

Community and Pipe Bands

Well pipe band or bands in general when I was growing up were important to every parish nearly in the community because every parish or town or village at least would have had a band of some description. When I first of all came into the St Patrick's Pipe Band in Donaghmore I came in for reasons funny enough which weren't musical because at that time the bands in the different areas and not just in the different religious areas, the different geographical areas they grew out of politics and political needs rather than the musical needs.

The St Patrick's Pipe Band for instance emerged from a traditional political party in this part of the world and was seen as a symbol of politics rather than a musical outfit. I was during the nineteen forties indoctrinated into that kind of historical background and the reason that I joined St Patrick's Pipe Band was that I wanted to play bagpipes or not that I had any desire to follow a musical instrument but it was because my father was in the pipe band and my grandfather before him was a founder member and so I came. I was expected to come in because of my family traditions.

First and foremost you were expected to go. The bands were expected to play at political rallies and on certain holidays of the year, the seventeenth of March fifteenth, of August, Easter time and again the funny thing about it is that half the pipe band, at least a certain proportion of the pipe band, perhaps couldn't play the tunes at all. They were actually bluffing their way. They were dummy fluters so to speak and the only reason they were there was to make up the numbers and to show their support for whatever political calls at that particular rally or that particular day was invented for or was organized for Yes there was rivalry between the bands, the rivalry came in bands just as in other fields of life too like football you've got the different rivalry from different clubs. The biggest rivalry usually is your closest neighbours.

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That was also pertinent to pipe bands because you were always trying to be better than the next one. The rivalry at that time, it would have been a friendly rivalry, in fact I would have known and remember on certain twelfth of July's our biggest rivals were probably an Orange band four or five miles away but they were always able to come along, perhaps borrow our instruments and by the same token we would borrow theirs at different times of the year so although there was a rivalry it was a friendly rivalry.

There was always politics involved but not all the time, most of the time and the whole substance of keeping the band going St Patrick's Pipe Band for instance, they started off in a local hall in Donaghmore during the twenties early thirties and I remember this from what my father and grandfather said to me during the twenties. There was some kind of dispute with another accordion band who occupied the same premises, in actual fact, there was a court case and the pipe band actually lost the case, lost the tenancy of that hall, had to move to and build a different premises and build their own hall a number of miles away and sometimes you had that internal rivalry created even within one parish where bands actually split within that parish, rivals in their own right. It was always expected from you as a son if your father was in the band or any of your relations, you were expected to inherit that and carry that mantel with you and in actual fact just like football again a lot of bands you'll find throughout Northern Ireland are very much family bands. In our case it was the Faloon family were always associated with St Patrick's Pipe Band and my mothers side too, the McCullagh family, that actually was the way of it right across the North where families who supported the bands coming through and carrying them through. You would have known the band in the particular area through the families that lived there.

I came into it in the forties but then in the fifties it started to change. Bands in general right across the North of Ireland started to become more musically orientated than politically motivated and with the formation of the Pipe Band

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Association, competitions were being organized on a weekly basis and you found then there was new outlets for the bands to perform, instead of the traditional routes. You now had bands starting to compete and compete against each other. As a result the music started to come through, the music started to become the important thing, what people nowadays would imagine a band is really for, playing music, rather than be attached to a political organization or whatever, more cross fertilization now than traditions coming in to bands, whereas in my earlier days bands were segregated catholic or protestant. Nowadays the norm is for all pipe bands to be mixed and In actual fact during the sixties St Patrick's Pipe band was one of the first, if not the first band to become a mixed band where you had protestant fellows coming through joining the band and they were the people at that time who were taking the quantum leap by coming across and as I say we would claim for that We would claim that St Patrick's would be one of the first cross community pipe bands which is the norm today.

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