



MacAskills in the New World Book Review :: Gordon Mack

AN ILLUMINATING and detailed account of MacAskill emigrants to the New World has been published in New Zealand. †*Four Sons of Skye*, by James G. H. McKay, charts the genealogy and history of the family of William Mòr Tolmie (or Tolme), an Inverness-born merchant who died in 1755.

Tolmie became the estate factor to the 22nd Macleod clan chief – *Norman the Wicked* – and from a Dunvegan base ran his own very successful mercantile operation trading from Norway to France. He was appointed postmaster for the entire island. But much more significantly he also managed all of the Macleod estate leases (tacks) bringing him enormous power and influence since the clan chief who was also an MP, was frequently absent.

McKay's book, revised in 2014, is packed full of historical information and huge volumes of genealogy which is often tricky to follow. But it does throw up entertaining facts such as family links between the Tolmies and the early Plantagenet Kings of England, and reaffirms ties between the MacAskills and the Lords of the Isles.

However, it is the chapter on the family of Mòr Tolmie's grandson, John (1793-1844), which will be of most interest perhaps to students of Rubh' an Dùnain history.

Uiginish JP John Tolmie, married Margaret Hope MacAskill, the daughter of an Eigg doctor and one of ten children. Her siblings included her eldest brother Hugh and her youngest sister Colina. It was Colina's marriage to her second cousin Donald MacAskill which forged the link with Rubh' an Dùnain. Donald was son of the 5th clan chief and Rubh' an Dùnain tacksman.

Among John and Margaret Tolmie's nine children was Frances, the celebrated Skye folklorist who penned a short 28pp historic account of Rubh' an Dùnain.

In time Margaret Tolmie's eldest brother Hugh would take over the



Margaret Hope Tolmie (nee MacAskill) c. 1878 – Picture courtesy J.G.H McKay, NZ



Talisker distillery founder, Hugh MacAskill, one of the last Rubh' an Dùnain tacksmen – Picture courtesy Patricia Leslie, NZ

Rubh' an Dùnain farm when his brother-in-law Donald and his wife emigrated to New Zealand. He would also go on to found the Talisker distillery.

The book includes many rare MacAskill photographs, including studies of Hugh MacAskill and his wife Jessie as well as Margaret Hope MacAskill herself. It also presents images of a number of family keepsakes which are held in New Zealand.

This is a self-published work but polished and well presented. It deserves considerable praise for the exhaustive research which McKay has undertaken and for the historic value which we, and future generations, can enjoy and admire.

† **Four Sons of Skye**, *The history of a Tolmie family from Skye. Scotland to Otago, New Zealand*, by James G. H. McKay, first published 2011, revised 2014. \$35NZ (PayPal) ISBN 978-0-473-16892-6. The author can be contacted [here](#).

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