

## **MacDougall Heritage Scholarship Report**

By: Victoria Rumble

I would like to thank Margaret Carasik and the MacDougall-McCallum Foundation for the scholarship and opportunity to provide assistance in seeing Dunollie preserved and opened to the public. It was explained to me that in addition to archiving artifacts at Dunollie house my role was to act as liaison in the preservation efforts between the Scottish clan and the North American clan.

Catherine Gillies and I brought down various textiles from attic storage, sorted, and archived them in preparation for storage until such time as the house and castle are ready to receive visitors.

I spent some time working on the mapping project on Lismore started by Darlene and Diane, the first scholarship recipients, a few weeks before my arrival.

I spoke to island residents on Lismore regarding why Americans of Scottish descent are so aware and proud of their heritage and how we observe it here. I used a series of photographs shown by means of an overhead projector screen and various handouts from Fort King George in Darien, GA to help get the message across. I'm indebted to my friend, Lonnie McMillan, for his input on this subject also.

### **OBSERVATIONS:**

By assimilating myself into the Scottish culture for a month I learned a great deal about the social and cultural differences between America and Scotland that are not apparent during a brief holiday. For example:

Based on my conversations with Scots from all parts of Scotland I feel confident in saying that most vastly underestimate the knowledge of, and level of interest of most Americans of Scottish descent. Many of us are conversant in the writings of Boswell, Johnson, Martin, Pennant, etc., not to mention more recent works by Grant (both historian I. F., and diarist Elizabeth), McNeill, and others.

We can regularly avail ourselves of history lessons through television via the History Channel, History International, BBC America, Discovery, The Learning Channel, etc. and obtain current titles as well as rare editions of books through such sites as Amazon.com and American Book Exchange.

I became keenly aware of how fortunate Americans are to have tens of thousands of volumes of books, journals, and newspapers spanning every era of recorded history at our instant beck and call with the simple click of a mouse. The information super highway of America becomes a cobblestone path in Britain because of slow computer connections, breakdowns in computer service, and general difficulty in obtaining computer access.

Everywhere I went I encountered this problem – stores that couldn't process a credit card payment, bus drivers who couldn't sell tickets to passengers, etc. because computers and machines weren't functional. Many of the emails I sent back to the states during my visit were received as nothing more than a blank screen, all text lost in transmission. I couldn't check out of the five star Glasgow Hilton when I left for the airport to come home because the computer wasn't working at which point I left instructions for the amount due to be processed on my credit card when the computer came back up and left.

While I struggled to understand how businesses could function like that, one jovial taxi driver voluntarily pointed out to me the difference he perceived between Americans and Scots (my "southern drawl" immediately identifies me as Southern American) – namely that while Americans tend to worry about sticking to schedules and stress out over various details Scots are laid back and take life as it comes.

These comments are not meant to imply one lifestyle is necessarily better than another, merely to point out that given such differences we Americans need to realize they do exist and exercise patience when such issues arise.

After listening to my hostess on Kerrera discuss various differences in matters of etiquette and social responsibility I also realized Americans and Scots alike should be aware these differences exist and be mindful not to inadvertently offend due to a lack of understanding of protocol. Language differences alone present large enough pitfalls to endanger communication without compounding the issue by mistaking American enthusiasm and get-it-done attitude for failure to cooperate in accomplishing shared goals.

#### FINDINGS:

During my visit I archived a vast and amazing collection of textiles spanning the past 300 years. Items included the following from the Regency and Victorian era:

- Dresses
- Corsets and corset covers
- Chemisettes
- Undersleeves
- Pocket
- Petticoats
- Shawls
- Gloves
- Hats
- Stockings
- Shoes
- Wrappers
- Baby clothes and accessories
- Children's clothing and hats
- Plaids and kilts

- Kilt hose
- Sporrans
- Dirks
- Shirts
- Waistcoats and more

The term petticoat was used to describe both an undergarment and an outer garment (skirt) depending on the era the garment was worn. During the 18<sup>th</sup> century the latter were often made of nice fabrics such as silk, and in cold climates quilted for added warmth.

Undersleeves extended from wrist to elbow and were worn underneath the wide sleeves of women's dresses and gown during the Victorian era. There were somewhere near a dozen different undersleeves, most only one and not a pair, but the varieties of fabrics, white work embroidery and styles present a fascinating collection. Chemisettes were worn underneath bodices to fill in the neckline giving the impression of a "blouse" underneath.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century a *pocket* was worn underneath a lady's petticoats to hold necessities rather than being made into the garment. They were worn singly or in pairs suspended from a tie about the waist, and were accessed via a slit in the petticoats (petticoats were often worn in multiples). The pocket at Dunollie was an exceptional find because it is a utilitarian version, not embroidered or decorated, and probably worn for less formal wear. While fancy versions were often kept and are displayed in various museums, finding an unadorned pocket is a rare and exceptional treasure.

The further significance of various articles of historical dress is outlined on [www.geocities.com/homespunlhg](http://www.geocities.com/homespunlhg).

Even the scraps of fabric, many lengths of various laces, and partially made or dismantled clothing is of paramount importance to historians who study costume and construction.

The textiles and household items of Dunollie contrast nicely with the approximately 4,000 more basic artifacts contained in the Hope MacDougall collection. In my humble opinion, not to present them together for contrast will be to lose the significance of both collections.

Like all Scottish clans, the MacDougalls were a varied lot with social status ranging from clan chief or laird to the basest crofter. Each is historically significant and worthy of respect and preservation in order to present a true picture of Scottish life and material culture during previous centuries. Without that contrast it becomes impossible to understand why some families stayed and others emigrated to America, Australia, and Canada.

It is this shared heritage and a desire to preserve it that will reunite us from all parts of the globe.

I'm sure my ancestors were the crofters struggling to feed a large and growing family and pay rent to keep a roof over their heads, therefore, I appreciate the significance of Miss Hope MacDougall's lifelong obsession with documenting Scottish culture, yet I have an indescribable devotion to Dunollie castle and other properties because it anchors me to something larger and more tangible, a connection to not only stones, beams, and mortar but to family loyalty, honor, perseverance, and love and devotion that could not be separated by oceans, time, or distance.

Any one item, or small group of items, contained within either collection is interesting, but the real significance of the artifacts is that when **combined** they demonstrate a way of life that no longer exists and never will again. When the business of opening the sites to the public has been completed visitors will be able to walk through the exhibits and see history unfolding before their very eyes.

It is a rare miracle to be able to display various items of clothing alongside a portrait of a family member wearing those very garments as is the case in some instances at Dunollie. Extant documents, pictures, and family papers supply further details regarding the life of a respected highland clan and their role in an evolving Scottish history.

#### IN CONCLUSION:

I watched a news segment regarding the regulations of Historic Scotland for historic properties with keen fascination during my visit which reinforced the necessity of following protocol in order to see the facilities preserved and made available to the public. Restrictions and guidelines are strict and rigid and must be followed to the letter.

After I was able to catch my breath and see the artifacts with the objectivity of a historian rather than the short-sightedness of a MacDougall descendant, I realized that everyone involved simply must be aware that while these items represent distant heritage for most of us, they are the direct family heritage for our clan chief and her children and should be respected as such.

To understand that statement put yourself into her shoes and imagine how you would feel if suddenly thousands of people were to descend upon you demanding access to grandmother's wedding dress, great aunt's book collection, grandpa's favorite chair, or great grandmother's christening gown. This is a regular occurrence at Dunollie as various clan members make the pilgrimage to connect with their roots and show up on the doorstep unannounced.

We are going to benefit immensely from their generosity, while in turn they will benefit just as much from our contributions, monetary and otherwise, toward preserving the artifacts *en masse* for future generations. The bottom line is that unless the artifacts are properly preserved soon, they are not going to survive long for anyone to enjoy.

Coming from a background where artifacts are handled with white gloves and stored wrapped in acid free tissue inside acid free boxes in climate controlled buildings I was amazed these artifacts have survived as well as they have merely packed in trunks in an attic.

Seams and stitches as well as the fabric itself are very fragile in historic clothing and if displayed incorrectly can fall apart from the sheer weight of the fabric. Delicate colors can fade like a withering rose in improper light.

The City of Oban will also benefit from the proposed conversion of the site. During the month I spent there I met dozens of families from throughout Scotland there for holiday, and almost every one of them had scrambled up that steep path to Dunollie castle and visited Dunstaffnage. It didn't matter to them that they had no familial connection to the site – it was history, Scotland's history, and they wanted to see it and envision what part the residents had played in battles and emerging socio-economic conditions of Scotland.

Imagine what an asset it would be to the area to have a fully functional attraction for these visitors. As it stands now, once you've visited the shops there is very little to do other than ferry out to the various islands to see sites such as the abbey on Iona, Duart Castle and Torosay. Trust me, each of those sites benefits from the tourist dollars that help maintain the facilities.

The range of historic lectures and classes that could be conducted from that site is mind boggling. Scholarly study of historic clothing, traditional foods and cooking techniques, military strategy, social culture (to include folk lore and tradition), literature, music, etc. could be scheduled bringing visitors (both descendants and non-descendants) from around the world.

Frazer's Dragoons were conducting an encampment at Duart Castle when I visited and we had a very interesting discussion regarding the similarity in the type of questions and comments, and the lack of general historic knowledge on the part of many visitors despite the fact that an ocean and some 3000+ miles separate us. "Is that a real fire?" "Is that real food?"

For example, several days later during a conversation, a woman asked me if my craft of traditional cooking demonstrations meant I made cornbread (the extent of her knowledge of early American foods, I being an American), and it never occurred to her I am equally adept at preparing the many traditional Scottish foods (and there are far more than tatties, neeps, and haggis).

By the same token when I appeared dressed in a regency gown for a traditional craft day because no one recognized the style I was asked if my clothing was "American". I was happy to explain that the style is documented throughout Europe, and that since most of the fashion trend-setters during that time were European royalty it was in fact only copied by Americans. I also explained that on a note closer to home the style is described by Elizabeth Grant in her *Diary of a Highland Lady* and is seen in portraits at Dunollie.

I appreciated the importance placed on bringing clan members together from around the world at Duart Castle, and Dunollie could easily accomplish the same goal while serving as an educational facility for the public. Questions like the ones above regarding foods and clothing can be the catalysts to bring all interested parties together to learn from each other.

To accomplish our goals of preservation we must all contribute toward the expense of meeting Historic Scotland's guidelines for public structures of this sort – car park, toilets, insurance, staff, etc. We must also be willing to contribute time and labor when possible. Everyone can contribute something, and when small donations are combined they equal massive donations.

Being an author, I left a supply of my books to be sold with the money going toward the preservation efforts.

We must be mindful and respectful of our clan chief's wishes and cooperate to provide assistance without altering the historical integrity of the property or breaching the requirements regarding Scottish historical properties, and above all, we must be patient and not give up until the project becomes a reality.