

The Marquis Family of Argyll, Scotland.

My grandfather, Angus George Marquis, was born in 1901 into a family of **Tarbert** (Kintyre, Argyll, Scotland) fishermen. This family began with marriage of Alexander Marquis and Catherine McCaog in Tarbert in 1818. Alexander had been born on the small island of Cara (just off the west coast of Kintyre) in around 1790. Thus begins my journey in the discovery of the Marquis family story.

Island of Cara

Both Alexander's father, Donald, and grandfather, also Alexander, were the tacksmen (chief tenant) for the MacDonalds of Largie, who owned the island of Cara, and both described as traders and smugglers. Grandfather Alexander and his son Donald were still called McMarcus, so grandson Alexander was the first 'Marquis'. Alexander McMarcus (the first identified direct descendant of mine) was married to a cousin of Flora MacDonald of 'Bonnie Prince Charlie' fame, who was also related to the nearby MacDonalds of Largie. Flora actually visited Cara sometime before emigrating to North Carolina in 1774, presumably to visit her cousin, but unfortunately, her brother was killed during this trip in a hunting accident. In fact, there seems to have been some sort of long-term family association between the McMarcus family of Cara and Flora MacDonald's family on South Uist. In 1793, Flora's niece married a John MacMarquis, and Donald McMarcus's daughter, Mary Ann, moved to South Uist in 1829.



Idiosyncratic spelling meant many versions of the name existed before the standardisation and Anglicisation of Gaelic surnames took hold at the end of eighteenth century.



Beginnings – Gaelic Bards

Cristinus Macmarkys, in 1428, is the earliest potential candidate for the MacMarquis (Gaelic: Mhic Mharcus) family to be so far identified in recorded history, he was a rector at the church of St. Moluag, Trotternish, situated in the MacDonald part of the Isle of Skye.



In 1506, John McMarkisch was granted tenancies to lands at **Laggan** and **Kerranmore** in southern Kintyre (see map below) by King James IV – the first recorded appearance of a MacMarquis in Kintyre. He was described as a ‘carminista’, meaning something like a ‘singer’ or ‘versifier’, and apparently a member of a notable Gaelic bardic family.



Laggan and Kerranmore

Professor Colm Ó Baoill believes the bardic Mac Mharcuis family of Kintyre were probably related to the better-known Mac Marcuis poets of Antrim in Ulster, Ireland. More recently, Dr Pía Coira informed me that the bardic family itself claimed descent from Marcus (*Marcach*) MacDonald, a son of the MacDonalds’ first family, the Lords of the Isles, though who his actual father was is apparently open to some dispute. If this claim of lineage turned out to be true, it would imply a much higher social status for the bardic family. References for Marcus place him in Ulster, where he was killed in 1397, which might indicate that the Kintyre Mac Mharcuis family originated there as part of the Antrim Mac Marcuis family of poets. Precision in establishing early medieval family origins in Scotland is difficult, few written records have survived and questions of authenticity over much of what does exist. The fact that a sizable number have survived for the MacMarquis family – plus the general nature of them – indicates that the MacMarquis bards and tacksmen occupied a

fairly prominent position within the hierarchy of the Gaelic Highland clan system – if not quite MacDonalld ‘aristocracy’. It appears that some members of bardic families were used by their MacDonalld patrons as a sort of hereditary professional bureaucracy with a wide range of responsibilities which, as well as poets and musicians, also included lawyers, clergymen, even physicians. This was certainly the case for the most famous MacDonalld bardic family, the MacMhuirichs, who by the 18th century had evolved into clergymen and tacksmen. The McMarcus tacksmen on MacDonalld Cara, perhaps suggests a similar trajectory.

The MacMarquis family and aspects of the bardic tradition seems to have persisted at Laggan for at least two hundred years. Some of the family even managed to survive through the 1600s, a century when clan conflict, Civil War, Jacobite rebellions, plague, and famine convulsed the peninsula. Neil McMarqueis was at least one Marquis from the Laggan area who, in 1685, took part in the Jacobite Rising that ravaged Argyll in support of James II (VII of Scotland). The last MacMarquis to be recorded in the Laggan area was Donald McMarcuhis, who appeared in the 1694 Hearth Tax living in Glenadall, in the Mull of Kintyre.

Other Marquis Families in Argyll

Further evidence for the MacMarquis family having a long and some kind of influential presence in the region, comes from the fact that the name features twice in early historical maps of Argyll. First, *Baile Mhic Mharcuis* marking the settlement of the bardic family at Laggan during the 17th century, which would indicate a sizable community for that period. ‘Baile’ generally refers to a small township. Second, in Nether Lorne, Argyll there is promontory called *Rudha Mhic Mharcuis* overlooking the island of Easdale, again, suggesting a family of some importance having resided in that area for a significant period.

Being a comparatively rare name in Argyll means that it is likely any MacMarquis living there would have been related to the families of Laggan and later Cara. During my research I’ve come across several MacMarquis family groups throughout Argyll: Dalmally and Glenorchy from 1685; Nether Lorn, southwest of Oban, from 1654; Campbeltown, 1685 until the 1750s and ‘60s; even a family of ferrymen at Coulpport, Rosneath, during the 19th century.



'Laggan is on two 17th century maps as 'Balamack markish' and 'Balamack markyh': the 'Township of MacMarcus'. From one of these CPont's maps of 1610, local historian, Duncan Colville, reckoned that the MacMarcus settlement would have stood on the opposite side of the river from the former farmstead known as Gartgreillan.' Angus Martin.



Tarbert Marquis Family

Alexander Marquis's marriage in 1818 began what would become exactly two hundred years of his decedents fishing the waters of Loch Fyne. During the violent fishing-net conflict (1851-67), his son Dugald, along with many other Tarbert fishermen and even their womenfolk, would be jailed for illegal fishing. With the sinking of the Nancy Glen and the sad death of Duncan MacDougall (whose great grandmother and great uncle were Marquises) in January 2018 – the last of the heirs of Alexander Marquis fishing out of Tarbert – those two centuries came to an end.

The 20th century witnessed the gradual disappearance of the Marquis name from Tarbert, as more of them sought better opportunities elsewhere, creating new branches of the family in other parts of Scotland and beyond. My grandfather left Tarbert during the First World War for an engineering apprenticeship in the Govan shipyards. He later moved to Leicestershire where many of his descendants, including me still live, with others spreading the name to Cornwall, South Wales, and Sunderland in the UK, and onto new continents in the USA and Australia.




For the full story of the Marquises of Argyll, see my recently published book: *The Marquis Family of Argyll*.

The Life and Times of

The Marquis Family of Argyll

Smugglers, rebels, bards and fishermen




STEVE MARQUIS

**The dramatic story of
The Marquis Family of Argyll**

FOR more than three centuries, the Marquis family have been at the heart of Scottish highland history. Bards, smugglers, rebels and - latterly - courageous fishermen on the bitterly cold northern seas, they have witnessed first-hand the changing fortunes of a tumultuous land. Originally immersed in the rich Bardic traditions of the Gaelic, they were significant land-holders during the 16th and 17th centuries who found themselves in the thick of clan conflict, civil wars, Jacobite rebellions and the many social convulsions that threatened the highland way of life. They even had links, through marriage, to the legendary Flora MacDonald, whose involvement with Bonnie Prince Charlie brought her international fame.

In this fascinating book, Steve Marquis chronicles the erratic progress of his family from their bardic beginnings to the present day, including his own grandfather's decision in the 1920s to leave Scotland for Leicestershire in the English Midlands, where many off-shoots of the family continue to live today.

During the 18th century, Alexander McMarcus and his son Donald were described as traders and smugglers on the tiny island of Cara, just off the west coast of Kintyre. In 1818, Alexander, now Marquis, married Catherine McCaug in Tarbert, thus starting the fishing family the author's grandfather was born into in 1901. During the violent fishing conflict of 1851-67 his son Dugald, along with other Tarbert fishermen, would be jailed for illegal fishing. With the sinking of the *Nancy Glen* and the sad death of Duncan MacDougall in January, 2018, 200 years of Marquis men fishing out of Tarbert came to an end. The MacMarcus/Marquis family history closely mirrors that of Gaelic Kintyre. It is a tale of struggle and endurance as they attempted to survive extremely traumatic and violent times.



Steve Marquis, seen here with the island of Cara in the background, is a retired history and humanities teacher who lives in Leicester.

Steve Marquis, 2018.