



Issue 2

The Mackay Banner

A Publication of
Clan Mackay Society, USA



June 2015

Do you have interesting Mackay news? You too can contribute to The Mackay Banner. Send your articles to cmckay@verizon.net to see your commentary in the next edition.



Welcome to the second quarter edition of the Clan Mackay Society USA Banner for 2015. The executive board of the Society sincerely hopes that the first quarter of this year has been a productive and prosperous one for the membership and that you have been able to celebrate our Scottish Heritage by attending at least one Highland Games Gathering during the last three months of 2015.

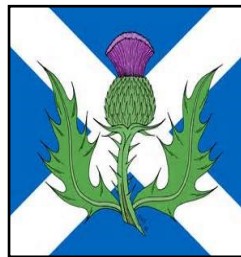
In this edition of the Mackay Banner you will find a schedule of events that are planned for the second quarter of this year. We hope you will be able to attend one or more of these gatherings.

Also you will find in this issue news from the various regions, an article on the appearance of giant thistle in the United States through the courtesy of one of our members, and an interesting story from our National Vice President regarding his visit to Mackay Country and the Mackay Church in Tongue.

In Issue 1 of the banner earlier this year we published an article on Clan Mackay Germany. It was the intent of your editor to continue with that series and an attempt was made to do so. However, as it turns out, it is not as easy to establish communications with other Clan Societies as one would think.

Therefore in this issue, in the place of feature articles on other Mackay Societies, we will begin a series of historical Clan Mackay articles which we hope you will find interesting. Suggestions for historical topics will be gladly received and considered for publication.

FROM THE MID-ATLANTIC REGION



The Scottish Thistle is the oldest recorded 'National Flower' and is probably one of the most well-known, and easily recognized symbols of Scotland.

Although it may look familiar, you probably don't know the legends that surround its adoption as a national Scottish emblem.

A humble weed might seem an odd symbolic choice, but really what could be better than a native-born plant which is as bold as it is beautiful?

There is a rich history and several legends surrounding the thistle, and we'll take a closer look at some of it right here.

This resilient little weed has always bloomed across Scotland's landscape, but it wasn't until the 13th century that its place in the country's symbolism and written history began.

One of the best-known thistle legends takes place in the mid 13th century during a surprise invasion by the soldiers of the Norse king, Haakon, at Largs (one of western Scotland's coastal towns).

The story has it that after coming ashore, this Viking force planned to creep up on the Scottish Clansmen and Highlanders and overcome them while they slept.

This surprise element of stealth required that they go barefoot - which proved to be their undoing.

Unfortunately for these unwary invaders, one of their soldier's bare feet came down hard on a Scottish thistle and his cries of shock and pain were

Clan Mackay Society, USA

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enough to wake the sleeping Scots.

Leaping to their feet, the clansmen charged into battle and the rest, as they say, is history... and yes, the fiery Scots were victorious.

Legend has it that because of the heroic role the plant played in the outcome of the battle, the thistle was immediately chosen as a national emblem.

Now, how much of this is truth no-one knows, but we do know that by the 15th century the Scottish thistle was being used as a national emblem.

It appears on silver coins that were issued in 1470 during the reign of King James III (1466 - 1488), and early in the 16th century it became an integral part of Scotland's' Coat of Arms.

In 1503, the marriage of King James IV of Scotland to Princess Margaret Tudor of England, seems to have been the inspiration behind the poem entitled 'The Thrissil and The Rois' ('The Thistle and The Rose') penned by the Scottish poet William Dunbar.

The thistle represented King James and the rose represented Princess Margaret.

Toward the middle of the same century, historians believe that Scotland's' highest chivalric order was founded by King James V (son of King James IV), it's name was 'The Order of The Thistle'.

It's heraldic symbol was, not surprisingly, the humble thistle.

The official motto of this organization is 'Nemo me impune lacessit', this Latin translates into 'No one provokes me with impunity' (or in Scottish-English 'Wha daur meddle wi' me?') which ties in perfectly with the original legend.

Interestingly, it's possible that this order had much older roots, because some historians believe that James V was reviving a much more ancient order,

Notice in a Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow, restaurant - " Kids - eat two for the price of one..." to which a passing non-customer had added " I can't eat a whole child, far less two..."

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one that perhaps dated back as far as the early 9th century.

In which case the thistle would have been represented in Scottish symbolism even earlier than it's debut as a defender of the realm in the Viking vs Scots battle at Largs.

Today the Thistle is seen on everything from sporrans and jewelry to soap and tea-towels, and it's a Scottish symbol recognized all over the world.



That little weed has come a long way!

Not only has it come a long way, but it has made it's way to the Mid-Atlantic Region of Clan Mackay Society, USA.

One of our members, Mrs. Fitzgerald of Great Falls, Virginia provided us with these photographs of her six foot plus American thistle.



Our thanks go out to Mrs. Fitzgerald for these photos and we encourage all members to submit photos of interest to the editor for subsequent publication.

FROM OUR NATIONAL VICE-PRESIDENT

Several years ago, our current National Vice-President, Don McGee, was in Mackay Country in



Mackay Church of Tongue

wee bonnie Scotland and visited the "Mackay Church" in Tongue. Beside the side door of the "Mackay Church" also known as St. Andrew's Church of Scotland was a poem that caught his attention.

The small congregation of this church seats about 125 people including a balcony reserved for the

officialdom of Clan Mackay and more recently for Lady Sutherland. For years since she summered at the ancestral home of the chiefs of Clan Mackay just outside Tongue.

The moving words inscribed on parchment and framed hanging by the side door of the Church's sanctuary reads as follows:

**Enter this door...
As if the floor...
Within was gold...
And every wall...
Of Jewels all...
Of wealth untold...
As if a choir...
In robes of fire...
Were singing here
Nor silent, nor rush...
But, HUSH...
For God is here.**

s/ James Mackay

This was 3 years ago. In correspondence, Don has learned that St. Andrews is served full time by an ordained minister of the church of Scotland. While it is small congregation, it is making its way.

Our thanks to Don for submitting this article.

A Scotsman, an Englishman and an Australian were in a bar and had just started on a new round of drinks when a fly landed in each glass of beer. The Englishman took his out on the blade of his Swiss Army knife. The Australian blew his away in a cloud of froth. The Scotsman lifted his one up carefully by the wings and held it above his glass. "Go on, spit it oot, ye wee devil" he growled

3rd Quarter Events

Let's Go To The Games

The following is a listing of many of the games and gatherings that will be occurring in the next quarter of 2015. Please review it and if there are any games in your area, pack up and go support. If, while at the games, you discover that there is not a Clan Mackay tent, contact you local commissioner and volunteer to host a tent next year.

Date	Highland Game	Web Address
July 24-26	Dayton Celtic Festival	www.daytoncelticfestival.com
July 25-26	Seattle Scottish Highland Games	www.sshga.org
Aug 31-Sep 2	Colorado Scottish Festival	www.scottishgames.org
Aug 1	Spokane Highland Games	www.spokanehighlandgames.org
Aug 1	166th Annual Highland Games	www.highlandgames.com
Aug 1-2	Monterey Scottish Games	www.montereyscotgames.com
Aug 8	Central New York Scottish Games & Celtic Festival	www.cnyscottishgames.org
Aug 15	Buffalo Niagara Scottish Festival	bnhv.org/scottish
Aug 15	Maine Highland Games	www.mainehighlandgames.org
Aug 22	Long Island Scottish Festival and Highland Games	www.liscots.org
Aug 29	Green Hill Highland Games	www.facebook.com/ greenhillhighlandgames
Sep 4-6	Wisconsin Highland Games	www.wisconsinscottish.org
Sep 5-6	Virginia Scottish Games	www.vascottishgames.org
Sep 5-6	150th Scottish Highland Gathering & Games	www.thescottishgames.com
Sep 10-13	Longs Peak Scottish-Irish Highland Festival	www.scotfest.com
Sep 11-13	Celtic Fest Mississippi	celticfestms.org
Sep 12-13	Columbus Scottish Festival	www.scottishfestival.org
Sep 18-20	New Hampshire Highland Games & Festival	www.nhscot.org
Sep 18-19	Charleston Scottish Games and Highland Gathering	www.charlestonscots.org
Sep 19	Charleston Scottish Games and Highland Gathering	www.charlestonscots.org
Sep 26	Ligonier Highland Games	www.ligonierhighlandgames.org
Sep 25-26	St. Louis Scottish Games and Cultural Festival	www.stlouis-scottishgames.com
Sep 26-27	Celtic Classic Highland Games and Festival	www.celticfest.org
Oct 3	Scotland County Highland Games	www.schgnc.org

Of Special Interest

Tongue, Scotland—The Heart of Mackay Country

The town of Tongue is situated in the heartland of Scotland's Mackay Country, one of the principal villages and the pick of the villages along the north coast. Situated on the sandy Kyle of Tongue, the village is an important junction where the road from Altnaharra, Lairg and the south meets the North Coast Along with the next-door village of Kirkiboll,



Tongue, Scotland

It is probably a historical accident that led to this significant settlement being called "Tongue" rather than "Kirkiboll", a name coming from the Old Norse for "Church Farm" and now applied to the uphill areas of the village. The name Tongue also has old Norse origins, but more obvious ones. It comes from "tunga" or tongue of land projecting into the loch. Although the Norse probably lived here between the 900s and 1200s, nothing certain has been found of their settlement.

The village has a gabled church, built 1680. It is often referred to as "The Church of the Mackays".

This church has been highlighted in another article of this issue of the Banner.

Others speak of it as "The Little White Church". The church was built on the site of two former churches in 1724 and is the burial place of the

Reay Family, chiefs of the Clan Mackay.

Perhaps Tongue's most significant moment in history came in early 1746 when the ship *Hazard*, on its way to Inverness, fled into the Kyle of Tongue to evade the HMS *Sheerness*, a Royal Navy frigate. It was carrying over £13,000 in gold coins to fund Bonnie Prince Charlie's rebellion, and its crew took the gold ashore in an effort to carry it overland to its destination. The Mackays were supporters of the government and their forces caught up with the crew of the *Hazard* next morning at Lochan Haken, near the southern end of the Kyle of Tongue. The gold was thrown into the loch by the crew before they were captured, though most of it was later recovered by the government.

Having always been in Mackay country, Tongue became the seat of the clan in 1554 when their castle at Borge was destroyed by the Gordons of Sutherland. Although the clan home was destroyed, a new mansion was built in 1678 and Tongue House became the new seat of the Mackays.

This House of Tongue, the former home of the Lords Reay, Chiefs of the Clan Mackay, is on the coast of their ancient province of Strathnaver. It was burnt in 1656 by the Cromwellian English invaders, but rebuilt by the Master of Reay in 1678, and added to in the eighteenth century. But in 1829 it had to be sold by the 7th Lord Reay, together with the vast Mackay estate (the whole north-western corner of Britain) for debt to the Sutherland family. The Mackays were undoubtedly responsible for the tower house built near the House of Tongue, a little north of today's village and overlooking the Kyle of Tongue.

The area surrounding Tongue has many historical places of interest. As well as Tongue House and Castle Borge, there are the ruins of 14th Century Castle

Of Special Interest

Varrich. Caisteal Bharraich (anglicised to Castle Varrich) stands on the inlet overlooking the Kyle of



The House of Tongue

Tongue. It is a Mackay stronghold dating from the 14th century and is believed to have been built on the foundations of an old Norse fort. A signposted footpath leads from the center of Tongue, there are a couple of awkward deer fence stiles to negotiate, which become even more awkward when carrying a German shepherd, as well as a steep climb to the tower.



Footpath to Castle Varrich

It is believed that Bishops of Caithness used it when moving between Scrabster and Balnakiel House near Durness. Caisteal Bharraich is the oldest stone building in the north of Scotland and is built on the oldest rock in the United Kingdom - Lewisian

Gneiss. It is a 14th century clan stronghold that offers fine views after a invigorating one mile walk from the footpath beside the Bank in Tongue. Castle Varrich is reputed to have been the stronghold of a Norse warrior of the 11th Century a small tower spectacularly located on the summit of a bluff dominating the Kyle of Tongue just to the west of the village. The origins of the castle are unclear, but some believe it could be the "Beruvik" mentioned in the Norse Orkneyinga Saga. Others believe it was built as recently as the 1500s, by either the Bishops of Caithness or by the Mackay family.



Banner editor Charles McKay at Tower of Castle Varrich

Tongue Hotel, the dukes former lodge and a former Victorian hunting lodge sits proudly at the northern end of a remote wilderness of distinctive and outlandish natural beauty, guarding the Kyle of Tongue and its eventual transition into the Atlantic.

The Ben Loyal did not start out with any aspirations to be a hotel. In fact the original buildings provided for some of the needs of the local community. What is now the staff cottage was once a post office, the beer cellar was one of the three local bakeries, this particular one being the only one on the north coast to use peat to bake the bread, and finally what

Of Special Interest

is now the lounge bar was a shop.



Ben Loyal Hotel

Tongue has shops, services and a youth hostel. Local attractions include the ruins of Castle Varrich (reputed to have been the stronghold of a Norse warrior of the 11th Century) and Coldbackie Beach.

The bridge over the Kyle of Tongue offers excellent views of the surrounding area especially Ben Loyal to the South. Ben Loyal is the Queen of the Scottish mountains with Tongue Bay and the Rabbit islands to the North. The islands take their name from the fact that rabbits were first introduced there in the 1700's as a source of meat for the local Laird.

Tongue is a green village and well wooded a contrast to the surroundings. Before the causeway was built in 1971 the only route to the west from the village of Tongue was by the road around the Kyle. At low tide seals, waders, and seabirds can be seen from the causeway.

A visit to Mackay Country would be grossly incomplete without a visit to Tongue.

Callum decided to call his father-in-law the "Exorcist" because every time he came to visit he made the spirits disappear

2015 Annual General Meeting

*We will gather on **September 5 & 6, 2015**
at the **Virginia Scottish Games and Festival***

Come Join us!



GREAT MEADOW

**5089 Old Tavern Road
The Plains, VA 20198**

TICKETS at the Gate:

Two day adult \$30

Single day adult \$20

Children 5 - 12 \$5

Under 5 Free

Children 12 and under free on Sunday

**Gates open to the general public at 9 a.m.
both Saturday and Sunday.**

**The Festival will close at 6 both days,
although we will continue with the Con-
cert on Saturday evening until 9.**

www.vascottishgames.org