



CLAN DONALD MID-EAST



Fall 2011

All Things Sporrans

The Sporrans (Scottish Gaelic for "purse") is a traditional part of male Scottish Highland dress. This pouch comes in handy since kilts don't have pockets. Made of leather or fur, the ornamentation of the sporran is determined by the formality of dress worn with it. The sporran hangs below the belt buckle; and a lot of effort is made to match their style and design. "Day Sporrans" are usually more utilitarian and are often made with either brown or black leather with simple adornment. These "day" sporrans often are made with Celtic knot designs carved or embossed onto the leather surface and frequently have three or more tassels.



(A horsehair sporran)

"Dress Sporrans" are often highly ornate with filigree or etched metal work on the cantle which is often brass, sterling silver or silver plated. Victorian examples were often quite ostentatious, and usually have a fur-covered face with fur or hair tassels. During Victorian times the preferred fur for sporrans was the badger which was driven close to extinction in the British Isles during this era due to the need

to supply sporran makers with their preferred fur.

The cantle may contain intricate filigree or etchings of Celtic knots and may have a

set stone, jewel, or emblems. "Animal Mask Sporrans" or "Full Mask Sporrans" are made from such small animals as the badger, otter, fox, or pine marten, where the head is used to form the top flap that folds over the opening of the sporran.

In our region, we are fortunate to have a master sporran maker by the name of Dave McConnell who has been making hand made sporrans since 1992. Dave had always been involved with leather working and initially made his first sporran because he was unhappy with his own "store bought" sporran. He came across a pattern and decided to try and see if he could do better. He liked the result and lots of other people at the highland games also complemented him on his work. Dave decided to quit his government job and start his business because he liked the work so much. Since then he has crafted sporrans for Sir Godfrey James Macdonald of Macdonald, 8th Lord Macdonald and High Chief of Clan Donald. He also made sporrans for the Chiefs of Clan Henderson and Clan Donnchaidh. Dave told me his most unusual sporran was made from an American bison pelt.

Fortunately, he didn't have to use the whole head for this bison sporran.



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Regional Events Fall 2011:

- October 1 — Virginia Celtic Gathering & Highland Games, Williamsburg, VA
- October 1 — Radford Highlanders Festival, Radford, VA
- October 1-2 — Chesapeake Celtic Gathering, Snow Hill, MD
- October 29-30 — (Richmond) Meadow Highland Games, Doswell, VA
- December 3 — Alexandria Christmas Walk, Alexandria, VA

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All Things Sporran (cont'd)

Dave has also made a concealed carry (hand-gun) sporran and several wolverine full mask sporrans. When asked if he had any trade secrets he was willing to share, he said, "No". However, he does want all the kids to know that the eyes, nose, teeth and mouth on his full-mask sporrans are made of glass or plastic—not real animal eyes or teeth.



(Dave McConnell wearing two of his Full Mask sporrans)

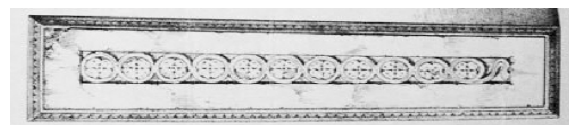
Coincidentally, Clan Donald has the name MacSporran as one of the many associated family names that belong to the Clan. "MacSporran" which means "Son of the Purse" were the hereditary purse bearers or the treasurers to the Lord of the Isles. Reportedly, Donald, 1st Lord of the Isles, appointed 16 officers who were either close family members or important allies and each was given a hereditary title, i.e. Beth (physician), Murrich (bard), Lavery (speaker) and Sporrans (pursebearer). For most of Clan Donald's history the position was only held by a single person until the Lordship of the Isles was abolished by the Stuart King in 1493 when King James stripped John, Lord of the Isle and Earl of Ross of all of his royal lands, charters and titles. It has been since this time that the numbers of those

bearing the surname MacSporran have spread and multiplied.



(MacSporran Tartan)

"The Annals of Man" commented that one Paul Sporain was a Prince of the Isles and chief during the time of Somerled. A land charter from 1168 referred to a Paul O'Duine as "Pol an Sporain" who was also reckoned as a reigning chief. Kintyre legends report that this Paul left his daughter Eva as his heir. Eva subsequently married Gillespie Cambel and led to the founding of Clan Campbell (maybe a good chunk of Clan Donald money went with her). The graves of Paul and Gilbred Sporain are reputed to lie at the Isle of Iona and were witnessed by Martin Martin who mentioned that their tombs lay on the west end of the island marked by a stone burial slab. The stone slab pictured here depicts a serpent entwined around a column of eleven discs said to represent silver coins. An early record in Kintyre indicates that Duncan Roy McSpairand was a tacksman in 1541 and a coat of arms is attributed to two brothers that came from Kintyre to Ireland about 1600. This small part of Clan Donald formed the Clan MacSporran Association in 1975 and held yearly gatherings in Scotland until dissolved in 2002. The various spellings for this surname are: MacSporran, McSporran, MacSparran, McSparran, McSparran, McSparrin, McSparron, McSparran, McSparrin, McSparran, McSparran or Purcell. Most with this name live in the U.S., Scotland or Northern Ireland. ■





Mid-East Commissioner's Corner

I'm looking forward to this Fall's events and it occurred to me that many of you probably don't understand the rules... so here goes:

1. Have fun.
2. Come into the tent: we are only at these games because of your support.
3. Please except our hospitality: It is a well established tradition for highlanders to basically offer a visitor the shirts off their backs. Now, I know many of you would prefer that we remain completely covered, however, our commissioners will usually have food and drink that they bought just for the games...so if offered, it is okay to accept.
4. Sit down for a spell: We like visitors. Have a seat and rest— please come into the tent to get out of the hot sun or rain. Again, your dues make this possible.
5. Join in: Every one of these games has some sort of Clan parade. We need members and as the largest highland clan its embarrassing if the State Commissioner is by himself representing the Clan. There are also a lot of events that we

need members to compete in.

At Williamsburg, this fall, there is a haggis toss that requires a two woman team, a four person tug-of-war, and a kilted mile. This is the first time in my memory that the region has held a kilted mile. At Richmond each year there is the annual pumpkin toss. The winner earns a free tent space for the clan saving us \$185.00. (helpful hint on this event is not to toss the pumpkin by holding just the stem). In all of these events the important thing is to have fun and **BEAT THE CAMPBELLS.**

6. Send us stuff: Most newsletters have some information about significant events in our member's lives. If your child is getting married or you just got a masters degree....please drop us a line and brag a little.

I hope to see you out there this fall. ■

Stan Darroch



Clan Donald Chief's Tour

This year the Clan Donald Chief's tour had a very special day on the itinerary. We were escorted to the Isle of Iona by Ian MacDonnell (Australia), Castle Aros Councillor, Finlaggan Council of Clan Donald. Ian has spent significant time successfully researching the Clan Donald history as it relates to Iona Abbey as well as the Clan Donald graveslabs. Iona began its rich spiritual history when in 563AD St. Columba founded IONA Abbey. IONA grew to be an influential centre for the spread of Christianity among the Picts and Scots and even in Western Europe. Many kings of Scotland, Ireland, Norway were buried over 600 years in one of three ancient dry-stone tombs in St Oran's most ancient and hallowed grave yard, in "the Ridge of Kings". St. Oran's chapel, built by Somerled and situated next to the Abbey, is the ancient burial chapel of the Lords of The Isles and so is the actual burial place of many our

Clan Chiefs. As a gift from Ian, we received "an unpublished draft for the tour members" booklet of his work supporting the fact that only two years after Reginald mac Somerled endowed the Benedictine Abbey, Clan Donald significantly distinguished itself as the early patron, builder of the Abbey complex and as its protector and benefactor right throughout the next three hundred years (1200-1500). With the advantage of having the author of this research as your guide and educator it provided an experience that every member of our group considered the unrivaled highlight of our tour and ranks at the top for many of the previous tours. This is a must visit location for anyone and a location with great Clan history for us as members of Clan

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Clan Donald Chief's Tour (cont'd)

Donald. I cannot begin to explain the depth and detail of Ian's research within this short article and hope soon that there will a publicly available document for us all to share. It includes a lot of original research and analysis to solidly attribute some of the Lords of The Isles graveslabs to individual Chiefs and explain the recurring burial process in "the same grave as his father" within St Oran's Chapel. (The site does not currently attempt to do any of this).

I do want to share my recounting of the Service of Worship conducted in the Michael Chapel by Murdoch Mackenzie of the Iona Community. The anticipation began before we left our homes. Members of the tour were instructed to collect a pebble from their homes and bring it with you to the service. This created a stir of excitement all by itself. Our day on Iona concluded with this service late in the day. As we entered the chapel candles illuminated the corners of the small stone room. The bright afternoon sun was streaming a column of warm light across the altar and on to a table where each of us passed and placed our pebbles into a glass bowl filled with water.



Every part of this service was fashioned with purpose and meaning to the presence of Clan Donald. The opening responses set the tone "We have come from many places to this place of many memories". We were additionally fortunate to have Morag MacNeil sing several times throughout the service in Gaelic. Listening to such a clear sweet voice in the ancient words provided an air of historical authenticity that added to our lasting memory of the event. I cannot describe the feeling to be in a place where the heritage of your ancestors was so greatly honored. We each drew a pebble cleansed in the water from the bowl. The stone we took came from another member of our clan from



another part of the world. Very symbolic. Ian spoke of the importance and sponsorship of the Lords of the Isles and took us to a place of great pride in the not so well known spiritual heritage of Clan Donald. As we left the chapel we each took away not only the Clan Donald exchanged stone but a pebble especially collected from the beach at St. Columba's Bay by members of the Iona Community (a very ancient pilgrim custom). These stones are tangible symbols of our relationship as kin and clan.

I hope you are intrigued enough to participate in one of the Chief's tour. These trips are planned to provide us an opportunity to see places that would never be part of a commercial tour and about our ancestors. In this respect they are unlike any other tour you can go on. Each one is structured to give the traveler an experience of their own heritage. This years trip deserves acknowledgment for three officers of the High Council, Rob Parker, Peggy Ruetz and Ian Macdonnell. Overall they put together a Chief's Tour that creates an unparalleled clan experience.

Ian has posted some video on YouTube – search using Ian Macdonnell. ■

Mike McDonald





Story Corner: Fairy Tales

A great part of our Highland heritage comes forward to us in the form of stories or fables. For those of you who have children, great-grand children, nephews/nieces (or just like story time) this section will be a recurring piece of the Mid-East A' Bhratach—The Banner.

This newsletter we have two Scottish tales for you. The first is rather short and is here in its entirety, the second is just a teaser and you will have to look the remainder of the tale up on the Mid-East website (look for a link on the homepage to the full fairy tale).

Scottish Fairies sometimes reside in subterranean abodes, in the vicinity of human habitations, or, according to the popular phrase, under the “door-stane,” or threshold; in which situation they sometimes establish an intercourse with men, by borrowing and lending, and other kindly offices. In this capacity they are termed “the good neighbor,” from supplying privately the wants of their friends, and assisting them in all their transactions, while their favours are concealed. The story of Sir Godfrey Macculloch is a good example.

As this Gallovidian gentleman was taking the air on horseback, near his own house he was suddenly accosted by a little old man arrayed in green, and mounted upon a white palfrey. After mutual salutation, the old man gave Sir Godfrey to understand that he resided under his habitation, and that he had great reason to complain to the direction of the drain, or common sewer, which emptied itself directly into his best room. Sir Godfrey was a good deal startled at this extraordinary complaint; but, guessing the nature of the being he had to deal with, he assured the old man, with great courtesy, that the direction of the drain should be altered; and caused it to be done accordingly. Many years later Sir Godfrey had the misfortune to kill, in a fray, a gentleman of the neighbourhood. He was apprehended, tried, and condemned. The scaffold upon which his head was to be struck off was erected on the Castle Hill of Edinburgh; but hardly had he reached the fatal spot when the old man, upon his white palfrey, pressed through the crowd with the rapidity of lightning. Sir Godfrey, at his command, sprung on behind him; the “good neighbor” spurred his horse down the steep bank, and neither he nor the old man in green were ever again seen.

The Faithful Purse Bearer

A tale of the times of old. Far away in the north, where the purple heath spreads as thick on the hills in summer as the snow lies white in winter, where the streams flow down the granite-strewn corries of the mountains, brown gold as the topaz lying hid in their bosoms, a powerful chief ruled his clan.

Over hill and glen his domain spread far and wide, and his name was law itself in peace, and power in warfare. 'Twas said the Spey and the Garry both contributed to his table, and Cairn Gorm and Ben Alder furnished him with sport; which would mean that over much country, and by many men, his sway was known and acknowledged.

Now, upon two things the chief prided himself more than all else—more than his prowess in war, yes, more than the extent of his domains and power – the beauty of his wife and his own justice. What his clansmen thought of these two things is not to the point; what he thought of then was enough for himself and for us.

It must also be added that he possessed something seldom vouchsafed to men in authority, but an invaluable blessing when procurable, and that was a faithful steward, who had charge of his purse, his farm, and his treasures which may be included a charge not the least, you may be sure, in importance at that period—the complete control of his cellar.

Ian na Sporrán was faithful to his chief, and was trusted by him in return... ■

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Check out the Clan Donald Mid-East Website

<http://mid-east.clan-donald-usa.org/index.html>
