

### **The Stewart Brothers of Park Sheep Farm**

The Park Clearances, like all the Highland Clearances, developed as a result of the introduction of commercial sheep farming by the landlord.

The Seaforth Lewis Proprietor, in pursuance of a similar policy to that of his counterparts in the Scottish Highlands, entered into a lease agreement with a group of gentlemen for land for a sheep farm in the most southerly part of the Park peninsula early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

At that time the whole of the Park peninsula was occupied by small tenants, and therefore the clearance of the small tenantry in the area round about Valamus was carried out when the sheep farm was established there. The manager of the sheep farm was Mr Donald Stewart from Perthshire.

The land-use policy of the Lewis proprietor was to give priority in the use of the land resources of the Island to commercial sheep farming because southern sheep farmers offered very high rent for grazing land in the Highlands in order to enable them to expand and meet the rising demand for wool and mutton from the industrial cities of the south. Therefore, because it was more profitable for the landowners to lease land to southern sheep farmers, the indigenous small tenantry were moved and replaced by sheep.

From the outset the Park Sheep Farm expanded by encroaching on the land occupied by the small tenantry, and as it did the local people were cleared in order to make room for the sheep. Eventually 42,000 acres out of the total 68,000 acres in the whole peninsula was taken up by the Park Sheep Farm, leaving only 26,000 acres for the crofters in the northern area of the peninsula, as at present occupied by crofters.

By 1843 the Park Sheep Farm had taken up the whole of southern Park, including Lemreway and Orinsay, but not Steimreway, which was the subject of an unexpired lease. That was the limit of the territorial expansion and later on, as the crofters of Steimreway were an embarrassment in the middle of the sheep farm, they were moved to Lemreway, which was re-populated by crofters in 1857. Orinsay was not re-occupied by crofters until the landless ex-servicemen of Lemreway land raided the village in 1921, and staked out crofts for themselves because the Estate refused to give them land, although they were given promises of land by the Government, under the Smallholders Act of 1911, before the War of 1914-1918 started.

Donald Stewart, the original farm manager, became tenant of the farm and it was said that he made so much money in Park that he was able to move to Harris and lease and stock the farm at Luskentyre. Eventually, he became the factor to the Macleod Proprietor of Harris who seems to have fallen under his control. He cleared the people from the whole of the Borve, West Harris area and bundled them to the Bays of Harris, and overseas. He and his sons held a number of farms in Harris when West Harris was cleared for Donald Stewart. Squads of well-rewarded 'flunkies' wiped out all evidence of the community. They drowned the fires on the hearths with the household milk, and set the houses on fire.

Donald Stewart was succeeded on the Park farm by his brothers Alexander and Archibald, known in Park as 'Gilleán Ruadh na Pàirc' (The Red-headed Men of Park). They held the tenancy of Park farm until 1842, when Walter Scott succeeded them in the tenancy.

Like their brother in Harris they oppressed the small tenantry, and the Park Sheep Farm was enlarged to the point where the people of Lemreway and Orinsay, comprising of nearly 60 families and 327 souls, were being evicted when the new tenant, Mr Scott, came to the farm. The Estate officials came to these villages in June 1842, backed up by the force of the law in the person of the Sheriff, etc. The law was always on the side of the landlord oppressors. On this occasion the women turned on them when they were pulling down the houses, and drove them off. However, next year they returned and drowned their fires on the hearths, and these two villages were cleared in 1843, the year of the Church Disruption in Scotland. The following year marked the end of the Seaforth Mackenzie regime in Lewis, and James Matheson bought the Island for £190,000.