

CLANN NA ASKETILL  
Descendants of Asketil  
The MacAskill Sept Society



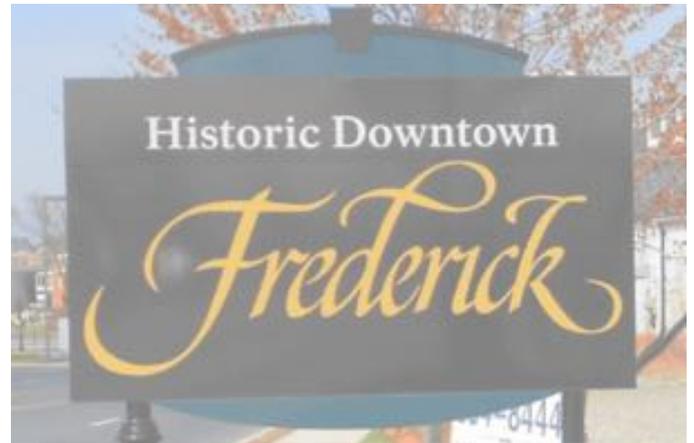
Fall 2018  
Quarterly Newsletter



## 2018 Annual Gathering

The 2018 Annual MacAskill Sept Society Gathering was held in Frederick, Maryland.

A rainy weekend in Frederick didn't dampen our Gathering. Thirty-three attended the festivities with a get-together in the hotel lobby hosted by Earl, Doreen, and Scott McCaskill. We caught up on all family news and asking about those who couldn't attend this year. Scott treated the group with hors d'oeuvres to enjoy and a welcome bag of interesting things to do in the area, along with information about the weekend. After, everyone went out in the rain for dinner to the restaurant of their choice.



*Members (Rachel McCaskill, Ann McCaskill, Anne and Claude Libis) enjoy registration, opening reception on Friday night at the Fairfield Inn and Suites in Frederick, Maryland.*

## Saturday's Dinner and Silent Auction

Our evening was hosted by Scott and Heidi at their beautiful home. A tented patio was awaiting us, as it was still drizzling when guests were arriving. Passed hors d'oeuvres and a wonderful dinner were available for all of us to enjoy. Their backyard included a beautiful pool and an outdoor kitchen with craft beer on tap, a variety of wines, and liquors including Talisker, from the only distillery on Isle of Skye. A dancer, from the USIR, put on an impressive performance for us. She had just come from a dancing contest in PA that afternoon and she also explained the different types of dances. We had our annual silent auction during and after dinner which did very well this year.



*Sights from the Saturday night silent auction and annual dinner at the home of Scott and Heidi McCaskill.*

## Sunday's KIRKIN o' the TARTAN

A wonderful Kirkin' service on Sunday, at the Grace Episcopal Church in Brunswick, MD, was the highlight on another very rainy day. The service started with a procession of pipers, drummers and flags. The service was highlighted with pipers and drummers performing Amazing Grace as part of the service. About 22 of us attended, with Dan presenting the tartan to the altar for us, along with others from their congregation.



## Saturday's Annual Business Meeting Recap

Saturday's business meeting was called to order by Lloyd at 10 AM. Announcements and the Secretary's minutes of the 2017 Gathering were approved. Officers' reports were read.

### Topics Discussed:

- Reprint of Dixie McCaskill's book (20). They will be available for \$20 each +\$5 for shipping.
- Miles Scott has revived our website. Go online and see for yourself at: [www.macaskillseptsociety.org](http://www.macaskillseptsociety.org) .
- Dan McCaskill brought up how we could build our membership through various ways. Contacting lapsed members, mailing out hard copies to other MacAskill/McCaskills to get their interest, also through Facebook and LinkedIn, etc. Any other ideas are welcome to help us grow.
- Betty Joe McCaskill is looking for pictures from past Gatherings. Check with her at: [www.bmccask1@yahoo.com](mailto:www.bmccask1@yahoo.com) .
- Locations for the 2019 and future gatherings were brought up. A gathering in Canada??, Nova Scotia?? for 2020, maybe?? Anyone who would like to host the event, please contact Dan, Miles, or Don, your gathering committee. A Summer gathering has been discussed the last few years and we are thinking about starting it in 2020 and then every 5 years. Any ideas are welcome.
- Some at the meeting expressed their interest in traveling to Scotland within the next year or two. Maybe a group tour would be conceivable. Let us know if there is any interest in this type of trip.
- An annual donation of \$100 to the USIR (US Inter-Regional Highland Dance Group) was approved.
- Also, a scholarship idea was brought up to assist a student attending college. A committee was elected to investigate what we need to do and how to select a student. The Scholarship committee of Mary Anne Scott, Diane MacAskill and Scott McCaskill was nominated and approved.





The following article was included based on discussion at the annual meeting this year.

## We've Got to Talk About Septs

Dr. Bruce Durie explains why there's no such thing as a 'sept' family

Those of us who regularly attend Highland Games and Gatherings, especially in North America, are used to seeing the gloriously-decorated tents organized by clan and family societies. A great deal of work goes into these pavilions and our bonnets are off to the wonderful volunteers who give so much of their time to organize and staff them, often traveling hundreds of miles to do so.

However, a noticeable feature of such tents is usually a board outside proclaiming the 'septs' of that clan or family - as an unabashed recruiting and marketing tool. And why should they not? All such bodies live by membership.

However, is there any justification for these lists or, indeed, the very concept of a 'sept' at all?

*The sept lists we know today emerged as a direct result of the Victorian rediscovery and romanticization of the Scottish Highlands (with the Waverley novels of Sir Walter Scott acting as the Outlander of that time) and the emergence of Gaelic Societies. In the early 20th Century, lists of names were compiled indicating which Highland clan one's surname 'belonged to' or was associated with, thus indicating the 'correct' tartan the enquirer was 'entitled' to wear. It turned out to be a great marketing ploy for the tartan manufacturers who could then capitalize on the growing enthusiasm for all things Scottish - the situation remains unchanged to this day. A casual read over the available resources shows that the associations vary with the list consulted, which underlines their lack of authenticity.*

The most commonly-consulted sept list is in *The Clans, Septs and Regiments of the Scottish Highlands* by Frank Adam. Written from Adam's home in Malaya, originally published in 1908, and hardly out of print since, this book slavishly followed the Victorian 'septs' trend, as did his earlier (1896) work *What is My Tartan? Or, The Clans of Scotland, with Their Septs and Dependents*.

In a later revision of *Clans, Septs and Regiments* the then Lord Lyon, Sir Thomas Innes of Learney, (my edition is from 1960) calls Adam's recitation of sept names 'a rather wonderful effort of imagination' and says that 'the very word 'sept' is delusive, and no serious attention can now be attached to W.F. Skene's theories about 'septs' as non-genealogical 'branches''. These comments (issued by none other than the foremost authority at the time on clans, families and surnames) are short of outright condemnation, but rather telling nonetheless. Some of it is sheer wishful thinking. For example, any number of 'clans' list Morrison as one of their septs (McNeile, for instance) despite Morrisons now having a chief of their own, thus uniting three disparate and possibly unrelated branches. Indeed, Morrison itself regards Gilmore, Brieve and MacBrieve as septs, along with 'variants' such as Murieson, which is a completely separate surname. Carmichael, despite having its own chief, is claimed as a sept by Douglas, MacDougall, Stewart of Appin and Stewart of Galloway. Clan Gunn, from the far north, claims Wilson as a sept, which is not only predominantly Lowland, it is the third most common name in Scotland and simply means 'son of William'.

It's nonsense.

Another example is the good and well meaning people of the Innes Clan Society claiming McInnes as a sept, which is demonstrably at odds with the history of these two surnames. Innes is from the Moray and Banff areas in the north of Scotland, possibly taking the surname originally from the barony of Innes granted by Malcolm IV in 1160. It is perhaps derived from inis or innis, which means grazing land, an island, or a haugh between two rivers. Consider, for example, Innis Tile (Iceland) and Inis Ceithleann (Enniskillen). By contrast, McInnes derives from MacAonghais and originated in Morvern and Ardgour, Argyll, with McInnis the predominant Jura equivalent. Moray and Morvern are 150 miles from each other on opposite sides of the country.



Of course, there are surname variants - a MacKay is a Mackay and also both a MacKie and a Mackie. McCord may well be the same as McCourt, and, of course, McCord, MacCord and M'Cord are identical. However, not all similar-sounding names have the same origin.

Durie is named for lands in Fife acquired about 1260 and is often spelled Dury, but Drury is Norman, first found in Suffolk during the reign of King John Lackland; Fletcher is the Anglicisation of Mac an Fhleisteir or Mac-an-leistear (which translates as 'son of the arrow-smith' and makes sense as they were reputed to be arrow-makers to the MacGregors and others) but the similar-looking MacAlister comes from 'son of Alasdair', referring to Alasdair Mòr, son of Domhnall, the patriarch of Clan Donald. These are but a few examples.

Often, the variety of names associated with a clan or family only indicates the Gaelic naming system becoming 'anglicised'. Gilchrist is a Scots or English rendering of the Gaelic 'Gille Crìosd' or 'servant of Christ'. Alternatively, the main family itself may have distinguished some of its branches by the patronymic of the founder of that branch.

It's uncontroversial that people of one surname lived on the lands of, or were in some way allied to or dependent on, a major clan or family nearby. But can they be called 'septs'? If so, where does this word come from?

In reality, the term 'sept' was borrowed from Irish culture in the 19th Century to explain the variety of surnames used by members of a single clan, and to allow people of some surnames to claim affinity with a clan and wear that tartan. The Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue (up to 1700) does not even contain the word 'sept' in this context and the Scottish National Dictionary (Modern Scots from 1700) does not list it at all. Most Gaelic dictionaries translate the words clan, sept, tribe, family, kindred, surname and nation as 'fine', with no distinction.

Correct usage would be to accept surnames of a family and its allies, tributaries and dependents as 'the names and families of Clan X' rather than to term each name 'a Sept of Clan X', as the concept was foreign to the clan system at its height.

There is also a common, but clearly illogical, belief that septs include those descended from a chief through the female line and so having a different surname. If the daughter of a MacDonald marries a MacPherson, their children are part of Clan MacPherson - and where the husband has no clan, then the children have no clan. However, if they actually did seek the protection of the chief and perhaps even lived on the relevant land, they would have been considered part of the clan and not separate (as the term 'sept' would indicate).

The bottom line is this: no-one should be dissuaded from joining an appropriate surname society and celebrating their Scottishness. Everyone should find, buy and wear a tartan that suits them. As for those with no 'clan' tartan or surname, by all means buy and wear a District Tartan that's considered typical of, or related to, a particular place. Even better, design your own and have it registered with the official Scottish Register of Tartans!

I simply feel that it should be done with some semblance of authenticity. Clan and family societies displaying lists of associated names should at least try to substantiate such claims. That is a valid thing for Clan and Family Societies to put their efforts behind, and for Chiefs to encourage.

#### About the author

Dr. Bruce Durie is an author, teacher and broadcaster on genealogical and heraldic topics, and has Right of Audience at the Court of the Lord Lyon. His book *Scottish Genealogy*, now in its 4th Edition, is a best seller. His latest published work is *Your Scottish-American Ancestry*, from which some of the material in this article is taken. [www.brucedurie.co.uk](http://www.brucedurie.co.uk)

# Blast from The Past

We will revive articles from previous newsletters in this section.

*“The Worst Bunch of Bagpipe Jokes Ever Collected” from the Spring 2009 Newsletter*



Q. What’s the difference between a bagpipe and an onion?

A. No one cries when you cut up a bagpipe.

Q. What’s the difference between a bagpipe and a trampoline?

A. You take off your shoes when you jump on a trampoline.

Q. How can you tell a bagpiper with perfect pitch?

A. He can throw a set into the middle of a pond and not hit any of the ducks.

Q. How is playing a bagpipe like throwing a javelin blindfolded?

A. You don’t have to be very good to get people’s attention.

Q. What’s the difference between a lawn mower and a bagpipe?

A. You can tune the lawn mower.

Q. If you were lost in the woods, who would you trust for directions: an in-tune bagpipe player, an out-of-tune bagpipe player, or Santa Claus?

A. The out-of-tune bagpipe player. The other two indicate you have been hallucinating.

Q. How can you tell if a bagpipe is out of tune?

A. Someone is blowing into it.

Q. Why do bagpipers walk when they play?

A. To get away from the sound.



Please contact Lloyd MacCaskill @ [lloydmaca@aol.com](mailto:lloydmaca@aol.com)

if you would like to purchase some MacAskill Tartan.



Check out our new website:

[macaskillseptsociety.org](http://macaskillseptsociety.org)



Join the Society or Renew  
your Membership

Please click the following link to  
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**Membership  
Application or  
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<https://goo.gl/forms/LFu6FeQo51Gab1ty2>

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would like members to share pictures, experiences, and useful resources on this page.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/458130997638435/>

If you would like to contribute to the quarterly “MacAskill Sept Society Newsletter” or the website, please email the communications officer, Miles Scott, at [ascott@vcom.edu](mailto:ascott@vcom.edu).

