

Richmond County Historical Society

'Those who don't remember their ancestors don't deserve to be remembered!'

May, 2019 Newsletter

The Life and Times of Flora MacDonald



Flora MacDonald

The May meeting of the Richmond County Historical Society will take place on Monday, May 20th at 7 p. m. at the Rockingham City Hall.

Richmond County Historical Society member Marla Coulthard will present the program for the May meeting on the subject of Flora MacDonald, who for a time in the mid-1770s lived in our area.

“Flora has taken me on many adventures,” said Coulthard. “I enjoy sharing those travels and experiences with folks who value history and heritage.”

Flora became one of Scotland’s most enduring heroines for the part she played in helping Bonnie Prince Charlie escape following the failed Jacobite Uprising of 1745. The Jacobite cause was aimed at returning a Catholic Stuart to the throne of Great Britain.

With a £30,000 reward on his head, the Prince was hiding out on the island of South Uist in the Outer Hebrides, staying barely a step ahead of the King’s soldiers, and that was thanks mainly to aid from the Clan MacDonald. Flora’s step-father Hugh MacDonald, who is buried at Mt. Carmel Church in Richmond County, provided her with a pass to travel by boat from the Outer Hebrides 43 miles over the sea to Skye. Besides the boatmen, the

pass listed Flora, a man escort, and an Irish spinning maid named Betty Burke, who was in fact Prince Charles Edward Stuart in disguise. The plot was successful and the Prince returned to exile in France, never to make another attempt to regain the throne.

Following the “Forty-five,” King George II did everything in his power to destroy the clan way of life and times became increasingly difficult for Scottish Highlanders. Thousands emigrated, most to either Australia or North America. Many came to North Carolina. In 1775, Flora and her husband, Allan, settled on an idyllic stretch of Cheeks Creek, just north of Richmond County in what is now part of the Uwharrie National Forest. They purchased two tracts from Caleb Touchstone. Some of the land was already cleared and planted. Houses and barns were in place and even a gristmill.

The peace the MacDonalds sought in moving to North Carolina did not last. Before long, because of an oath Allan had taken as a military man, they found themselves on the wrong side of history in the revolution to free America from Great Britain.

Coulthard, an avid hiker, has explored every corner of the Uwharrie National Forest, but no place grasped her curiosity like those 525 acres that for a brief time was home to Flora MacDonald. She became fascinated in the MacDonald’s history and her journalistic inquisitive nature took over resulting in what has become nearly 14 years of research.

“It wasn’t until just a couple of years ago that I decided it was time to pull all this research together into a book,” Coulthard said. “But more research was needed.”

That led to travel the last two summers to the Scottish Highlands and a trip to Nova Scotia last fall. Her talk will focus on the MacDonald home site, which she hopes to see listed on the National Registry of Historic Places, and on her travels to fully explore the life of Flora MacDonald.

Coulthard, a native of Hamlet and currently a resident of Rockingham, is a lifelong writer. During a career that spans nearly 50 years, she was an award-winning journalist and editor in the U.S. Army, she ran her own publishing company for a decade before becoming for a span of five years, the managing editor of the Richmond County Daily Journal.