

MacDonald, Flora ^[1]

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ca. 1722–March 5, 1790

See also: [Flora MacDonald Homesite](#) ^[2] (from the *Encyclopedia of North Carolina*); [Flora MacDonald](#) ^[3] (from the *Tar Heel Junior Historian*); [Highland Scots](#) ^[4] (from the *Tar Heel Junior Historian*)



Portrait of Flora MacDonald by Allan Ramsay and Joseph Van Aken, 1749. She is depicted with a red or orange tartan with a blue overcheck. The tartan worn is the Tullibardine district pattern. The white rose was a Jacobite symbol. Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

^[5]Flora MacDonald was a prominent Loyalist during the American Revolution and a Scottish folk hero. She is known for the aid she gave Charles Edward Stuart, also referred to as “the Young Pretender” or “Bonnie Prince Charlie.”

Flora was the daughter of Randal and Marion MacDonald, who lived at Milton on the Isle of Uist in the [Hebrides](#) ^[6] islands of Scotland. Her father died when she was a small child. When Flora was six, her mother married Hugh MacDonald and moved to Skye. Many sources state that Marion was abducted by Hugh MacDonald and forced into marriage with him. After their marriage, Flora stayed in Milton with her older brother Angus. At the age of thirteen she went to live with the head of her father’s clan, the Clanranalds. A governess, or private tutor, was hired to educate Flora and the Clanranald daughters. Through visits to her mother in Skye, Flora became acquainted with Lady Margaret, the wife of Sir Alexander MacDonald. In 1739, she was invited to Monkstadt, the MacDonald’s home on the Isle of Skye and lived with them for several months. She went with them to Edinburgh to complete her education, residing with the MacDonalds until she returned to Skye in 1745.

Flora’s help to [Charles Edward Stuart](#) ^[7], a claimant to the thrones of England, Scotland, and Ireland, made her famous in Scotland and England. Charles’ Catholic grandfather, King James II, was deposed and exiled in 1688. His supporters came to be known as Jacobites in reference to Jacobus, the Latin name for James. Parliament passed two acts in 1689 and 1701 to exclude Catholics from sitting on the English or Irish thrones. James III, also called the Old Pretender, attempted to regain the throne in the Jacobite rising of 1715. In 1745, Charles Edward gathered Scottish support for his cause to try to regain the throne. There were some early successes, but the Jacobites were ultimately defeated at the [Battle of Culloden](#) ^[8] in 1746. Charles escaped and made his way to Uist.

That same year, Flora was visiting her brother and the Clanranalds in Uist when she became part of the plot to help Charles escape Scotland. Some accounts suggest she was hesitant to help Charles and only agreed after meeting him. Flora obtained passports from her stepfather, an officer of the king, issued for herself and her traveling companions. This included Charles Edward, who was disguised as an Irish spinning maid named Betty Burke. The group evaded patrols of the king’s officers and left Uist for Skye, where they encountered a storm while sailing between the two islands. Upon reaching Skye, Charles was hidden in a cave and Flora went to Lady Margaret’s home, where officers of the king were dining. Later that evening the group stayed at the Kingsburgh estate for the night. In Flora’s own statement about the events, the stay at Kingsburgh was necessary because she became sick. This account also indicates that the residents of the house in Kingsburgh were not informed that one of their guests was Charles. The next day Flora and the prince traveled to Portree where Charles boarded a boat to France.

Shortly afterwards, the prince’s escape became known, and Flora was arrested. She was initially imprisoned in Scotland before being taken to London and imprisoned in the [Tower](#) ^[9]. She was released under the Act of Indemnity in 1747. Flora was presented with a [silver service set](#) ^[10] “by admiring friends in London in appreciation of her heroism.” After accomplishing the release of those arrested with her, Flora returned to Scotland. On November 6, 1750, she married [Allan MacDonald of Kingsburgh](#) ^[11], the son of the man she and Charles Stuart had stayed with during his escape. Flora and Allan MacDonald had seven children; Charles, Anne, Alexander, Ronald, James, John, and Frances.

Like many other Scots in the 1770s, Flora and Allan experienced financial hardship due to debts and increased rent on their tack, or lease. The MacDonalds emigrated to North Carolina in 1774, as did many other Scots. They traveled with their children Anne, Alexander, James, and Frances and Anne’s husband, Alexander McLeod. A ball was held in Flora’s honor once she and her family arrived in Wilmington. The MacDonalds traveled to the Scottish community at “Cross Creek, now Fayetteville, but six months later they moved to Mount Pleasant, now [Cameron’s Hill](#) ^[12].” In January 1776, the MacDonalds bought a tract of land in [Anson County](#) ^[13] where they built a home. They called the estate [Killiegray](#) ^[14].” According to some stories, two of their children died and were buried at the estate in North Carolina, but there is no proof of this.



Flora MacDonald's monument over her gravesite in Skye. The monument, placed in 1880, was restored in 2019. Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

^[19]As the Revolutionary War approached, Flora and her husband sided with the British monarchy as loyalists^[16]. Allan MacDonald was one of the first to aid the royal governor, Josiah Martin^[17], and proposed that he could raise a battalion of Highlanders. Flora went among her community and encouraged the Scots to volunteer for service to the monarchy. Many accounts state that she gave speeches in Gaelic that received excited and enthusiastic responses from the crowd.

Allan MacDonald received a commission and joined General Donald MacDonald^[19]'s forces. The plan for this army was to march to Wilmington^[19], where they would join with British forces to keep North Carolina loyal. The regiment of Highland Loyalists was defeated at the battle of Moore's Creek Bridge^[20] on February 27, 1766. Among the eight hundred prisoners taken were Flora's husband, Allan and one of their sons, Alexander. Allan was imprisoned at Halifax^[21] for a time, then transferred to Pennsylvania. He urged Flora to return to Scotland, which she was finally able to do in 1779. Flora sold her silver tea service and other gifts given to her during her imprisonment in London in order to pay for passage to Scotland for herself and her youngest daughter. Popular and folk history accounts of this journey state that when her ship was attacked by a French ship, Flora went above deck to encourage the crew. She hoped to rally them to defeat the attackers and broke her arm during the battle. However, in a 1789 letter Flora wrote to Sir John MacPherson, she stated that she "dislocated the wrist ... and brock some tendons" of one hand as a result of an accidental fall before her journey. While on board the ship to Scotland, the crew "spying a sail, made ready for action, and in hurreying the ladys below to a place of safety ... [!] fell and brock the dislocated arm in two."

Flora MacDonald lived with her brother in Scotland until her husband was released in a prisoner exchange. They returned to Kingsburg (or Kingsborough), their ancestral home in the Highlands. Flora died on March 5, 1790. The sheets on which Charles Edward had slept were used as her burial shroud. They had been with her throughout her travels. A marble slab was initially placed on her grave by her son. Over the years, travelers and admirers of Flora chipped pieces of the stone away as personal souvenirs until the slab no longer existed. A tall lona cross now stands as a monument on her grave with the inscription "her name will be mentioned in history, and if courage and fidelity be virtues, mentioned with honour." The memorial was placed in 1880 and restored in 2019.

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