

# B.C. PIPERS' NEWSLETTER



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# MACCRIMMON

## HEREDITARY PIPERS

by DAVID WEBSTER

**I**N a world where rapid change is a notable feature of our society it is at once comforting and inspiring to find that some worthwhile traditions have withstood the ravages of time to a remarkable degree.

For hundreds of years the MacCrimmons were the hereditary pipers to the Chief of the Clan MacLeod, and ran a piping college at Boreraig on the Isle of Skye, off the West Coast of Scotland. A wealth of fascinating legends of the MacCrimmons have been passed down along with the music of the Great Highland Bagpipe and are still well known and loved by pipers of the 20th century.

In my first book on Scottish Highland Games I told how the 1745 Rising affected the situation and Ian Dubh MacCrimmon in 1795 decided, because of the changed circumstances, to sail to America and seek a new life in that country. He got as far as Greenock, but, overcome by homesickness, he returned to his native heath where, until he died

in 1822, he would sit outside his old house playing imaginary tunes on his walking stick.

At that time it appeared that the genius of the MacCrimmons and piping traditions had been forever lost to Scotland, yet I believed that somewhere there must still exist a MacCrimmon piper. If, as they say, it takes seven generations and seven years training to make a great piper, surely such a heritage should not so easily be lost.

I was right. After dropping out of sight for well over a hundred years, MacCrimmon pipers came to light and have had their hereditary position restored. The fact that they have re-emerged on the other side of the Atlantic makes the story all the more interesting.

To appreciate the importance of this development the earlier story of the MacCrimmons must be recalled.



A great piper at the MacCrimmon memorial cairn at Boreraig; Angus Macpherson (second left), who was born in 1877, was the son of Calum Macpherson (Calum Pìobaire), piper to Cluny Macpherson. Calum's father had been the last pupil of John MacCrimmon. The lady on the right is the late Countess of Erroll, Lord High Constable of Scotland.



**A**LTHOUGH it has sometimes been suggested that the MacCrimmon family was started around 1600, it is quite certain that the Clan was established long before that. There were even associations between the MacLeods of Dunvegan and McGrymmens before that time, and indeed John MacCrimmon was a witness to a Contract of Friendship at Inverness in the 16th century and one of the contracting parties was MacLeod of Dunvegan.

An even more interesting reference, however, is in the Gaelic poetry of one Mary MacLeod who was born in 1567. This lady was a nurse closely associated with Dunvegan and one of her poems is translated as follows:

*“ By the music of the sea  
Lonely am I.  
This was not my use and wont  
But the high sounding bagpipe  
Unmatched by any other music,  
When touched by Patrick's fingers.”*

It is almost certain that Patrick referred to was Patrick Mor MacCrimmon.

The piping college at Skye was said to be established by Iain Ohar (Sallow John) who was well known prior to the 1600s and that seat of learning flourished until 1747 when the Act of Proscription, introduced after the 1745 Rising, claimed the bagpipes as a weapon of war and the playing of these was a punishable offence.

There has been passed down over the centuries a wealth of interesting anecdotes, some of which are undoubtedly based on fact. For example, the MacCrimmons skills and techniques were closely guarded secrets and legend has it that when one of the MacCrimmon women taught a sweetheart the fingering of a tune, the family on discovering her actions, cut off her fingers so that she could not do such a thing again; and to deter others from following suit.

In December, 1745, an officer and sixty of MacLeod's men, including Donald Ban MacCrimmon were captured at Inverurie. The Jacobite pipers of the opposition, greatly respecting the past master of piping, refused to play until he was released to return to Skye.

The MacCrimmons are said to have composed great tunes and mastered difficult phrases by practising in the Piper's Cave and Piper's Hollow where they could listen to the echo of their own music in order to assess and adapt their playing.

Bagpipe music, as most Scottish readers will know, is divided into *Ceol Mor*, the great music and salutes, laments and the like, and *Ceol Beag* which are marches, strathspeys and reels. The MacCrimmons concentrated on the former, and taught entirely the Piobaireachd. Their own compositions show not only significant events recording the history of the clan, but also minor incidents of importance to the pipers. For example “*A' Bhiodag*



Iain Norman MacCrimmon (left), 10th Hereditary Piper to Clan MacLeod; and Malcolm Roderick MacCrimmon, 9th Hereditary Piper to Clan MacLeod.

Bhoidheach” (the Bonny Dirk) is attributed to Patrick Og MacCrimmon, who offered him a much-admired dirk if he would compose a tune extolling the qualities of the weapon.

When Ian Dubh was laid to rest in the Kilmuir Churchyard at Dunvegan in 1822 it seemed as if the MacCrimmons might never again pipe for the MacLeods. Well-known historians and authorities on the MacCrimmons have said that Ian Dubh's brother was not a piper. Fortunately, Sir Walter Scott recorded otherwise: “MacLeod's hereditary piper is called MacCrimmon. He is an old man, a lieutenant in the army, and a most capital piper, possessing about 200 tunes, most of which would die with him as he declines to have any of his sons instructed in the art.”

Donald, his younger son, went to Canada in 1820 to assume a Crown Land grant in Ontario. In the year 1918 Malcolm Roderick MacCrimmon was born at *Edmonton*, Alberta, Canada, and inspired by family stories passed down



through the years, he learned to play the bagpipes and set about tracing his family tree.

Correspondence with the 17th Chief of the Clan MacLeod of MacLeod led to the production of a complete lineage record, filling in all the gaps between hereditary pipers and young Malcolm himself.

When World War II was imminent Malcolm enlisted in the Calgary Highlanders, Alberta's only Scottish Regiment, and was later transferred to the Scots Guards, the only Canadian soldier of the War to be transferred to a British regiment. This allowed him to study under Pipe Major William Ross, that greatly respected Chief Instructor of the Army School of Piping in Edinburgh.

Eventually Malcolm was able to visit the remote and mysterious island of his forefathers. There, at Dunvegan Castle, Dame Flora, Mrs MacLeod of MacLeod, 28th Chief of the Clan, officially appointed him 9th Hereditary Piper. The great tradition was again re-established.

Malcolm ensured that his son, Iain, was given every opportunity to master the traditional instrument. Apart from his father's tuition, Iain studied under recognised champions and masters such as Piper - Major Donald MacLeod, John McLellan, Andrew Wright and Bob Hardie. Gradually he gained international recognition and his compositions were played on important occasions and Grade One Pipe Bands have played MacCrimmon compositions in the World Championships.

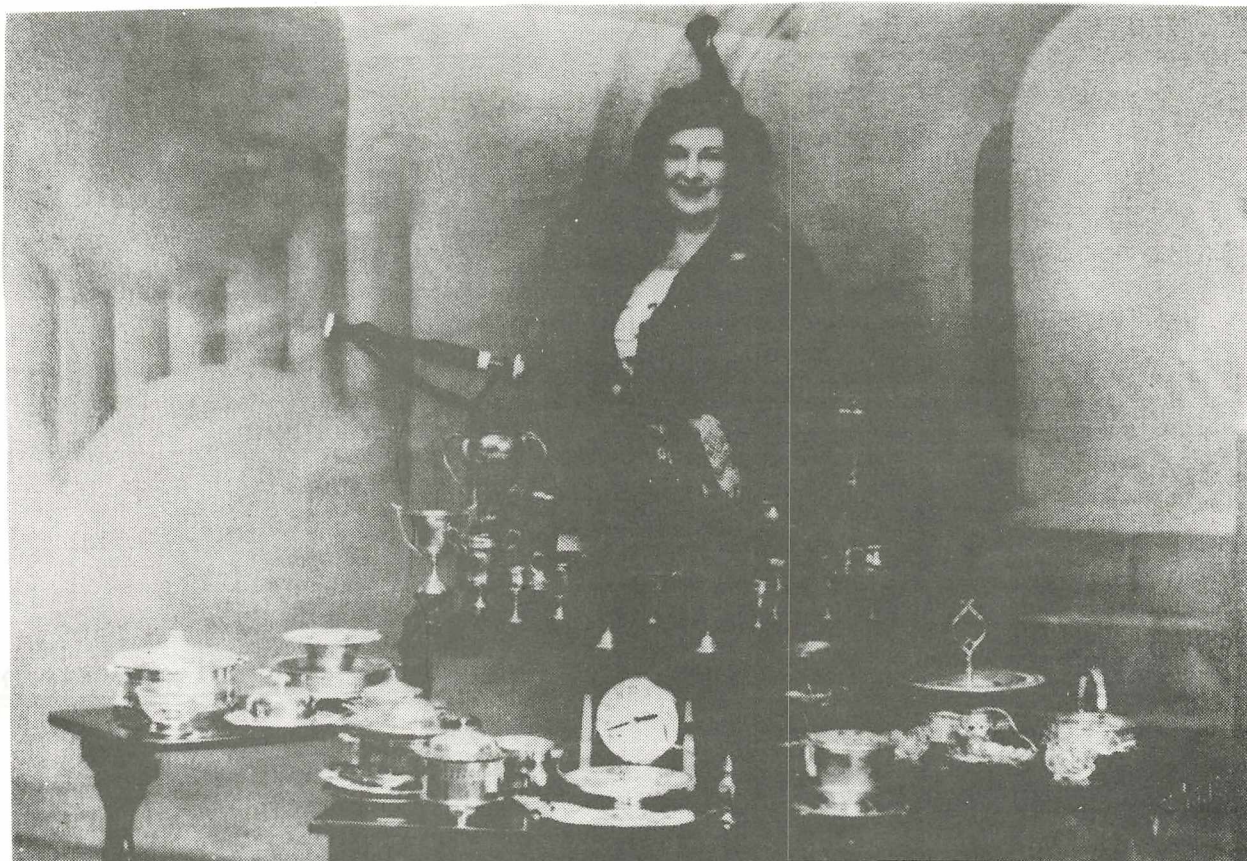
Iain MacCrimmon has now compiled two books of pipe music which amply illustrate that although the fundamentals remain the same, as in many other spheres, interpretation is now much more sophisticated. In writing a foreword to Iain's latest book, John MacLeod of MacLeod has some very relevant

comments to make: "The times have changed from that period when the Scottish Clan was so stabilised that the post of the piper to the Chief was handed down from father to son as part of the natural order of things. Yet in this world where nothing lasts, it is somehow exhilarating to learn that amongst the elements which have survived the physical break up of the Clan system is the outstanding and original musical talent of this family of MacCrimmons."

Iain has now officially succeeded his father and has been invited by Chief John MacLeod of MacLeod to give a piping recital during the Clan MacLeod Parliament. He will travel to Skye and play for his chieftain. Once more the great hall will echo to the strains of the Ceol Mor from the bagpipes of the MacCrimmon and there won't be a prouder man in the world than Iain, 10th Hereditary Piper to the Chief of the Clan MacLeod.

#### THE MACCRIMMONS LINEAGE

1500-1980			
		Finlay a' Bhreacain	
1st Hereditary Piper		Ian Odhar	
2nd "	"	Patrick Donn	
3rd "	"	Donald Mor	1570
4th "	"	Patrick Mor	1595-1670
5th "	"	Patrick Og	1670
6th "	"	Malcolm	1690
		Donald Ban	1710
		Angus Og	
7th "	"	Ian Dubh	1730-1822
8th "	"	Donald Ruadh	1743-1825
		Roderick	1814-1880
		Malcolm	1851-1928
		Roderick Murchison	1889-1912
9th "	"	Malcolm Roderick	1918
10th "	"	Iain Norman	1952



Mrs. M. Newbold nee Margaret MacDonald  
(late 30's)



## MINI-GATHERINGS

The first Mini-gathering of the 1982-83 season was held on Saturday, October 9th, 1982. It was most encouraging to see so many new young competitors and we look forward to their continued participation.

The judges for the day were Alison Palmer and Jim Stewart. The results were as follows:

### CHANTER CLASS - MARCH

1. Kathy MacLeod
2. Aileen Watson  
Lenna Clark
3. Jennifer Crawford  
Marnie Stephen  
Shelly Anderson  
Sophia Thomson

### NOVICE - SLOW AIR

1. Stuart Forbes
2. Kevin Mark
3. Robbyn Bell
4. Norma MacLeod
5. Graeme Savage
6. Neil McDonald

### JUVENILE STRATHSPEY AND REEL

1. Kevin Gray
2. Chris Main
3. Michelle Langston

### JUNIOR 6/8 MARCH AND JIG

1. Shauna Stephen
2. Robert MacLeod
3. John McKay

### AMATEUR JIG AND HORNPIPE

1. Andrew Bonar
2. Sandy Miller
3. Corey Tillyer

Please note there was an omission on the Promotions List for the 1982-83 mini-gathering season. Moira Lee has been promoted from Junior to Amateur.

The second mini-gathering of the season was held on November 6th, 1982. The judges were Peter Aumonier and Jack Lee and the results were as follows:

### CHANTER CLASS - SLOW AIR

1. Aileen Watson
2. Kathy Macleod
3. Linda Wright
4. Lenna Clark
5. Jennifer Crawford

### NOVICE 2/4 MARCH

1. Kevin Mark
2. Stuart Forbes
3. Paul Laporte
4. Glen Mitchell
5. Scott MacNeil

### JUVENILE JIG

1. Gregor White
2. Julie Main
3. Michelle Langston

### JUNIOR MARCH, STRATHSPEY AND REEL

1. Malcolm Bokenfohr
2. Robert MacLeod
3. Geoff Harris





## NOVEMBER KNOCK-OUT

Our first knock-out of the new season started "on time" on Friday November 5th at the Scottish Auditorium. A large and appreciative crowd was on hand to witness one of our better opening evenings, with seven pipers competing in the knock-out and six in the opening 6/8. The 6/8 warm-up, judged by Jimmy Wilson, produced some interesting tunes and was won by Jack Lee playing "The Banks of Farrar". By the way Jack, it is a composition of Willie Ross ----.

The knock-out event also produced some interesting tunes especially the two-part 2/4's. With no solo event calling up these tunes and few bands including them in their medleys, this is one of the few chances of hearing some of the prettier and more unusual competitions.

Our judges, Jimmy Wilson, Mike McInnes and Donald MacMillan were faced with some difficulty in producing three candidates to proceed to the second round, as all the competitors played well. However, their decision gave Graham Davidson, Jack Lee and Steve Geddes a berth in February.

Because of the large entry in the knock-out, the pupil-teacher event didn't start until fairly late in the evening. Once again some novel arrangements and equally novel prizes were evident.

"Most likely to emigrate to Eastern Canada" - Shaunna Stephen and Angus MacPherson  
"Most look alike" - Kevin Gray and Terry Lee  
"Most creative socks" - Robert MacLeod and Jim Stewart  
"Fewer than 10 eye signals" - Malcolm Bokenfohr and Jack Lee. Thanks to all who participated.

The December knock-out is scheduled for Friday, December 3rd at the Scottish Auditorium.

The 6/8 warm-up will start at 8:15 p.m. SHARP.  
Requirement for December - composition of Donald McLeod.

## MATCH-UPS FOR KNOCK-OUT

Robbie McNeil versus John A. McLeod  
Owen Reid versus Dave Hennigan  
Christine Waddell versus Angus MacPherson

IMPROMPTU - SELECTION BY CITY OF VICTORIA PIPE BAND  
COMPOSER NIGHT

6 • Will all those who plan to participate in the composers event, please phone Angus MacPherson at 939-9614.

BAR SERVICE      ADMISSION \$2.00    UNDER 19 & OAP \$1.00



## A LETTER FROM EDMONTON

October, 1982

On July 24th 1982, some 21 MacCrimmons, MacLeods and friends left Edmonton, Alberta, for a visit to the Isle of Skye in the inner Hebrides. History was once more being made on the Misty Isle as Iain and Charlotte MacCrimmon had their wee son Calum James MacCrimmon christened during a Clan MacLeod Church Service in the Parish Church of Durinish, Dunvegan. The last MacCrimmon to be baptised in Skye was prior to 1820.

During the evening festivities a great bonfire was set for all visitors to see and enjoy. To finish off the day, Iain MacCrimmon - 10th Hereditary Piper to the Clan MacLeod gave an excellent piping recital to over 300 Clan MacLeod members and friends from all over the world attending this gathering.

Tuesday morning before the Clan left the Castle Area for a visit to the MacCrimmon cairn at Borreraig, present World Champion Pipe Major John Burgess played many tunes to the delight of all in the beautiful Dunvegan Castle flower garden.

Upon reaching Borreraig across Loch Dunbegan on a marvelous sunny afternoon, Pipe Major John Burgess and Iain MacCrimmon played their pipes turn about as they led one and all up the long winding path to the Borreraig Cairn, home of the MacCrimmons.

After a few speeches by attending dignitaries, including Chief John MacLeod of MacLeod, a rare treat was in store for all. Pipe Major John Burgess gave an excellent rendering of that famous MacCrimmon Piobaireachd "Too Long in this Condition", followed by the MacLeods piper Iain MacCrimmon playing "The Lament for Mairi MacLeod". A perfect ending to a perfect day.

A spot of tea plus a few drams at nearby Husabost House certainly ended a most successful day's activities for all lovers of the great Highland Bagpipe Music.

Unfortunately, come early Wednesday morning our wee group had to leave Skye as time was precious, on to Lewis and Harris in the outer Hebrides to spend a few days with relatives.

A ceilidh in the Tarbert Hotel, Harris, gave all our group a chance to hear that fine Gaelic singer "Willie John MacAuley and his group". John Murdo Morrison the hotel owner added several of his own Gaelic selections plus Iain playing several numbers to round out a rousing evening.

During our stay in Stornoway, we managed to visit Angus (Boxer) MacLeod, late wee Donald MacLeods brother, who appears to be quite fit. Also talked to Donald MacDonald, brother of that fine piper from Calgary - Angus MacDonald whom I understand has left that city with his wife Marion to reside in their nateve Lewis.

Much, much too short a holiday. Highland hospitality and all that goes with it, far beyond expectations.

Lieut. Donald Ruadhs relatives who made this trip to Skye and surrounding area for the first time, will never forget their Highland ancestors who came from these beautiful heather covered Isles.

Malcolm Roderick MacCrimmon

P.S. Iain has a Book III in the making for one and all to enjoy.

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COMING EVENTS

Once again the Vancouver Ladies' Pipe Band will host their Annual Burns Night Dinner on Saturday, January 22, 1983 at St. Mary's Hall in Burnaby. The evening will include a sit-down dinner and entertainment. A live band will provide good dance music (including Gay Gordons) for all ages. Talk it up with family and friends and bring your group along for this very special evening of fun and entertainment. Tickets are \$35.00 per couple and can be purchased from any band member. If you wish further clarification on anything please call Shirley Mitchell at 521-4036.

\*\*\*\*\*

The Vancouver Ladies' Pipe Band Annual Piping, Drumming and Miniature Pipe Band Competition will be held on Saturday February 19, 1983 at Langara Campus, 100 West 49th Avenue, Vancouver, B.C. Entry forms will be available from your teacher or the Pipe Major of your Band. If you miss these two sources give Chairperson Heather Lawrence a call at 581-8632.

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WEST COAST INDOOR CHAMPIONSHIPS  
11TH ANNUAL TRIUMPH STREET PIPE BAND CONTEST

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 4TH

GUILDFORD PARK COMMUNITY SCHOOL  
14577 106A Avenue, Surrey

SOLO PIPING AND DRUMMING 1-5 P.M.  
BAND CONTEST 7-9 P.M.  
CÉILIDH TO FOLLOW

EVENTS

1. CHANTER (CHOICE OF TUNE)
2. NOVICE 6/8 MARCH
3. NOVICE STRATHSPEY AND REEL
4. JUVENILE SLOW AIR
5. JUVENILE 2/4 MARCH
6. JUNIOR AMATEUR MARCH
7. JUNIOR AMATEUR PÍOBÁIREACHD
8. SENIOR AMATEUR MARCH, STRATHSPEY AND REEL (SUBMIT 2)
9. SENIOR AMATEUR JIGS (PLAY A SET OF 2)
10. DRUMMING NOVICE MARCH
11. DRUMMING AMATEUR MARCH, STRATHSPEY AND REEL
12. DRUMMING SENIOR AMATEUR MEDLEY
13. DRUMMING PROFESSIONAL MEDLEY

ENTRY FEE: EVENTS 1-12 \$2.00  
EVENT 13 \$3.00

Competitors will be informed of their times of play before the contest.

Entries must reach the Secretary by November 20th. Cheques payable to the Triumph Street Pipe Band.

Mail entries to: Hal Senyk, 2771 Adanac St., Vancouver, B.C.  
V5K 2N1

Or phone Hal Senyk at 604-253-1743 or Duncan Fraser at  
270-2489.

