

The Battalion

If it's not Scottish

Festival and Highland games brings taste of Scotland to Texas

BY AMANDA PALM
The Battalion

Although she was always told she was Scotch-Irish, growing up with red hair and knowing her grandfather came from Ireland, Jean North was positive she was Irish and just "sort of dropped the Scotch part."

At one time, North lived in Ireland and quickly realized she was the only redhead in Southern Ireland — her grandfather came from Northern Ireland. She became interested in her ancestry and in her research, found out that five of six names of her ancestors were in the *Scottish Book of Names*.

"The Book of Names is like a Bible to the people who go to the festival," she said. "You can look up a name, and it will tell you where in Scotland that family registered [their name] and in what century."

North said the history of Scots in Texas date back centuries.

"The British gave the Scots in Ireland an opportunity to colonize in America," she said. "Over two million Scots left Ireland. They were fighters, a warrior people. At first they got stuck in the New England area, but eventually, they filtered into the Texas area. Texas was pioneered by the Scots."

For many years, North and her daughter traveled throughout Texas attending other Scottish festivals, which sparked interest into their past.

"It is so important to preserve our heritage," she said. "I want to be able to pass it on to future generations. I had always heard stories about my great-grandfather, but I didn't have a clue who that man was. I searched for years, and when I finally found the names of my great-grandparents, it made me realize how important it is to know your kin."

"Then suddenly, I was the one with the information and the one who knew all the stories. If I had died before any of that information got down on paper, it would all be gone."

In 1996, North and her daughter hosted the first Trinity Scottish Festival and Highland Games. The

two-day festival is comprised of a banquet on the first night and a day of competitive games which ends with a night full of Scottish music and entertainment.

"There is a six-man tug-of-war," she said, "and other games like the tossing of the cabor, where contestants toss a huge pole as far as they can. And we also have the toss the sheep event, where they throw hay in a giant bag up in the air over a pole."

Each year, a clan is chosen to be honored at the festival. This year, Clan Cameron is the honored family.

"We try to choose a clan who comes to support us each year," she said. "They are usually those who are an active clan in our festival, as well as throughout Texas."

Every clan has a tartan (a fabric of specific colors) that represents the clan.

North said the dyes for the tartans originally came from natural plants in the area of Scotland the clans lived in. The resulting colors of the tartan once helped distinguish clans in warring times and in gatherings with other clans.

For the first time, the June MacRoberts Memorial Award will be given to the top athlete of the Highland Games. MacRoberts designed the Bluebonnet Tartan, which was declared the Official Tartan of Texas in 1989.

"Ms. MacRoberts wanted a tartan that represented the Texas Scots," she said. "She chose the bluebonnet, the state flower, and looked at the colors in the bluebonnet and created the tartan."

The festival is at the Community Center in Trinity, on Highway 19, 22 miles from Huntsville. There will be a parade through downtown Trinity to begin the day's activities and the Highland Games will follow.

North said a person does not have to be Scottish to enjoy or appreciate the festival.

"We have a little saying that goes, 'If they're not Scottish when they get here, they will be when they leave,'" North said.



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