

The Caledonian Society of Cincinnati

A History from 1827 to 1977

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Go anywhere in the world and you will find a Scot. They are all over North America. They are on the plains of Argentina and Brazil. They can be found in Japan and Korea as well as in Australia and New Zealand. While not so numerous in Russia or Finland, they are well entrenched in Africa, India and Arabia. They conduct church services in English in Amsterdam, Holland. Indeed, men of Scottish ancestry have reached the Moon, and are now looking beyond the stars.

Two centuries ago, Scots traveled the migratory routes to the western country of the United States, following the Mohawk Valley, the passage from the Virginia to Kentucky, or the descending flow of the Ohio River. Many of them met at Cincinnati. One of them, General Arthur St. Clair, was instrumental in stabilizing the area for settlement by his successful campaigns against the marauding Indians, and later became the first Governor of the Northwest Territory.

The Founding of the Society

In the early years of the 19th Century, a spirit of mutual helpfulness among the Cincinnati Scots led to the organization of the Caledonian Society. On Monday evening, August 20, 1827, the first meeting looking toward organization was held in the office of attorney John Douglass, Jr. Also, present were Joseph Clark, John Douglass, Sr., Alexander Kinmont, David K. Kirk, Robert Macgregor, James Sims, and William Thomas. The objective of the Society was "to relieve such of our countrymen as may arrive among us in distressed circumstances, and to give them information and advice for locating themselves in the western country."

By November 30, 1827, the following additional members had been received: James Atcheson, John Bogle, Robert Buchanan, Duncan Campbell, George Chapman, Robert Chapman, George Christie, Alexander Clark, William Drenan, Andrew Harvey, David Henderson, John Henderson, David Kilgour, Henry Kilgour, Jr., Henry Kirk, James Kir, Robert Merrie, Humphrey Miller, Charles Macalester, Edward Macalester, Andrew McAlpin, James McCandless, Robert McCulloch. George McDonald, James McGregor, Peter McNicol, Robert Patton, James Sample, Dr. William Smith, Bellamy Storer, James Taylor, Thomas Thompson, James Thones, Andrew A. Todd, Gavin Wallace, Hugh White, and William B. Wilson.

The first Constitution of the Society was adopted September 10, 1827. Among the Articles of this Constitution is an interesting one that deals with politics. It states, "all discussions relative to the politics of America are strictly prohibited at our meetings; and no political toasts will be permitted to be drank (sic) at our celebration of St. Andrew's Day". On the subject of intoxication, Article XIX states that "If a member attends any of the meetings in a state of intoxication (as described by a majority of the members present) he shall be compelled to leave the meeting and be fined One Dollar for the first offense, Two Dollars for the second offense, and for the third offense his name shall be forever erased from the records." In keeping with the objective for which the Society was created, Article XV provided that "the standing committee of arrangement.... shall inquire into the circumstances and character of all applicants for relief (our countrymen who arrive among us in distressed circumstances), who shall state to the President the amount of aid they deem necessary, who will grant an order on the Treasurer provided It does not exceed Five Dollars. Likewise, when any member of this Society is visited by sickness, which he could not prevent, and confined to bed . . . "the aforesaid Committee shall pay him a weekly allowance of Three Dollars for the first four weeks and Two Dollars and fifty cents for the next four weeks." This early form of health insurance also provided for payment for the advice of a physician in the event of doubtful cases.

Early St. Andrew's Days

For the purposes of promoting "social intercourse and for keeping alive those recollections of our native country which must be dear to every Scotsman, " Article XXIII provided that the members of the Caledonian Society shall dine together-upon St. Andrew's Day. In keeping with this Article, St. Andrew's Day was first celebrated in 1827 at "Watson's Hotel" according to a brief entry in the minute book. In 1828, the St. Andrew's Day celebration, as a local newspaper reported

it, was a "hummer" complete with piping, dancing, poetry recitation, and singing of patriotic songs. Also mentioned was the "introduction of black bottle", pitchers of hot water, bits of lemon peel, and lumps of sugar, after which the tumblers never cooled. As reported in the December 6, 1828 Issue of the Cincinnati Weekly Chronicle, the affair was held in the Broadway Hotel near Second Street and was celebrated in accord with the Constitution in "due and ancient form." They began at 4 pm. on December 1, 1828 and did not adjourn until the next day. Although somewhat less spectacular than the 1828 affair, the annual Celebration of St. Andrew's Day continued with full programs of song, patriotism, recitations and speech-making. Since 1827, not one anniversary has been missed by the Society. One St. Andrew's Day celebrated on Tuesday evening, November 30, 1869, included an original song, "Bonnie Scotland," written by member William McAlpin, as well as the "Star Spangled Banner," "Home Sweet Home," and "Green Grow the Rashers, O." The songs were interspersed with lengthy toasts, some (in spite of the Society's constitutional ban on political toasts) to the President of the United States, and to the memory of Washington, "drank (sic) standing and in silence." Earlier, members were requested to meet, with their badges on, at the Holmes Hotel (then located at the southwest corner of Pearl Street and Broadway) on Wednesday morning, July 7, 1841, to pay their last tribute to our deceased President, William Henry Harrison. The minutes are not clear as to the form of the tribute.

Benevolence

The benevolent object of the Society has touched many lives in many places. In the earlier years, the Society advanced financial support to several asylums and relief organizations. In the year 1847, crop failures and subsequent suffering were prevalent in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. The Society raised nearly \$6,000 for the purchase of 1,200 barrels of corn meal to relieve the Scottish poor. Learning that the British government would handle the shipment and distribution without cost, the Society distributed the \$700 thus saved among general Cincinnati relief organizations, including the Ladies' Washington Benevolent Society, Cincinnati Orphan Asylum, St. Peter's Orphan Asylum, African Colored Orphan Asylum, Union Relief Society, and the Ladies' Hebrew Benevolent Society. In 1878, the Society aided the Yellow Fever sufferers in Vicksburg, Mississippi.

The Society Burial Plot

Not unmindful of the needs of the departed, the Society, under the terms of Article XXVII, Real Estate, of the Constitution, acquired a plot in Vernonville, an old settlement now part of Cincinnati on the west side of Reading Road north of Oak Street. In 1858, the Society purchased another burial plot in Section 32 of Spring Grove Cemetery in Cincinnati, and erected a fine monument of Aberdeen granite costing more than \$800. The Vernonville remains were re-interred there in 1890, and the last burial in the Spring Grove plot was made in 1922, with space yet remaining today. It remains in the Society's bylaws that a burial place for a departed Scot may be had in the space remaining upon application to and approval by the Committee of Arrangement.

Participation in the Civil War

Occasionally, the shadows of war challenged the blazing patriotism of those members of the Society. On the event of the Civil War, members of the Caledonian Society of Cincinnati formed the Cincinnati Independent Highland Guards, which was mustered into service at Camp Dennison, Ohio on June 21, 1861. This group formed the nucleus of the Fifth Regiment Ohio Volunteer Infantry. The Regiment's first Colonel, John H. Patrick, was killed in action at New Hope Church, Georgia, on May 25, 1864. The second Colonel, Robert L. Kilpatrick, was severely wounded shortly after and, having lost his arm, was discharged on July 30, 1864. The third Colonel, Robert Kirkup, remained with the Regiment until the end of the war. All three of these men were members of the Society and contributed to the brilliant record of the Regiment in the field at Winchester, Port Republic, Cedar Mountain, and Dumfries, Virginia; Antietam, Maryland, in 1862; Chancellorsville, Virginia; Gettysburg, Pennsylvania; Lookout Mountain, Tennessee in 1863; Kennesaw Mountain and Dallas, Georgia in 1864. The Regiment took part in the siege of Atlanta and Savannah, Georgia, and Goldsboro, North Carolina from late 1864 to March 1865 and was mustered out of service on July 26, 1865. Andrew McAlpin, Society President, lost his son, Captain Henry in other Civil War action.

World War I

In 1914, the Society raised nearly \$2,000 for the aid of wounded Scottish soldiers and sailors, and their widows and orphans. A substantial sum was contributed toward the Harry Lauder One Million Pound Fund for the Maimed Scottish Heroes in the World War. Tragically, Society member Ralph F. Abercrombie, who was returning home from Scotland, lost his life when a German submarine torpedoed and sank the steamship Lusitania. Two Society Presidents, Lt. Colonel William Gillespie and Captain James R. Stewart, served overseas in World War I, as did members A. S. Wilson and William T. Paterson.

Grants and Funds

How well the Caledonian Society has accomplished its object is shown by what it has done in the past 150 years. The Society has never attempted too much, nor has it been connected with failure. This is reflected in the extant minute-book volumes, where the business meetings show constant small losses in meeting Burns' Night and St. Andrew's Day celebrations, and large over-runs in fund raising for a worthy cause. The beginning for some of the Society's permanent benevolent resource springs from the \$200 given in 1830 by the widow of the first President, David Kilgour. In 1860, a fund of \$1,000 was bequeathed by the widow of member John Walker. The fund was once loaned to Alexander E. Ferguson, "father of the Southern Railroad" upon mortgage security at 10% interest. The Walker Fund is still in operation today. Thomas Gibson, who became a member in 1847, bequeathed to the City of Cincinnati \$31,000 in 1914 for the establishment of an endowment for the Medical Department of the University of Cincinnati. This endowment is still intact and operating for the benefit of one of the finest medical schools in the United States. The William S. Walker (\$1000) and James J. Muir (\$1500) Funds¹ were later established and presently serve the Society for benevolences including educational grants and prizes.

The old minute books of the Caledonian Society and contemporary newspaper accounts of the organization's activities reveal a continuous interest in Scottish traditions in literature and music. Every St. Andrew's celebration has been graced with the singing of Annie Laurie, The Battle of Sterling, Scotland The Brave, and similar tunes rendered by well-known soloists, and all such gatherings were concluded by the singing of Auld Lang Syne by the entire assembly. The members were entertained between songs by piping and drumming, speeches and toasts, and demonstrations of Highland dancing. All celebrants had their opportunity to participate in the strathspeys and reels that later formed the foundation of the "square-dancing" now firmly entrenched in our American culture. For many years, a parallel organization, the Burns Club, kept alive local interest in the works of Bobbie Burns and that of other Scottish literary figures. One Scots characteristic is that of committing to memory enormous amounts of poetry. Since the absorption of the Burns Club into the Caledonian Society many years ago, there has never been a shortage of those who can rattle off stanzas of Burns' poetry upon demand at any Society function. Included among these were the late Robert Smith, and more recently Past President James N. Wilson, who recited Tam O' Shanter at every Burns' Birthday Celebration for more than 25 years.

Ladies at Society functions

In past years, tradition remained strong and changes in the Society came slowly. In 1890, wives of members were first allowed to attend a St. Andrew's Day celebration, and in 1969 Burns Night was no longer a stag affair. Always frugal, the Officers of the Society frequently changed the location of meetings and celebrations in order to reduce the cost of "using the rooms" by a dollar or two. Hotels were popular meeting places for Society functions, including the famous Gibson House, operated by member Peter Gibson and a Mr. O. H. Geffroy in the early 1870's. Mr. Geffroy, wishing to become sole owner and thinking that Mr. Gibson would not care to assume that responsibility, said to him, "I will either buy your interest or sell my own," and named the price. Mr. Gibson said, "Aye, I'll think it owre," and next morning he said to Mr. Geffroy, "I'll tak the hoose," and the Hotel Gibson has been on the Cincinnati scene ever since.

Music has always played a major role in all activities of the Caledonian Society of Cincinnati. Traditional Scottish songs were rendered in profusion at every Society gathering, and even more so at St. Andrew's anniversaries. Existing records and old programs give an indication of who was singing what: Captain Robert Air in the 1830's sang "Hall Columbia" and "Jock O' Hazeldean"; in the 1840's Peter Clarke, John Walker and William McAlpin sang "Draw the Sword of Scotland"

and "Scots Wha Hae." The tune "Rolling Home to Bonnie Scotland" held special meaning to Society member and Pipe Major John Carson, who "rolled home" on the afterdeck of a steamship after the Boer War.

Society Pipers

The early records of the Society are obscure concerning those members who are proficient bagpipers, although a "Highland Sandy" is mentioned in 1843. John Carson was the outstanding Society piper in 1910. During the period following World War I, several pipers and drummers were prominent in Society affairs, including Duncan McPhail and John Smith. In the 1920's, Major William L. Nimmo, Chief of Cincinnati Detectives, and his young sons Lomond and Donald provided fine piping. William McKay, the bass drummer, had been with comedian Harry Lauder for many years.

The Society and the Pipe Band

Not until 1953 did the Society get into the piping business in earnest, when member Wallace Evans gave the organization a set of bagpipes. His stipulation was that they be loaned to any Society member that would learn to play them. Money was pledged at that time to procure an additional set. In 1954, a pipe band committee was organized, with Lomond W. Nimmo as the first instructor in piping. By 1959, sponsorship by the Caledonian Society of a pipe band became a reality, and its Cincinnati Pipe Band performed for the first time at the St. Andrew's Day celebration of that year. To remain self-supporting and repay loans from the Society used for uniforms and equipment purchase, the Pipe Band began to book paid appearances. In 1960, a deal was made with Scandinavian Airlines by the Society to fly haggis and heather in from Scotland for the St. Andrew's celebration, in exchange for a concert for the airline at a later date. The first Pipe Major of the band was Alvin Spivak, appointed in 1961, followed by Lomond Nimmo in 1964. Under full steam in 1965, the band made 37 appearances, including one at the Ohio State Fair. In 1968, the band led the famous St. Patrick's Day Parade in Cincinnati, and by 1970, was of such self-sufficiency to hold its first Annual Tartan Ball. Today, the Ball is regarded as being one of the most colorful Scottish events in the Cincinnati area. In 1976, the band changed its name to "Caledonian Pipes and Drums of Cincinnati" and remains under the sponsorship of the Caledonian Society of Cincinnati today.

The Society in the Community

As the Society expanded its activities in the 1950's, the general public had only limited contact with things "Scot," and indeed, a newspaper article published in 1952 concerning the 125th St. Andrew's Day celebration noted the Caledonian Society as being "exclusive." In 1955, the Society appeared on WCET Television in a program about clan history, tartans, and pipe music. In 1958, it was proposed that the Society sponsor a dance group for the purpose of teaching and preserving the old Scottish folk dances. By 1959, The Scottish Dance Society had performed in Bellevue Park in Cincinnati and was holding weekly classes at the YWCA. In 1968, the group had participated in the International Ball in Cincinnati and has since then appeared at all Society gatherings with their beautiful demonstrations of Scottish reels and other traditional dance patterns. Miss Nora Kindness, daughter of Past President George Kindness, is the Dance Director and brings to the organization an impressive background of certified training in Scottish dance.

In 1968, the Caledonian Society of Cincinnati became a sponsor of "Little Braemar" at Linville, North Carolina, and of the Grandfather Mountain Highland Games held there each July. Since that time, sponsorship has been continuous with the Grandfather Mountain Games growing into an event involving tens of thousands of people. Society members attend the games in increasing numbers each year, and they are prominent in piping and dancing competition. In 1974, Little Arline Ott, daughter of member Pipe Major Arch Ott, won gold and silver medals in the Highland Dancing Competition. In 1975, she received two gold medals and one bronze medal for her skills.

Prominent Members

When the Society was incorporated on February 6, 1832 by special act of the Ohio Legislature, the list of incorporators included Andrew McAlpin who became a leading Cincinnati merchant, and Bellamy Storrer, who became third President of the Society and first Judge of the Superior Court of Cincinnati. John and Charles Kilgour, sons of the first President, David Kilgour, were prominent in the development of the Cincinnati street railway system, while member Bayard L.

Kilgour, grandson, became founder and chief officer of the Bell Telephone system in Cincinnati. Washington McLean, early owner of the Cincinnati Enquirer newspaper, prominent Masonic leader William B. Melish, as well as Edwards Ritchie and James R. Sherlock left their names on Cincinnati streets. Member Salmon P. Chase became Secretary of the Treasury under President Abraham Lincoln, and later was Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States. The Society membership rolls also included nationally known attorney Laurence Maxwell, Jr., prominent Cincinnati clergyman Rev. William Tait Paterson, and Past President Rev. Peter Robertson. William Copelan became Chief of Police in Cincinnati, and Barney Houston became Fire Chief. Jedediah H. Hibben's mercantile building still stands at the corner of Walnut and Seventh Streets in Cincinnati. In more recent times, member Samuel W. Bell, a Judge in the Hamilton County Courts, founded the S. W. Bell Home for the Sightless, now quartered in a splendid new building on Elm Street. Dudley Miller Outcalt, also a Judge in the Hamilton County Courts, while a Lt. Colonel in the U.S. Army Air Corps, lost his life on a flight mission in World War II. Simon Ross was a District Judge in the Federal Court as well as a Colonel in the Army of the United States. William Napier Sim, a Past President, was educated in Marine Engineering in Scotland, and established a prosthetic brace fabricating shop in Cincinnati General Hospital in 1926. He became one of the leading experts in the nation in this field of medicine, and the number of sufferers benefiting from his pioneering work is legion.

In the early 1970's the Caledonian Society of Cincinnati experienced a considerable growth in membership and activities under the leadership of Captain Howard A. Miller. He introduced the concept of expanding the pageantry and ceremony in the St. Andrew's celebrations, making this anniversary one of the most spectacular and beautiful events in Cincinnati. Entering the Army Air Service in 1923, he later served with the 8th Air Force in England in 1942, and with the 9th Air Force Tactical Command in 1943. Severely injured when his B-24 bomber crashed in 1944, he returned home and later served with the Post Office Department and rose to high leadership in the American Legion.

The minute books and past newspaper articles indicate that patriotism, service to country, fellow man, and to the Caledonian Society characterize all sixty-one Presidents of this organization. Editorializing on September 10, 1927, the Cincinnati Enquirer said: "In Cincinnati, Scottish influence has been strongly marked since the establishment of the community as a pioneer settlement, strikingly so since the organization of the Caledonian Society in 1827. Scottish names have been identified with every progressive civic movement of the past century. Scottish names crown the proud roster of Cincinnati achievements in art, literature, education, politics, business, and industry. Men of Scots blood today stand high in the affairs of the community, the State and Nation, admirable exhibits of a great city's stability and distinction. All-American they are, staunch and true to the flag of flags, but holding reverently in their hearts memories of the land of their fathers, the thistle and the heather bloom, the lochs and braes and tumbling streams, the piobairch's lament, and all the romance of life and love and tragedy of the Heilan' ways. "

The 150th Anniversary of the Caledonian Society of Cincinnati opens speculation as to the future of this venerable organization. Perhaps the answer lies written in Article XX of its constitution: "A dissolution of this Society can not take place as long as five members adhere thereto."

The Society from 1977 TO 2000

In 1979, then-president Clipson created the Order of St. Margaret to recognize ladies who had made significant contributions in support of the Society. He made the first awards on St. Andrew's Night of that year. The recipients were Helen Gunn Webster, Elizabeth Harris Russell (now Mrs. Betty Whitaker), Gertrude MacRae McIlwain and Agnes Ann Kindness.

For decades the Society had been recognizing scholastic achievement in the form of a cash prize of \$50 to the top student in either the UC College of Medicine or Engineering, alternating each year. In 1983, the Society combined the \$1000 William S. Walker fund, a \$2000 bequest from McMillan/Druck and a \$1500 bequest from J.J. Muir into the Scholastic Achievement Prize Fund whose interest would fund the cash prize in perpetuity and raised the award amount from \$50 to \$500.

In 1963, Jim Traquair established a Scholarship Fund, but by 1982 only \$8,000 had been accumulated and no scholarships had been awarded. In 1982 we established and converted that fund to the present tax-deductible

Scholarship Fund Trust managed by three trustees elected by the membership and independent of the Society Board of Trustees. In 1983 it granted its first ever scholarship. Each year since, except one in which there were no qualifying applicants, it has awarded at least one scholarship of \$1000.

Past presidents Howard Miller and Jesse Andrews had always dreamed of acquiring a building to house the Society. In 1990 then (and current) Secretary Andrews and past President Dave Kerman convinced the Board to create a fund for that purpose. It will take a while but it's constantly growing and, thanks to Howard and Jesse, one day the Society will have a home.

Much has changed since 1977 including the Constitution. On November 1st, 1997, upon incorporation as a tax-exempt corporation, it was replaced by the current Articles of Incorporation, Code of Regulations, and By-Laws. Probably the most significant change in the new Articles was the Society's primary objective which had formerly been the aid and assistance of indigent Scots. Under the new Articles, its purpose is now "...to preserve and promote Scottish heritage and encourage appreciation of Scotland's culture ...". In 1999, the minimum age for members was also reduced from 21 to 18.