
James, Mary & Alexander McDonald

British 1820 Settlers to South Africa

FRANCOIS McDONALD
WYNAND McDONALD



THE PUBLISHER

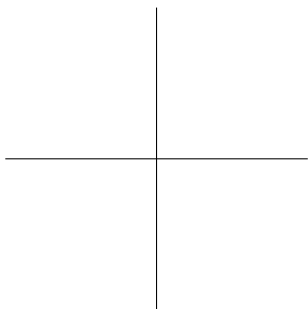
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Preface

This book documents the genealogy of the McDonald family in South Africa, focusing on the descendants of James McDonald and his wife Mary Welch. James and Mary were British 1820 Settlers who emigrated to the Cape Colony. This work aims to provide a comprehensive reference for the descendants of this lineage.

The book is divided into chapters that detail the lives and contributions of each generation, from James and Mary to the present day. Each chapter includes biographical information, historical context, and genealogical records.

The primary objective is to preserve the McDonald family history, ensuring that future generations have a detailed record of their ancestry. This book also includes information on allied families and significant individuals who played a role in the family's history.

Acknowledgements

Acknowledgments are due to the many family members who contributed their time and information, making this project possible.

Introduction

The McDonald Family in South Africa

The McDonald name has a rich and varied history in South Africa, with many members of the McDonald family arriving through different avenues. Some came as soldiers, others as sailors, merchants, and among them were also the 1820 Settlers who embarked on the journey to start anew in the Cape Colony.

Among the 1820 Settlers, two distinct McDonald families immigrated to South Africa. Patrick McDonald travelled with Walter Synnot's party, while James McDonald came with Alexander Biggar's party aboard the *Weymouth*. Each of these families has its own unique story and contributions to the history of South Africa. However, this book is dedicated solely to the lineage of James McDonald and Mary Welch.

British 1820 Settlers

The British 1820 Settlers played a pivotal role in the colonization of the Eastern Cape, South Africa. These settlers were primarily motivated by economic hardship in Britain, following the Napoleonic Wars, with the government encouraging emigration to reinforce the British presence in the region. These settlers embarked on a journey with the promise of land, opportunity, and a new life.

Upon arrival, the Settlers faced a harsh reality. Instead of fertile farmland, they were allocated land on the Eastern Cape frontier, a region fraught with tension between Xhosa communities and the British colonists. Letters from the Settlers to the Colonial Office reveal the settlers' struggles, inadequate support, poor soil quality, and constant threat of conflict (eGGSa 1823).

One notable group was the party led by Captain Alexander Biggar, a former army officer who had fallen from grace due to financial misconduct. He saw the Cape Colony as an opportunity to rebuild his reputation and life (Nash 1987, p. 45). From *The Settlers Handbook* we learn that:

Articles of Agreement were signed between Biggar and his party at Portsmouth on 13th December 1819 before they embarked, all the men of the party were indentured to Biggar for a period of three years, and were to receive food and clothing but no wages for their first year of service. In the second and third years they would be paid wages 'according to colonial practice'. Each man would be given 20 acres of land which he would be free to cultivate on Saturdays and Sundays, and at the end of the period of service he would receive title to it, although Biggar was to retain 'Manorial Rights' (Nash 1987, p. 45).

His party sailed on the *Weymouth*, departing from Portsmouth on 7th January 1820, and arriving in Algoa Bay (modern-day Port Elizabeth) on 15th May 1820 (Nash 1987, p. 45). After their arrival, Biggar and his party were located at Drie Fontein on the Brak Rivier. With the single exception of George Pollard, Biggar's labourers

deserted or applied to be released from their engagements soon after they reached Albany. By July 1820 several of them were employed at Somerset Farm. By 1826 the party had disband completely and the location was granted to Captain Alexander Biggar (Tanner-Tremaine 2019, p. 37)

Chapter 1

James McDonald

1.1 Early life in Britain

♂ James McDonald	[a]
★ 9th October 1789, Crawford, Lanarkshire, Scotland. ≈ 11th October 1789, Scotland. † < 7th November 1822, Cape Colony, South Africa.	
∞ Mary Welch, 12th May 1817, St Botolph-without-Bishopsgate.	

James’s birth date, birthplace, and parents remain uncertain. The most reliable source is Biggar’s 1820 Settler list, which listed his age as 31 (eGGSA 2024a, pp. 536–539). This suggests a birth year between 28th September 1787 and 27th September 1788. However, settlers often inflated their ages to qualify for the program, so this estimate should be viewed with caution.

Both FamilySearch and 1820settlers.com suggest that James McDonald was born on 9th October 1789, to William Wallace McDonald and Janet Aitchison in Crawford, Lanarkshire, Scotland, with a baptism on 11th October 1789 (FamilySearch 1789) (1820settlers.com 2021a). However, this lacks evidence to definitively link them. The birth date contradicts the age calculation above, and the suggested parents’ names haven’t reappeared among known descendants.

1.2 The Journey to the Cape Colony

James, Mary, and their one-year-old son, Alexander, immigrated to South Africa with the British 1820 Settlers (Nash 1987, p. 46). Their names first appear in Alexander Biggar’s settler correspondence. This letter, dated 27th September 1819, was addressed to Lord Bathurst from 3 Northumberland Court, Strand, London, in which Biggar proposed a list of potential members for his party to South Africa (eGGSA 2024a, pp. 536–539). They are also referenced in his later settler returns (Appendix 1.3.3 provides a complete list and further details) (eGGSA 2024b).

1.3 Settlement and Life in the Cape Colony

1.4 Marriage and Family

Marriage to Mary Welch

James McDonald and Mary Welch were wed on the 12th May 1817, at St Botolph-without-Bishopsgate, Bishopsgate, City of London (FamilySearch 1817) (1820settlers.com 2021a). The marriage record shows James signing his name, while Mary made a mark ("+") next to hers. Both were listed as parishioners. Isaac Netto and Catherine Netto (née McDonald) witnessed the ceremony (Figure 1.1).

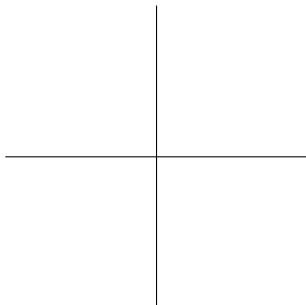
1.5 Descendants

Alexander McDonald, born from the union of James McDonald and Mary Welch, is their only known descendant (Nash 1987, p. 46).

1.6 Death

James must have died before the 7th November 1822 because we know that marriage bans were published on that date for Mary Welch and Robert Henman. See Chapter 2.2 for further details.

1.7 Associates



Chapter 2

Mary Welch

2.1 Early life in Britain

2.2 Marriage and Family

Marriage to James McDonald

For further details refer to Chapter 1.

Marriage to Robert Henman

Marriage bans were published on 7th November 1822 in Grahamstown for Mary Welch's and Robert Henman (1820settlers.com 2021a) (1820settlers.com 2021b).

2.3 Descendants

2.4 Death

Chapter 3

First Generation

Overview of the first generation. . .

3.1 Alexander McDonald

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Birth and Early Life

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Marriage and Family

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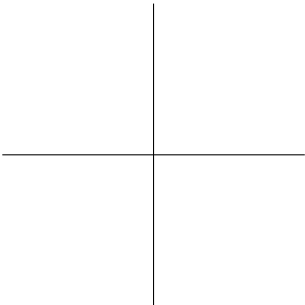
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3.2 Descendants

3.3 Death

Contributions and Legacy

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Appendix A

Genealogical Charts

A.1 Detailed Family Trees

A.2 Charts for Each Generation

Appendix B

Historical Documents

B.1 Correspondence

Biggar’s 1820 Settler List

Men’s Names and ages	Trade	Wives’ names and ages	Children’s names and ages
Alex. Biggar 38	Farmer	Mary 39	Margaret Graham 19, Ann Harold 18, Mary John 16, Jean Straton 14, Georgina 12, Agness Elizabeth 10, Charlotte 8, Robert 7, Alexina 3, Helen 1
Thos. Bingle 39	Gardener	Sophia 27	Elizabeth 19, Thomas 10, Eleanor 8
George Faircloth 33	Labourer	Mary 32	James 9, Elizabeth 4
Robert Godfrey 27	Wheelwright	Martha 28	Henry 5, Martha 1
Thos. Page 25	Labourer	Ann 33	
Jas. McDonald 31	Blacksmith	Mary 23	Alexander 1
Robert Cole 21	Cutler	Jane 22	
George Epsey 29	Millwright	Mary 23	
John Penny 33	Labourer	Mary 26	Henry 4, Mary 2, William 1
George Pollard 32	Farmer	Mary Ann 30	Mary Ann 8, William 6, George 4, Sarah 2
William Pollard 25	Farmer	Mary 27	William 4
William Hadder 25	Wheelsmith and metal refiner	Elizabeth 24	William 3, Elizabeth 2
John Gullen 45	Farmer		

Table B.1: Biggar’s settler list sent to Lord Bathurst on 27th September 1819.

B.2 Marriage Certificates

B.3 Birth and Death Records

B.4 Wills and Legal Documents

Appendix C

Photographs and Illustrations

C.1 Family Photographs

C.2 Maps and Illustrations

Appendix D

Glossary of Terms

D.1 Genealogical Terms

D.2 Historical Terms

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