allan MacDonald and at least twenty-five other prisoners, including his son Alexander, were sent to Philadelphia. Here he soon was released, on account of "his candor and low state of health," on parole, with liberty to live at Reading, Berks County. In 1777 he raised at New York a company of eighty-six North Carolinians and Virginians which he led for about a year. In October 1778 he rejoined the Royal Highland Emigrant Regiment in Nova Scotia, where he remained for the rest of the war.

When the war ended, the regiment was reduced in size, and MacDonald, his wife [Flora](#) ^[2], and their daughter settled on regimental land along the Kennetcook River in Hants County, Nova Scotia. In October 1784 he left for London to present a claim for compensation, telling the commissioners that he intended to return to Nova Scotia. Ironically, on the way home, the ship on which he and Flora were traveling was attacked by a French man-of-war. During the clash Flora, ever the heroine, remained on deck spurring on the sailors and was thrown down, breaking her arm. She said later that she "had now perilled her life in behalf of both the house of Stuart and that of Brunswick, and got very little for her pains." Flora died in 1790 and was buried in a shroud made from the sheet on which Prince Charles had slept and which she had preserved for that purpose through all her adventures and migrations of almost a half century. Allan survived Flora by a few years and died on the half-pay list of the British army.

Allan and Flora were survived by three sons and a daughter; their other son, Alexander, had been killed during the war. All four sons—John (ultimately to achieve the rank of colonel in the British army and become a writer on military subjects), James (a lieutenant of infantry in the British Legion by 1782), and Charles (by 1782 a captain in the British Legion), as well as Alexander—served the British cause during the Revolution. John died in Exeter, England, in 1821 at age seventy-two. The only surviving daughter, the widow of Major McLeod, died at Steine, Isle of Skye, in 1835.

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