

THE CLAY PIPER

First Coast Highlanders Newsletter

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FEB 2021

Member Spotlight

— This quarter, “The Clay Piper” would like to put the spotlight on Stephen Romeo. He was one of the original band members who started this bagpipe and drum band 12 years ago. Steve currently holds the position of tenor drummer and has also held board positions such as President, VP, Quartermaster. Stephen’s upbeat personality provides that motivational charge that we all need from time to time. He has been there through thick and thin, supporting each of the members and their families. Many thanks from all of the members and students of First Coast Highlanders for your support and dedicated service.

What is your full Name? Stephen Michael Romeo



Where are you from? I was born in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, in 1942 and attended schools in Buffalo NY, Wheeling WV, and Detroit MI. After being discharged from the US Navy, I settled in Tampa FL, and moved to Clay County twenty years ago.

What was your profession and career? I have a long and diverse career path: I was a Tampa Policeman, managed the loading dock for a grocery chain, a bowling alley, and was taken hostage as manager of a convenience store during a hold-up. I owned and operated a mower repair shop, sold real estate, and sold commercial electric products. I was a partner in an auto parts store, and partner in a real estate office. Before moving to Clay County, I was the Human Resources manager of the company that provided fueling, baggage handling, and contracted support services at Tampa International Airport. I am retired from both Aircraft Services and Ace Hardware in Middleburg.

How did you get to FCH? I was always fascinated by bagpipes so when I met Art at Gayward Hendry’s Cane Grinding picnic about ten years ago, I was hooked and reeled in.

My family. I am married to Jane, a West Tennessee native. Together we share two sons, a daughter, a daughter-in-law, a prospective daughter-in-law, two granddaughters and a grandson-in-law. They all reside in the Tampa Bay area. We also have a mixed breed rescue dog. My hobbies include Civil War reenactment, gold prospecting, and fishing.

Do You Have a Scottish/Irish Clan? My family includes Pringle, Buchannan, Fleming and Campbell Clans.

How did you become a drummer? I began learning bagpipes with a band in St. Petersburg FL several years ago but had to abandon that due to career pressures! After playing bass drum with First Coast Highlanders for eight years, I switched to a lighter tenor drum about two years ago.

What has your Life Achievements Been? Raising my three children to adulthood, loving my wife, and staying healthy, not really wealthy and wise. I served FCH as Vice President, President, and Quartermaster on the Board of Directors. I am a member of Knights of Columbus and was Master of Middleburg Masonic Lodge No. 107 for 2005.



Scottish History in America

Each year, on the last Saturday in February, the “North East FL Scottish Games and Festival” is held. This year it is February 27, 2021. Hopefully we all will have had our COVID vaccination and the world will be as normal as it was or can be and a great time will be had by all.

Every year a Scottish clan is honored throughout the event. NEFL Scottish Games Committee has selected “**CLAN MacRae.**” First Coast Highlanders pipes and drums will be leading Clan MacRae during the opening ceremonies with their tune “MacRae Meadows.” Where is MacRae Meadows and what is the story behind it.

I reached out to William (Bill) Caudill, Director of the Scottish Heritage Center, located at Saint Andrews University, Laurinburg, North Carolina. Bill is the principal instructor for piping and leads the pipe band at St Andrews University. He serves as a judicator for EUSPBA judges panel and also serves as Vice President of the EUSPBA. Bill Caudill has provided this story of the MacRae Family and their Meadows for this issue of “The Clay Piper.” The MacRae family information provided for this article is only a part of a larger document (Bill Caudill’s MA Thesis), conducting many hours of research and interviews. His thesis is entitled “Gone to seek a fortune in North Carolina.” It is a must read and you can access the entire story from the following link.

<https://www.semanticscholar.org/author/William-Samuel-Caudill/123853658>

The Story of MacRae Meadows

In 1884, promoters in Scotland and North Carolina recruited a group of at least 180 Highland Scots to settle in the Scottish-American community of southeastern North Carolina. At the time, the North Carolina settlement (which had been established almost 150 years earlier) was the largest concentrated group of Highland Scots in North America. The 1884 emigration - which proved to be the last organized emigration of Highland Scots to North Carolina - was motivated by desires both to assist impoverished Highland crofters in Scotland, and to reinvigorate North Carolina's Scottish-American settlement with an ethnically attractive labor force. Conflicting expectations among the emigrants and their hosts, however, quickly led to the emigration's failure. Nonetheless, many of the "promises" made and inducements offered were not exactly as they were made out to be. The greatest majority of the Scots returned to Scotland after just a few months.

Alexander MacRae, and his family, his wife Mary MacLennan MacRae, their seven sons, and one daughter emigrated from Glenelg, Inverness-shire, and arrived with the second party of North Carolina emigrants in 1884. Unlike the typically recruited emigrants, the MacRaes seem to have been a family of some financial means. Alexander MacRae owned a large fishing boat, which he sold in order to book the family's passage to North Carolina.



Alexander MacRae Playing pipes

Alexander MacRae and his family were one of the few who stayed in North Carolina. After several moves and an unsuccessful venture at farming, he and his family relocated to Wilmington, NC where they came across the family of Hugh MacRae (a prominent landowner and merchant in Wilmington) who had also invested in large tracts of property in the North Carolina mountains for development. The Wilmington MacRaes induced the Scottish MacRaes to move to what is now the present-day MacRae Meadows (site of the Grandfather Mountain Highland Games) where they established a small farm and ran a guest house for tourists through the late 1920's. In later years, and after some family tragedies which included the accidental fire which destroyed the MacRae guest house residence on the meadow site - as well as the deaths of both Alexander and his wife, the family fell onto hard times during the depression and were forced to sell their tract of land (present day MacRae Meadow) back to the Wilmington MacRae family and their descendants.

The MacRae House for tourists was where the MacRaes' Scottish background became a celebrated part of everyday life. “The MacRae House” was a renowned tourist destination for the remainder of Alexander and Mary MacRae's lifetime. People were thrilled with the way he would

play the bagpipes there. Bagpiping was not the only Scottish custom that the MacRaes observed at their guest house. There was a western North Carolina version of Highland ceilidhs held at the house: They used to have square dances on Saturday nights. Alexander would play his pipes. They'd sing. They'd bring in local musicians to play, and they'd ask John MacRae to dance. He'd dance a dance they called a "Highland Fling." While in the guest house Gaelic words and phrases were used by the family. They definitely

had the brogue. At times, when they were out or something didn't want to be overheard, they'd speak in Gaelic. It was the Alexander MacRae family from Scotland for whom the MacRae Meadows were named (as it was their farm from about 1888 onward till the late 1920's or early 1930's) - and not the Wilmington MacRaes who were the owners of Grandfather Mountain and several thousand acres in the area which eventually became the resort village of Linville, NC.

Authored by *Bill Caudill*

It is ironic that in 1956, the now world-famous Grandfather Mountain Highland Games were located on "MacRae Meadow." This year (2021) the Games will continue at Grandfather Mountains "MacRae Meadows and is Scheduled for July 8-11, 2021.

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FCH - New Officers for 2021

First Coast Highlanders conducted their Annual General Meeting on January 7, 2021.

Congratulations to the newly elected officers for 2021

President: Scott Young
Vice President: John Lynch
Secretary: Danise Young
Treasurer: Will Wheeler

Member at Large: Steven Romeo
Quartermaster: Robert Arthurs
Band Business Mgr.: Art Tenney

May you all have a successful 2021.

Congratulations to Will Wheeler for receiving the Pipe Majors annual Appreciation Award.

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Up-Coming Events

We continue to be challenged with the COVID-19 pandemic and all of its restrictions. However, First Coast Highlanders performing members and students continue to practice at Orange Park Presbyterian Church every Thursday evening starting at 6:00 PM. We encourage everyone to stay in touch with the band's activities on our website <http://firstcoasthighlanders.com> where you can find our calendar of events. If you would like to join us for practice, shoot us a text on Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/firstcoasthighlanders>. We would love to have you join us.

Tuesday – January 12, 2021 – 11:00AM - Ron Parker Memorial Service – Ron Parker Memorial Park, St. Augustine, FL

Saturday – January 16, 2021, All Day – Mount Dora Scottish Festival – Donnally Park, Mount Dora, FL

Sunday – January 31, 2021 – Kirkin of the Tartan – St Simons Island Presbyterian Church - St. Simons Island, GA

Saturday – February 27, 2021, NE Florida Scottish Games – Clay Co Fairgrounds - Green Cove Springs, FL

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A Silver Chanter Tail

A Novel by John Grant titled "The Silver Chanter." "It is a magical instrument that enables its owner to perform the most challenging bagpipe music with the utmost ease and musical expression." This appears often in tales of Scottish lore. Grant delivered the following telling of the tale to "Morar" in the 9 August 1913 edition of the Oban Times:

It is said that one day when a young MacCrimmon was playing his enchanted pipe near the piper's study, a hollow ledge of a precipice on the shores of Dunvegan, he met the "Fairy Queen," who handed the youth a silver chanter, by which he could charm the otter from the sea, the deer from the hills, and the lark from the clouds. No pipe ever played with such fragrance, and never before or since has any chanter piped such powerful strains, for the rich grandeur of the theme

of "The Cave of Gold" burst its beauteous chords asunder as this youthful minstrel entered the Cave of Gold. The fairy theme died away in faint and broken accent till the piper was heard no more. The price of this fatal pre-eminence was the hard condition that after a year and a day the young MacCrimmon should renounce his life on earth and enter the Fairy Kingdom through the Cave of Gold, from which he never returned. *****

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Answers to Crossword from "The Clay Piper" Nov 2020

Across: 2 1782 5 Ghillies 7 Spats 8 Georgell 12 Bonnet 14 Kiltpin 15 Hose 16 Bonnet

Down: 1 Proscription 3 Flashing 4 Inverness 6 Sgiandubh 9 Redshash 10 Inverness 11 Sporrán 13 Trews

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For more information about hiring a piper or the band, or becoming a sponsor, call Art Tenney at (904) 368-8177.

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