

April 2023 marked the 100th anniversary of the departure of two emigrant ships from the Outer Hebrides. The SS Marloch departed Lochboisdale on 15th April 1923 en route for St John, New Brunswick. On board were at least fifty families from Barra, Eriskay, South Uist and Benbecula who had made the decision to seek a new life in Canada.

The SS Metagama, which was also bound for Canada, left from Stornoway on 21st April 1923, carrying 300 passengers from Lewis and a smaller number from North and South Uist who had arrived in Stornoway the evening before on the SS Hebrides. Further large-scale departures from the islands occurred throughout the 1920s.

Those who emigrated in the 1920s were not the first to leave the islands as hundreds went before them throughout the 1800s with ships departing Scotland for Australia, Canada, the USA and South Africa. However, the departures of the Marloch and the Metagama in particular are emblazoned in the folk memory of the islands, as the overwhelming majority of those who emigrated were young people. Following the loss of so many in the First World War, it was another blow to the morale of those left behind. To the young people escaping severe economic hardship, it was an opportunity to seek adventure and opportunities which were not available at home.

Wider emigration

Emigration has played an important part in the history of the Outer Hebrides. Over the last 250 years or so people have left the islands for a number of reasons, whether through forced clearances, in hope of improving their prospects or to join family members who had emigrated previously. This affected demographics and resulted in families being dispersed across the globe to Canada, USA, South America, Australia, New Zealand, etc.

2025 Exhibitions & Conference

Throughout 2025 Museum & Tasglann nan Eilean in Benbecula & Lewis will be showcasing exhibitions on the theme of emigration. 'Cianalas 's Dòchas | Homesickness and Hope' will tell the stories of those who left island shores behind: the often-perilous journeys, reasons for leaving, challenges and obstacles of foreign lands, homesickness, survival instincts, the opportunities and the legacy. As well as artefacts and archives from our own collections, we will be borrowing artefacts from National Museums Scotland, the Fleming Collection and others to tell these engaging stories.

The exhibition will run at Museum nan Eilean, Lionacleit from 31st May until 29th November 2025 and at Museum nan Eilean, Stornoway from 14th June until 29th November 2025.

We are also planning an emigration-themed conference 'Saoghal Mòr Farsaing' for autumn 2025.

In summer 2026, our exhibitions will then look at the subject of immigration.

Family history

One of the legacies of the extensive emigration which occurred in the past is the large number of people spread throughout the world who have connections to the islands. The Hebridean Connections database contains genealogical information relating to many of these families, drawn from the collections of local historical societies. Visitors may also want to consult the Hebrides People centre, based at Northton, Isle of Harris. Please also visit the community heritage section of our website to find out more about the comainn eachdraidh (local historical societies), who have a vast depth of knowledge about families in their own areas.

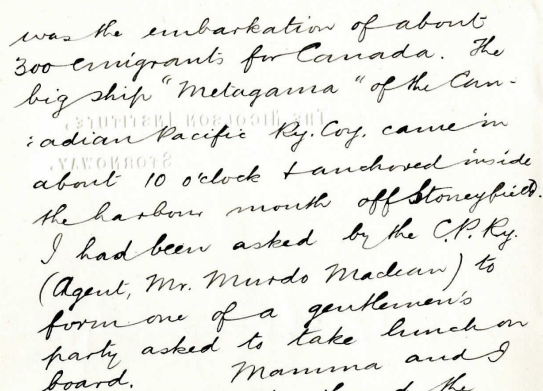
Tasglann nan Eilean has produced a Family History guide which draws together a wide range of sources for those interested in pursuing their family roots. This can be downloaded here:

[TnE Family History Guide](#)

Civic & Community Events

As part of the overall Hebridean Homecoming project, a number of civic events were held by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, and schools staged plays and performances based on the historic events which occurred. Comainn Eachdraidh (local historical societies) and other organisations throughout the islands from Barra to the Butt of Lewis also delivered a wide range of events including exhibitions, re-enactments and arts performances. More information is available here.

As part of the commemoration, Museum & Tasglann nan Eilean posted a series of contemporary letters from the Gibson Collection, referring to the departure of the Metagama in particular, on our blog. The blog is not currently available but information about the letters which featured is available from Tasglann nan Eilean.



was the embarkation of about
300 emigrants for Canada. The
big ship "Metagama" of the Can-
adian Pacific Ry. Co., came in
about 10 o'clock & anchored inside
the harbor mouth off Stoneyfield.
I had been asked by the C.P. Ry.
(Agent, Mr. Murdo Maclean) to
form one of a gentlemen's
party asked to take lunch on
board. Mamma and I