

# ROBERTSON'S RANT

The Newsletter of the Clan Donnachaidh Society—Mid-Atlantic Branch



## BRANCH UPDATE

By Norman Dunkinson

Greetings members! Thanks to all who attended the games this season, and we hope to see you at the final event of the year, the Scottish Christmas Walk in Old Town Alexandria, Virginia, on Saturday, December 7th!

2013 was a good year for the Branch—in addition to a revamped website and new t-shirts to promote the Clan, we also realized a recovery in paid members, with 32 in 2013 (so far) compared to a low of 19 in 2011. But this is still no where near our peak of 117 in 2006. So I encourage members to stay current with their dues (the membership year is 1 year from the date of payment), which are important in funding games fees and Clan Donnachaidh merchandise for sale at the games. And please help us recruit! New members are critical for keeping our Branch alive for generations to come!

## VIRGINIA GAMES REPORT

By Jim Fargo

The second half of our Games Season began with the 40th annual Festival at Great Meadow in The Plains on Labor Day weekend (August 31 and Sept. 1). Arriving at 8 AM on Saturday morning, we found that the games site had moved to a rear section of Great Meadow. I liked this new site better than where we have been for the past several years. We were situated beside our House of Gordon cousins at the end of a clan row. Both days were typical late-August (hot and humid) weather but fortunately no rain until the close on Sunday. This year our location was about 50 feet from the entertainment tent and was an ideal site for listening to the Celtic music coming from that tent. A welcome change was placing the clan tents around the highland athletics field so the clans could actually watch the athletic competitions.

As usual we combined our Donnachaidh Diner with the Gordon Grill and everyone in both clans were well fed. Much thanks to **Evan and Rosalie Duncan** for hosting our Diner again this year and to **Dave Todd** for hosting the Gordon Grill.

The Scottish Fiddling tent was located over by the Highland Dancing area, near

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President:

Sam Kistler

Vice President:

Ron Bentz

Secretary/Treasurer:

Norman Dunkinson

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### VIRGINIA GAMES REPORT (CONTINUED)

the main entrance, about as far from our location as possible. We again sponsored the "Ronald Duncan Gonnella Memorial" 2nd place Open trophy this year. I was unable to get over there to find out who won because, after the regular clan parade, I was organizing a second Sunday afternoon clan parade with Clan Donald. We followed the Saint Andrew's Society pipe band and marched completely around the clan area to our destination – Clan Leatherworks – where **Dave McConnell** (our sporran maker) was honored for his many years of being a vendor. Sunday was his last day as a vendor.

Lots of friends, visitors and clan folk came by our double tent site each day. In addition, over the course of the weekend we were visited by four Lindsay visitors and, through email address exchanges, I hope they can have a Clan Lindsay tent here next year. Secretary **Norman Dunkinson and his wife Chris** came down from PA to help us run the tent on Saturday since President **Sam Kistler** was attending the Carlisle Games in PA. Sam was with us on Sunday. We were pleased to welcome three new members who joined our Clan Society: **Leslie Chartier, Duncan Simpson and Foster Whitling**.

### THE BLACK WOOD OF RANNOCH

By Jim Fargo

We know from Scottish history books, that the old Caledonian Forest once covered over 2,100 square miles of Scotland. The Perthshire remnant of this ancient native pine forest is called "the Black Wood of Rannoch". This remnant lies on the south side of Loch Rannoch (the 'slios garbh' or rough side, to distinguish it from the gentler and smoother slopes of the 'slios min' or north side of the loch. The woods stretch from the loch side at 670 feet to about 1,000 feet above sea level and begin a few miles west of the village of Kinloch Rannoch at the former crofting communities of Carie on its eastern side and Camghouran on the western side. In the western half of the woods, the pines are short and heavily branched. The eastern half, near Dall (former home of our 18th clan chief) the pines are tall and thinner.

Our clan folk were not always good guardians of the Black Wood. The remoteness and trackless cover of the forest gave security and protection to rieviers and broken (clanless) men. Many living on the north side of Loch Rannoch would have been MacGregors driven from their own homes by Campbells who then relied on plunder and cattle raiding to survive. On numerous occasions the woods were set alight to drive them and wolves away from our communities. These fires might burn for weeks, destroying acres of trees.

Local tradition has it that the last wolf killed in Scotland was not killed at Lochaber but at Rannoch in the early 1700s. The story goes that the wolf was killed by the wife of a miller named Robertson with a potato masher when it attempted to steal her child. The wolf had escaped from a wolf hunt on the south shore of the Loch Rannoch by swimming to the north shore and

been attracted to the home by the smells coming from the kitchen. Upon entering the kitchen, the horrified wife fought to protect her child. She was handsomely rewarded for this deed by our clan chief, and the mill was thereafter known as Mullinvadie or "the mill of the wolf".

For the most part, our chiefs were content to live off the income supplied from harvesting timber. In 1733, Alexander Robertson of Struan (13th chief) supplied wood for the building of General Wade's bridge over the Tay at Aberfeldy. Wade and Struan were "friends" despite Struan being a zealous Jacobite. The building of bridges and the military roads opened up our homeland to wider markets for Rannoch fir wood from which he gained considerable income during the remainder of his life. Upon his forest return from exile in France in 1703, the fir woods provided the funds to build the 'Hermitage' at

Mount Alexander which we know as Dunalastair.

The Black Wood had been part of our clan's possessions since the days of our first chief when he acquired the entire south side of Loch Rannoch by marriage to one of the daughters of Malcolm, relative of the earl of Lennox. The north side of Loch Rannoch was similarly acquired by the Menzies chief when he married the other daughter of Malcolm. The Black Wood portion of the estate along with the house at Dall was sold to the Wentworth family in 1857. The 18th chief (George Duncan Robertson) had to sell the Dunalastair estate and moved to Dall in 1853. After the sale of Dall, he moved into Rannoch Barracks, which had been built to house the officers of the Hanoverian officers stationed in Rannoch to keep the peace after the "45". Prior to the 1857 sale, the Black Wood was only out of our clan's possession twice.

The barony of Strowan was annexed by the Crown in 1690 after our "Poet chief", Alexander Robertson, refused to acknowledge the succession of William of Orange to the British throne. The barony was returned to this chief in 1727. Dunalastair was burned to the grounds after Culloden and Struan went into hiding in the Black Wood at Carie. After his death in 1749, the barony was again taken over by "The Commissioners of Forfeited Estates and Barons of the Exchequer". On the whole, the commissioners managed the property well, with the income from the estate used to benefit the residents of the local communities, build Rannoch Barracks for the soldiers stationed

at the west end of Loch Rannoch, build and repair roads and bridges throughout Atholl. In 1751, the Commissioners gave the "tack of the fir woods, sawmill and house" to John Robertson of Tulliebelton, merchant and Provost of Perth, "to cut 2,000 fir trees yearly and no more, for the space of three years, and for the tack duty of 350 pounds sterling." In 1766, the factor for the annexed estate of Strowan, Captain James Small, provided half of the cost of building a new bridge across the Errochty Water just below Struan Kirk. The other half was provided by voluntary contributions from the surrounding neighbors who used the bridge. This bridge is still in use today. The barony, including the Black Wood, was restored to our 15th chief, Colonel Alexander Robertson (son of Duncan Robertson of Drumachune, 14th chief) by the government in 1784.

At the beginning of the 19th century, a commercial concern began felling operations. Transport was their great difficulty, but labor was plentiful and cheap. To offset the transport difficulties, an elaborate system of canals were built within the Black Wood. Traces of three levels of canals and collecting basins can still be seen today to send logs down to and into Loch Rannoch. The logs were then floated down to the eastern end of the loch, then down to Loch Tummel and eventually to the Tay. Once the Tay was reached, the logs were probably rafted together and floated down to Perth then on to Dundee. Fortunately for the Black Wood, the project proved to be unprofitable and was abandoned. The Black Wood continued to be

the home to various peaceful activities (illicit stills, charcoal making and hunting).

The Black Wood was saved from harvesting for use in the trenches of the Great War of 1914-1918 because it was more inaccessible. Unfortunately, tremendous amounts of lumber were required for WW II and much was harvested. The land was purchased by the Forestry Commission in 1947 and has been saved and allowed to regenerate.

#### References:

*"Brief Account of the Clan Donnachaidh"* by David Robertson, FSA Scot. 1894, pp 3-33.

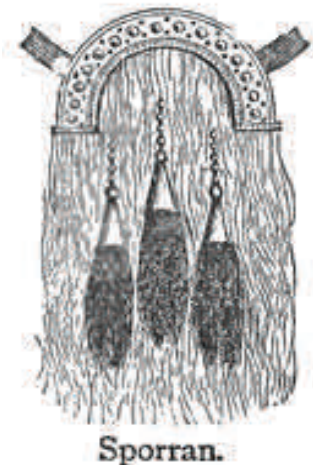
*"Short History of Clan Robertson"* by J. Robertson Reid, 1933, pp

*"Tales of Rannoch"* by Alec D. Cunningham, 1989, pp 37-41.

*"The Robertson Heartland"* by John Kerr, 1992, pp 3-4.

*"Life in the Atholl Glens"* by John Kerr, 1993, pp 115-116.

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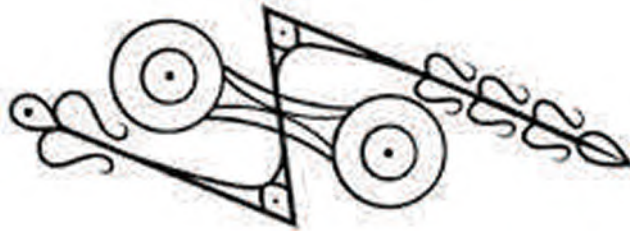
## ROBERTSON'S RANT

### MCLAIN GAMES REPORT

By Ron Bentz

This festival, always the Saturday before Labor Day, is always enjoyable as it takes me five minutes to arrive! **Sam Kistler and I** were very happy to welcome members **Betty Bentz** and **Harry Robertson**, and **Norm Dunkinson**, the father of our Secretary/Treasurer. Once again, entertainment was provided by the Martin Family Band, and it's been enjoyable to watch this group grow over the years. Folks could also hear the familiar voice of Charlie Zahm over the grounds from time to time.

While this event is always enjoyable, I spoke to a committee member who agreed this festival could easily be made bigger and better. We will see going forward if that's the case. I would encourage anyone who can to make it to this event – you will enjoy it!



### LIGONIER GAMES REPORT

By Jim Fargo

On September 21st, the clan van rolled into Idlewild Park in Ligonier, PA. President **Sam Kistler** and I soon had the van unloaded and gear conveyed by golf cart over to the tent site. We were set up and ready by 8:30 AM for the start of the 55th annual Ligonier Highland Games. **Tom Due and his two children (Heather and Patrick)** were waiting for us. This year we were initially situated between clans Scott and MacPherson. By 10 AM we determined that the MacPherson folks were not coming and, being ever resourceful, Tom (our western PA convener) returned to his vehicle and came back with a second tent which allowed us to double our tent area and provide additional covered seating space. We sure needed it later in the day!

Despite the weather forecast for rain, rain and more rain, the crowds were there and the two brief morning showers did not dampen the festivities. We had nine clan folk march in the parade of tartans. **Dave Strunk** was doing the judging at the athletics field and waved as we marched by the athletic tent.

After the parade, the Donnachaidh Diner was in operation and **Evan and Rosalie Duncan's** shortbread and Struan bread were welcome additions. Along with the arrival of several regular attendees from the western Pennsylvania area, we were joined by Art East and family from West Virginia. By 1PM, the skies had opened up and we huddled under our two tents. By 2 PM we were drenched and decided to pack up and depart.

Although there was no clan Lindsay tent again this year, two men from Clan Lindsay did arrive while we were closing up and gave us a hearty "MOO"! By the time we got everything back to the van, about half of the clan tents were gone and most everyone left were packing up. We look forward to seeing everyone at next year's Ligonier Highland Games under hopefully sunny skies. The date is September 20, 2014.

## CEUD MILE FAILTE (100,000 WELCOMES)!

We'd like to welcome the following new and returning members who joined us or renewed since the last report:

|                  |                  |                |                    |                  |
|------------------|------------------|----------------|--------------------|------------------|
| Leslie Chartier  | Ellen Hansen     | Steve Hoffman  | Anne Jackson       | Timothy Keefer   |
| Karen Layne      | Mollie Long      | Philip Long    | Robert McRobbie    | Joyce Mundy      |
| George Robertson | John Robertson   | Duncan Simpson | Robert Warren      | Marjorie Wells   |
| Foster Whitling  | Hunter Zimmerman | John Zimmerman | Kristina Zimmerman | Laurie Zimmerman |

We hope to see you at the Games in 2014!

## SCOTTISH CHRISTMAS WALK—ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA

The 43rd annual Scottish Christmas Walk will be held in Old Town Alexandria, Virginia, on Saturday, December 7th.

Please join us to march in the parade and for our annual luncheon at the Fish Market at 105 King Street (ordering this year will be off of the standard menu). The parade begins at 11:00am at Wilkes and South Saint Asaph streets and ends at Market Square. We hope to see you there!

## BLAST FROM THE PAST

By Norman Dunkinson

The following is a selection from *Robertson's Rant* volume 17, issue 2, published during the summer of 1999:

*A Scotsman and an English woman who have never met before find themselves in the same sleeping carriage of a train. After the initial embarrassment, they both manage to get to sleep, the woman on the top bunk, the Scotsman on the lower.*

*In the middle of the night, the English woman leans over and says, "I'm sorry to bother you, but I'm awfully cold and I was wondering if you could possibly pass me another blanket?"*

*The Scotsman leans out and, with a glint in his eye, says, "I've got a better idea...let's pretend we're married."*

*"Why not," giggles the English woman.*

*"Good," he replies—"Get your own blanket!"*



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### RADFORD GAMES REPORT

By Jim Fargo

On October 12<sup>th</sup>, the clan van arrived at the campus of Radford University. President **Sam Kistler**, **Robert Knight**, son **Andrew** and I soon had the van unloaded at the tent site. We were set up and ready by 9 AM for the start of the 18th annual Radford Highlanders Festival on Moffett Field. This year we were situated at the end of the clan row next to Clan Campbell (separated by a tree). This allowed us to have an open space on both sides to host our bagpiper clan folk and their gear.

Along with the arrival of our clan piper **Ripley Williams** from the Virginia Highlands Pipes and Drums, we welcomed athletic judge **Dave Strunk** from Pittsburgh, **Erin Bierwirth** who recently moved to Tennessee, and many other visitors this year.

We had four clan folk (and Erin's dog) march in the parade of clans. We formed up alphabetically away from the clan tent area and followed the Virginia Highlands Pipes and Drums onto the athletic field, passed the reviewing stand and lined up with the other clans for the massed band performance. We soon returned to the tent to set up the Donnachaidh Diner for lunch.

Although there were only six clans present this year, we were able to assist many Radford students in determining which clans they were descendant from and which societies they could be eligible to join. It was a cool, cloudy (mid-60s) day in a great setting. We look forward to being there again in 2014.

### RICHMOND GAMES REPORT

By Jim Fargo

The Central Virginia Highland Games & Celtic Festival was held this year at the Richmond Raceway Complex (formerly the VA state fairgrounds) on October 19-20. Our two clan tents were in our usual "ceilidh corner" spot with House of Gordon's two tents right next door. Our combined Donnachaidh Diner/Gordon Grill team (headed by master chef **Dave Todd**) was the place to be throughout the festival. Much thanks to everyone from both clans for bringing food and beverages to help stock the Diner/Grill on Saturday and Sunday.

Saturday's weather was reminiscent of Scotland with a cold cloudy drizzle most of the day. Unfortunately, there was no parade of clans scheduled for Saturday and we lost the opportunity to field a large contingent of clan folk. For Sunday's parade we were only able to field two clan folk. Hopefully, there will be clan parades on both days next year so that Saturday attendees can participate.

Returning bright and early on Sunday morning, we shared breakfast with the House of Gordon and prepared for another busy day. Sunday was chilly and sunny! Visitors to the tent were way down from Saturday. The clan parade was at noon and the clans followed the massed bands onto the athletic field. Both Donnachaidh participants roared the clan war cry as we passed the announcer. After the parade, the Diner/Grill reopened and was very busy. Later in the day, we joined with the House of Gordon to celebrate a hand-fasting (renewal of vows) that was held beside their tent.

This was the last festival of our games season. Put this event on your calendar for next year!!!



## ADAMAN OF DULL

By Jim Fargo

Adamnan was the eighth abbot of Iona and a blood relation of Saint Columba as were the abbots before him. He was expelled from Iona by his monks because he yielded to the Roman church on the tonsure, the dating of Easter and other differences which had been decided at the synod at Witebia in Northumbria in 664AD. According to tradition, Adamnan (also known as Eonan) and eleven other monks left Iona and went east as missionaries to Christianize the rest of Alba. Adamnan settled at the north end of Loch Tay in Glenlyon. Adamnan brought Christianity to the area by establishing a settlement and chapel called "Brennudh" near the bridge of Balgie near Fortingall. The chapel was built near the only Pictish stone circle in Glenlyon which was a sacred site to the local population. Adamnan had a mill built on the stream of the neighboring side-glen at Milton Eonan (Eonan's mill) to better the people's living conditions. Another monk, Fillan, settled at the southern end of Loch Tay and also founded a chapel at Struan where the clan kirk now stands. Both men later became saints of the Columban church.

The rock on which Adamnan preached and prayed to avert a plague is known as "Craig-dianaidh" or the "rock of safety". In later days, neighboring chiefs would meet on this rock for judicial decisions and other purposes and do so in complete safety. It was here that a meeting between the chief of the MacIvors and the Stewarts of Garth occurred in 1476. The meeting degenerated into a battle and the MacIvors were de-

feated and many of the survivors fled north across the mountains to seek protection from our chief and became part of clan Donnachaidh.

When Adamnan was dying, the people assembled to receive his blessing, and asked where he wished to be buried. He requested that they should carry his corpse down the water until the rings of withs or "duls" that attached the handspikes to his bier broke. There they buried him in 704 AD and named the place Dull. This burial site is said to be where the first Christian church in the area was built and looks south onto the River Tay as it flows into Loch Tay. The original chapel, schools and other buildings were dedicated to St. Adamnan and the lands around Dull are still called Appin (abbey-lands) of Dull. When Kenneth McAlpine became king in 848 AD, he moved the college to his capital at Dunkeld.

The Abthania (abbey-lands) of Dull was part of the territory held by Crinan (father of King Duncan) as both the abbot of Dunkeld and as the secular leader of the area. Just south of Fortingall is the former Robertson barony of Fearnan which is located on the north-eastern shore of Loch Tay. The chapel was replaced with a monastery of the Tironesian order in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. It was transferred from the Dunkeld diocese to St. Andrews in 1411.

The Clan Society in conjunction with the Breadalbane Heritage Society did an excavation in the Dull Parish Church in 2002-03 prior to the construction of a new floor within the building. The third and final excavation in June 2003 extended the earlier

trial trenches and recover a fragment of an inscribed cross with an inscription that may date to the 8<sup>th</sup> century. (see photo). The form of the lettering and Columban shape of the incised cross are all features connecting this slab with the historical and place-name evidence of a Columban monastery. A story board about the excavation is located in the Clan Museum at Bruar.

Clan tradition says that this church site is the burial place of Duncan, the first chief of Clan Donnachaidh, who died around 1355. The story goes that Duncan had been mortally wounded by one of his servants while visiting the King at Scone to get new charters for his lands. Dying on the way home, his men carried him to Dull, where they were met by his eldest son Robert, our second chief. Robert had his father buried there and returned home with the new charters.

### References:

*"Lairds of Glenlyon" by Duncan Campbell, 1886, pp. 6-7.*

*Glasgow University Archaeological Research Division (GUARD), Project 1533, 2005, pp. 7-8, 12-13, 317-320.*

*"The Robertsons, Clan Donnachaidh in Atholl" by James Irvine Robertson, 2005.*





**CLAN DONNACHAIDH SOCIETY  
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The Clan Donnachaidh Society is a world-wide organization dedicated to the preservation of our Highland heritage. Membership is open to those persons bearing recognized sept surnames and their descendants and spouses.

Membership in the parent Clan Donnachaidh Society in Scotland includes a subscription to the Clan Donnachaidh Annual.

Membership in the Mid-Atlantic Branch of the Clan Donnachaidh Society includes a subscription to the Branch newsletter, Robertson's Rant, published quarterly and containing listings of Highland Games and Celtic Festivals throughout the Mid-Atlantic region, Game and Festival reports, historical and biographical articles, and news items of interest to Donnachaidhs everywhere. Membership also includes an open invitation to join your fellow society members at the Clan Donnachaidh Tent and Diner at numerous Games and Festivals, and at other activities including the annual Scottish Christmas Walk and Clan Donnachaidh luncheon in the Old Town section of Alexandria, Virginia, in early December.

Parent Society membership dues are \$25.00 per year (individual) and \$35.00 per year (family = two persons/same address). Mid-Atlantic Branch membership dues are \$20.00 per year (individual).



*Clan Donnachaidh in the Parade of Clans at the VSGA Games at The Plains, Virginia, on Saturday, August 31st.*

*Back row, left to right: Norman Dunkinson and Evan Duncan; front row, left to right: Robert Knight and Jim Fargo.*