

# B. C. PIPERS' NEWSLETTER



**The official monthly publication of  
the British Columbia Pipers' Association**

FEBRUARY, 1971      NO. 110





B.C. PIPERS' NEWSLETTER

Published by the British Columbia Pipers' Association.

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B.C. Pipers' Newsletter

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The B.C. Pipers' Newsletter is published monthly at 1073 Doran Road, North Vancouver, B.C. by the British Columbia Pipers' Association and is distributed to all members. Address all communications concerning the Newsletter to the above address. All other communications to the Secretary, B.C. Pipers' Association, 834 Burnaby Street, New Westminster, B.C.

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6241 Berwick Street  
South Burnaby, B.C.  
February 5, 1971

B.C. Pipers' Association

Dear Sir:

On Friday, January 29th the Vancouver Police Pipe Band held their Annual Burns' Dinner and Dance. The location this year was the auditorium of St. Frances de Sales School, South Burnaby. We had a greater increase in attendance this year over the previous years, and the dinner is getting more and more popular.

The evening began with a cocktail hour at 7 P.M. and 8:15 everyone was seated and enjoying a very fine meal complete with the traditional haggis.

The head table guests included the Rev. George Turpin, Padre of the force and his wife. Representing the Vancouver Fire Department was Chief A. Konig and his wife. Inspector Ian MacGregor represented Chief Constable J. Fisk who was in Ottawa on business. Donald Ross and his wife Ishabel represented the B.C. Pipers' Association.

After dinner the crowd was entertained by a fine display of highland dancing by Miss P. Wilkie - The Graf Brothers - Miss Michelle MacInnes, all of these young people are children of police department members and were accompanied by Piper Donald MacInnes. The entertainment also included a display by the Pipes and Drums and the Dancers of the Police Band. This was the first time in over thirty years that a dance team from the band has performed the Reel of Tulloch and it received a very enthusiastic reception.

The evening was rounded off by a dance to the music of Eric Foster and his group.

I would like to take this opportunity to apologize to the many people who were unable to obtain tickets. We are presently looking into the prospect of obtaining larger premises for 1972, and with this in mind we hope to avoid any disappointments and will be able to extend an invitation to all members of the B.C. Pipers' Association.

Yours very truly,

F.J. Hall,  
Drum Major, Police Pipe Band

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4563 West 11th Avenue  
Vancouver 8, B.C.  
February 3, 1971

B.C. Pipers' Association  
1073 Doran Road  
North Vancouver, B.C.

Dear Sir:

Several weeks ago I was talking about the writing of pipe music

with some other pipers and an idea for a centennial project came to my mind.

Many local pipers have written pipe tunes which in all probability will go unpublished. However, these tunes are a part of our "mini-culture" and must be brought out in the open for the enjoyment of all. My idea involves the collection and publishing of these tunes by the B.C. Pipers' Association.

This idea has received the approval of the Board of Directors of the Association and will now proceed.

If you have written or know the whereabouts of any original tunes it would be appreciated by the Association and those in the piping world if you would contribute to our collection to be published by the Association. You may also write tunes especially for this publication.

You may contact me by mail: 4563 West 11th Avenue  
Vancouver 8, B.C.

or by telephone: 224-4138

or at any of the local piping functions.

A short history of the local composer may also be included. We would enjoy hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Bruce Topp

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### BI-MONTHLY COMPETITION

The January bi-monthly competition was held January 29, 1971 at the Seaforth Armoury. The Novice class (Section 2) played Old Highland Airs. There were 24 competitors. The results are as follows:

- 1st - Shelley MacLean
- 2nd - Mark Steffich
- 3rd - Laurie Robson
- 4th - Stephen Shipley
- 5th - Gordon MacDonald
- 6th - Kim Walker

The results of the Junior class - Jigs:

- 1st - Cindy Chambers
- 2nd - Robyn Palmer
- 3rd - Allan MacDougall

The judge for the evening was Bill Lamont.

The next bi-monthly competition is February 19, 1971 when the Juvenile class plays 6/8 March and the Open Amateur class plays Piobaireachd. Time - 8 P.M.

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GENERAL MEETING AND KNOCK-OUT COMPETITION

Once again a fine evening of piping and socializing took place at the familiar Steelworker's Hall on East Broadway. As usual, the formal business meeting was very short and the Knock-Out competition began.

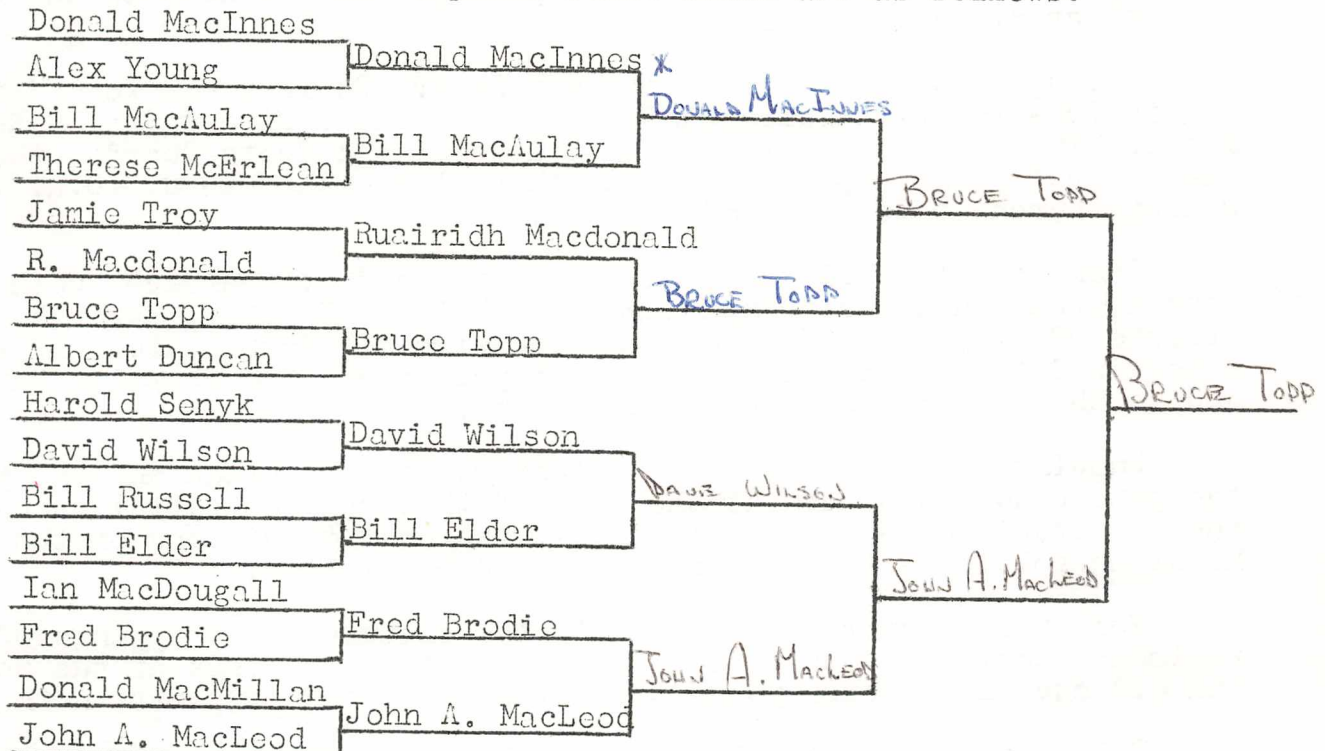
The first competition of the evening was to be between Ian MacDougall and Fred Brodie. Unfortunately there was no competition as Ian was not able to attend. Fred, however, played very nicely and presented a pleasing performance. I think this was the first time many in the audience (approximately 100) had heard the Pipe Major from Port Moody give a solo performance.

The second competition was between Donald MacMillan and John A. MacLeod. Donald opened the event playing extremely well but had the misfortune of breaking down at the seven minute mark. Many of the one hundred "judges" felt Donald was playing pipes just a shade too strong which contributed to his eventual difficulty.

John A. MacLeod followed Donald and once again, gave a very musical performance. John, of course, was awarded the win by judges Ed Esson, John MacDonald and Alex Reid.

The first round of our Knock-Out Competitions is completed now and next month we move to round two. The winners of the November competitions, Donald MacInnes and Bill MacAulay will compete along with the winners of the December competitions, Ruairidh Macdonald and Bruce Topp. The March events should be most interesting and all members will find the evening enjoyable.

The results of the complete first round are as follows:



REMEMBER NEXT MONTHS COMPETITION: DATE - March 5, 1971  
TIME - 8:00 P.M.  
PLACE - Steelworkers Hall



The following article printed in the Vancouver Province October 7th, 1944 was sent to the Newsletter Editors by Association Pipe Major Seb Nellies.

The Further a Scot Gets Away From Home the More He Loves the Pipes -  
Early Days of Piping Here - by Roderick MacLeod

During the last Great War, an old Highlander, hearing someone declare no good could come of it, said: "It did one good thing, it brought the bagpipes to the fore."

And with his historical knowledge of the pipes, gleaned principally from stories told at the fireside in the isolated glens and clachans of the Highlands, and proud of the heritage left him by his forbears, he knew full well that, wedded from birth to a race which thrived on war, the pipes again would rouse that martial spirit and go into action with the fighting men, inciting them to conquer or die.

It is no exaggeration to say that where, at the beginning of the war in 1914, we had in Vancouver a score of pipers, by the end we had a hundred. And in the present war, from a few score they have grown to a few hundreds. This has no doubt been repeated in different parts of our Empire.

When the C.P.R. reached its western terminal here, many Scotsmen came with the early settlers. But no piper. A man, George Black, danced the sword dance over a pair of twisted handkerchiefs, while an inferior instrument played the accompaniment.

So there was wild rejoicing when it was learned a real piper had arrived. He was Hector MacKenzie, who for more than 40 years has been familiar to all those interested in piping. He did much in the early days to create a love for the pipes.

Through his energy the Vancouver Fipers Society was formed in 1902, and in 1903 the first pipe band was formed under Pipe Major MacKenzie's leadership. Dressed in the Royal Stuart of the Scots Guards, they made their first public appearance when they played the 6th D.C.O.R. to Wesley Church at Georgia and Burrard.

Then the Clan McLean organized a band and its services were much sought, both in the city and across the line. In 1911, through the efforts of many who had been connected with military bodies, it was determined that Vancouver should be represented by a Scottish battalion, and so the 72nd Seaforth came into being.

Knowing that what makes the fighters is the tartan and the pipes, the pipe band was placed at the head of this gallant battalion under the leadership of one who well upheld the best traditions of the ideal Highland soldier - the late Pipe Major John Gillies.

For over 30 years this band, in the picturesque trappings of the regiment, could be seen at the annual sports gatherings of the Scots and did much in earlier years to foster pipe band competition in the city.

Thirty years ago the late Donald McIvor, that master of the piping art, secured a staff position with the Vancouver police department and in six months time a band, in ordinary patrol uniform, made its first



appearance in 1915. Soon afterward they appeared in the MacLennan dress, the tartan of the late respected chief, Malcolm MacLennan, who loved the pipes and was instrumental in the band being formed.

For the last number of years, under the leadership of one of the greatest exponents of the art - Pipe Major Alex. Johnston - the band has been consistently in first place in competition with the best in the country.

Mrs. Allan MacNab, affectionately known as Mary Isdale, who considers it a labor of love to teach Scottish step dances, thought that the dainty lasses she instructs could be further inspired by the stirring music of the pipes.

She chose as instructor Pipe Major Jimmie Begg. Under his guidance the girls soon gained efficiency and in April, 1927, the Vancouver Ladies' Pipe Band was instituted. They have given good account of themselves in competition with the older bands.

Many pipers of note have come to live in the city and under their tuition the younger generation has taken enthusiastically to the pipes. It is said there are no old pipers, but those who attended the Scottish sports could agree when they say tall, gentlemanly Robert MacLaren, F.G.S., 80 years of age, lead the procession in full Highland regalia. A keen student of the pipes and their music, he is a self-taught piper.

Equipped with an intimate knowledge of the old tunes of Scotland, he plays the instrument daily, not to while away an idle hour, but to enrich his mind and catch the music in the message it conveys.

There is a great history of the pipes and their place in war, far beyond the purview of this story.

They were known in India in 1781 when the 73rd were fighting Hyder Ali, and Sir Eyre Coote shouted to his piper, gallantly playing, "Well done, my brave fellow. You shall have a silver-mounted set of pipes when the battle is done."

They knew them at the battle of Yimiera, and at Vittoria in the Peninsular War. At Cudidad Rodrigo, at Waterloo, at Loos, and who will soon forget the gallant deeds of the 16th Canadian Scottish when our own young piper, James Richardson, at the taking of Regina Trench, marched up and down in full view of the attacking Germans, rallying his fellow Highlanders with the exulting thrilling skirl of the pipes to the tune of "The Standard on the Braes of Mar."

His fearlessness in the face of danger in no small way made the day a day of victory. Detailed afterwards to escort prisoners to the rear he returned to pick up the pipes he loved, and was killed. The Victoria Cross was awarded posthumously.

Many will remember Piper Findlater at Dargai Heights, who, shot through the ankle, sat down and played "The Cock O' the North," while his comrades surged on under a merciless rain of bullets.

The further the man of Scottish birth goes away from his native land the dearer everything that identifies him with the land becomes. And that ideal is communicated down the generations.

So should the art die in the homeland it will always remain in Canada, whither it has carried as a valuable possession by the many Highland emigrants.

But today all pipers are waiting with itching fingers to play the Victory March, and if as the old Highlander said, the Great War did good in bringing the pipes to the fore, let us fervently pray that the blessed good that follows this one will have made it worth the cost.

In the garb of old Gaul, with the fire of old Rome,  
From the heath-covered mountains of Scotia we come;  
Our loud sounding pipes breathe the true martial strain  
And our hearts still the old Scottish valor retain.

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LOST

Fred Brodie has lost a blue manuscript book (12 x 14) which contains some very important piping tunes. Anyone having information on the whereabouts of this book, please contact Fred at 522-2151.

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IMPORTANT NEWSLETTER NOTICE

It has become necessary to discontinue sending Newsletters to those members still in arrears for the year 1970, if payment has not been received by the Treasurer by the 15th of March, 1971. This is a financial necessity and the Association would appreciate prompt payment of all dues.





## WITH PIPE AND SWASH

Before the days of public clocks, Scottish citizens were awakened by the skirl of pipes and the beat of drums. David Fergus

For hundreds of years the townsfolk of the burghs of Scotland were played to bed each night by the skirl of the pipes and the tuck of drum; and every morning around the ungodly hour of four o'clock, they woke to face a new day as the burgh piper and the burgh drummer paraded the streets and closes sounding their shrill reveille. In the days before public clocks were in general use, this form of primitive two-man time-signal was a civic amenity which every town council tried to provide.

The custom of appointing a burgh piper appears to have started in the fifteenth century. In 1487 Edinburgh had no fewer than three burgh pipers, and the Town Council ordained that the richer townsfolk were to take it in turn, day about, to feed the pipers.

In 1660 the Capital was reduced to one piper, John Johnston, whose duties were "to accompany the Toun's Drummer throw the Toun evening and morning" for an annual salary of £10 Scots. As this was worth 16s 8d sterling, Piper Johnston considered that he was underpaid, and he dared to ask the council for a free house. The councillors met to consider this bold demand, and decided that the piper's services were "neidles and unnecessar." The unfortunate piper was sacked forthwith and the city had to make do with the services of a single "swasher," as the drummer was called. (A "swashbuckler" is, literally, one who buckles on a swash or drum, and hence the word has come to mean a noisy, exhibitionist type of person.)

Johnston's unhappy experience illustrates the tense relationship that always existed between the burgh pipers and their employers, the councillors. Although the burgh piper was an indispensable civic employee, he seems to have been regarded as a necessary evil, for pipers as a class had a bad reputation, and the burgh records of Scotland are full of the grievances, complaints and feuds of the musicians and the councils:

There was an old proverb, "as fou as a piper," and they were regarded as being rather too fond of wine, women and the pipes. In 1698 the uninhibited piper of Selkirk was the leading spirit in a riot, when revellers "danced about in disordered dress in the streets, drinking healths, tossing wigs and hats, kissing, and pouring brandy down horses' throats."

In religion the pipers had a reputation for latitudinarianism (delightful word) that brought down the wrath of Calvinistic councils. James Roy, a piper of Elgin, was sentenced to stand in "hairclayth" and make public repentance for going through the town on a Sunday afternoon, blasting out ungodly tunes on the great pipes.

In most towns the piper and the swasher made their evening parade along the High Street and round the town's "backsides" at 8 P.M. Reveille was at 4 or 5 A.M. In addition to these daily duties, the piper played at penny weddings, at all burgh occasions such as Riding the Marches, and at horse races (as in Peebles). Sometimes the piper was granted the monopoly of music teaching in the burgh (as in Burntisland, where one of the pipers was also a violer).



Both piper and swasher were provided with free livery, and gay fellows they must have looked among their hodden-grey fellow townsmen. The Stirling uniform was a garment of "rid Inglesne kaser, viz wit breikis and shankes with whyte knettingis wrocht in gude fassoun," the whole topped with a "blue bannet with a cock of ribbons on it."

In Jedburgh, Robin Hastie, a famous piper, "wore a coat with a red neck and sleeves, breeches, large brass shoe buckles nearly the size of your head, and a three-cornered hat." In several towns "Piper's Crofts" or "Piper's Greens" remain as memorials to remind us that free housing for the piper was usually provided by the Town Council. In Jedburgh the Piper's House, near the old bridge over the Jed, still has an effigy of a piper on the gable-end.

The pipers of the Lowland burghs appear to have played bellows-bagpipes, something like the modern Northumbrian pipes. In an old picture of James Livingstone and Andrew Simpson, the piper and swasher of Haddington, Livingstone is clearly playing Border pipes, with the bellows tucked under his arm.

When Livingstone died he was lamented in an elegy which tells:

When the grey morn began to keek,  
And 'boon the toun is seen nae reek,  
Jamie wad rise, and his pipes cleek,  
    An' then wi' speed  
He'd rouse the tounfolk frae their sleep,  
    But nou he's deid.

Another famous burgh piper whose deeds were recorded in verse was Habbie Simpson, of Kilbarchan, who lived in the early 17th century. The Life and Death of Habbie Simpson, the Piper of Kilbarchan, by Sempill of Beltrees, tells how:

At fairs he played before the spearmen;  
And at horse races, many a day  
Before the black, the brown, the gray,  
He gart his pipe, when he did play,  
    Baith skir and skreed.  
Now all such pastime's quite away,  
    Sen Habbie's deid.

He was a keen sportsman, a good footballer and popular with the ladies:

Whan he play'd the lasses leuch  
To see him teethtless, auld and teuch.

Habbie Simpson finally achieved the unique honour, for a burgh piper, of having his statue raised in the town where he had so often skirled and skraighed.

In Kay's "Portraits" there is an engraving of one of the most famous of Lowland pipers, old Geordie Syme, of Dalkeith, with his bellows-pipes. Geordie was a kenspeckle figure in Dalkeith some 200 years ago, in his long yellow coat lined with red, his red plush breeches, white stockings, and silver-buckled shoes. He was a favourite with the local gentry, and was a retainer of the Buccleuch family.



Geordie was succeeded by Jamie Reid. When the Duchess of Buccleuch was due to come to Dalkeith Palace, Jamie used to station himself conspicuously by the roadside, and when Her Grace appeared he would welcome her with the tune, "Dalkeith Has Got A Rare Thing". He used to escort her from the town to the strains of, "Go To Berwick, Johnnie". He was duly rewarded with a crown piece from Her Grace of Buccleuch.

Jamie's son, Tom, was something of a juvenile delinquent, and Jamie, knowing nothing of child psychology, attempted a somewhat unorthodox method of correction. He would fasten the boy's coat tails in a vice and then blast his pipes in the captive's ears till he was thoroughly subdued and deafened.

"This maks the callant as quate as a pussie," declared old Jamie, "and, besides, dings the music into his heid. I hae great hopes he will mak a grand piper, for by this way he has learned amaist a' the tunes a'ready."

But Tom did not succeed his father: the office of burgh piper of Dalkeith fell to Robert Lorimer, whose son was Dalkeith's last piper. The practice of playing around the town fell into disuse around 1821, largely as the result of a long, sarcastic poem attacking the "vile, unearthly clamour."

The office of burgh piper was often hereditary. In Kelso, for instance, the Anderson family held the monopoly of piping for several generations, and one of the family became celebrated in a local poem:

John Anderson, my jo,  
Come in as ye gae by,  
And ye sall get a sheep's heid,  
Weel baken in a pie,  
Weel baken in a pie,  
And a haggis in a pat,  
John Anderson, my jo,  
Come in and ye'se get that.

It was from this unpromising doggerel that Burns was later to make his immortal lovesong.

Sir Walter Scott took great interest in the local pipers of his day. His uncle, Thomas Scott, of Jedburgh, was one of the few pipers who could play the old tune of "Soor Plooms In Galashiels". It was reputed to be especially difficult, as it required a peculiar art of pinching the back hole of the chanter with the thumb to produce certain high notes. The old man played the tune on his death-bed, a splendid gesture.

Sir Walter himself had a personal piper in attendance at Abbotsford, a boozy, smuggling Highlander by the name of Bruce, whom Scott dignified by the title of "John of Skye."

Scott regretted the passing of the burgh pipers. "By means of these men," he wrote, "much traditional poetry was preserved which must otherwise have perished. It is certain that, till a very late period, the pipers of whom there was one attached to every Border town of note, and whose office was often hereditary, were the great depositaries of oral, and particularly of poetical tradition."

The most notable piping dynasty in the Lowlands must have been that of the Hastie family in Jedburgh. The first of the line, John Hastie, was reputed to have played his pipes at Flodden. A later John Hastie flourished around 1720, and when he died his duties were taken over by his nephew, Robin, who continued in office for about 60 years. By the end of his life he was, in Sir Walter's words, "a wretched performer," but he knew many ancient tunes and airs that died with him.

Peebles had several pipers who have left their mark in history of legend. One, James Ritchie, used some of his earnings as a piper to buy a cow. When the Tweed rose in flood and carried off the cow, James is said to have remarked philosophically, "Deil may care! It can wi' the wind, let it gand wi' the waither!"

Another piper of Peebles once boasted that he would play his pipes all the way to Lauder, some seventeen miles away across the hills. He literally blew himself to death and dropped dead high up on the moors on the borders of Heriot parish. As his death was judged to be an act of self-destruction, he was buried where he fell, at a spot called "The Piper's Grave".

For some reason the Lowland, or bellows-pipes, fell out of favour, and as the Highland pipes came to replace them, Highlanders took over the duties of the Lowland pipers. In 1785 Inverkeithing had to send all the way to Sutherland for a piper. In the early nineteenth century Haddington's piper was a Donald McGregor and Galashiels had a Highlander called Donald Maclean.

One by one the old pipers died off and were not replaced. Sometimes a town would make do with a drummer alone. Sometimes a drum and fife combination continued for a few years. But eventually every town followed the lead of Dingwall, which had dispensed with the services of its last drummer in 1774 "as there are bells and a clock."

There is no doubt that by 1820 the piper and the swasher must have seemed walking anachronisms, as they paraded the wynds and closes. And yet ... and yet ... I have a suspicion that they finally disappeared largely because of that shame of being "Scotch" that afflicted so many Victorian Scots.

Not all trace of the piper and swasher has disappeared. Linlithgow still has a fife-player and swasher to play around the burgh at the Marches, and other Lowland towns have drummers for their special occasions. But surely it would be a fine thing, and one that would add some colour and gaiety to life, if every burgh could have a piper and a swasher in brilliant livery for special occasions.

Reprinted from the

Scots Magazine, January, 1971

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PIPER OF THE MONTH

A new member of this year's Board of Directors is featured as our Piper of the Month. John MacDonald has become well known during the last few years as a competent piper and judge. Born in Loch Lomond, he moved to Glasgow with his family when he was eleven years old. His first interest in piping was inspired by a Boys' Brigade Pipe Band that practised in a near-by school ground. John was soon a member of the Band along with his younger brother Kenneth. Since the pipe major of the Band felt he could not give John competent tuition he arranged to have Pipe Major William Jack of the Dalziel Highland Band teach young John.

John had developed many imperfections in his playing and, almost had to start learning from the beginning. Within eight months John had progressed to the point of being able to play as a member of the Dalziel Band. The year was 1936.

The Dalziel Highlanders was a Grade 1 Band and while John was a member he can remember the Band never placing worse than third in the aggregate standings. The Band had a corp of excellent pipers complimented with drummers such as Jimmy Catherwood, Alex Duthart and Gordon Jelly. In summary the Band was most successful. John played as a member of the Band until the beginning of World War II and was a keen member of the Scottish Pipers' Association.

In 1938 John became increasingly interested in Piobaireachd and Pipe Major Jack introduced him to Peter MacLeod. John received tuition from this Master for approximately two years and was regularly placing first or second in the amateur competitions. He was about to turn professional as World War II approached.

When the War began John joined the Gordon Highlanders and played with the Gordon Highlander Pipe Band under Pipe Major George Cruickshank for a period of two years. At this time he was "Released for Industry" for a year and one half. He was then recalled to the Royal Engineers.

Mr. MacDonald's piping activities came to an almost complete halt when he was sent overseas with the Engineers. When arriving in Calcutta, India John's pipes were misplaced and never seen again. A period of six months passed while he served in India and John was entertained on more than one occasion by Indian Regiment Pipe Bands who enjoyed hearing his piping. When in Kotah, a state of India, he was offered the position of tutor to the Indian Regiment Bands. John was unable, however, to accept.

When the War ended, he returned to Scotland and played with a Legion Band as he prepared himself for a return to the Dalziel Band. Before he had the opportunity to rejoin the Band, John and his family moved to Kuwait in 1948. He was employed by an oil company and remained in this hot arid country for sixteen years. Although John had taken his pipes with him, the social acquaintances and the climate did nothing to encourage his piping. His only piping performances were at Burns' Dinners and on New Year's. John was so sure that his piping days were all but over that he presented his pipes to his one and only pupil only to have a new set presented to him on leaving Kuwait.

In 1964 John and his family returned to England and then Scotland. In 1966 they emigrated to Canada, directly to Vancouver. On the strength of his piping capabilities he was offered a job in Powell River. He played with the Powell River Band and in his own words, "practised more during his four month stay in Powell River than during the previous twenty years". John then joined the Imperial Oil Company and moved to Vancouver.

John played in several of our local professional competitions and was in the prize money but soon discontinued his competitive endeavours.

Jimmy MacMillan encouraged John's return to piping circles. Mr. MacDonald joined the B. C. Pipers' Association after attending one of our annual dinners and soon began a continuing series of judging engagements. More recently, John became a Director of our Association.

We wish John MacDonald continued success and we hope to see him as a professional competitor in future competitions.

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"Weekend Vegetable"





