

History of the Port Hope & District Pipes and Drums [1958-1987]

by John A. Elliot

The Port Hope Legion Pipe Band was formed in the spring of 1958 and was made up of men from the Port Hope and Cobourg area. Practices were held in private homes until an interested sponsor could be found. As they had no uniforms this first summer, they wore white shirts with gray trousers for each parade. When the Port Hope Legion issued an invitation, the members came to the Legion Hall on Young St. They took part in the first official parade by leading the Legion Zone F-2 Ladies Rally to the Port Hope Cenotaph on May 24, 1959. During the Royal visit, Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip attended St. Mark's Anglican Church on Sunday, July 26, 1959. An honour guard was formed by the band in front of the monument of Col. Arthur Williams on Queen Street in Port Hope through which the royal party drove on their way to the church. On this special occasion the members looked splendid wearing their red and white diced kilts, white shirts, new Red Fraser kilts and ties, horsehair sporrans, white spats and red checkered hose with green flashes. Original band members in these parades were: Pipe Major (P/M) Mac McFarlane and Drum Major (D/M) Mac Cannon. Pipers: Nick Whitefield, Steve Keating, Jim Poynton, Alex Fettes and Allan MacGillis. Bass Drummer: Tom Walkinshaw. Drum Sergeant: Jim Kemlo. Side Drummers: George Ferguson and David Begg. Tenor Drummers: Ralph Martin and Wimpy McAnerin.

These were the band members from 1958 to 1967 :

P/M: John (Mac) McFarlane. D/M: Mackenzie (Mac) Cannon, Andrew Forbes, Thomas (Tom) Walkinshaw who also played the base drum when needed. Pipers: Alexander (Alex) Fettes, Charles (Charlie) Roy, Harold Croft, James (Jim) Poynton, William (Bill) Martin, James (Jim) Neck, Harry Milne, Allan MacGillis, George (Dusty) Miller, Steven (Steve) Keating, George Lovett, Charles (Charlie) Roy, David (Davie) Pollock, Gary Jones, John A. Elliot, Thomas (Tom) Lauchlan, Nick Whitefield, Jake Watson, Ian Chivas, and John Robertson. Drum Sgt.: James (Jim) Kemlo. Drummers: Albert (Bert) Lancaster, Alfred Ray Furmidge, Clarence (Wimpy) McAnerin, Frank Dougherty, Thomas (Tom) McGinn, James (Jim) Inwards, Fred Trumper who played bass drum and acted as drum major when needed, Albert (Bert) Sangster, David Goss, Roger Goss, Ralph Martin who played the pipes or tenor drum, Gabriel William (Bill) Fyfe, William (Bill) Brereton, Roy McElroy, William (Bill) Smith, Frank Marion, George Ferguson, John Ferguson, James (Jim) Cox, Rick Newman Jones and David Begg. The legion representative to the band was Rene Racine.

Pipe Major Mac McFarlane, formerly of the 48th Highlanders, was responsible for the training of the pipers with Drum Sergeant Jim Kemlo, formerly of the Essex Scottish Regimental Band, in charge of the side drum section. Drum Major Mac Cannon, formerly of the R.C.C.S. (Royal Canadian Corps Signals) band, supervised the bass section and looked after administration in co-operation with the band chairman Vernon Huffman.

The original band had six pipers, three side drummers, two tenor drummers, and a bass drummer; all of whom had prior band experience. By the spring of 1959 the pipers had increased to nine. Piper Allan MacGillis was voted in treasurer, the position he held until he retired from the band in 1984, being a member twenty-six years. Piper John A. Elliot then became treasurer till he retired from the band in 1986, also being a member twenty six years. Pipers were expected to supply their own instruments, but drums were purchased by the band. As more uniforms were

needed, money was obtained through private donations, dances, draws, manning food booths at the Port Hope Town Fairs, Christmas parades and donations from Branch # 30 Port Hope Legion. The kilts were made in Scotland. The Red Fraser was worn in honour of Col. J.A.V.Fraser who represented an old military family of Port Hope and a great nephew of Col. Arthur Williams, whose monument stands on Queen St. in front of the Port Hope Town Hall. Col. Fraser was very interested in the band and gave a very generous donation to help defray the cost of the uniforms. White shirts with white pith helmets were worn in the summer and glens (wedge cap with ribbon tail) with army battle dress jackets in the spring and fall. White spats, red checkered half hose with green flashes and Prince Charlie Gents horsehair sporrans were purchased as money became available. In 1961 the jackets were changed to white tunics with green cuffs and collars, made by Kathleen Cookson and Patricia Burke, two Port Hope ladies. The long Red Fraser Plaid was worn by the pipers and the short Red Fraser Plaid by the drummers.

During this time the band embarked on a training program with the result that by 1967 all but three of the 19 bandsmen had been trained from within. This was an exciting period of growth for the band. It played extensively throughout southern Ontario and northern New York State at Legion parades, tattoos and competitions. In the early 1960s they won the Carling Trophy twice as best band on parade at the Prince of Wales tattoo in Kingston. Other engagements included participating as guests of Westinghouse Canada Ltd. in the 25th Anniversary celebrations of Deep River, Ont., on July 1-5, 1970, being host band at the Cobourg Highland Games many times, and performing at the International Goodwill Day celebrations at Cape Vincent and Alexandria Bay, New York. Many stories could be written of this time with the following being remembered best. After a Legion parade on a Sunday in Bancroft a bar-b-que was attended by all. One of the bandsmen disappeared. When he finally arrived home in Port Hope on Tuesday, he was minus his kilt. During a July 12th parade in Peterborough the route passed in front of a hotel. On seeing the hotel two of the drummers took off claiming to be thirsty. The band marched on without them. They joined the band later further down the street. Making a parade on time was always a problem due to work. Many times bandsmen would come running up after the parade had started and would get dressed and tuned on the march. One was sometimes seen to have his spats on the wrong leg. The first drum major's mace was homemade, the head being a two section coal oil lamp painted silver. On one of the early parades it completely came apart with the two sections sailing into the crowd. Occasionally someone from the crowd would call out "Is there anything worn under the kilt?". The answer would be called back "No, it's all in good working order".

In 1965 employment changes forced the retirement of Pipe Major Mac McFarlane and Drum Major Mac Cannon. Jim Poynton was appointed Pipe Major, Andy Forbes Drum Major and Jim Inwards Drum Sergeant. Jim also doubled as bugler at Remembrance Day services, a position he held until he retired in 1987. The uniform was changed again so that in the Centennial year celebrations in 1967, the pipers were wearing green doublets and the drummers were wearing scarlet doublets. The plain glen was worn as headgear. A sgian dubh, which is the small dagger worn under the top of the sock, was purchased by each member.

In 1969 Jim Poynton's employment took him out of Port Hope for long periods of time so he was unable to act as Pipe Major. He served as one of the pipers and Bill Martin was appointed Pipe Major with Bill Fyfe as Drum Sergeant. Bill Fyfe had a friend, Walter Lawrence (Larry) Francis

who was living in Trenton. Bill asked Larry to assist with the training of the drum section. Larry was in the Royal Canadian Air Force (R.C.A.F.) at the time. Starting at a very young age, he had many years experience as a drummer with bands. At sixteen he won a Major Drum Championship in Toronto. In Boston in 1954 he was a member of the R.C.A.F. Rockcliffe Pipe Band which won the North American Pipe Band Championship under P/M Alex Howie and Drum Sgt. Jim Blackley. In the following year the band won again under P/M John MacKenzie. In 1956 he came in second in Open Drumming at the North American Championship Games where he also performed in both Highland Dancing and with that Pipe Band. While with the Trenton R.C.A.F. Pipe Band he travelled worldwide with the band performing in tattoos. They had the honour of playing for Queen Elizabeth twice. In 1973 he started teaching the Port Hope Pipe Band full time and was appointed Drum Sergeant. During the years with the band Larry brought in students from the Trenton area. Among those were Gary MacDonald, Jim Wiseman and Dawn Nicholl to help him with the training and play with the drum section. Dawn was with the band for three years and at the North American Championship Games held in Maxville in 1983 she came second in grade four solo drumming. Christine Richardson came in also as a piper. Jim Wiseman acted as drum major also during the time he was with the band. Larry stayed as the head instructor until he retired from the band in 1983. In 1980 at the Toronto Indoor Games the band won the grade four band competition, drumming overall and 3rd in drum fanfare and at Maxville Highland Games Port Hope won the North American Grade Four Drumming Championship. Larry's student Kenneth Rasmussen upset Reid Maxwell and won 1st in open drumming with Alex Duthart as judge. In 1973 Larry was voted in as chairman of the South Eastern Branch of The Pipers and Pipe Band Society of Ontario, a position he held till 1977. During this time Larry worked as a volunteer steward for the piping society at highland games, for two years from 1974 till 1976. He asked John Elliot to work as a volunteer steward with him, so John stayed in this capacity from 1974 till 1989, working at the games in Ontario and Florida. Game stewards worked as volunteers at highland games and under the direction of the chief steward were present in the competition area to organize the solo and band competitions. The band continued to participate in all Branch # 30 Legion parades, the Belleville and Kingston tattoos, the C.N.E. Warriors' Day and Christmas parades.

It was during this period the band suffered the loss of a number of men due to age and job relocations with the result the membership dropped to six pipers and six drummers. Larry Worthy, was band chairman now and he and the executive decided to embark on an extensive recruiting campaign with the emphasis on youth. After a series of advertisements were run in the local Port Hope Guide, forty two teenagers were enrolled in both piping and drumming, with girls being included for the first time. There were 20 enrolled in piping and 22 in drumming. Of the 22 drumming students, 17 stayed for 9 years and 9 continued on for 12 years. This instruction was carried out in the gym of Dr. Powers school, Ward St. on Tuesday evenings. It was kept separate from the regular band practice which was on Thursday evenings at the Legion which at that time was on Young St., as some of the parents did not want their children to be in the Legion building. The cost per student was fifty cents per night which covered rental of the gym, and purchase of practice chanters, drumpads and sticks. After one season it became evident that professional instruction was needed for the pipers. Alexander (Alex) Howie who had just retired after 28 years service in the R.C.A.F. and had been a permanent forces Pipe Major was invited to come to Port Hope in 1972, to take over the piping instruction. As different areas were needed for the instruction by this time, pipers Allan MacGillis and John Elliot made arrangements through Herman Hass, a high school teacher, to have the piping and drumming courses carried

on for these young students as night classes at the Port Hope High School on Highland Drive. The unique idea of night school classes offering courses in piping and drumming was a new venture for the Department of Education, the cost being \$12.00 per student for the forty week course. This covered the fee for the piping instructor and any equipment the students needed. When a new student could play correctly he or she were issued with a set of pipes or a drum and a uniform. At that time the cost of approximately \$1000. per outfit was paid for by the band. To have the necessary money to purchase equipment, ten senior bandsmen and supporters each took out personal bank loans for \$300. to raise \$3000. This was paid off through dances, parades, etc. It was done again until a total of \$9000. was available as working capital. This training program was enhanced when the band had the opportunity to move into the newly built Legion building, Toronto Road, Port Hope, which had its official opening on Feb.3,1973. After much negotiation the upstairs hall was made available by Branch # 30 for practice on Thursday nights. On summer evenings the band could be heard playing in the parking lot. In 1975 Alex Howie moved to Port Hope and was appointed Pipe Major at that time.

By 1974 with the influx of younger members the full dress military uniform was dropped in favour of the black barathea day jacket. The glen was discarded for the balmoral cap (flat tam) but was taken up again in 1982. The horsehair sporran was retired in favour of a black leather day sporran. The spats, red checkered hose and green flashes were changed in favour of green hose with red flashes. In 1984 white hose replaced the green hose. The training had shown results to the extent that the band formed part of the parade representation at the Lions International Convention held in New Orleans. Members and families, a total of 128 people, flew by charter in June of 1977 along with bands from Napanee and Maxville and enjoyed the southern hospitality for a week by taking short trips for shopping and sightseeing. One thing everyone remembers about the trip was the heat. Nights would cool off to 95 degrees F (35 degrees C). The day of the parade the weather was dry. The temperature was 115 degrees F (45 degrees C). and all band members were fully dressed in their wool uniforms. The band waited inside the air-conditioned Superdome until their turn to join the long parade. Shortly after the band started to march a rain shower began. The heat caused the rain to turn to steam almost immediately. By the end of the parade, the pipers were so dehydrated they found it difficult to continue playing. This was a change from some of the Christmas parades held in Ontario when it was cold enough to freeze the pipe reeds so the pipes couldn't play.

In 1982 Jamie York of Campbellford was appointed Pipe Major and Ron Fisher was appointed Pipe Sergeant. Drum Instructor was Larry Francis and Ursula Lock was Quartermaster.

On Monday, June 24th, 1984, Kenneth Rasmussen, who in August of 1980 had won the trophy for placing first in Solo Open Professional Drumming and was named North American Drumming Champion, and who had left the band to become a professional drummer, passed away quite suddenly. He was in his 22nd year. The funeral was held at the Ross Funeral Home, Walton St., Port Hope. Eulogies were given by Larry Francis, Drum Instructor, Michael Finn, Drum Major and Peter Bolton, School Teacher. An honour guard was formed by band members. Pipe Major Alex Howie played a lament on the pipes which was taken up by the band as the casket was carried out. In the fall of 1984 Larry Francis donated a trophy in Kenneth's name, to be presented yearly to the most improved drummer.

On Friday, August 2nd 1985, the band was invited to participate in the massed pipe band display with thirteen other bands as part of the Pre-Games Military Tattoo held the evening before the 38th Glengarry Highland Games at Maxville, Ontario.

At the Honours and Awards Night held at the Port Hope Legion on Friday, September 27th 1985, two members of the band were honoured. Allan MacGillis was presented with a Certificate of Appreciation, in recognition of services rendered to Branch # 30, being with the band for twenty seven years from 1958 to 1985, serving as both piper and treasurer. John Elliot was presented with a Certificate of Merit, being with the band for twenty four years from 1961 to 1985, serving as piper, publicity chairman, Piping Society Representative and finally treasurer. Both men also received their twenty five year Legion lapel pins. John retired from the band in 1986 after twenty five years service, but remains a legion member.

In the fall of 1985 Bill Fyfe retired from the band and Tina Jarvis of Oshawa, came in as drum instructor. At this time due to the fact that many members of the band were coming in from the surrounding area as well as Port Hope it was decided to change the band's name to "The Port Hope and District Royal Canadian Legion Branch # 30 Pipes and Drums".

In 1986, after working for nearly two years to raise the money, the band and family members took a ten day bus trip to Florida from April 3rd to April 13th. They stayed in Dunedin, competing at highland games in the area. Side trips were taken to Disney World, Sea World and Busch Gardens. The group enjoyed shopping trips and relaxing at the beach. While at Sea World the band took part in the daily parade and presented a short musical program. Back in Ontario during the 1986 summer competitions, the band competed in grade three. In the fall of 1986 David Nixon of Oshawa came into the band as drum instructor.

Over the years it has been in existence the band has participated in many events. There has been the Royal Visit in 1959 of Queen Elizabeth 2nd and Prince Philip, Decoration Day Parades, Legion Ceremonial and Drumhead services, Canada Day, Ganny Race Day, Fall Fairs, Remembrance Day, St. Patrick's Day parades in Syracuse, N.Y. and many Christmas parades in Port Hope and other towns and cities. For many years in July, an evening of music has been presented by the band for "The Friends of Music" along with the McKay Highland Dancers at the Port Hope Bandshell. Tattoos have been attended at Bancroft, Belleville, Kingston, Maxville, Peterborough, Toronto, Trenton, Alexandria Bay and Cape Vincent, New York. Competitions have been entered in both Ontario and the United States, bringing home many trophies. Programs have been presented at nursing homes in the area. Picnics, corn roasts and bar-b-ques have been well attended. The band has played at the Canadian National Exhibition in Toronto many times and attended the C.N.E. Scottish World Festival. To raise money for uniforms, instruments, trips, etc. dances, draws, fair booths, bingoes, turkey rolls, parades, car washes and a dance-a-thon were all successful. The very popular St. Valentine Tartan Ball was sold out for many years.

A great many individuals and family groups have worked hard as volunteers to build the band that is the subject of this history, by playing instruments or supporting in other ways such as selling tickets, working at dances, etc. Space does not allow me to have everyone listed but I will try to list the group of people where more than one family member were connected with the band in some manner:

Bill Fyfe and daughters Jane and Catherine, Larry Francis, son Jim and daughter Kathy, Jim Poynton, son David, Darryl Hogg, sons Scott and Darcy, daughters Michele and Kelly Ann, Allan MacGillis, sons Robb and Gary Moynes, Angela and Christina Skora, Chris and David Yeo, John Elliot, daughters Nancy and Deborah, Ray Rhines, daughters Kim, Andrea and Jennifer, Ursula Lock, son Jeremy, daughters Gillian and Erika, Bill Martin, son Geoffrey, daughters Jodi, Lori and Trudy, Mike Finn, daughter Helena, Tim and Andrew Fletcher, Aldine and Julia Marshall, Jody and Lori Krebs, Mark and Cindy Rands, Ralph Allan, sons Shane and Jason, Kim and Shawn Skinner, Lori and Mark Simpson, Jonathon and Chris Good, Susan and Stephanie Dyrkton, Roxanne and Jeannine Gable, David and Roger Goss, David and Douglas Lent, Michelle and Lisa Cowan, Tracy and Wayne Llewellyn, Douglas and David Talbot, Penny and Chris Lingard, Dick Maddigan and his son Paul and Mathew and Jamie Baggaley.

Over the years the members were: Pipe Majors-Mac McFarlane, Jim Poynton, Bill Martin, Alex Howie, Lewis Dorling, Ron Fisher and Jamie York. Drum Majors: Mac Cannon, Andy Forbes, Jim Wiseman, Mike Finn and Shannon Brooks. Tom Walkinshaw, Fred Trumper and Jim Darrah played bass drum besides acting as Drum Major when needed. Drum Sergeants: Jim Kemlo, Jim Inwards, Jeremy Lock, Bill Fyfe and Larry Francis. Bass Drummers: Larry Francis, Rick Newman Jones, Bruce Taylor, Jim Murdock, Mike Leger, Gillian Lock and Lori Krebs.

Early band members now deceased: Alex Fettes, Charlie Roy, George Miller, Steve Keating, David Pollock, Jim Kemlo, Ray Furmidge, Wimpy McAnerin, Frank Dougherty, Tom McGinn, Jim Inwards, Roy McElroy, David Begg, Bill Fyfe and Jim Cox.

It is significant that so many young people have been trained through this organization. Many have continued to enjoy and participate in piping and drumming. I hope this Pipe Band will continue to represent Port Hope and the Legion for many more years to come.

I would like to thank all who helped with the information gathered for this history which has been taken from a longer account written in 2001 and which can be obtained from John A. Elliot, Port Hope (jmelliot @ nhb.com.)

Band in Parade down Main Street Port Hope 1965.



Band Uniform Centennial Year 1967.



Band in Parade down Main Street Port Hope 1981.

