

## Mal Darroch's Legacy

By Doug Robertson, June 12, 2018

*Like branches on a tree, we all grow in different directions, yet our roots remain as one.*

Years ago, I came across the wonderful website [www.darroch.org](http://www.darroch.org). Mal Darroch created it as a modern medium for the book *A Darroch Family in Scotland and in Canada*. In addition to posting the book online, Mal created a message board for guests to post information and ask about the Darroch clan. Mal patiently and happily responded to comments and questions for years. It was a labour of love. I use the word *was*—past tense—for Mal passed away on May 25, 2018. Micheline, their three children and seven grandchildren will miss him. So will those of us who met him through his website.

This post is a tribute to Mal's passion for the Darroch family history and the legacy he left. People who make a difference often acknowledge they do so by standing on the shoulders of giants. If that is the case, one of Mal's giants would have been Frank Darroch (1905-1989). In 1974, Frank published *A Darroch Family in Scotland and in Canada*, also known as "the red book." Mal had had a deep respect for Frank's research, and created the Darroch Family Web Site to preserve his work. On the site's [Home page](#), Mal wrote:

The inspiration for the creation of this site is primarily as a result of the monumental efforts of Frank Darroch in researching and compiling his wonderful compendium of one branch of the Darroch family.... I hope that by making this site available to all who wish to access it I may be able to, in some small way, contribute to and continue that important historical work that Frank Darroch began those many years ago.<sup>1</sup>

Mal fulfilled his stated purpose and more. The website includes Frank's whole book plus a [Family Lore](#) page for stories, a [Message Board and Guest Book](#) to connect with other Darroch family members, and a page for [Updates and Additions](#) to add to the list of descendants Frank had garnered in 1974.

Just before Christmas in 2017, I had my first phone conversation with Mal. I felt of his insatiable desire to connect with other Darrochs. Years ago his career required him to travel across Western Canada. When on the road, he would search for the Darroch name in local phone books of towns in which he worked. He found dozens of Darrochs. He said, "Only one did not descend from our family." Over the years, he kept in touch with many of them. With this kind of interest in family, one can see why Mal was drawn so much to Frank's work.



Mal Darroch's website, [www.darroch.org](http://www.darroch.org), contains an online version of Frank Darroch's book.

<sup>1</sup> <http://darroch.org/index.html>, retrieved February 1, 2018.

I, too, have been fascinated with Frank's research and wanted to add to it, starting with Frank himself. I researched the backstory about his writing the red book. As I did so, I unearthed many untold stories—"gaps" as Frank called them—which would interest Darroch descendants. I concluded that a website or blog would be the best way to share these stories, so I called Mal to see how he started the Darroch Family Web Site. His response surprised me. He said, "I know next to nothing about websites and technology." I was surprised. "Then who built the website?"

Mal explained. Around the time he was thinking of getting the red book posted online, a friend was starting a website design business. He asked if he could create a site for Mal, with the idea of showing it to potential clients. Mal jumped at the chance. He painstakingly re-typed every word of the book. More accurately, he re-typed *every letter*. To preserve every whit of Frank's work, Mal purposefully replicated typos and errors. (Don't tell Frank, for he wanted to *correct*, not preserve the errors!) The site opened in 2008. Over the years, Mal would submit revised information and his friend would update the site.

In spite of their mutual interests, Mal and Frank never met. Their nearest common ancestors are John Darroch and Agnes Greenlees, who married in 1849. Frank and Mal are on distant branches of the family tree, plus they lived 4,000 kilometers apart. Their family branches serendipitously connected, however, through Mal's sister Gail. Gail was working as a research librarian in the St. Catharines Public Library when she noticed the name of a patron: Martha Darroch. Gail inquired and, sure enough, Martha's husband, Don, was Frank's nephew. What a happy coincidence!<sup>2</sup> The two families became close friends.

So, why did Mal invest so much time and effort into this website? He told of the joy he found in meeting so many people—and not all were relatives—some simply shared the same name or a derivative (Darrach, Darrogh, Darrow, etc.). On the site's Message Board, Mal stated the project had given him "...an enormous amount of pleasure and continues to do so" (Post #25). Mal's response sounded hauntingly familiar to me. It was similar to what Frank wrote in the [Foreword](#) of his book four decades earlier: "For me it has been fun!" Their fun has blossomed into a lasting legacy for us.



Mal Darroch

I started this post with this quote: "Like branches on a tree, we grow in different directions, yet our roots remain as one." I am grateful to Frank for researching our roots and to Mal for connecting the branches. What will become of the website now that Mal has passed on? Fortunately, his work will continue. Micheline, their son Bryan, Mal's sister Gail and nephew Chris will keep up the work on the site. One of Mal's most valuable legacies is an enduring interest in family history, and we have all benefited from his investment in that pursuit.

Have you seen the [Darroch Family Website](#)? If not, I encourage you to visit it. On the site [Guestbook](#), post a tribute to Mal, the man who made it happen.

---

<sup>2</sup> Gail Benjafield, "A Scottish Family in Wellington County" ([http://darroch.org/family\\_lore.html](http://darroch.org/family_lore.html))