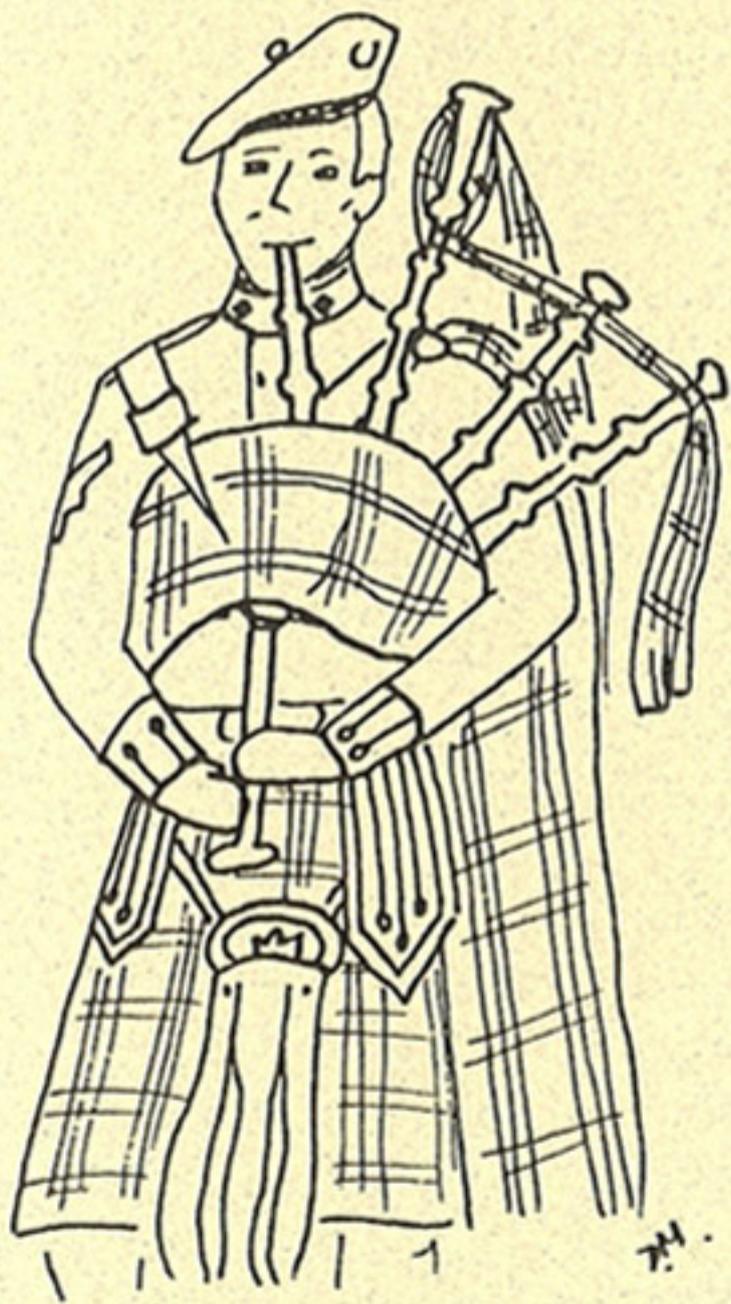


The Highland Society



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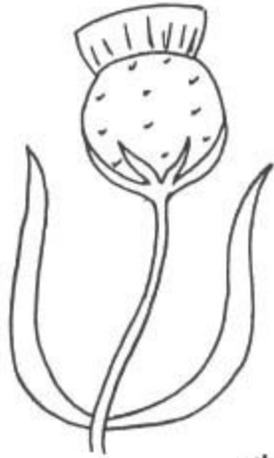
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THE HIGHLAND SOCIETY

CHAPTER I

The Scottish have a long history on the Miramichi. They came to this country well over a hundred years ago. Since then they have given much to their new home. Hard work and courage have given them the right to be proud. Each November a group of these Scotsmen meet together. They call themselves the Highland Society of New Brunswick at Miramichi. They meet to keep their shared history alive. The family of each Scotsman was a part of this past.

The Highland Society has been around a long time. Its parent society in London was formed in 1778. It was meant mainly to help needy Highlanders who lived away from their homeland. This help was very important to many people. Scotland's Highland Clearances had uprooted thousands of people. A group called the Jacobites had started the trouble. Scotland was under the rule of the English. The Jacobites wanted to make Bonnie Prince Charlie King of Scotland. The English destroyed these hopes. They beat the Jacobites at Culloden in 1746.

All Highlanders paid dearly for this. For years the English did not allow them to speak their own language. They couldn't play their music, or wear Scottish dress. Their chiefs lost their powers. Many of the chiefs then lost interest in the people living on their land. They decided that "sheep would make more money than men". The Highland sheep were very small. The chiefs brought in better animals. 1792 became known as the Year of the Sheep.



Sheep herding

CHAPTER II

In Rosshire there was trouble. The Ross' cows got onto a sheep-walk. Fines were given out again and again. They could not get the cows back until the fines were paid. The Rosses then decided to use their fists to get them back.

They won this fight. That gave them the courage to start the Rosshire Sheep Riot. They tried to drive the sheep out of the country. The people by the road helped. They gave food and water to the Rosses. It was a peaceful protest, but the government did not see it that way. They sent out soldiers. The leaders were arrested. Happily, they got away during the night. This was the last time the Highlanders ever banded together against the sheep men.

Then people were told to leave their homes. The owners wanted the land for even more sheep. The people did not want to go. They had lived in the same place for hundreds of years. The Gunns of Kildonan were driven off their land first in 1813. Irish soldiers were sent to drive them out. The people went without protest.

CHAPTER III

The next year became known as the Year of the Burnings. On June 13th, the men of Strathnaver were away. They were looking for lost cows. The owner's men came to burn the houses. Some of the people didn't move quickly enough. They were left with nothing.



Margaret MacKay was almost one hundred years old. She was alone in her daughter's house. The leader shouted, "She has lived too long! Let her burn!"

Her daughter came and carried her out. Her blankets were on fire. She died five days later.

At another house, the family cat tried to run from the fire. The men saw a chance for some sport. They threw the cat back into the fire again and again. At last it died.

There were many deaths in the next few days. Some died from living outside. Women who were with child went into labour before their time. Old men went into a world all their own.

In Grunmore, one old man crawled into an old mill. He ate meal from the floor. His dog kept the rats away. He lived only a few days.

All of Robert MacKay's family were sick. He carried them to safety by the ocean. He would pick one daughter up and carry her for a while. Then he would go back and get another. In this way he took them twenty-five miles to safety.

In all about fifteen thousand people lost their homes. The landowners planned to let them live by the ocean. There they could fish for a living. This life was hard for them. Many died in the water. One hundred boats were lost in one year. The soil was poor. The wind would blow it away. When their cows broke out, they had no money to pay the fines. They had to sell rings and clothes to get the cows back. Some stole sheep. For this they were sent out of the country.

In other places, the people ran into the cities. Overcrowding brought sickness. Then in 1846 no potatoes grew. The people went hungry.

CHAPTER IV

Many became tired of so much hardship. They decided to go to another country. They hoped to make a new start.

One of the countries they moved to was Canada. There are many Scottish people in New Brunswick. They built their houses close together. That is why there are so many Scots on the Miramichi, in Lower Newcastle and Black River.

Some Scots were given land for service in the British Army. They could never own land back home. Most, however, were here because they had to be. Things were just too hard for them in Scotland.

The Scotsmen always remembered that they were Highlanders. They wanted to keep their language and fighting spirit alive. They wanted to be sure that their writings, dress, music, and history did not die. They wished to give aid to the people who found life hard in the new country.

At a Saint George's dinner in Douglstown on April 28, 1840, the need for a Scottish society was discussed. A meeting was called to talk more about it.

James Gilmour and Alexander Rankin of Douglstown acted quickly on the idea. They were overseen by Sir William Colbrooke, Lieutenant-Governor of New Brunswick. In 1842, power was given to them to form a branch of the Highland Society of London. One hundred and fifty-one men joined in this first year. On April 11, 1846 they came together under their own name. The Highland Society of New Brunswick at Miramichi was born.

Highland Society meetings have not changed much since they began. The heather, the pipes, the plaid, and the haggis all still have special meaning.

Each member is given a piece of heather. Heather grows as a low bush. It has tiny pink flowers. Heather is found in Scotland. That is why a tiny heather branch stands for the homeland.

Bagpipes are another piece of Scottish history. They were once used in the war. The sound of the pipes called the men to fight. The Highland Society uses them to pipe its members into the meeting. The piper begins to play before anyone comes into the meeting. He then plays until everyone sits down.



Scottish piper

All officers must wear a plaid tie in the meetings. Many members wear plaid hats or other plaid clothing. Each family has its own special plaid. These are not the originals. The original plaids were lost when the Highlanders were kept from wearing them by the British. The present-day plaids came into being much later.

Haggis is served at the dinner. Haggis is a very old Scottish dish. It has the heart, lungs and liver of a sheep in it. This is mixed with fat and meal. The haggis is boiled in the insides of the sheep. As strange as it may sound, haggis is said to be good.

CHAPTER V

The society has done much for the Miramichi since that time. In 1861, they built a school on Henderson Street in Chatham. It cost over 815 British pounds to build and equip. It was named the Presbyterian Academy. The school was rebuilt in 1888 in the same place. This was known as the Chatham Grammar School. The Federal Government bought this building in 1909. It became known as the Armoury. From 1975 to 1980 it was the Chatham Recreation Centre. At this time the town tore it down.

In 1882 the Highland Society lost all its records. There was a fire in the office. They is why there is so little known about it before that year.

Curling is a sport of Scotsmen. The Chatham Curling was the first Curling Club formed in Canada. The Society bought a cup for the Chatham Curling Club in 1884. Every year on Robbie Burns Day Chatham plays against Newcastle for the Highland Society Cup.

In 1904 the Highland Society gave \$500 towards the Burns Memorial in Fredericton. In 1912 they set up the Highland Society Scholarship at the University of New Brunswick. In 1914 they became interested in the Miramichi Hospital. It was just being planned for opening in 1916. In those years, the society gave \$18,000 to this cause.

In 1942 the society held a dinner to remember the one hundred years since their founding. By chance, there were again one hundred fifty-one men present. This was the same number as in the first year. It was fitting that the meeting was held in Douglastown on Saint Andrew's Day that year.

From 1968 to 1975 the society paid to outfit the Pipe and Drum Band. It took part in many public get togethers. Then it became hard to find people to play in the band. At last it had to be given up.

CHAPTER VI

In the corner of Elm Park in Chatham there stands a monument. The Highland Society put it up in 1984. It was for New Brunswick's Bicentennial. It is in remembrance of the Scottish people who first came to the Miramichi.

The Scottish history and way of life are being kept alive. The Highland Society is not lost in the past, however, It is still adding to the Miramichi in many ways .



WORD LIST

sheep

plaid

haggis

heather

pipe

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