

# B. C. PIPERS' NEWSLETTER



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

JANUARY, 1963

No. 34

AN ASSOCIATION FOR THE PRESERVATION OF BAGPIPE MUSIC

AND THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF PIPE PLAYING IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

1911

1912

1913

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B. C. P I P E R S ' N E W S L E T T E R

Published monthly by the British Columbia Pipers' Association.

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ANNUAL MEMBERS' BANQUET: JANUARY 5th.

The Annual Members' Banquet, held on January 5th, 1963, in the Stanley Park Sports Pavilion, was well enjoyed by all present. After an hour of pre-dinner cocktails and visiting old friends, Bill Paterson, of Bellingham played into the banquet room the members of the head table, including Honorary Vice Presidents Pipe Major John Robertson, of Shawnigan Lake, and Lt. Col David Fairweather, Commanding Officer of the Seaforth Highlanders of Canada, Mr. Phil Yandle, President of the B.C. Highland Dancing Association, Mrs. Mary MacNab, widow of our former President Alan MacNab, and founder of the Vancouver Ladies Pipe Band, Pipe Major and Mrs. Edmund Esson, and Ian Walker, President of this Association.

Following the dinner, the President made a belated presentation to Pipe Major and Mrs. Esson, on the occasion of their marriage, on March 16th, 1962. Ed Esson warmly thanked the Association for this gift, an engraved silver tray.

The programme of the evening was extremely interesting and entertaining, although, as always, few of the pipers were initially willing to play, practically all of them having recently suffered broken fingers, sprained arms or serious chest colds, precluding them from playing. Fortunately these afflictions gradually became less and less noticeable, and the entertainment continued until 12:30.

Piping numbers were given by Jim MacMillan, Bill Peterson, Norma Nicholson, Seb Nellies, Ian Walker, Alex Finlayson, Bill Lockie, Bob Young and Terry McHardy. Don Collins played a selection of Scottish pieces on his accordion, Jessie Nicholson gave three very well received vocal selections, and Georgina MacPhail danced the Highland Fling, accompanied by Norma Nicholson, so it can be seen that the programme was varied, and interesting.

Out of town visitors included Bill and Isla Paterson, Bellingham, Mr. and Mrs. Eric Thompson, Hopkins Landing, Pipe Major John Robertson, Shawnigan Lake, and Gordon and Ruth Donaldson, Seattle.

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Our sympathies are extended to Mr. Norman Jessiman, President of the St. Andrew's & Caledonian Society of Vancouver, for his recent illness. It is our sincere hope that he enjoys a speedy recovery.

- 0 -

# The CLANSMEN

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Bagpipes - Reeds - Clan Crests - Scottish Novelties

The following article was written several years ago by Pipe Major John Robertson, and is reproduced in its entirety in this issue of the Newsletter. In succeeding issues, we plan to reprint from Pipe Major Robertson's scrapbook an important and controversial series of letters which appeared in the Oban Times in the late '30's, dealing with the MacKay - MacCrimmon controversy. We would very much like to hear from some of our readers on this subject, and would invite you to throw a fresh light onto this interesting subject.

THE MACKAYS: by PIPE MAJOR JOHN ROBERTSON:

In dealing with a subject so varied, so highly technical, so controversial that even some of the most prominent performers and experts are not agreed, I approach the question of bagpipe music and particularly the classic of the pipes - the Piobaireachd - with some misgivings and a great deal of trepidation. It is not my purpose, however, to offer any opinions of my own, being at the best, a player of very ordinary ability and possessing no right to be classed with those immortals who have left to us the proud legacy of a history which goes back into antiquity and antedating the period of recorded history.

Pipers possess something they may justly feel proud of and I fear even by players themselves is not appreciated to the extent that the subject merits. From time immemorial prowess on the field of sport as well as on the field of battle has been a feature of the rise of different nations, and the height of their achievements. This prowess is exemplified in feats of daring, of glory or of valour. There is ample proof, however, to show that these in themselves are not lasting. Otherwise, the great nations of Greece and Rome would today be in possession of the earth. The things that are really worthwhile are those that are more expressive of a people or a nation's ideals, - art, music, poetry song. Nations may come and go, dynasties may rise and fall, kings may rule or lose their heads at the hands of an outraged people; but the finer things of life, - the culture of a nation, survive and become finer and more mellow with age. It is in this class that I prefer to treat the music of the pipes.

There is a story told of an Arab who had a famous garden and who, on being obliged to move away from that section of the country, offered to sell it to a friend. Being a good business man, the friend set about making an appraisal of it, and eventually he brought his figures to the owner. All the items were set down - the cost of the grading and the masonry, the water pipes and the pool, the cost of the walls and the arbor and the trees and shrubs and vines and flowers. After studying it a while, the Arab said: "This is no appraisal, my friend. You have not appraised the perfume of my orange groves, nor the glories of my Iris, nor the exquisite aroma of my spice trees. You have not appraised the song of the birds that





place on permanent record even their finished compositions. They did, however, develop a second language common only to the bagpipe, and known as "Cainmteareachd" and the power of observation and interpretation developed under the method is hardly conceivable to those of us who learned our tunes from the staff notation. I have never seen this story in print but when I was about twelve years of age, I heard it from the lips of our shoemaker, John MacDonald.

Between the MacCrimmons and the MacKays, a record of whose contribution to bagpipe music is the purpose of this effort, there existed a great deal of rivalry. At the time of which I write there were periodic competitions held in Edinburgh.

To these events came the leading pipers from different parts of Scotland. All the tunes had to be original. On this occasion, one of the MacCrimmons and one of the MacKays had to travel a certain part of their journey by coach, in which they occupied opposite seats. MacCrimmon, as was the custom, carried a cane or walking stick, and to while away the time he kept fingering it as he would a chanter. On the following day MacKay was the first to be called on to play an original piobaireachd, which he did. On finishing, he stepped off the stage, where he was accosted by the enraged MacCrimmon, who slipping up to him shook his fist in MacKay's face, exclaiming: "A Racaire! Thug thu dheth mo mheur e." (You rascal! You took it off my finger) MacKay had not only interpreted the tune from MacCrimmon's fingering the day before, but was able to go through the different intricate movements in competition, without previous preparation.

In a school so closely guarded and whose secrets were so jealously preserved, it must have required not only courage, but a great deal of ability combined with a vision which possibly foresaw the gradual waning of interest in piobaireachd playing, with the passing of the Druid customs and the traditional knowledge of the great Masters of the art. For this contribution we have to give credit to Angus MacKay, for he, it was, who recorded the first really serviceable collection of Piobaireachd, and it is to his efforts that I dedicate this brief history of a period little known to our present day and generation. There were many prominent and famous pipers graduated from the MacKay school.

The first we have any definite knowledge of was Blind Roderick (Ruaridh Dall) who belonged to Sutherlandshire and became piper to MacKenzie of Gairloch about the end of the sixteenth century. Little is known of the life of Blind Roderick except that he was piper to four Chiefs of Gairloch in succession, and died in 1689 at a very ripe old age, leaving an only son, John. John, known as John Dall (Blind John) was born blind in the parish of Gairloch in 1666, and at an early age was sent to Borraraig to serve a period of training under Patrick Og MacCrimmon.

Having learned the rudiments of music from his father, it was not long before he easily outstripped all the other students, and on the termination of the usual seven year course at the famous Dunvegan school, Blind John was acknowledged to be equal if not a better piper than his teacher. Besides being an outstanding piper, he also won quite a reputation as a poet. Blind John's success aroused a great deal of jealousy and this culminated in an effort to bring his career to an untimely end by pushing him over a cliff. Landing on his feet, however, he suffered little injury and to this day the place is known as the Blind Man's Leap. (Leum an Doill)

It was while at Borreraig that his Master, Patrick Og MacCrimmon attempted to compose a tune which he failed to complete to his satisfaction after composing the two first measures. On studying it, John Dall caught the inspiration of his master and added the extra measures, but to this day it is known as "The Unfinished Tune". Leaving Dunvegan, he succeeded his father as piper to MacKenzie of Gairloch, and the years that followed were marked by profuse and outstanding contributions to Bagpipe Compositions. He composed no less than twenty-four Piobaireachd, and a great number of Strathspeys, Reels and Jigs. Among the most noted of these were "Patrick Og MacCrimmon's Lament", "Corrienessan" and MacLeod of Raasay's Salute".

John Dall MacKay died in 1754 at the advanced age of 88 years, and was buried in the grave alongside his no less famous father. He was succeeded by a son, Angus, and Angus, in turn, was succeeded by his son John.

It is worthy of note that no less than four members of the family were pipers to eight chiefs of Gairloch, the succession being from father to son. One member of the family emigrated to America in the year 1802, and died in Pictou in 1835 when over 80 years of age.

Outside of the MacCrimmons, there is no family on record that gave so many really outstanding pipers to the different Clan Chiefs throughout the Highlands of Scotland, as did the MacKays. One noted piper, Roderick MacKay, went from the Reay country to Raasay. He had received his tuition from his namesake, John Dall MacKay of Gairloch. He died young after becoming famed in his day for many outstanding compositions. He left behind him to carry on the tradition of the family a boy called John who was adopted into the family of Malcolm MacLeod, brother to the Laird of Raasay. Malcolm MacLeod was himself a good piper and through him the boy John MacKay acquired a good knowledge of pipe music. To finish his education, he was sent to the MacCrimmon school and on completion of his course he became piper to MacLeod of Raasay, and afterwards to Lord Willoughby of Eresby, in Perthshire. He finally settled in the village of Kyleakin in Skye where he conducted a school for pipers. John MacKay had four sons, Donald, Roderick, Angus and John, all of whom were pipers. Of the sons, Donald was for some time piper to MacDonald of Glengarry and afterwards to His Royal Highness the Duke of Sussex.

Roderick was with MacKay of Arisaig and Moray of Abercairney. John became piper to Lord Giowyd, while Angus became piper in turn to Davidson of Talloch; Campbell of Islay and afterwards to Queen Victoria. This famous piper who received his training from his father, John MacKay, was Queen Victoria's first piper and his efforts may be said to mark the beginning of a new era in bagpipe playing. In 1838 he published the first proper collection of Piobaireachd containing sixty tunes, with notes of historic interest as well as a record of hereditary pipers. In 1841 and 1843 he published a complete tutor for the bagpipes and a collection of tunes named the Piper's Assistant. All of these are long out of print. Angus MacKay died at Dumfries on the 21st of March, 1849 under rather distressing circumstances. With advancing years, his mind became somewhat deranged, and while walking near the River Nith, he fell in and drowned.

A few of the tunes handed down to perpetuate his memory are: "The Desperate Battle of the Birds", "The Duke of Roxburgh's Farewell to Black Mount Forest", "Balmoral Highlanders" and many others no less noted.

Angus MacKay was really a genius, and outstanding among a galaxy of famous pipers bearing the name of this great Highland Clan, and in passing it will be well to mention one - Donald MacKay, a son of Angus's brother Donald, was born in 1845, and was some time piper to the Prince of Wales (Edward VII). He died from blood poisoning in 1893.

In 1820 William MacKay, who was piper to the Royal Celtic Society, won first prize at the Highland Society of London's Competition and in 1940 published a complete tutor for the Highland Bagpipe.

- Pipe Major John Robertson -  
Shawnigan Lake, B.C.

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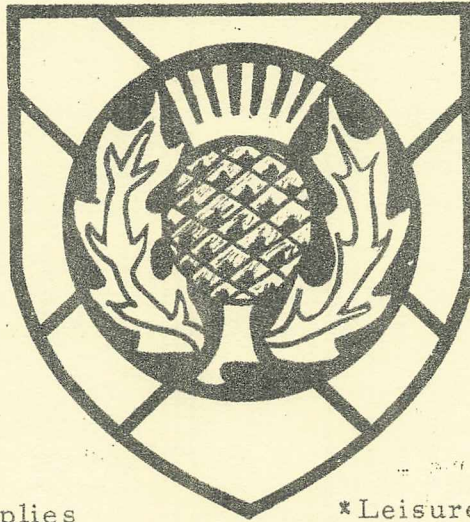
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DONALD PLANS A TARTAN REVOLUTION:

(from "The Weekly Scotsman")

There's hope for all those born in Scotland of Irish, English or Welsh parents. A Lewis man who believes all born in Scotland should be able to wear the kilt, has devised a simple way for them to dodge any angry cries about clan connections. His answer: "Simply wear a plain brown tweed kilt".

The advocate of this kilted revolution, Pipe Major Donald MacLean, is a native Gaelic speaker from Lewis. In all his 54 years he has rarely worn anything other than Highland dress. Even when he served in the Regular Army and had the opportunity to change into trousers on leave, he simply changed from one kilt into another.

One day he caused quite a sensation among members of his old regiment, the Seaforth Highlanders, at Fort George, near Inverness. For a day he wore a pair of flannels. And all over the depot, people asked: "Is this really Donald MacLean? He's never worn trousers before. It can't be!"

Said the erect Lewis man of his own non-tartan kilt: "I think it should encourage non-Scots who live in Scotland - those who are not entitled to a clan tartan."

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LOCHABER'S LAST LAMENT?

(from "The Weekly Scotsman")

In the piping world the term "Lochaber no more" may have new significance.

For the only pipe band in Lochaber and district - Fort William Pipe Band - is in trouble, and may be hard pushed to keep going for much longer in its 40 year history.

Last week a public meeting in Fort William heard the gloomy picture. The average age of the band is between 50 and 60. Hardly any new members are coming forward, particularly from the younger generation. The problem is not merely membership. It costs so much to equip a pipe band, and the present uniforms are 30 years old.

Says band Secretary Mr. A. Fairlie: "It would be tragic if the band had to close down. For there are no other pipe bands in the West except those in Oban and Portree, and I feel that part of Scotland should have a band. Why no youngsters?" Mr. Fairlie says sadly: "T.V. and a general apathy among youngsters. They may seem keen on the surface, but they won't do anything more than talk." The next few weeks will see whether this is true or not. No doubt Mr. Fairlie will be delighted to have himself proved wrong.

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FROM PIPE MAJOR JOHN ROBERTSON'S SCRAPBOOK:

RESULTS OF B.C. PIPERS' ASSOCIATION: 5th Annual Gathering:

Fifth Annual Gathering - Elk's Hall, Saturday, November 21st, 1936.

Judges:

Amateur Events: Mr. A. Whyte, Mr. D. MacDonald Mr. J.D. Nicol  
Professional Events: P.M. John Gillies, M.S.M., P.M. Wm. Bain,  
P.M. Donald Cameron.

Amateur Piobaireachd:

1. Wm. Armstrong 2. Wm. Lamont 3. John Gibson

Marches Under 16:

1. J. Watt 2. Betty Pringle

Strathspeys and Reels Under 16:

1. J. Watt 2. Betty Pringle

Marches. Girls Under 21:

1. M. MacDonald 2. Mary Dewar 3. Betty Pringle

Marches Over 16:

1. Wm. Armstrong 2. Wm. Lamont 3. John Gibson

Strathspeys and Reels Over 16:

1. Wm. Lamont 2. Wm. Armstrong 3. John Gibson

Highland Fling: Confined to Members:

1. Wm. Armstrong 2. G. Woods 3. J. McHardy

Sword Dance: Confined to Members:

1. G. Woods 2. Wm. Armstrong 3. J. McHardy

Old Highland Airs: (Veterans)

1. W. Bain 2. I. MacDonald 3. W. Bowes

Open Piobaireachd:

1. A. Macindewar 2. Ed. Esson 3. W. Douglas 4. A. Johnston

Open Marches:

1. Wm. Urquhart 2. Ed. Esson 3. D. MacDonald

Open Strathspeys and Reels:

1. W. Douglas 2. D. MacDonald 3. A. Macindewar

Open Jigs:

1. D. MacDonald 2. W. Douglas 3. A. Macindewar

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BI-MONTHLY COMPETITION: FEBRUARY 8th

The first Bi-Monthly Competitions of 1963 will be held on Friday, February 8th, 1963. The events will be held, as usual, in the Gymnasium at the Seaforth Armoury.

The evening should be a lengthy one, and we would ask all spectators to be seated by 8:00 p.m., at which time the events will commence.

The events to be held will be as follows:

Novice Old Highland Airs  
Juvenile Strathspeys and Reels  
Junior Piobaireachd  
Amateur Jigs  
Senior Amateur Marches

We would like to see more of our members support these competitions. We do not have to stress the importance of them, and can assure everyone that the standard of playing is very high and very enjoyable.

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GENERAL MEETING: JANUARY 25th.

The monthly General Meeting will be held on Friday, January 25th, in the band room of the Seaforth Armoury.

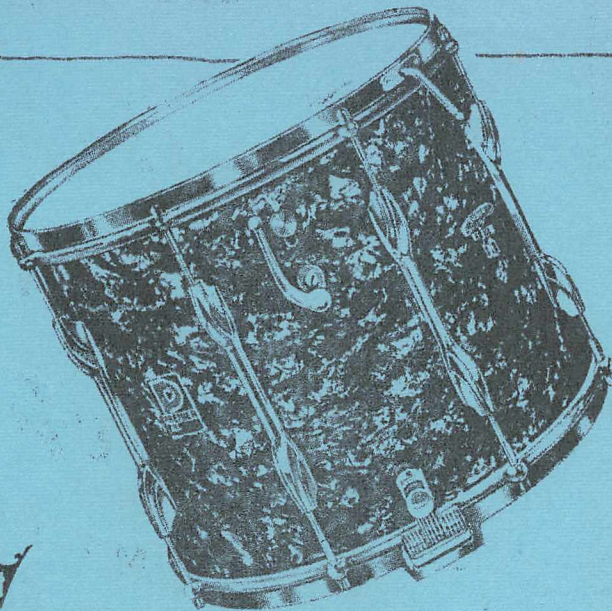
The forthcoming Annual Gathering, which will be held this year on March 23rd, will be discussed.

Following the meeting, the newly released record "Pipe Major John Wilson Visits the B.C. Pipers' Association" will be played.

All members are urged to attend.

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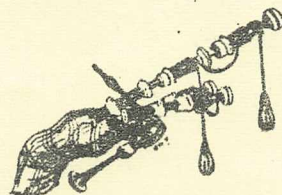
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SCOTLAND

VANCOUVER LADIES PIPE BAND ANNUAL FESTIVAL:

February 15th and 16th have been set as the dates of the Vancouver Ladies Pipe Band Festival, which will be held at the Cambrian Hall, 17th & Main Street.

A good program of dancing, piping and drumming has been arranged, and a large number of competitors are expected.

If anyone wishes to assist with a donation, kindly direct the same to the Vancouver Ladies' Pipe Band, c/o Mrs. F. Nairn, 150 South Boundary Road, Vancouver 6, B.C.

The Festival is a very popular feature of the winter piping season, and should be supported by all piping and drumming enthusiasts.

Entry forms can be obtained by phoning CY 9-3589. Remember Friday and Saturday, February 15th and 16th.

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PIPE MAJOR JOHN WILSON VISITS THE B.C. PIPERS' ASSOCIATION:

We are very pleased to announce the recent release of the record "Pipe Major John Wilson Visits The B.C. Pipers' Association".

Produced in conjunction with Pipe Major Wilson's visit to Vancouver, in March, 1962, this record should prove to be extremely popular. It contains an interesting variety of pieces, including several compositions of John Wilson.

It is, as far as we know, the only record to contain two complete piobaireachd: "Lament for Captain MacDougall" and "The Old Woman's Lullaby".

Also on this record are the following pieces: "Lament for the Old Reedmakers" (Slow March), "The Judging Was Bad" & "Holyrood Park" (6/8 Marches), "Bobbie Cuthbertson" & "Colin MacKay" (Hornpipes); "The Braes O' Badenoch" (2/4 March), "Capt. Duncan McGregor" (Strathspey), "Tom Kettles" (Reel), "Padruig Og", "The Loch Ness Monster" & "John Grieve" (Jigs).

Produced by Aragon Records, well known for the Powell River record and the three Donald MacLeod records, this record is a must for all pipers. We know that you will enjoy hearing it, and would suggest that you go to your record store for one right away.

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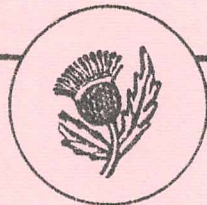
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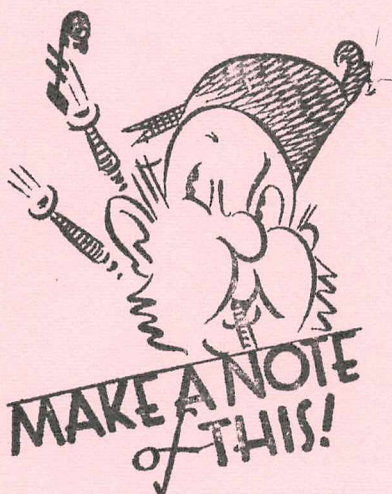
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