Memorial Trophy Donated for Outstanding Contribution to Gaelic Culture

By Seumas Gagne

Long-time supporter of Slighe nan Gaidheal, Colin MacRae, has donated a beautiful trophy in memory of his father, Alexander MacRae. The award has been named The Alexander MacRae Memorial Award for Outstanding Contribution to Gaelic Culture, and will be given out to a member of Slighe nan Gaidheal each year at the Annual General Meeting.

Any person may nominate a member of Slighe nan Gaidheal for this award. Simply write a letter explaining why you believe your nominee has made an outstanding contribution to the Gaelic world and send it to the attention of “MacRae Award.” You may also e-mail your letter to board@slighe.com. The Board of Directors will select the winner from among the nominees. Board members themselves will not be eligible to be selected.

The Board wishes to express its appreciation to Colin for the trophy, and for the fascinating biographical sketch of his father, which we have included in this issue of Am Bradan Fhíosa.
Am Bradan Fiosa

Publication Information

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If you would like to work on the Communications Committee, please contact Seumais at 206.297.8398 or via e-mail at seumais@slighe.com

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Seirm’s New Season Approaching!

by Seumas Gagne

Do you remember when you were in school, and it seemed like you had just started summer vacation when the back-to-school sales were advertised? Well, this is going to be a little like that, but the payoff is better.

Seirm’s new season starts in September, and we’re hoping for a good turnout. We had a great time last season and this one is going to be even better.

Participation is open to all current Slighe nan Gaidheal members, both adults and children, and our rehearsals will again be at Roosevelt High School on Monday evenings from 8:00 pm to 10:00 pm. Choir dues remain the same as last year, just $20.00 in addition to your Slighe nan Gaidheal membership to help the organization cover the costs of renting the rehearsal and performance spaces.

We’ve already booked Central Lutheran Church for our Winter Céilidh on December 21st, and we know that competition for audiences is going to be fierce on that weekend, so book it for Seirm now! You won’t be sorry you did. Of course, the best way to make sure you’re at the concert is to sing or play with us.

If you attended our Spring Céilidh, you know that Seirm is not exclusively for singers anymore. If you’re interested in joining Seirm as a non-singing instrumentalist, there may be a place that would be just right for you. Contact me to discuss your ideas via e-mail at seumais@slighe.com or via phone at (206) 297-8398.

Our new season will begin with a pre-season retreat on Saturday, September 7th. If you would like to participate, plan on attending the retreat and contact me. I’ll send you the address and directions. I hope to see you there!

Conversation with my Sister-in-Law

by Ted Neveln

The days after the Fèis were oddly punctuated by several old friends whom we had not heard from recently suddenly calling up. One of these was my sister-in-law from Bethel, Alaska, who suddenly showed up in Seattle. Almost any other time we’re hoping for a good turnout. We had a great time last season and this one is going to be even better.

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Alexander MacRae
by Colin MacRae

Many Scots have made their mark on America, but in the Twentieth Century no one represented its Highland culture more enthusiastically and effectively than Alexander MacRae of Inverinate.

Alexander was born at Inverinate, Kintail, along the shore of Loch Duich on the 14th of July 1884. His father, Alexander, was known as Ali Beag the Leaguer, the head of the Land League in Kintail. Ali Beag fought for better conditions for the crofters and is especially noted for his testimony included in the 1886 report of the Napier Commission.

Gaelic was spoken in Alexander’s home, although both his father and mother knew English as well. Alexander learned English in school where Gaelic was banned. He told how he was punished if he spoke Gaelic in class. The goal of the government was to discredit the Gaelic language and make those who spoke it feel ashamed.

Shortly after his mother died in 1900, Alexander moved to Glasgow where he joined the Glasgow branch of The National Sailors and Firemen’s Union. While waiting for a shipboard assignment, he worked as a conductor on the Glasgow Tramway system. In 1903, he went to sea as a fireman and shipped out three times. After terrible experiences during the third trip while rounding the Horn and picking up survivors of a large earthquake in Chile, he gave up the seagoing profession. He was one of many Gaelic-speaking Highlanders on board. Most were proud men raised in strong religious families and did not appreciate the way they were treated aboard ship.

Alexander next worked on the estate of Sir Simon Fraser in Beauty where he learned the trade of gardener. He also served as a ghillie along with his cousin Duncan Mór Maclean. It was here that he began his life-long activity in piping. His father, a Free Church Presbyterian elder, would not allow pipes in his home. Duncan, a fine piper, helped him carve a practice chanter out of holly, a custom common in that day, and taught him how to play. He later had lessons on the pipes from John Tait MacRae, a gifted prize-winning Kintail piper.

Alexander next joined the Gordon Territorials where he served until 1911. He then emigrated to Helena, Montana, USA, where his brother Donald had a job waiting for him with the U.S. Land Office on a surveying team. Donald had come to the United States in 1909, about four years after their sister, Mary MacRae Allan, came to join her husband in New Jersey.

Alexander was active in the Gaelic and piping circles of Helena and Butte, Montana and piped for many events. In 1913, one of those events was a welcoming party for a family from Richmond, Surrey, England. The daughter in that family was Lillian Taylor. She told how she was quite taken with the piper and they were married in 1918. In 1919, they moved to Seattle, Washington where he found work as a ship’s carpenter. In 1924, he went to work for the Seattle School Board as a landscape gardener and stayed with them until 1954, when he retired at 70 years of age.

Gaelic-speaking Highlanders were proud men raised in strong religious families who spoke it feel ashamed. They were not paying sufficient attention to their long vowels. Students were not paying sufficient attention to their long vowels. The government did it not as a song but as prose. She wanted to get across something of the genuine outrage that lays behind the pretty tune and she also was concerned that some of her students were not paying sufficient attention to their long vowels.

The first day featured faculty performances and the fourth day was devoted to students. Maureen Lyon whipped together a performance of An Astrachadh Ard for our intermediate language group. Rather interestingly, we did not-as-a song but as prose. She wanted to get across something of the genuine outrage that lays behind the pretty tune and she also was concerned that some of her students were not paying sufficient attention to their long vowels.

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In Praise of the Oaks of Roslyn

by Rich Hill

Take my greetings to the East,
To that beautiful, merry place
Where mighty oak trees grow;
A warm, peaceful grove,
And tranquil, grassy hills
Where you hear the birds’ joyful song.

Here is my praise to the fianna
The musical song of islands and bays.

A proud language full of longing,
The ancient language of the Fianna,
I heard with joy another language;
A quiet whisper without falsehood,
And tranquility fill the room.

Amidst the murmuring of the branches,
A quiet whisper without falsehood,
I heard with joy another language;
The ancient language of the Fianna,
A proud language full of longing,
The musical song of islands and bays.

Here is my praise to the east.
To that beautiful, merry place.
Where mighty oak trees grow;
A warm, peaceful grove,
And tranquil, grassy hills
Where you hear the birds’ joyful song.

O excellent Gaels of Roslyn,
You are the fresh, new oaks,
Long life to you and your world!
Let calm weather be yours;
And voices are raised
With the spirited songs of the bards.

O excellent Gaels of Roslyn,
You are the fresh, new oaks,
Long life to you and your world!
Let calm weather be yours;
In that burgeoning wood,
I drink to your health with love!