

# Gàidhlig air feadh an t-saoghail ...

Gaelic across the world. The great exodus from Scotland in the 19th century saw Gaelic speakers settle in many countries around the world, taking their language and culture with them.

Canada was one country where Gaelic was once spoken widely. It is now limited to Nova Scotia, which is the only region outside of Scotland where Gaelic language and culture are still everyday aspects of community life. The [Gaelic College](#) or Colaisde na Gàidhlig in St Ann's, Cape Breton Island, does a lot to keep the language and culture alive.

Some Nova Scotians migrated to New Zealand in the 1850s, settling in and around Waipu. Many more Scots migrated here from Scotland. How did Gaelic fare in this new country?

## Gaelic in New Zealand

Of all the Scottish immigrants to New Zealand, only a minority were Gaelic speakers. Gaelic was best preserved in the Highlands of Scotland, and as a proportion of all Scots migrating to New Zealand Highlanders reached their peak between 1853 and 1870. But even then, those from the Highlands made up only 16% of all Scottish immigrants. Over the rest of the 19th century the figure was only around 10%.

Scottish associations such as St Andrew's societies, Caledonian societies and Burns clubs were common in New Zealand in the second half of the 19th century and into the 20th. These groups fostered many Highland traditions, but generally Gaelic speakers were a minority.

Dunedin's Gaelic Society was an exception. Founded in 1881, it was open only to those who originated in the Highlands and spoke the language. Its meetings, library and choir all helped keep the language alive. We'll have more about this organisation in a future issue.

Elsewhere in Otago and in Southland Gaelic church services in some towns also helped to preserve the language.

A RICH treat was afforded the Gaelic-speaking population of Milton on Sabbath afternoon last, when Rev. John M'Leod, from New South Wales, preached in Gaelic to an audience of nearly forty persons. Had the fact been known before, no doubt a much larger congregation would have assembled, the announcement being only made by Mr Chisholm in closing the services conducted by Mr M'Leod in English. Mr M'Leod left Dunedin to prosecute his studies for the ministry some years ago, and has now returned to recruit his health, which has suffered from the excessive heat of that climate. When Mr M'Leod left Otago, we understood that the Synod of Otago purposed eventually securing his services on behalf of the Gaelic-speaking population of the province, among whom a revival of early services and associations would no doubt prove most beneficial. Mr M'Leod preaches much more fluently in Gaelic than English.

*Bruce Herald* 1 February 1871

Gaelic-speaking areas existed in the 19th century and 20th centuries in other places where Gaelic speakers were concentrated, including Turakina, the Mackenzie Country and Waipu.

Turakina is the site of New Zealand's longest-running Highland games.

The Mackenzie Country takes its name from the Gaelic-speaking sheep thief James Mackenzie. There are many stories about this somewhat mysterious character, including that his trusty dog Friday responded only to commands in Gaelic (despite having an English name). The spot where Mackenzie was captured is marked by a monument with inscriptions in English, Māori and Gaelic.



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### £50 Pounds Reward.

Sheriff's Office, Lyttelton,  
May 11th, 1855.

**WHEREAS** the Prisoner, **JAMES MACKENZIE**, sentenced to a term of imprisonment, at the last session of the Supreme Court, for sheep stealing, did, on the 10th instant succeed in effecting his escape and is still at large, the above reward will be paid to any person or persons, who may succeed in apprehending him and handing him over to the proper authorities.

Description of **MACKENZIE**:—Height, about 5 feet 11 inches; hair, light; eyes, small and grey; nose, large and aquiline; face, long and thin; body spare and muscular

At the time of effecting his escape he had on a brown wide-awake hat; cloth waistcoat, check shirt, marked with a broad arrow, and numbered, corduroy trowsers, a pair of worsted socks, no boots or shoes. Speaks English imperfectly, feigning generally that he only understands Gaelic. Has a peculiar habit of putting his hands behind him, and snapping his fingers.

**CHARLES SIMEON**,  
Sheriff.

*Lyttelton Times*, 12 May 1855

One of their granddaughters later recalled Ann Matheson and her sister Isabella McDonald, well into the 20th century, "speaking Gaelic so that I wouldn't know whom they were discussing".

In 1925 the famous Scottish entertainer Harry Lauder sailed to Singapore on a ship captained by Ann's brother Murdoch McDonald. Lauder noted that Murdoch spoke "in the soft, warm accents of the true Highlander", and that he "had the full Gaelic". As the youngest of the family Murdoch had been born in New Zealand, but he was raised in a Waipu household that retained the language at least within the home.

In a society dominated by the English language oral use of Gaelic often declined in New Zealand within a generation, becoming confined to the home and Gaelic Society events. The language lives on in New Zealand in many Gaelic place names, for example Benmore, Dalmore, Dunedin, Glencoe, Glendhu, Glenorchy and Kinloch.

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### He spoke in the soft, warm accents of the true Highlander, and had the full Gaelic

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With its large Scottish population, many of them Highlanders, Waipu was different. In his 1953 landmark book about the community, *Lion of Scotland*, Neil Robinson recorded that "nearly one hundred years after their forebears had left Scotland, it was still a commonplace for children to chatter in Gaelic, even though they might forget it when they went out into the world".

Norman Matheson was a teacher in Waipu in the 1860s and he and his wife Ann's elder children, all born in Waipu, learnt Gaelic. The younger ones who were born after the family moved away from the area did not pick up the language in the same way.



CAPTAIN M. McDONALD.

Along with Waipu Dunedin was another place where Gaelic lingered in New Zealand, and special efforts were made to keep it alive. We will have some stories of that in a future issue.

