

Johnny “Creek” MacKenzie

(The following article has been provided by the Culross Historical Society.)

John MacKenzie was the descendent of an old Scottish family of the Lochbroom area in Ross-shire, Scotland, a descendent of a MacKenzie who, in 1638, signed the National Covenant establishing Presbyterianism in Scotland. His wife was Margaret MacKenzie, from the same area, but no relation.

John, his two brothers and four cousins left the Lochbroom area to work in the Lothian area near Edinburgh on a large estate, but were not satisfied working for a landowner who exploited their many skills as tradesmen for his own benefit. They had built a reaper, the forerunner of the grain binder. The landowner took the reaper to the Royal Show in England where it won the prize as a new labour-saving farm implement. He gave no credit to the MacKenzies for its construction, but claimed the prize and patents as his own. This persuaded John, his brothers and cousins and their families to come to Canada, where they had heard of the availability of land and the many opportunities it offered to be independent.

John and Margaret MacKenzie and their family of five sons and one daughter, all under seven years of age, arrived in Canada at Quebec City on June 28, 1838 to the sound of cannons and bells, celebrating the coronation of Victoria as Queen of Britain.

They made their way to Dundas and then to the Scottish settlement around Crieff, Corwhin, and Morriston in Puslinch Township. They purchased a farm south of Duff’s Church, which today is at the junctions of Highways 6 and 401. The farm had a creek running across the front of the property, thus the name Johnny “Creek” MacKenzie was used to distinguish their family from other John MacKenzies in the area, a custom used in Scottish settlements.

Two more sons were born to John and Margaret, and as the boys grew up, extra land was needed for them. Hearing that land was available in Culross Township, John made several trips there between 1865 and 1868 to purchase farms on the 4th and 5th concessions for his six sons.

John (1831-1904) settled on Lot 18, Con. 5, Culross Township, which had been purchased by his father in 1865 from Richard MacDonald. In 1875, John married Mary Wilkinson, and they had two children, Mary Euphemia and John Donald. Mary married Thomas Aitken. In 1916, John Donald married Donald Steel, daughter of Kate and George Steel. They had five children, John Brock, Lorna (Mrs. Ullett), Wanda (Mrs. Costello), Elda (Mrs. MacAuley), and Clyde, a doctor in Detroit.

John Brock took possession of the farm in 1940, and his mother moved to Guelph. Brock married Dorothy Canham of Lucknow and they had five children, John, Dorla (Mrs. Graeme Cassidy), Rennae, Allan, and Mary. In 1958 Brock died of a heart condition. His wife, who is office manager for the Teeswater News, and his daughter, Mary Kaye who teaches at Hillcrest, continue to live on the home farm which is rented to Currie and Kevin Moffat. Lot 18, concession 4 has been sold to Alan Whytock.

Duncan (1831-1904) settled on Lot 19, Concession 5, Culross Township, his father having bought it also in 1865. Duncan married Jeannette McNaughton and they remained in Culross only a short time. They sold the farm to James McNaughton and moved to Port Elgin area (Bruce Township). Other owners of this farm have been James, Thomas, and at present, Walden Moffat.

Kenneth (1833-1904) was the only son to never own land in Culross, but joined his brother Duncan in Bruce Township and chose a farm near Paisley.

Alexander (1835-1904). In 1868 his father bought lots 22 and 23, Concession 4 for his son Alexander (Sandy) and his wife Elizabeth (Betsy) MacRae, their two daughters, Isabella and Annabella and their son, John A. The two lots were purchased in 50 acre sections from three different owners who bought the land from the Crown, and the west half of lot 23 was purchased directly from the Crown. Two more daughters, Margaret and Catherine, and three sons, Kenneth, Donald and William were born to Sandy and Betsy in Culross.

In 1874, Sandy and Betsy bought Lot 23, Concession 5 from John Reid, and in 1891 they bought Lot 20, Concession 5 from John Keith. In 1900 his son Kenneth and his bride, Edyth Switzer, purchased this farm and operated it until 1920 when they sold it to Thomas Christie. Kenneth and his wife were very interested in the advancement of the community and added much to its progress by their participation.

Donald MacKenzie took over Lots 22 and 23, Concession 4, and in 1913 he married Annie Whytock. They farmed until 1919 when they sold the farm to Duncan Keith.

Betsy MacKenzie and her youngest son, William continued to farm Lot 23, Concession 5, from 1904 until her death in 1911, then William continued on the farm. He married Mabel Donaldson in 1914 and farmed until his death in 1950. He was known as an excellent farmer, and was particularly interested in developing his herd of Shorthorn cattle. The farm and the Shorthorn herd were taken over on his death by his son Alex MacKenzie, who married Bessie McInnes. They continued to farm until 1962 when the Shorthorn herd had to be sold due to animal health problems. The farm was sold to present owners, Ray and Donna Pennington. Alex and Bessie live retired in Teeswater.

John A. never married. Isabella (Mrs. John Mowbray) went to Michigan and later returned to the Whitechurch area. A granddaughter, Alba McIntyre, lives in Teeswater. Annabella (Mrs. William Trench) lived in Teeswater. Margaret was Mrs. Franklin Wocks and Catherine was Mrs. David Grant.

Donald (1837-1872) and Murdock (1843-1923). In 1866, Lot 21, Concession 4 was purchased for these two sons. Being expert carpenters and framers, they built the barn on the property. It is said that the framing on this barn was so expert that hardly an axe mark can be seen on the framed timbers. The barn was purchased by the Teeswater Agricultural Society and is used as a horse barn for the fall fair.

On the death of Donald in 1872 the farm was purchased by his brother Willie MacKenzie (1841-1890) and his wife, the former Mary Pringle, who already owned the south 1/2 of Lot 21, concession 6. On the death of Willie in 1890, Nancy sold the farm to her brother, Malcolm Pringle, who some years later sold it to John Armstrong.

In conclusion, the family of John and Margaret MacKenzie was very instrumental in opening up and farming what is considered some of the best land in Culross, owning 850 acres at some period in time. Five John MacKenzies have trod this acreage in the last century.

John and Margaret MacKenzie visited their sons in Culross several times, walking from Puslinch to Culross. Only their daughter, Isabella, never came to Culross, having died in 1857, at age 25 years. She, her father (d. 1877 at age 89), and her mother (d. 1880 at age 72) are buried in Duff's Cemetery, Puslinch Township.

Many incidents from the MacKenzie family history have been handed down to the present generation. They are typical of the pioneers of Culross. For example--

Mary Wilkinson MacKenzie was called "Mary Swift". When she married at age 28, she had already raised her dead sister's five children, so work was well known by her. She carried her eggs, cheese and butter in baskets through the back fields to her customers in Teeswater. When the large barn was built, she made all the buns and bread for the men. Mrs. McNaughton and Mrs. Keith made the pies.

There was trouble when John MacKenzie backed notes for a Teeswater flaxing mill. The bailiff appeared and left again. John and Mary had to pay for their farm over again.

By this time, they had two children, Mary Phemie and John Donald. These two grew up working hard, milking cows and helping with the crops and livestock. They were experts on horses and loved to tease the old ram by throwing a coat over a stone and letting it hit its head. They played in the pond at the front of the farm in summer and skated in winter. Mary Phemie would drive to Lucknow, Clinton, and Port Elgin with a fine little horse called Kitty. Runaways were frequent too. When John Donald was 17, a team ran away with a load of pigs. He was knocked under the wagon wheels and carried into the house on a board. After several months he recovered. Mary Phemie had her leg badly hurt in a buggy accident. Many slivers of bone were taken out with Dr. Stewart's golden wire probing around inside the wound. A year and many, many poultices later, it finally healed.

In 1900, John MacKenzie took his daughter to Walkerton and bought her the best gold watch and chain he could find in the jewellery store there. He was breaking her engagement to a chap who had consumption. There was quite an epidemic of this in Culross before 1900. Several families were wiped out.

In 1917, John Donald bought his first car, a Chev touring. For this, he traded ten acres of maple bush across the road from his stone house.



The Alexander (Sandy) MacKenzie Family

Back Row (L to R) Catherine (Mrs. David Grant), Donald (Dan), Margaret (Mrs. F. Wocks), Isabella (Mrs. J. Mowbray), Kenneth, Annabella (Mrs. W. Trench)
Front Row, Mother Elizabeth (Betsy), William, Father Alexander (Sandy)

John "Creek" MacKenzie, born 1788 or 1797, died October 10, 1877, Crown Cemetery.

Margaret MacKenzie, born 1808, died September 7, 1880, Crown Cemetery.

John MacKenzie, born 1831, died June 29, 1904, Teeswater Cemetery.

Duncan MacKenzie, born 1831, died 1904.

Isabella MacKenzie, born January 6, 1832, died January 22, 1857, Crown Cemetery.

Kenneth MacKenzie, born 1833, died May 29, 1904.

Alexander Mackenzie, born 1835, died July 6, 1904.

Donald MacKenzie, born 1837, died June 6, 1872, Teeswater Cemetery.

William (Willie) MacKenzie, born 1841, died January 31, 1890, Teeswater Cemetery.

Murdoch MacKenzie, born 1843, died September 4, 1923.