
Sport, Parish Life, and the Émigré

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INTRODUCTION

The period 1773 to 1867 was the age of improvement in both Scotland and England. The allegedly new relationship between people and nature, often expressed in the exploitation of physical power and the use of machinery; the rise of a new class structure; the transformation of politics and administration; and the civil attack on manners and morals cannot be treated within a closed circle of facts and incidents divorced from a much wider cultural and social context. Within the Scottish context, the main players who acted as improvers were invariably a nascent ruling class involving a loose confederation of groups represented by the great nobility, country gentlemen and women, lawyers, educationalists, philosophers, and ministers. A nascent ruling class which favored change, they were collectively involved in the forging of a social, economic, political, and ideological infrastructure aimed at promoting economic growth and social progress.

Two key themes are explored in this paper, namely, sport and parish life in the age of improvement and sport, emigration and the emigre. At a more substantive level, this paper primarily draws upon information systematically gleaned from the *Statistical Accounts* of Scotland, a unique collection of parish records kept by the parish ministers of the time, that reflect the way of life in Scotland. If one salutary lesson is to be learned from such scrutiny, it is that attention to diversity in sport is a useful counterbalance to broad generalizations about Scottish history and social development. It is often the assumption that during this period sport in Scotland must be understood within the context of an impoverished, downtrodden, dispirited, and austere society that had little time or energy for sport. It is an assumption that is challenged in this paper.

IMPROVING SOCIETIES IN THE AGE OF IMPROVEMENT

The period 1773 to 1867 has often been described as one of the formative periods of change in the structure of the Scottish economy, the making of the British upper classes, and the emigration of Scots to far-off lands.¹ The entry of Saturday, October 2, 1773, in James Boswell's *Journal of a Tour in the Hebrides* reads: "In the evening the company danced as usual. We performed, with much activity, a dance which I suppose, the emigration from Skye has occasioned. They call it America. Each of the couples, after the common involution's and evolution's, successfully whirls round in a circle, till all are in motion; and the dance seems intended to show how emigration catches till a whole neighbourhood is set afloat."² The real dance called America was not that witnessed by Boswell and Johnson in a house on Sleat on the Island of Skye in 1773 but the movement of people and in many cases whole townships to such places as North Carolina, Georgia, Nova Scotia, and Glengarry.

Monolithic caricatures of "the age of improvement" and of "mass Highland clearances" are inaccurate and have often clouded a precise understanding of Scottish history, culture, and social development.³ The age of improvement witnessed various specific and uneven phases of emigration and clearance. Small-scale emigration to the American colonies, and especially to North Carolina, occurred from the 1730s onwards.⁴ The first overseas Gaelic-speaking community was formed in Nova Scotia in the same year as Boswell and Johnson had danced on Skye. Paradoxically, the Passenger Vessels Act of 1803 had actually been pressed on the government by the landowners to stem the exodus of Highland people. By increasing transportation fares, the Act retained, for a short period only, a potentially migrant labor force. By the 1820s the collapse of the kelp industry made large segments of the workforce (men and women) redundant. A series of Ejectment Acts passed between 1816 and 1820 gave improving landowners sweeping powers of eviction to help them create a more efficient and capitalistic agricultural system. Between 1815 and 1838, Nova Scotia received twenty-two thousand Scots, the majority of them emigrating from Highland parishes.⁵ Two thousand people left Tobermory and Stornoway for Cape Breton in 1826-27.⁶ By 1835 a further three and half thousand left Stornoway, Oban and Campbeltown.⁷ In 1841, one year before Queen Victoria and Prince Albert purchased the Balmoral Estate, 631 emigrants from Harris and the Uig area of Lewis arrived in Quebec destitute and penniless.

IMPROVEMENT, ENLIGHTENMENT, AND CLEARANCE

No single series of events or interpretation of the period may be regarded as authoritative or definitive. The word "improvement" was not an invention of the 1780s, nor does this essay want to suggest that clearance, migration, emigration and protest dominated the period. The clearances are part of Highland social history but not of Lowland, despite the fact that a whole class of cotters and subtenants disappeared from much of Lowland society in the century after 1750.⁸ It was a period that also encompassed the age of enlightenment and the intellectual

challenge brought about through doctrines of David Hume, Adam Smith, Adam Ferguson, and Henry Mackenzie. The inherent values of the literati were those of the landed society. For Enlightenment intellectuals such as Adam Smith and Henry Mackenzie, land rather than trade formed the moral foundation of society.

This was a doctrine that might have been some comfort to the old and new aristocracy but was of little comfort to the farmers, crofters, and others whose grazing rights and very existence was threatened by the emergence of recreational capitalism and the development of the Highlands as a sporting playground for the British upper classes.⁹ Land was not only wealth, it was power. When the impoverished Lewis cotters sent a delegation to see Lady Matheson, widow of the drug baron who cleared Carnish on the island of Lewis, to plead for access to land given over to sport, she retorted that these lands were hers and that local cotters had nothing to do with them. At stake, it is often argued, was a clash of two cultures, Highland and Lowland, that had fundamentally different understandings of the nature of land. Those who lived on the land were deeply attached to it, convinced by the traditional notion of *duthchas* that they held it in heritable trusteeship. In contrast, landed proprietors had begun to increasingly view their land and sporting estates as commercial enterprises.¹⁰

Even authoritative historians have urged that modern interpretations of what many outstanding Victorian men and women, including Queen Victoria herself, considered to be an age of improvement must be coolly critical and not simply reflective or derivative.¹¹ One of the ironies is of course that although there were many improvers, there was comparatively little improvement until social and economic circumstances made it profitable for some in the last two decades of the eighteenth century. The rage for improvement took on different appearances and occurred at different rates and in different parishes, cities, and glens at different times. Few improving landowners of the time had the resources of the Countess of Sutherland nor the conviction of her factor Patrick Sellar, who was convinced as early as 1813 that in order for the landed estates to become viable, the land had to be completely cleared, if necessary by emigration to North America.¹² Others such as Sir John MacDonald of Sleat admitted in 1763 that he could not help rejoicing in the flourishing condition of the country when it overflowed with people.¹³ Although the ideology of improvement was pursued with an almost evangelical zeal by the Sutherlands, Breadalbanes, Montroses, Lovats, Hamiltons, and Camerons, in reality only a few of the improving landlords such as Sir Archibald Grant of Monymusk and John Cockburn of Ormiston practiced the gospel of agricultural improvement, and usually with little profitable results.

IMPROVING SOCIETIES?

The age of improvement spawned numerous improving societies, which emerged from the 1720s onwards. The Honourable Society of Improvers in the Knowledge of Agriculture in Scotland was founded in Edinburgh in 1723.¹⁴ Others such as the Highland Society of Glasgow, founded in 1727, and the Highland Society of London, founded in 1778, were socially exclusive and fairly

typical in that in that they functioned in many instances to facilitate the interweaving between members of a hereditary Highland aristocracy and a broader British network of social and political elites. The Duke of Argyll presided over the Highland Society of Scotland, formed in Edinburgh in 1784 by a group of improvers who defined their aim as an inquiry into the present state of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, the condition of the people, and the means of improvement of the Highlands. The society also had an interest in the preservation of language, poetry, music, and customs of the Highlands. The driving forces behind the society were Sir John Sinclair (1754-1835), Henry Mackenzie (1745-1831), Sir William Macleod (Lord Bannatyne 1743-1833), and Sir John Macgregor Murray (d. 1822). By 1786, the society had become the sole established body for promoting agricultural change in Scotland.¹⁵

Highland Societies of Scotland sprouted in response to the widespread destruction of Gaelic culture following the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745.¹⁶ The paradox was that many of those who had been responsible for the forces that led to the widespread contempt and destruction of Gaelic culture became the cultural gatekeepers of its continued existence, albeit in often different romanticized forms.¹⁷ The present-day Braemar Royal Highland Society Gathering held in September every year originated from a meeting of the Braemar Wrights Society that took place in Braemar in January 1816.¹⁸ The early social composition of this society consisted not of improvers or even landowners but local skilled manual workers, mostly carpenters, who developed the society as a form of collective social insurance in the absence of any welfare state. By 1826, the society had become the Braemar Highland Society, and although social relief remained one of the membership functions, other primary tasks included the preservation of the kilt, language, and other cultural interests of the Highlands. By 1831, the vice presidents of the society included Lord Elcho, Sir David Kinlock, Sir Thomas Lauder, and Sir William Cumming, all titled landowners of the improving persuasion.¹⁹ One year later, the society included athletic contests in its annual gathering for the first time.

Tranter has argued there is little reason to believe the period 1773 to 1867 was not like any other period that preceded it.²⁰ Despite changes in the nature of technological production, the rate of change brought about by industrial production, movements in population, the disruption in the Church of Scotland, and increasing rates of urbanization, it has often been asserted that perhaps continuity outweighed change. Above all, this might have been the age of the muddled minister who supported emigration but was involved in the opposition to slavery, shared in the ideas of the French revolution but still held strictly to a view of society that supported patronage and ordered hierarchy. John Drysdale argued that the relationship between master and servant was inherently natural to society in both this world and the next.²¹ The landed classes, no less than James Boswell, would have found comfort in such sermons. The power of the church lay in Edinburgh with the General Assembly and yet it depended upon an intricate web of aristocratic, often rural patronage to sustain its influence. The age of improvement was a living paradox: urban in milieu, professional in character,

but with the values of the landed interest. The exploitation of physical power and the use of machinery; the rise of a new class structure; the emergence of a new Caledonia and the disappearance of North Britain; the emergence of a greater Scotland overseas freed from the complexities of living in a nation within a larger nation-state; the development of the railways (they had arrived at Inverness by 1863); famine, brutality, and phased clearances all emerged- and yet the values of the age of improvement were intended to preserve the status quo. Was it a case of *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*?

It has often been argued that sport and popular recreation disappeared during the age of improvement. Research into the *Statistical Accounts of Scotland* adds to and supports the assertion made by Tranter that there is little evidence to suggest that the period between 1780 and 1840 in particular witnessed an abnormal absence of sporting pastimes.²²

SPORT AND PARISH LIFE IN THE AGE OF IMPROVEMENT

Sir John Sinclair of Ulbster (1754-1835) in Caithness was in many ways the model of an ambitious politician and agricultural improver of the time.²³ Born in Thurso Castle in Caithness, he studied at Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Oxford, was admitted to both the Scottish and English bars (1755-82), and sat in Parliament (1780-1811). He had brought a range of agricultural changes to bear on his estates in Caithness in the 1790s in the belief that productivity could be doubled without diminishing the number of workers. He established the Board of Agriculture in 1793 by which time he had supervised the compilation of the *Old Statistical Accounts* of Scotland, 1791-99 (OSA), comprising a description of life in every parish in Scotland, written mainly with the help of parish ministers. The aim of the aforementioned compilation was to use the answers "to add to the quantum happiness of the country" and highlight to the government both the strengths and the weaknesses of the Scottish political economy. These accounts were superseded by 15 volumes of the second or *New Statistical Accounts* of 1845 (NSA). By the 1820s, Sir John Sinclair had changed his mind about his own parishioners and had begun to preach the dangers of overpopulation and the need to encourage migration to the towns, coastal villages, and beyond.

For the historian of sport, the *Statistical Accounts of Scotland* afford one of the most comprehensive and unique insights into the lives of Scottish people from very diverse parishes: urban and rural, rich and poor, Highland and Lowland. As guides to the frequency of both popular and aristocratic sporting culture, the *Statistical Accounts of Scotland* are by no means ideal.²⁴ Both the *Old Statistical Accounts*, which cover the 1790s, and the *New Statistical Accounts*, which cover the 1830s and 1840s, tend to understate the level of sporting activity. Few of the parish ministers who contributed to the *Old Statistical Accounts* were specifically asked to comment upon sport or outdoor recreation per se, although many did. However, the contributors to the *New Statistical Accounts* were specifically instructed to report on the customs, games, and amusements in common use. Despite certain limitations, there is sufficient information to establish a glimpse

of sport and parish life during the age of improvement. The evidence contained within the parish accounts of daily life in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Scotland might also be used to challenge persistent beliefs that have often clouded the understanding of certain periods in the social and historical development of Scotland in general and the Highlands of Scotland in particular.

It has often been suggested that in comparison with earlier and later stages, what was notable about sport in Scotland was its abnormal absence between about 1780 and 1850. The conventional wisdom on sport in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland is not too far removed from the following accounts penned by the parish ministers of Moulin (North and West Perthshire) in 1790 and the parish minister of Diurinish on the Island of Skye (Western Isles) in 1841. The Reverend Stewart noted, "It is remarkable that those gymnastic exercises, which constituted the chief pastime of the Highlanders 40 or 50 years ago, have almost totally disappeared. At every fair or meeting of the country people, there were contests at racing, wrestling, putting the stone, football and shinty."²⁵ Some fifty years later, the Minister of Diurinish observed "that all public gatherings, whether for shinty playing, or throwing the putting stone, for drinking and dancing, for marriages or funerals, have been discontinued and people live very much apart."²⁶ A similar picture is drawn by the Minister of Inverness, who wrote in 1835 that "although the games of football, shintie, throwing the stone, hammer and bowls, were formerly common among the lower orders, no amusements of the sort are now practised...except on Christmas and New Year's day."²⁷ Here then is a picture of an austere, disrupted parish way of life in which a dispirited, downtrodden, fever-ridden impoverished population, many looking for new hope and prosperity overseas, had little reason to celebrate and less energy for sport.

NO ENERGY FOR SPORT?

The conventional wisdom was that the most noticeable thing about the recreational and sporting habits of the Scots of the late eighteenth century was the sheer lack of them. Yet, with the *Statistical Accounts*, as with caricatures of Scottish history and social development, it is unwise, even impossible, to generalize because the state of affairs in one parish often bore little resemblance to that in the neighboring parish. An example of this diversity comes from Drainy (Moray): "Their general character is that of a sober, honest, peaceable people.... Rather grave than lively, seldom indulging themselves in any relaxation or diversion."²⁸ In contrast, in Kilchoman (Islay), it is clear the tenants enjoyed the advantages of a more benevolent regime in that the account states, "They are in general as contented with their situation as most people, as they have the comforts and conveniences of life in a reasonable degree...the dance and the song, with shinty and putting the stone, are their chief amusements."²⁹ In Kilwinning (Ayrshire), the principle amusement was archery,³⁰ and in Kirkmichael (North and West Perthshire) it is football, "a common amusement with schoolboys."³¹ Here we find mention of cock-fighting as we do in the parish of Applecross, where the dues from contests form part of the schoolmaster's salary, which amounts to "200

marks Scotch made up from quarter payments of ls.6d for English scholars and 2s.6d for Latin and arithmetic and cock-fight dues, which are equal to one quarters payment for each scholar.³²

One might have expected the minister of the parish of St. Andrews and St. Leonards (Fife) to account for golf in more detail other than to say, "There is a large tract of downs or bents which besides providing pasture for sheep, forms the links well known to golfers."³³ Fortunately for the Scottish tourist board, the popularity of golf is mentioned in other accounts: In Inveresk (Lothians), "the golf so long a favourite and peculiar exercise of the Scots, is much in use here;"³⁴ in Burntisland (Fife), "to those who are fond of the healthful diversion of golf there is adjoining one of the finest pieces of links in its size in Scotland;"³⁵ in Banff (Banffshire), there are "the links, affording an excellent field for the healthful exercise of riding and golf;"³⁶ in the parish of Ayr (Ayrshire), "no fields can be more commodious for walking, or the healthful exercises of riding and golf...wise parents send their children early to sport upon turf full of different sorts of clover particularly the yellow and white;"³⁷ in Angus, "between Broughty Ferry and Arbroath and the mouths of the North and South Esk, there are considerable areas of consolidated sand dunes or link, which have been valued for a variety of purposes, ranging from grazing and rabbit warrens to golf;"³⁸ in Cullen (Banffshire), "the parishioners are in the occasional habit of amusing themselves with the games of golf, shinty, football and target shooting,"³⁹ and in Rosemarkie (Black Isle), "the use of the flat sandy fields are used for golf as well as for racing."⁴⁰

To judge from the material contained in the *Statistical Accounts of Scotland*, Tranter is correct to argue that there is no reason to suppose that the environment of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Scotland was any more hostile to the survival of popular sports than that of earlier times.⁴¹ Certainly by the 1850s some traditional recreations had declined in popularity in certain parishes. For instance, the demise of cock-fighting and gambling is alluded to in the parishes of Wiston and Robertson (Lanarkshire), Westruther (Berwickshire), and Rothwell, Cummertrees, and Graitney (Dumfriesshire).⁴² Similarly, a dearth of football is mentioned at Wiston and Robertson (Lanarkshire), Westruther and Foulden (Berwickshire), Cross and Burness (Orkney); and shinty at Dingwall (Ross and Cromarty) and Highland Games and athletics at Kilbirnie (Ayrshire) and Kilmorie (Arran). The Shrove Tuesday football match between the married and unmarried men of Scone (Perthshire) and the practices of foot-racing, wrestling, putting the stone, football, and shinty at Moulin (Perthshire) and wrestling, stone and hammer throwing, football, and quoiting at Montquhitter (Aberdeenshire) had all been marginalized, according to the parish ministers, if not eradicated by the 1790s.

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF SPORT?

Yet it would be misleading to argue that sport and recreation per se disappeared throughout Scotland during the period covered by the *Statistical Accounts*. In 1792, in Inveraray (Argyll), "Provost Brown, late of Inveraray, when

100 years old, headed one of the contending parties at a shinty match ...and carried the town's colours in procession among the victors,"⁴³ in the same county of Argyll, the parishioners of Kilchoman enjoyed "the dance and the song, with shinty and putting the stone being the chief amusements";⁴⁴ in 1794, in the parish of Canoby (Dumfriesshire), it was recorded that "in particular horse-racing and cock-fighting were much in vogue and the irregularities can be seen upon the lower classes of people;"⁴⁵ in Kirkmichael (North and West Perthshire), "shooting matches and rural balls are frequent at the holy season. Football is a common amusement with the school boys who also preserve the custom of cock-fighting on Shrove Tuesday;"⁴⁶ in Stornoway (Ross and Cromarty) in 1833, the principal sporting amusements were seen as "the club and shinty, quoits or discus and putting the stone;"⁴⁷ in Kilmorack (Invernesshire) in 1841, "the quantity of ardent spirits consumed is immense. A great deal, however, of the rioting at marriages and funerals, which formerly existed, has been done away with. Their favourite amusements are shinty matches and dancing,"⁴⁸ in Muirkirk (Ayrshire), "the chief amusement in winter is curling, or playing stones on smooth ice; they eagerly vie with one another who shall come nearest the mark, and one part of the parish against another—one trade or occupation against another—and often one whole parish against another,"⁴⁹ and in Wamphray (Dumfriesshire), "we have but one general amusement, that of curling on the ice; and the parishioners take much credit for their superior skill in this engaging exercise. After the play is over, it is usual to make a hearty meal upon beef and greens, in the nearest public house."⁵⁰

A SPORTING PLAYGROUND

It must not be forgotten that by the 1850s the Highlands of Scotland had also begun to develop as one of the sporting and recreational domains of the monarchy, the aristocracy, and the nouveau riche. The development of sporting estates and their association with the conspicuous consumption of leisure for the rich had begun much earlier in the nineteenth century, if not before.⁵¹ For instance, in 1810, Mar forest had been let to Sir Harry Goodriche for as much as £1,200. Its 10,000 acres were extended in 1829 and again in 1838, covering 60,000 acres by 1839. In 1811, according to one account, there were only six deer forests in which red deer were actively preserved for sport, namely those at Atholl, Black Mount, Glenartney, Glen Fiddich, Invercauld, and Mar.⁵² By 1812, Highland lairds such as the Duke of Gordon had begun to advertise Glenfeshie (Cairngorms) in the *Times*. That year it was let to Grant of Ballindalloch for only £70.⁵³ By 1827, Rothiemurchus had been cleared of sheep for grouse shooting. By 1833, the Earl of Malmesbury was offering sporting rights on Harris for as little as £25. That same year, suggests Malmesbury, sporting estates had become all the rage. Estates such as Strathconan received enquiries from London, Cumberland, and Ireland before being leased to the Marquis of Bath for £1,200 in 1854 and to the Irishman Sir John Latouch of Newbury for £2,200 in 1855. By 1859, the shooting value of the land on the Glengarry estate had surpassed its grazing

value. Even in remote areas proprietors enjoyed the benefits from sporting rent. Sconcer on Skye was let for seven years in 1855 at the cost of £500 p.a.

As guides to the frequency of aristocratic sporting culture, the *Statistical Accounts of Scotland* are by no means ideal.⁵⁴ There is, nonetheless, sufficient information to establish the existence of deer forests and sporting estates in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland during the period between 1790 and 1850. Evidence from the parish records accounts for deer forests at Crathie and Braemar (Aberdeenshire); Kilmuir-Easter (Ross and Cromarty);⁵⁶ Eddrachillis (Sutherland and Caithness);⁵⁷ Cabrach and Mortlach (Banffshire)⁵⁸ and Halkirk (Sutherland and Caithness)⁵⁹ by the 1790s. By the 1840s, additional forests are accounted for at Glen Orchy (Argyll),⁶⁰ Kingussie and Strath (Invernesshire);⁶¹ Blair Atholl and Comrie (North and West Perthshire);⁶² Kilmanivary (Ross and Cromarty)⁶³ and Kirkmichael (Banffshire).⁶⁴

More specifically, the parish ministers noted events in Dowally (Perthshire) where "Red Deer have been shot which weighed above 18 stone and it would not be difficult for the Duke to furnish a Royal hunt,"⁶⁵ at Cabrach (Banffshire) where "the forests of Glenfiddich and Black Water are stored with deer,"⁶⁶ at Moy and Dalarossie (Invernesshire) where "Red Deer are very famous around the source of the Findhorn river,"⁶⁷ at Halkirk (Sutherland and Caithness) where "Na shean [Lord of the Venison or game] were seen as sport and amusement,"⁶⁸ at Crathie and Braemar (Aberdeenshire) where "The Earl of Fife and Mr. Farquharson of Invercauld have each of them extensive forests well-stocked with red and roe deer,"⁶⁹ and at Mortlach (Banffshire) where "in the forest of Glen Fiddich there is an abundance of red deer."⁷⁰

The Earl of Fife and Farquharson of Invercauld are but two of the many members of the hereditary aristocracy associated with shooting in the parish records: "the forest of Lewis (Ross and Cromarty) was devoted by the first Earl of Seaforth to the exclusive maintenance of red-deer for sporting purposes,"⁷¹ the Marquess of Abercorn regularly went shooting on the banks of Lochlaggan (Ross and Cromarty);⁷² in the parish of Portree (Invernesshire) Lord Macdonald's forest at Sconcer abounded with red deer;⁷³ in the parish of Edenkille (Elgin), the noble family of Moray were reported to go shooting for several weeks of the shooting season;⁷⁴ in Kirkmichael (Banffshire), the Duke of Richmond leased his portion of the hill for shooting at a rate of £300 in 1842.⁷⁵ The hunting of deer regularly graced "the south bank of the Marquis of Breadalbane's estate" in Dull (Perthshire),⁷⁶ and the late Duchess of Gordon was said to have regularly let her summer shooting quarters in the parish of Alvie.⁷⁷ The systematic development of sporting estates in the North, West and Eastern Highlands developed at such a pace that *The Oban Times* of February 22, 1879, carried an advertisement by J. Lyall Wilson (publisher of the *Sportsman and Tourists' Guide*) intimating the setting up of an agency for the letting of moors, deer forests, and salmon fishings (*The Oban Times*, February 22, 1879:4). The Duke of Athole and the Duke of Sutherland were but two from a list of notable people who agreed that their names could be associated with such a development.

Much of the attraction of the *Statistical Accounts* is that they cover a period of significant change in Scotland. Yet, emigration was a process that had already been underway for some time and was perhaps to culminate in the first two decades of the nineteenth century. Emigration is a revealing commentary on many aspects of the condition of the Scottish working classes in the nineteenth century. Again, there is a danger of generalization because many cases of emigration are often difficult to quantify. Some accounts of emigration reveal more about the history of individual families than they reveal of general trends or simple explanations. Countless Highland families may have followed the example of Anne Beaton Boggie, a native of Stromness in Orkney married to a handloom weaver, who was forced to go on a tramp for laboring work, moving from Tranent to Pollokshaws, Old Monkland, Edinburgh and Airdrie before the family left for America in 1856. There, the family was as rootless as in an improving Scotland, passing through Illinois, Nebraska, and Iowa before settling in Utah.⁷⁸ There were many routes to the emigration ships, and the experiences of the Highlanders who were cleared off their land directly into a steam packet, as at Barra or South Uist in 1850-51, or immortalized in paintings such as the 1883 portrayal of "Lochaber no more" were not the most common routes. Yet, it has often been asserted that Scottish customs, including sporting customs such as shinty and Highland Games, were transported with the émigré to far-off lands and flourished in contexts free from the pressures and turmoils being experienced in a changing Scotland.

SPORT, EMIGRATION, AND THE ÉMIGRÉ

Increased rents, the harsh winter of 1771, and cattle blight were some of the many factors that contributed to some seven hundred Macdonalds leaving Skye for North America in 1772.⁷⁹ Between 1768 and 1772, some three thousand Highlanders were estimated to have settled in the Cape Fear area of North Carolina. Another harsh winter in 1783 saw famine barely staved off by the distribution of relief. Familiar complaints of rising rents, uncertainty of tenure, poverty, and disaffection with improvement convinced many that emigration was the only course left open. It might be argued that the numerous agricultural tenants being displaced by the changes that were occurring in Glen Garry, Glen Moriston, Knoydart, Arisaig, and Morar could easily have moved south to Lowland towns where labor was in much demand due to industrialization. But those who had the resources for an ocean crossing were much more likely to emigrate to North America, where they had the prospect of holding land by permanent tenure instead of as a temporary, precarious, and dependent possession. It is in this strict sense that the movement from the Scottish Highlands to North Carolina, to the Mohawk Valley, to Glengarry County, to Nova Scotia, to Prince Edward Island and other localities during the later half of the eighteenth century can be understood as a gesture of defiance, maybe even rebellion. Their emigration, as has been remarked by Marianne Maclean, one of Glengarry County's leading

modern historians, registered a radical protest against the impact of transformation and the rage for improvement in the Highlands of Scotland.⁸⁰

A vivid picture of depopulation is portrayed in many of the parish records: from Lochbroom (Wester Ross), “the oppression of the landlords is a general complaint in the Highlands; and the consequence is that great numbers of people are forced to emigrate to America;”⁸¹ from Boleskine and Abertarf (Inverness-shire), “formerly Abertarf was inhabited by numerous... Macdonalds, Kennedies and Frasers... but this part of the parish having, within these 30 years, exchanged its proprietors...hardly contains the tenth part of its former inhabitants;”⁸² and from Duirinish (Skye), “from August 1771 to October 1790, eight large transports have sailed from this island with emigrants, to seek settlements in America.”⁸³ The writer of the North Uist account was at great pains to describe what he saw as the principal causes underlying trends towards emigration: “the sudden rise of the land-rents were certainly the original but not the only cause of emigration from the Isle of Sky and Uist to America.”⁸⁴ Many may have been lured to promised lands under false pretences. For instance, the Barra account (Western Isles) states that upwards of two hundred people left that county within two years; some emigrated to the island of St. John’s and Nova Scotia in North America, “being inveigled thither by a Mr F... Upon promises of the undisturbed profession of their religion (being all Roman Catholics) and of free property for themselves and their offspring for ever.”⁸⁵ Various views are offered in the accounts, with the following from Ardchattan and Muckairn (Argyll) being typical of many: “140 persons emigrated from hence to America and this year more are preparing to follow, being much encouraged by the flattering accounts of former emigrants.”⁸⁶

Various phases of emigration and, to a lesser extent, migration from the Highlands has often been viewed as part of a conscious protest by various sections of Highland society aimed at preserving traditional customs and a way of life.⁸⁷ Those who emigrated to the Maritime provinces of Canada between 1780 and 1820 took with them not only the values and close-knit texture of the local society from which they came but also the material culture and traditions that both contributed to and were constitutive of the local societies from which they came. One cannot divorce the development of, for example, Highland Societies, Highland Games, shinty, and curling overseas from the diverse conditions that gave rise to emigration in the first place.

Numerous Scottish Societies, St. Andrew’s Clubs, Burns Clubs, Thistle Societies, and Caledonian Societies rapidly emerged after about 1820. According to the 1903 Register of Scottish Societies in the United States and the Dominion of Canada, such societies functioned to relieve indigenous émigrés or their families; foster and encourage a love of Scotland, its history, literature, customs (including national athletic games); and promote friendly and sociable relations amongst the membership. Such societies might have included those formed in Philadelphia as early as 1749; Savannah, Georgia, in 1750; New York City in 1756; Halifax, Nova Scotia, in 1768; St. John, New Brunswick, in 1798; Albany in 1803; Buffalo in 1843; the Burns Club of New York in 1847; and the Detroit St. Andrews Society of 1849, which held its first Highland Games in 1867.⁸⁸ By the time the

Kingussie Record of 1903 had reported on the efforts of the New York Highlanders Shinty Club, traditional sporting customs had become part of the social and cultural fabric of many émigré communities.⁸⁹ It is not necessary to provide example after example to illustrate the point that by the time the North American Caledonian Association was formed toward the end of the nineteenth century, Scottish Highland Games and other ancient sporting traditions had become focal points of emigre reunions. The San Francisco and Glengarry Highland Games will serve as illustrative examples of two points that are being made here.

The Caledonian Club of San Francisco held its first Highland Games in 1866. Like many other émigré societies, the objectives of the club included the encouragement and practice of Highland Games; the preservation of a taste for the Gaelic language and literature; and the binding more closely of the social links amongst sons and daughters of the descendants of émigrés. One year later, Donald MacLennan addressed the assembly in these words:⁹⁰

We are assembled here this morning to participate in the sports so dear in the memories of our native land. Though transplanted, as it were, to the shores of the pacific many thousands of miles from bonnie Scotland, still the hearts of her children warm at the recollections of their youth and beat more strongly at the mention of her name. It has been one of the peculiarities and the pride of our people, in whatever portion of the globe we may dwell, to honour and cherish all that reminds us of our earlier years; and in those fond recollections we harbor our national games.

Perhaps those fond recollections of youth were akin to those from the parish of Kilchoman (Islay) who “so far are so sensible of the advantages they enjoy, and are in general so contented with the situation, that very few have emigrated.”⁹¹ Yet in contrast, if one is to use a comparative example of another MacLennan, Hugh MacLennan, a leading exponent of Canadian national identity, expressed relief when he returned to Montreal from the empty glens of Kintail. Comparing the two landscapes and experiences, he wrote:⁹²

Such sweeps of emptiness I never saw in Canada before I went to the Mackenzie River. But this Highland emptiness, only a few hundred miles above the massed population of England, is a far different thing from the emptiness of our own North West Territories. Above the 60th parallel in Canada you feel like nobody but God had ever been there before you, but in these deserted Highland spaces around Kintail you feel that everyone who ever mattered is dead and gone.

Hugh MacLennan was born in Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia. But his family origins were in Kintail, his grandfather being one of the thousands of people who were expelled from Scotland as a result of an uneven sequence of events infamously termed the Highland Clearances. It was inevitable that MacLennan should have mixed feelings about his trip to the place where his ancestors had lived, for he knew that the Highlands were once thickly populated, and he knew that a valuable human culture and a distinctive way of life had been destroyed here. He thus returned to Montreal with a profound sense of relief at

having escaped from a place where he felt that everyone who ever mattered was dead and gone.

Today, should you venture beyond Barrisdale into the Knoydart peninsula, now one of the most isolated localities in all of Europe, you will find in its 200 square miles no more than two or three dozen people.⁹³ So completely have many of the district's original communities been obliterated, there is among modern Knoydart's population not a single person who can claim descent from any of the hundreds of families who lived there in the period before Thomas Gillespie drove his sheep into those parts. Yet, as any visitor from Scotland to Ontario's Glengarry county is made aware, you can find, an ocean's breadth from Knoydart and its neighboring localities, vast numbers of folk who to some extent still think of themselves as belonging to some romanticized faraway glen or shoreline. And not without some reason were prospective emigrants warned, "Go not to Glengarry if you be not a Highlander" by the author of one 1829 publication.⁹⁴ Of the 8,500 or so people living in Upper Canada's easternmost county at that time, around three-quarters were of Scottish Highland extraction and many were still largely Gaelic-speaking. Much the same was true of the 17,500 Glengarry residents of twenty years later when, as it was revealed by census data, one resident in every six was named either Madonell or Macdonald.⁹⁵

In 1819, the same year as the St. Fillans Society of Scotland held its first Highland Games, the Glengarry Highland Society was organized to promote Scottish traditional sports by means of a Highland Gathering. Although not the oldest continuous games in Canada, it is certainly often referred to as one of the original Highland Games.⁹⁶ Yet, what exactly is it that is being celebrated at the Glengarry Highland Games? A lost past, a romantic history, a dislocated Scottish diaspora, an authentic Highland Games free from the encroachment of Anglicization, an ancient sporting tradition which has flourished in an authentic Gaelic culture that escaped the rage of improvement? I think not. Certainly the Glengarry Highland Games and the pipers, the dancers, the hammer throwers, and the heavy events give the occasion a distinct sense of being associated in some way with some part of a Highland culture which in itself is as different as it is similar and in any case is almost impossible to define. Or does it owe nothing to Scotland at all, being perhaps a celebration of a different sense of community whose substance has nothing to do with an émigré culture and whose customs and traditions have exorcised an early culling of nostalgic pride? Is it a Glengarry sense of identity that is as different in the twentieth century as it was in the nineteenth century? It is perhaps a celebration that owes as much to the loyalist exodus from the Mohawk valley; the years and lifetimes not of hewing peat or kelp or coal but turning forest into farmland and the myriad of experiences which make Glengarry County and the Glengarry Highland Games what they are today: something that is not Scottish or Highland but is a celebration of being a North American Scottish Highlander. The distinction between the two contexts is absolutely crucial.

CONCLUSION

The evidence contained in the *Statistical Accounts of Scotland* allows for at least two tentative conclusions to be made. First, it is difficult to substantiate broad generalizations that sport and popular recreation disappeared or even significantly declined in Scotland during the period between about 1790 and 1850. Certain sports were certainly marginalized for certain periods in certain parishes. But many also survived and adapted to the continuities and changes being experienced. As previously mentioned, it is important to challenge an all-encompassing mythology or picture of an austere, disrupted parish way of life in which a dispirited, impoverished population had given up sport. This might have been closer to the truth in the clearance parishes of, for example, Strathnaver in Sutherland or in certain parishes in the Western Highlands, and even the more industrial South, where Calvinist doctrines might have been more resolute. Even shinty, which may have lost some of its early popularity due to the breakup of certain large estates and the resultant dispersion of traditional sources of players, did not disappear but continued to be played in certain parishes throughout the phases of clearance and disruption in the Highlands.

Second, the whole notion of the Highlands as a sporting playground is not only paradoxical but somewhat at odds with the notion of a Highland social formation, or for that matter a stateless nation such as Scotland, devoid of sporting customs and amusements during the later part of the age of improvement. This notion was in no small way constructed through the actions of Queen Victoria herself during the 1840s. The Victorian monarchy attracted a wealthy sporting elite whose priorities were not always that of improvement or community stability or rural development. The whole notion of the Highlands as a natural sporting playground is itself a mythical caricature that sits alongside the brand of Scotland portrayed through tartan kilts, castles, mist, mountains, golf, shortbread tins, whisky, and sporting estates. The wilderness experience that was captured in the sporting shoot is no more natural than the clearances from Strathnaver in Sutherland or the land raids that occurred in Argyll, Caithness, and Perthshire. The notion of a natural sporting playground is itself unnatural because it was created, in part, by men and women and facilitated through an ideology of improvement.

Finally, while it is crucial not to provide sport with an overdetermined degree of social or political importance in the lives of Scottish parishioners, it is also important not to underestimate the existence of a sporting culture in Scotland during the period covered by the *Statistical Accounts of Scotland*. One conclusion might be that bleak abstractions of the “peoples clearances” or emigration and the push to America or the age of improvement or religious social control and disruption or the absence of popular sporting pastimes do not take us very far unless they are specifically unpacked in terms of time, people, and space, to name but three factors. To some extent, to talk of a Highland polity is itself a false picture because it is often necessary to distinguish between Eastern, Central, and Western Highlands as well as between the mainland and the Western Isles. Such

concerns can be made without diminishing the fact that sport itself in all its different forms has contributed to cultures north of the Highland line and indeed to the making of a nation, albeit a stateless one since 1707—but perhaps not for much longer.

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 2. James Boswell, *The Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* (London: Penguin, 1984) 265.
 3. The point being made here is that the clearances in Scotland were never a universal phenomenon but occurred in different places and at different times.
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 5. Marinell Maclean and Colin Carrell, *As an Fhearann: From the Land* (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 1986) 13.
 6. *Ibid*, 13.
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 9. *Ibid*, 362.
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 11. Asa Briggs, *The Age of Improvement 1783-1867* (London: Longman, 1993).
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 13. *Ibid*, 197.
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 16. Grant Jarvie, *Highland Games: The Making of the Myth* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991) 72.
 17. *Ibid*.
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 19. *Ibid*.
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 25. *Old Statistical Accounts of Scotland* (OSA) Vol. VIII: 770.
 26. *New Statistical Accounts of Scotland* (NSA) Vol. XIV: 360.

27. *NSA*, Vol. XIV: 18.
28. *OSA*, Vol. XVI: 467.
29. *OSA*, Vol. XX: 395.
30. *OSA*, Vol. VI: 369.
31. *OSA*, Vol. XII: 678.
32. *OSA*, Vol. XVII: 293.
33. *OSA*, Vol. X: 711.
34. *OSA*, Vol. II: 307.
35. *OSA*, Vol. X: 91.
36. *OSA*, Vol. XVI: 17.
37. *OSA*, Vol. VI: 19.
38. *OSA*, Vol. XII: 13.
39. *NSA*, Vol. XIII: 331.
40. *NSA*, Vol. XIV: 35.
41. Neil Tranter, "Popular Sports and the Industrial Revolution in Scotland: Evidence of the Statistical Accounts," *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 1987, Vol. 4: No 1, 21-28.
42. Neil Tranter, "Popular Sports and the Industrial Revolution in Scotland: Evidence of the Statistical Accounts," *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 1987, Vol. 4: No 1, 29.
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46. *OSA*, Vol. XII: 690.
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60. *NSA*, Vol. XVI: 117.
61. *NSA*, Vol. XIV: 66.
62. *OSA*, Vol. XII: 374.
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