

Music, dance key elements of Scots-Irish Festival

BY GAYLE PAGE
Standard Banner Staff Writer

It's almost here. The Fourth Annual Scots-Irish Festival – organized and hosted by Main Street Dandridge Community Trust – will be here before you know it. This old-time music festival takes place in Historic Downtown Dandridge, September 25, and usually draws visitors from all over the East Tennessee region and farther afield.

There will be plenty of great food, including Scottish meat pies and pastries; old-time fun and games in a special kids section; and several merchandise and craft vendors, along with clan societies and heritage organizations that will help guide folks to find their own Celtic roots. But mostly, the street festival focuses on the dances, songs and sounds handed down to us from our Scotch-Irish ancestors.

Traditional Appalachian music is primarily derived from Anglo-Celtic folk ballads and instrumental dance tunes played typically on fiddles. The poignant ballads were almost always sung unaccompanied by women whose

roles were keepers of the family's cultural heritage through storied songs, and in an effort to rise above the drudgery of their hard work. Appalachian folk music is a distinctive genre of folk music believed to have developed from traditional Scottish, English and Irish music brought to the United States by immigrants from those countries, as well as from the Northern Ireland Ulster-Scots whose stubbornly independent contributions left lasting impressions on the East Tennessee landscape, including customs, music and folklore.

America's modern country music relies heavily on harmony and a jig-type tempo that is a direct channel of Scots-Irish music settlers brought with them to America. Bluegrass music is similarly Scots-Irish, as well, and those plaintive strains can still be heard emanating from the mountains of Kentucky and Tennessee today.

Along with the use of pipes and fiddles, dancing in the form of clogging is very common in the region, and it points toward an obvious link to the Scots-Irish heritage of the area. Square dancing is also a merged style of Scots-Irish



Festival draws many visitors

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dance. It has a nimbleness not found in other dances originating in Europe. Additionally both of these dances rely on spirited musical accompaniment, primarily fiddle playing – a prominent role both historically and currently – as well as the lively Appalachian

style that has its foundation in the Irish and Scottish reels. The fiddle and dance often helped to bring communities together in times past.

In terms of cultural influences from the Scots-Irish, it was likely they who gave Appalachia the

roots of its colorful language and magical folktales. Throughout America the Scots-Irish left an enduring influence on the importance of family, of individualism and public service.

The Scots-Irish Festival of 2010 will present an excellent

lineup of musical talent and various Celtic/Gaelic styles ranging from the tender ballads of Colin Grant-Adams, who brings Scotland to life in song; the Thistle-down Tinkers, a Celtic guitar and fiddle duo presenting traditional Scottish and Irish music; Cut-throat Shamrock, who play and sing an unforgettable acoustic Celtic rock style; the Martin Family Band from Pennsylvania that plays traditional Celtic music and performs Irish step dancing; the Knoxville Pipe & Drum Corps, a bagpipe and drum marching band decked out in Mackenzie tartans and kilts and playing a medley of Scottish tunes; and, last but not least, Jefferson County High School's own Kelly Shipe, who performs on both bagpipes and the Celtic harp.

Organizers of the Dandridge Scots-Irish Festival received word on August 27 that BBC Northern Ireland will be there taping for its radio show called "A Kist o Wurds" at our 2010 music festival. The Dandridge Scots-Irish Festival is surely becoming world renowned, so there is no good reason for anyone in this community to miss out on it.