

The Clan Grant

James Grant, historian,
Clan Grant Society – USA

The clan and name of Grant are of great antiquity. Feudal barons named Grant were land holders and office bearers in the Scottish highlands in the 13th century. Robert le Grant held Coulmony on the River Findhorn, in Moray, *circa* 1258. Sir Laurence le Grant was Sheriff of Inverness in 1263. John le Grant received a charter for the lands of Inverallan in Strathspey in 1316. In the 14th century, Sir John Grant, Knight, served the Earl of Moray as custodian of his forests and his manor house, Darnaway Castle.

Although we do not know their precise origins or their exact relationships to each other, these ambitious early Grants were undoubtedly the ancestors of our present-day chief and the forebears of the extended family later known as the Clan Grant. Our Chief, the 6th Lord Strathspey, and other hereditary chieftains of cadet families, descend directly from Sir Duncan le Grant of Freuchie, Knight, who held lands in Strathspey in the 15th century.

The Lordship of Glencarnie (from the Gaelic *Glenchearnich*, glen of heroes) and the Barony of Freuchie (from *fraoch*, place of the heather) were among the earliest holdings of Sir Duncan Grant in Strathspey. These lands generally encompass the present-day towns and environs of Aviemore, Carrbridge, Dulnain Bridge, Boat of Garten and Grantown-on-Spey.

The first known reference to the Clan Grant was in a notarized agreement between James Grant of Freuchie and his family, on the one part, and Finlay Farquharson and his tenants in Strathdee. The document referred to “*lye Clan de Grantis*” – an entity which included the blood relatives of the chief named Grant, as well as his friends and adherents who looked to him for their protection. Although the document was dated October 8, 1527, the concept of clanship existed long before that time.

Strathspey, the valley of the River Spey, was the “country of the Grants”. During the halcyon days of the clan system, it was the stated goal of succeeding chiefs to consolidate and hold all the lands in Strathspey “between the two Craigellachies”. And they very nearly succeeded!

Craigellachie is the name of the high hill overlooking the modern town of Aviemore. It is also a village situated thirty-five miles downstream – hence, the two Craigellachies. *Creag Eileachaidh* (Kra GEL’ a key) means “rock of alarm”. In former times, there were high places or hills located throughout Strathspey where huge bond fires were ignited to warn the clan of impending danger, to designate a gathering place for the men of the clan, or to proclaim a great celebration, such as the birth of the chief’s first-born son. The clan’s motto or rallying cry was, and is today: “*Stand fast, Craigellachie!*”

Although the principal families of the clan were entrenched in Strathspey as early as the 15th century – and in Stratherrick (on the southeast side of Loch Ness) before that – important cadet families were later established in other parts of Scotland. There were Grants in Glenmoriston, at Corrimony and Shewglie in Glenurquhart, at Monymusk in Aberdeenshire, and Kilgraston in Perthshire. With the passage of time, these families became virtually autonomous and conducted their affairs independently of their more powerful distant cousins in Strathspey.

In the late 17th century, Ludovick Grant of Freuchie (*d.* 1716) was the *de facto* Chief of the Clan Grant. In 1694, *Glencharnie, Freuchie* and all his other lands – which by that time were considerable! – were consolidated by the Crown into the Regality of Grant. From that time forth, Ludovick Grant, 8th Laird of Freuchie, and subsequent heritors lineally descended from

him, were known as the Chiefs of Grant, and their principal residence of *Ballachastell* (town of the castle) was called Castle Grant.

A century later, Sir James Grant of Grant, Baronet (1738-1811), was perhaps the ablest chief of his long line. He was well-educated and well traveled; he was a dedicated public servant and ardent improver of his vast estates; and he was keenly aware of his over-riding responsibilities to his family, tenants and clansmen. Sir James Grant was the founder of Grantown, which was a creative attempt to provide employment for his clansmen during a time when many highland lairds were clearing tenants from their lands. Sir James was a Member of Parliament, Cashier of Excise for Scotland, Lord Lieutenant and Sheriff of Inverness-shire. Patriotic to a fault, he raised and served as Colonel of two regiments during the conflict with France during the last decade of the 18th century.

During the 19th century, the Earls of Seafield were Chiefs of the Clan Grant. In 1858, the 7th Earl, Sir John Charles Ogilvie-Grant (1815-1881), was created 1st Baron Strathspey in the Peerage of the United Kingdom, and in 1879, he was made a Knight of the Thistle. The Earls of Seafield were avid planters of trees; they assumed leadership roles in the affairs of the Church of Scotland; and generally served as conscientious guardians of their vast estates.

Since 1915, when the 11th Earl of Seafield, Capt. Sir James Ogilvie-Grant, was killed in World War I, while serving with the Cameron Highlanders in Belgium, the Chief has been the Lord Strathspey. Today, the Right Honorable 6th Lord Strathspey, Sir James Patrick Trevor Grant of Grant, Baronet of Nova Scotia, is Chief of the Clan Grant. Lord Strathspey lives in retirement at Duthil, one of the oldest holdings of his ancestors in Strathspey.



The Clan Grant was more than just an extended family. It was also a paramilitary organization or regiment. In the heyday of the clan system, it is estimated that the Chief of Grant could muster as many as six-hundred fully armed men within forty-eight hours notice.

In 1651, the Laird of Grant's brother, Lt. Col. Patrick Grant, led a contingent of Grant clansmen against Oliver Cromwell in the Battle of Worcester, the final battle of the English civil war. Ludovick Grant, 8th Laird of Freuchie, raised a regiment of his clansmen for the Crown in 1689, and served as its Colonel. These troops augmented the government forces in the famous Battle of Cromdale.¹

In the late 1720's, Col. William Grant of Ballindalloch commanded one of the independent companies of militia that patrolled the highlands to maintain law and order. The remnants of these troops were later amalgamated with other soldiers to form the Royal Highland Regiment, the famous Black Watch.² In the last decade of the 18th century, Sir James Grant of Grant recruited two regiments for the government – the 1st Strathspey Fencibles and the 97th Inverness-shire Highlanders.³

During the heated election campaign of 1820, the Clan Grant marched *en masse* on the town of Elgin when their chief and his sisters were being harassed in their residence at Grant Lodge. The episode ended peacefully when representatives of the town's citizenry assured the clan that no harm would come to the chief and his family.⁴

The clan was a system of land tenure. The chief and chieftains were the landlords or lairds; the members of the clan were tenants and subtenants. Based on the principle of primogeniture, the chief's eldest son almost always inherited his father's titles and estates. The chief's widow (dowager) was generally guaranteed security by virtue of a marriage contract

(prenuptial agreement) negotiated by her father. Younger sons were sometimes provided with lesser estates. It was not uncommon for the chief to place his sons in remote or noncontiguous locations at the outer reaches of his territory in order to expand his sphere of influence. In this manner, the Grants secured footholds in Glenmoriston, Glenurquhart, Rothiemurchus, Elchies and Blairfindy.

Younger sons of the chief and chieftains frequently received commissions in the army, purchased for them by their father. In the 18th and 19th centuries, a number of younger sons “went out” to the colonies to become colonial administrators, judges, merchants and planters.

Daughters were usually married to the neighboring gentry, in many cases to solidify familial or political alliances. Young ladies, of course, were allowed to choose their husbands – as long as the suitors were of the same social class and able to earn the approval of her father.

The clan was also a system of jurisprudence. From earliest times, the chief was held accountable for maintaining law and order within his clan lands. To accomplish this, the chief presided over a judicial system administered by *baillies* (bailiffs) and *procurators fiscal*. The *baillies* sometimes dispensed a harsh brand of justice for crimes that included theft, assault, poaching, receiving stolen property, moor burning, and liaising with freebooters and criminals. Sentences included the levying of fines, scourging (lashing), having an ear cut off or nailed to the gallows tree, banishment from the clan lands, imprisonment in the dungeon at Castle Grant, or in extreme cases, hanging. Matters of moral turpitude – adultery, breach of Sabbath, blasphemy or unseemly behavior – were addressed by the clergy and the Kirk Session.⁵

The chief also controlled a large business enterprise. Considering that he and the other chieftains of the clan held most of the lands in Strathspey between the present town of Aviemore and the village of Craigellachie, including the rivers, moors, forests, mills and farms, there was a never-ending stream of income in the form of rents. Sometimes payments were rendered in kind – victuals and other goods paid in lieu of rent. The chief was aided in the management of his estates by his chamberlain, and later by his factor.

The clan system evolved from the feudalism of the Middle Ages. It was not democratic, although the chief invariably had a council of advisors selected from his immediate family and senior cadets. When a young man in his minority succeeded his father as chief, he was customarily trained in his responsibilities by a tutor, usually an uncle or a senior cadet chieftain.

The Clan Grant was comprised of a number of cadets and branch families. Cadet families descended directly from the chief, a former chief, or a cadet chieftain. Some prominent cadets were the Grants of Glenmoriston, Corrimony, Rothiemurchus, Easter and Wester Elchies, Kinchirdie, Lurg and Monymusk. The present family of MacPherson-Grant of Ballindalloch descends from the Grants of Rothiemurchus.

Principal branch families – those whose precise origins cannot be determined from existing documents and charters – include the Grants of Freuchie and of Grant; the Grants of Auchernach and Burnside, also known as the Clan Allan; the Grants of Auchnarrow, later Dellachapple, known as Clan *Chiaran*; the original family of Ballindalloch; the Grants of Tullochgorm, known as the Clan *Phadruig*; the Grants of Gartinbeg and Dalvey, known as the Clan Donnachie; the Grants of Glenlochy, later of Kilgraston in Perthshire; and the Grants of Blairfindy in Glenlivet.⁶



¹ Fraser, Sir William, LLD, *The Chiefs of Grant*, Edinburgh, 1883, Vol. I, pp. 499-501, 266, 269; Vol. III, p. 68

² MacWilliam, H.D., *A Black Watch Episode of the Year 1731*, Inverness, 1908, p. 1

³ MacKintosh, H.B., *The Inverness Shire Highlanders or 97th Regiment of Foot 1794-1796*, Elgin, 1926; and
The Grant, Strathspey or First Highland Fencible Regiment 1793-1799, Elgin, 1934

⁴ Fraser, *opere citato*, Vol. I, pp. 464-466

⁵ Forsyth, Rev. William, *In the Shadow of Cairngorm*, Inverness, 1900 (reprinted 1999), pp. 105-13, 67-80

⁶ Fraser, *opere citato*, Vol. I, pp. 499-529, 160-161, 280-281, 532