

McDONALD: HECTOR

Known as Hector

**Born: 1812 (his headstone says 1814),
Isle of Coll, Scotland;
(some sources say Isle of Coll, Tyree, birthplace of his father)**

Married, 1st: c. 1847, Kapiti region, New Zealand

To: Te Kopi Ngatera (d. 14 April 1848)

Married, 2nd: 23 May 1854, Wellington, New Zealand

To: Agnes Carmont (b.2 Sept 1829 - d.27 Nov 1906)

Died: 7 Aug 1878, Otaki, New Zealand

**Buried: Hokio Beach Cemetery, Horowhenua;
headstone in McDonald private cemetery, Moutere Rd, Levin**

Hector's parents were:

Roderick (born c. 1776, Isle of Coll, Inner Hebrides, Scotland;
d.8 Nov 1846, Tasmania, Australia,),

and

Anne (nee MacLean) (born c.1782; d. 25 Jan 1839).

They were married on 19 May 1801.

Hector had two brothers and eight sisters:

Allan 1802,
Hugh 1803,
Euphemia (Effy) 1805,
Marion 1807,
Janet 1809,
Mary 1813,
Margaret 1814,
Catherine (Kitty) 1815,
Ann 1817,
Flora 1825

Hector and Te Kopi had one son:

Hugh Victor (b. 14 April 1848 – d. unknown)

Hector and Agnes had five sons and five daughters:

Hector Hugh b. 23 May 1856, d. 14 Sept 1902, in Palmerston North

Mary Agnes Jane b. 17 Aug 1857, d. after 1918

Annie b. 16 Sept 1858, d. 19 Dec 1894, aged 36, in Levin

John Roderick b. 4 April 1860, d. 19 May 1915, aged 56, in Wanganui
Roderick Allan b. 22 Dec 1861 (headstone says Dec 1860) d. 12 Jan 1931, in Levin
Neil Alexander b. 13 June 1863, d. 30 May 1894
Allan b. 30 April 1865, d. 15 June 1892
Agnes Flora b. 10 May 1867, d. 26 Jan 1947, aged 79, in New Plymouth
Flora b. 19 Feb 1869, d. 23 May 1878, aged 9
Margaret Lucy b. 8 July 1871, d. 15 Jan 1910, aged 39

Arrival in New Zealand

As a 6-year-old, Hector emigrated with his family from Scotland to Tasmania. Growing up in the Derwent valley where Hector's father's clan had a large block of land, Hector appeared to have 'little taste for the uneventful and unprofitable life offered by farming' so he went to sea aboard a whaler which brought him across to New Zealand in the early 1830s. In 1832, he established his own whaling station on Kapiti Island with the consent of the dominant Maori chief of the district, Te Rauparaha, who was at the height of his powers about 10 years after conquering this coastal region. Te Rauparaha invited Hector to settle at Rangiuuru, on the northern side of Otaki River.

After they had developed a trusting relationship, the chief allowed Hector to marry his niece Te Kopi Ngatera in Maori tradition. She died, apparently in childbirth, while having their first child Hugh Victor in 1848.

Later, in 1854, he married a young Scots woman Agnes Carmont, a devout Catholic who had immigrated to Wellington, at the age of 19, on the *Phoebe* in 1850. They would have 10 children.

Hector's third son, Roderick (Rod), described his father (in his book *Te Hekenga*) 'a rover by disposition' but on the Kapiti Coast 'he cast his anchor, and from the day he landed in 1832, until his death over 50 years later, he was faithful to the land which in his youth had enslaved his wandering fancy'.

Rod described him as a strong man 'with a Highlander's virtues, and many of his failings'. He lived as a chieftain 'respected by the Maoris for his firmness of character, and the honesty he always displayed in his dealings with them'.

After the establishment of Wellington as a settlement in 1840, Hector switched to trading. He had large stores at Otaki. He bought pigs, potatoes and pumpkin from the Maoris and dispatched them to Wellington in two schooners he owned, returning with blankets, clothing and pots for the locals.

It's recorded in *Te Hekenga* (1929) that in different parts of the Otaki district about 100 acres of land was purchased by Hector from Maori and registered in the Lands Office. Most of it continued to be occupied by Maori.

Leased Land & Farming Days

By the 1850s Hector had extended his activities to farming. He leased from Ngati-Raukawa and Muaupoko the whole coastal strip from the Ohau River to Poroutawhao, some 12,000 acres, on which he later ran about the same number of sheep.

The land from Waiwiri creek to Hokio stream Hector leased directly from Te Whatanui to whom he paid the rent. North of the Hokio – in Muaupoko country – a number of leading men – old Taueki, Rangi Rurupuni, Matene, and old Magere (Margaret) each received rent.

North of the Muaupoko block was land owned by the Ngati-Huia hapu of the Ngati-Raukawa tribe. Rent here was paid to He Hoia, Te Rau, and Hutana, among others.

The landward boundary of the McDonald run was along a line that ran from Lake Papaitonga across to Lake Horowhenua and on across to Poroutawhao pa. Beyond that, to the east, was unbroken bush right up and across the Tararua Range to the Wairarapa. It was entered only for hunting pigeons and searching for wayward stock.

Local Maori supplied the entire labour force on the run. They were very good stockmen who took great pride in hunting down wild cattle that had gone astray and shearing the sheep, with the women picking up the fleeces.

By the early 1870s, six white men only (Hector included) leased the whole of the coastal land from Otaki to the Manawatu.

Initially, Hector's land consisted of grassed hills on which tall patches of fern and tutu grew, while the grassed flats had scattered patches of flax and toetoe on them. Later, much of this country was cleared by felling and burning, but the results weren't entirely beneficial. Rod believed less stock were run, partly because there wasn't the same degree of shelter for the animals among the native stands, while the sand dunes became unstable and steadily drifted inland from the 1880s.

With all this land to look after, Hector was diversifying away from his trading business. By 1858, he had remarried and he and Agnes had three children - Hector Hugh, Mary Jane and Annie, along with Hector's son to Te Kopi, Hugh Victor. They moved from Otaki to the mouth of the Hokio Stream, and this began the family's direct connection with Horowhenua.

The Move to Hokio & the Accommodation House

It was the starting of the Cobb and Co coaches' mail service along the beach front from Wellington to Wanganui in 1858 that motivated Hector's move to Hokio.

Here he built an accommodation house on an elevated area by the stream where the present Hokio township sits. To the south of it was 50-100 acres of flats sown with lucerne and used as a holding paddock

It was an ideal location, being halfway between Otaki and Foxton, as a changing-post for the coach horses. It was the largest of such establishments - located every ten miles or so up the coast - a low, rambling building of 15 rooms, the timber for which had been pit-sawn at Lake Horowhenua and carted to the beach in bullock-drays. The roof was of toe-toe thatch. The premises provided short-term accommodation for drovers, traders and friends.

Early on, Hector combined this business with continuing to trade. Behind the house a slab-sided and thatched granary was built to store maize and potatoes bought from the Maoris and later sent by bullock-dray to Wellington. There were also stables for the coach horses which arrived for resting twice a day, one set of 5 or 6 going northwards, the other south. This continued until the railway line to Palmerston North was completed in 1886.

The premises obtained a bush liquor licence. The staple drink dispensed was overproof ship's rum, poured straight from the cask, which required the licensee's watchful rationing

to avoid unruly drunkenness. Hector was reputed to supply mostly no more than the customer 'could comfortably carry'.

For the next decade this establishment became a local connecting link between those who travelled up and down the beach road and the native people who continued to live their customary lives inland from the dunes.

There were no other white families living in the region, so all social contact for parents and children alike was with the surrounding Maoris. In 1860, John Roderick McDonald was their first child born at Hokio, making him the first European born in the district. A further 6 McDonald children were born at Hokio, including Rod, their third son. All spoke fluent *te reo*.

Agnes McDonald

Agnes was the daughter of substantial farmers but was brought up, mostly, in her uncle Dr McCartney's household in Glasgow, Scotland. From childhood she assisted him in his dispensary, gaining a knowledge of medicine that would serve her well later when dealing with the ailments of local Maoris. How she came to be in New Zealand was the result of a particular desire to visit this country, which led her to answer an advertisement from the wife of a Mr Charles Clifford for a companion to travel with her to New Zealand for 3 years. Clifford was a large landowner in Marlborough.

She and Hector met during his trading days in Wellington.

After moving to Otaki, then Hokio, as a wife and mother, Agnes was the only white woman for miles around, left alone with the children for days at a time when Hector was away in Wellington or Rangitikei. She undoubtedly had great courage to endure this life among a large population of what Rod described as 'turbulent natives'. She was a deeply and simply religious woman – all that happened was the will of God. Rod described her as having 'a great faith, a great charity and a great kindness of heart, large enough to encompass all, brown and white alike'. Her deeds extended to nursing and providing medical aid to Maori, as she did her own family, for a period lasting 40 years.

From early on in her life in this region, Agnes strove to reduce the high mortality rate amongst the Maoris. She visited Sir Donald McLean, the Native Minister, and requested supplies of medicines for treating a wide range of ailments. She underwent an examination by a Wellington chemist as to her qualifications in dispensing, after which she was supplied with a medicine chest by the Government, which was kept restocked as required. From then on, she acted as almost the sole doctor to local Maori until the establishment of the town of Levin.

It was no straight-forward task as the Maoris were wary of, and even resistant to, treatment. Accordingly, Agnes would search out cases she heard of in the surrounding pas and pressure the ill to submit to her attention. One disease she was particularly adept at treating was known as scrofula, detected by a swelling of the glands in the neck. If it shifted to beneath the armpit it was always fatal. She found painting the glands with iodine cleared the infection within a short time.

Yet another responsibility Agnes accepted was local Postmistress, the accommodation house at Hokio being also a post office. She also educated her children there.

The Move from Hokio

In autumn 1869, the McDonalds gave up the accommodation house, letting it to a man named Walmsley, and shifted to Horowhenua, then a local term for the area west of Lake Horowhenua. The accommodation house quickly deteriorated as Walmsley failed to attract a similar level of custom. His licence was cancelled and Hector brought in an older man, a Waterloo war veteran named Carter, but he too couldn't make a success of it. When he died, the building was abandoned, the roof fell in, and it was eventually consumed by the drift of the sand dunes.

The new McDonald home was just west of the now Moutere Rd, just before the bridge. It consisted of seven rooms, built in the usual old colonial style, with a high gable roof and upstairs bedrooms, and a long lean-to portion at the back. The walls were of slabs split from the bush that fringed the lake, and the roof of raupo thatch. The rooms were panelled with toe stalks laid side-by-side and bound with dyed flax in elaborate patterns, similar to those seen in some meeting houses.

The still-existent McDonald family cemetery on the west of Moutere Rd is close to the site of the house.

Agnes again acted as postmistress. Rod would ride daily out to Hokio to exchange mail as the coaches passed by, usually early each evening.

Hector's community interests and activities

During these years, Hector McDonald provided the government with information and advice about tribal matters including land disputes. The homestead provided hospitality for official visitors, especially during 1873 when Native Land Court judge John Rogan was adjudicating an action by Muaupoko to regain land lost to Ngati Raukawa. McDonald's home and farm were in the midst of the disputed territory and after attending the Land Court hearing in Foxton, he hosted a lunch for judge Rogan when he came to inspect the land for himself. Rogan subsequently awarded greatly increased territory to Muaupoko.

This failed to abate tensions between the opposing claimants and skirmishes near and around the McDonald homestead broke out frequently as the family continued going about their daily activities of farming and housework. On one occasion bullets whistled over their roof as Muaupoko and Raukawa engaged each other from their respective vantage points. Hector travelled regularly to Otaki, a place where he was able to consult with Sir Donald McLean on finding a resolution.

He was growing increasingly anxious, as his health declined, about the security of his tenure (remember, all his land was leased). He made several applications to McLean for a Crown grant, suggesting that it be made in the name of the son of Te Kopi, Hugh. It appears that some grant was envisaged, but delays ensued. In the meantime, the Native Department paid a supplement which doubled his salary of £10 as Horowhenua postmaster, a position he had held since June 1872.

In December 1876 Hector was elected to the first Manawatu County Council as member for Horowhenua Riding.

Hector's Death

Hector died suddenly on 7 August 1878, after collapsing in the street outside an Otaki hotel. He left an estate of only £47. The second son (Agnes's first-born), Hector Hugh,

succeeded to the farm and post office. He had become a native interpreter, working in the Maori Land Courts. (Later, he died young, at the age of 46, in 1902).

It's not known what became of Hector's first child, Hugh Victor, born to Te Rauparaha's niece, Te Kopi. All that's said of him is that he was brought up by Agnes along with her own children, he never married or had any family of his own.

In 1883, Agnes took over the post office and continued to run it until December 1894.

By the end of the 1880s the Horowhenua region had been opened up to European settlement. To the new settlers the McDonalds were figures of romance and the acknowledged authorities on things Maori. In a period when the area was still predominantly Maori, they had adapted themselves to the dominant culture, and provided an important link between Maori society and the immigrant population.

The Move to Heatherlea

In 1894, Agnes moved to Heatherlea, a substantial estate north of Levin built by her second son, John Roderick three years earlier. She attempted to take the Horowhenua post office with her, renaming it Heatherlea, but as it served few, if any, people, indignant questions in Parliament brought its closure within four months.

Agnes would survive another decade. She died on 28 November 1906, at Opaki, near Masterton, possibly while staying with relatives there.

According to great grandson Murray Griffin, the Heatherlea farm consisted of 1200 acres, bordering on SH1 to the south, Heatherlea Road to the east and stretching almost west to the Waiterere Beach turnoff. The family lived in a large homestead on Te Whanga Road, which still stands today. Murray's recollection is that Rod A. took 200 acres at the Heatherlea Road end for dairy farming while John farmed the rest.

There's a written account by John Bryant, another great grandson of Hector (a grandson of John Roderick), who spent a lot of his childhood at Heatherlea. He describes the property covering 40,000 acres "plus considerable Maori land under lease. The estate ran from the foothills of the Tararuas to the sea (including Waitarere beach)..." The farm grew wheat, raised sheep for wool, ran a dairy herd, and cut flax.

John Roderick (J.R.) had a special passion for horses – thoroughbreds, draughts and polo ponies. He was a driving force behind the establishment of both Levin and Otaki Maori Racing clubs, which each had annual races named for him. For many years he was president of Levin Racing Club.

He suffered a heart complaint for many years and died suddenly at age 56 while walking along a street in Whanganui (in much the same way his father had done, in Otaki in 1878).

Rod A.'s contribution to early Horowhenua

Much of what is recorded about the life and times of the original McDonald family in this region can be attributed to Hector's fourth son (or third son to Agnes), Roderick Allan known as Rod. It's recorded that in 1890 Rod had built the first store in Levin combined with a house, near the current town centre. After marrying Hannah Cameron, their first (surviving) son, Hector Roderick (Hector III), born in this house in 1892, was said to be the first white child born in the Levin township.

The store was sold that same year to Basil Gardener, who would later become Levin's first mayor (see separate biography of Gardener on this website). The McDonalds moved to Ihakara. After a horse accident, in 1903 Rod took over the private Temperance Hotel, which was just north of his original store.

Later he farmed an eastern corner of the Heatherlea estate, in an F.C. Swanwick account this was described as being bounded by the railway line, Roslyn Road and nearly to what are now MacArthur St and Fairfield Road.

In the late 1920s Rod spent much of one winter recounting his experiences of growing up here to writer Ewart O'Donnell. These included his observations of Maori traditions, tribal differences and the steady loss of ownership and control of their lands. The resulting publication (1929), has become the invaluable book *Te Hekenga* (the 'drifting').

Rod was the last of Hector's sons to pass away, not long after, in January 1931. His funeral service at St Andrew's Presbyterian church in Levin drew one of the largest gatherings of mourners the town had seen to that date, with representatives of four local tribes present in considerable numbers, along with relatives from many parts of the lower North Island.

Hector III

Rod's eldest surviving son, Hector (III), became one of the most memorable characters Levin has ever had – fluent in both *te reo* Maori and English - a confident orator with a wicked wit and a deep reservoir of anecdotes. Never inclined to regular work, his only occupation was casual droving after the family ceased farming in the mid-1930s. One anecdote relating to this occupation goes that the stock he drove (in Hawkes Bay) always arrived fatter than when they started out. They had plenty of time to graze while Hector slept on the side of the road!

He signed up to serve with the 1st NZEF Rifle Brigade in World War I. His oratory skills were recognised in Wellington and he was selected to recite the call to arms over national radio. He served in France and Italy and was said to have been gassed and wounded. He was married, briefly, to a woman called Nina, from Otaki, and they had a daughter, Nonnie, who it's thought died in Australia. Hector's contributions of letters, stories and poems to *The Chronicle* were considered gems. He lived until 1974, passing away at the age of 82 in Awapuni Rest Home.

Sources:

Rod A McDonald, with Ewart O'Donnell, '*Te Hekenga, Early Days in Horowhenua*'
Kete Horowhenua website
great grandson Murray Griffin
F.C. Swanwick articles in 'the Chronicle'
A.J. Dreaver, '*Horowhenua County and Its People, A Centennial History*'
'*Levin, the Making of a Town*'