

## Snippets on Early Education

At the first meeting of the Lochs School Board held at Soval Lodge in April 1873, the following members were present:

Donald Munro	Solicitor and Chamberlain of Stornoway
Roderick Miller	Surgeon at Stornoway
Rev. Ewan Campbell	Parish Minister of Lochs
Rev. George Lewis Campbell	Free Church Minister of Lochs
Donald Macdonald	Tenant of Crobeg, Lochs
John Mackay	Ground Officer of Balallan
Kenneth Mackenzie	Gaelic Teacher at Carloway

Mr Munro was appointed Chairman, Mr William Ross Solicitor, Stornoway was appointed to the conjoined offices of Clerk and Treasurer at a salary of £50 per annum.

In fact Mr Donald Munro, the Lewis Chamberlain was the Chairman of each of the four Parish School Boards in Lewis, and it was alleged that he failed to press on with the building programme for new school buildings, and that failure caused resignations from the School Boards subsequently.

At the Lochs School Board meeting of 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1876 it was agreed to accept an offer from Mr Alexander Macdonald, Contractor, Lyndale, Isle of Skye for £13,325 for the building of nine schools in the Parish of Lochs, including five schools in South Lochs, all with dwelling houses included, an average of about £1,500 per school building.

All nine schools opened about 1880. It was a commendable achievement to complete nine schools in four or five years, after accepting the contract in 1876, but some ten years after the 1872 Education Act.

Kershader opened in 1878.  
Cromore opened in 1879.  
Marvig opened in 1880.  
Gravir opened in 1881.  
Lemreway opened in 1881.

At that time there were no roads and the sites were served by sea, hence the schools were built near the sea.

School leaving age was set at 13 years and the attendance was not very good for the first few years. That meant that the first group of 13 year olds were leaving school about 1890. In the early stages of compulsory education very few children got the opportunity to take up secondary education in the Nicolson Institute, Stornoway, and continue to academic university education.

It was alleged that in the main it was the children of the Ministers, the Schoolmasters and the Tacksman farmers who usually qualified for higher education during the early years.

It was predicted by some people that formal education would give the young people wings, and that proved to be substantially correct. By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the first school leavers of the formal compulsory education system were old enough to emigrate and make their own way in the world.

If a social study of the villages of Lochs is carried out for the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it will be seen that a large number of men and women emigrated voluntarily to various parts of the world, such as Canada, USA, South Africa, Australia, South America, etc.

Another feature of these early times was the way young boys went for a trade. Baking was very popular and about a dozen young men from the writer's village learned the baking trade in Stornoway during the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Most of them operated their own baking and confectionery businesses in various parts of the world in due course. Shoemaking and tailoring were other trades that were taken up frequently during the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Then came the First World War, and many of these young men returned to fight in the trenches of Flanders and on the high seas. Allan Finlayson 'Allan Sheonaidh', 8 Marvig, was one such person. He had gone to South America before the War and on hearing about the War he volunteered and fought in the trenches on the Western Front until the end of the War in 1918.

An ungrateful country failed to give him a small landholding after the War and he was therefore among the first land raiders in Steimreway in 1920. He was a blacksmith to trade and he carried his furnace on his back to Steimreway over the virgin moorland. His temporary shack at Steimreway may be seen to this day.

Eventually he, like the other land raiders, had to give up and abandon Steimreway. Allan built himself a home on the common grazing outside Marvig, his village, and brought up his family there. He lived to a ripe old age.

**Population in 1911, prior to First World War**

<b>School District</b>	<b>Males</b>	<b>Females</b>	<b>Total</b>
Planasker	303	199	502
Cromore	143	155	298
Kershader	183	183	366
Gravir	233	235	468
Lemreway	173	166	339
Keose & Laxay	171	170	341
Balallan	263	197	460
Airidhbhruach	63	58	121
<b>Total</b>	<b>1532</b>	<b>1463</b>	<b>2995</b>