

A painting of a large, multi-story house with a green lawn and trees. The house has a prominent central section with a gabled roof and several chimneys. The style is somewhat impressionistic with visible brushstrokes. The text is overlaid on the painting.

# The Seaforth Heiress: Lady of the Last Prophecy

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BOOK CLUB KIT

# A Letter from the Author

The Highland legend of the Brahan Seer, also known as Coinneach Odhar, was what first drew me to the story of Mary Elizabeth Frederica Mackenzie. Mary, born in 1783, was the eldest daughter of Lord and Lady Seaforth and the “white-hooded lassie” named in the Seer’s final prophecy foreseeing the ruin of the Mackenzies of Seaforth more than a century after his death.

Mary’s story, narrated in her own voice through my novel *The Seaforth Heiress: Lady of the Last Prophecy*, takes place primarily in the Regency era, a time when society’s roles for women were strict and narrowly defined. Mary appears often to have skirted the worst of these constraints. In my research on her life, I discovered varying assessments of her character, described as everything from “saintly” to “scandalous,” but most commentators, past and present, acknowledged her adventurousness. One modern historian suggested that Mary may have been the “first feminist,” a claim that would be difficult to prove. But I love the entry in her India travel journal—a copy of which I obtained through the National Registry of Scotland—in which she writes rather indignantly about the young Rajah of Mysore saying, upon her first arrival at his court, that “he was almost as glad to see me as if my Husband had come, too.”

Mary was not a crusader or activist, being very much entrenched in the social order of her day. Yet it is undeniable that she was a woman ahead of her time. There were those who criticized her freewheeling manner, especially her friendships with prominent men—some of whom may, or may not, have been lovers. I did not delve into all these relationships, but touched upon her friendships with Henry Russell and Sir Walter Scott; the latter’s admiration for Mary (by all accounts purely platonic) is apparent in his description of her as having “the heart of a chieftainess, through and through.” She was, in fact, the only woman ever to assume the mantle of Clan Mackenzie chief, though her right to it was, and is to this day, disputed.

I was astounded that, as far as I could determine, no one had previously published a historical novel about the fascinating life of Mary Mackenzie or attempted to understand the impact the Seer’s prophecy must have had on her personal outlook and religious faith. As I discovered more about Mary, I found her to be the sort of hero I love. Bold yet kind, philosophically-inclined, and devoted to family and duty. I loved every minute of researching and writing her story. I hope that you will enjoy, as I did, getting to know her.



# Photo Gallery



Mary Elizabeth Frederica Mackenzie



Francis Humberston Mackenzie  
(Mary's father)



Sir Samuel Hood  
(Mary's first husband)



James Alexander Stewart-Mackenzie  
(Mary's second husband)



Pilgrim house in Barbados



A house similar to Admiralty House in Madras, India, early 1800s.

# Reading Group Guide

1. As *The Seaforth Heiress* opens, Mary Mackenzie is already aware of the Brahan Seer's prophecy about the coming ruin of her family and the possibility of her own role in its fulfillment. Yet she is determined not to believe in the "gift of seeing" or other forms of magic. Does her visit to an African Obeah-doctor on the island of Barbados suggest that she is more open to the possibility of magic, or supernatural powers, than she wishes to admit? What significance does the Obeah charm have to Mary's story?
2. What do you think is Mary's primary motivation for marrying Sir Samuel Hood? Is it love? Admiration? The promise of adventure? An opportunity to leave Barbados? Desire for a stimulating life in London? Family life and children? Something else?
3. Do you feel that Mary challenges the status quo of her time? Would you say that, relative to most women of her era, she is a "feminist"? Is her criticism of British colonialism deeply felt, or do her convictions have limits?
4. Which of these men in Mary's life do you think was most important to her later development as a woman of strong character? Her father, Lord Seaforth? Her first husband, Sir Samuel Hood? Her second husband, James Alexander Stewart?
5. Mary and her entire family to some extent live under the shadow of the Seer's curse. In your life, have you ever had a strong sense of a specific fate, something inevitable and beyond your control, that has caused you fear or worry?
6. What event in the story do you feel is the first "turning point" in Mary's attitude towards the Brahan Seer's prophecy? How does her attitude change throughout the book?
7. Should landowners such as Lord Seaforth and, later, Mary and James be held accountable for the disruption caused by the Highland clearances? Or were these landowners, as much as their tenants, victims of inevitable forces of economic and social change?



# Reading Group Guide

8. What was the root of Mary's battle with religious faith? If there were multiple causes, what were they?
9. Was Augusta's insistence on blaming Mary for Caroline's death consistent with how she is portrayed earlier in the story? How?
10. In the Epilogue, on the occasion of Mary's funeral procession, we learn that she was greatly beloved for her kindness and good works. Does this signify a change in her character following Caroline's death, or had she always been devoted to her tenants and her clan? Do you believe in good works as an atonement for sin?



# Your Opinion Counts

Word-of-mouth is crucial for any author to succeed. If you enjoyed *The Seaforth Heiress: Lady of the Last Prophecy*, please leave a review online—anywhere you are able. Even if it's just a sentence or two. It would make all the difference and would be very much appreciated.

Thanks,  
Elizabeth

