

Bagpipe competition set at Scots-Irish Festival

On September 24

BY GAYLE PAGE
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Both poignant and festive bagpipe music has the ability to stir even the most deeply-rooted Gaelic soul.

The origins of the bagpipe can be traced back to ancient civilizations. Most likely bagpipes were created as a primitive folk instrument because early herdsman had the essential materials right at their fingertips – goat and sheepskins and reed pipes. Pipes are often mentioned in the Bible, and historians believe they originated in a region of Mesopotamia.

Through Celtic migration, bagpipes were introduced to Persia and India, and later to Greece and Rome. In fact, a Roman historian of the first century wrote that the Emperor Nero knew how to play the pipe with his mouth and the bag thrust under his arm.

On Saturday, September 24, local residents are invited to come out and assess their own emotional responses to the playing of the pipes in downtown Dandridge at the fifth annual Scots-Irish Festival.

The Knoxville Pipe and Drums (KPD) will perform, resplendent in their Ancient Mackenzie Tartans by authority of the Chief of Clan Mackenzie, and contending in a bagpipe competition sanctioned by the Eastern United States Pipe Band Association.

According to John Rose, business manager and promoter for KPD, about 25 pipers, accompanied by eight drummers, will march and play their great highland pipes under the direction of Pipe Major Andrew Payzant, playing such favorites as “Scotland The Brave” and “Murdo’s Wedding,” among other selections.

“Dandridge is a great festival,” said Rose. “We really enjoy going up there.”

A bagpipe is an aerophone, which describes any musical instrument that produces sound primarily by causing a body of air to vibrate, without the use of Bagpipes are found throughout the musical traditions of Scottish and Irish cultures (as well as the Scotch-Irish). Though there were regional variations in the instrument, it is likely that the Medieval Scottish Highland bagpipe, or the “Piob Mhor,” is equally an Irish instrument.

One thing is for certain, both were used in war.

No one can say for sure whether it was Scottish mercenaries playing the pipes in war that inspired the Irish to adopt them, if it went the other way around, or if the Scots and Irish acquired the pipes simultaneously. In any case, it would seem that the Gaels were playing them by sometime in the period of 1400 to 1500.

An Irish manuscript telling the French tale of Fireabas says at one point “Let horns and pipes



Bagpipe music to fill the town

A member of one of the bagpipe bands competing in last year’s Scots-Irish events plays as he marches down the streets of Dandridge. (File photo - Ronnie Housley)

be played by you to gather your host.” If the date is correct and the writer has bagpipes in mind, this would be the first Irish reference to warpipes. In the first half of the sixteenth century, clear records finally appear, almost concurrently in Ireland and Scotland. A “piper Mac Ille Dhuibh” is mentioned

in the book of the Dean of Listmore (c. 1513-1526). Then there are records of pipers in the muster rolls of Irish soldiers that fought for Henry VIII at Boulogne. Most telling is the comment by the historian Holinshed for May of that year that “In the same moneth also passed through the citie of

London in warlike manner, to the number of seaven hundred Irishmen, having for their weapons darts and handguns with bagpipes before them.”

Soon after, we have our first clear report of warpiping for Scotland. A Frenchman who had been at the Battle of Pinkie Cleugh on

September 10, 1547, noted in *La Guerre d’Ecosse* (1556): “And while the French prepared for combat, the wild Scots incited themselves to arms by the sound of their bagpipes.”

Throughout history, high-decibel, mouth-blown pipes have always been associated with the waging of war; and as an instrument of war, the Great Pipes certainly have no equal. The notes of bagpipes have a shrill and penetrating quality that can be heard at distances up to nine miles, and are not easily drowned out even by the sounds of battle.

Compared to the instruments they replaced on the battlefield – trumpets, horns, and harps – the bagpipes have a more warlike, aggressive sound. As a result of their chilling effect on opposing troops, bagpipes were the favorites of generals everywhere. (CelticInstruments.com)

But you’ll find no militaristic warpipes at the Scots-Irish Music Festival, only a friendly competition between pipers vying for trophies. Perhaps the music of keening pipes will also accompany some of the highland dance performances. In either event, bagpipe music is compelling and calls to all whose ancestors were among the strong and independent Gaels that tamed the wilderness that once encompassed Main Street Dandridge.

Bagpipe competition sign-in begins at 8:30 a.m., on Saturday, September 24, 2011.