

Mr. Douglas Will

One of Winnipeg's pipers who, over the years, made outstanding contributions to the city and the province is Mr. Douglas Will. His leadership and knowledge has helped to ensure that the highland bagpipe and its music will continue long into the future.

Mr. Will was skilled in leadership and was a gifted teacher. He was very patient and had a great aptitude in the art of passing on his knowledge to others.

Doug was born to Alexander and Williamina Will in Aberdeen, Scotland. Alex Will was a police constable on the Shetland Islands prior to emigrating. When the family moved to Canada, they settled in Winnipeg, where Alex obtained employment with the CNR in the Transcona shops. They lived on Bertrand Street in St. Boniface and then moved to Ingersoll Street in the West end. Doug Will was the oldest of the Will family. He had two sisters, Mary and Ina, and a brother, James. The youngest brother, Daniel, was born in Winnipeg.

Doug's father was a piper and wanted his son to carry on the tradition and learn to play. His first teacher was John Duke, the Pipe Major of the Cameron Highlanders.

Doug became a very talented piper.

Apparently he practiced diligently and used to march around the family dining room table, much to the annoyance of his two sisters! Sister Ina tells the story of how the girls used to throw shoes at him in an effort to get him to stop playing, but to no avail!

Doug became a champion piper and competed in all the local highland games, winning numerous gold medals.

Doug married Margaret Mair and they had a son "Sandy" who became Colonel of the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders of Canada.

Doug joined the Camerons and was a member of the pipe band. He eventually took over the training of the Cadet Pipe band. Thus began an illustrious era of Doug's teaching skills. The Cadet band grew in numbers and he produced numerous champion pipers. Many of his students went on to be very proficient, and organize pipe bands of their own. One example was Bill Merriman, who moved to California where he organized a number of bands. At one point, he ran three bands – two junior bands and a Grade One band.

Eventually Doug left the Cadet band and due to poor health, didn't pipe for about seven years. In time, he got back to teaching, and joined forces with Bob Fraser and Ron Lamb, which led to the formation of the Lord Selkirk Boy Scout Pipe Band. He stayed with the scout band for a number of years as Assistant Scoutmaster.

There were also many adults who were interested in taking lessons and Doug willingly took them on. Some of these students became competent players and joined a band. Others just found a certain amount of satisfaction in working with Doug, and enjoyed the lessons and a cup of tea, brought out by Margaret Will at the end of the evening. Young students have fond memories of Mrs. Will's Kool-Aid and gingersnap cookies!

Jim Kidd persuaded Doug to join the St. John's Pipe Band. A number of pipers and former students were attracted to the St. John's Band because Doug Will was a member.

Doug spent countless hours adding new tunes to the repertoire, and "hand-writing" complete music books to aid the players in learning the tunes. This was before the era of copy machines and computers. There are just a few of these books still in existence and they are a real collector's item. His copies always had a hexagon drawn in the corner with his name and the date in it.

One of his students, John Weston, who greatly admired Mr. Will and remembered him fondly, has put together a website in his honour, with as many hand-written sheets of Mr. Will's music as he could find. See:

[http://www.jrweston.net/Doug Will's Pipe Music/index.htm](http://www.jrweston.net/Doug_Will's_Pipe_Music/index.htm)

Doug piped in countless parades. He was always content to play wherever the Pipe Major placed him, though he preferred somewhere in the back, rather than in the front rank. Doug was never interested in being a pipe major. He was content to be in the background, ready to help someone having trouble with a tune or their pipes.

Doug enjoyed socializing after the parade but was never a drinker. He didn't agree with getting drunk after a performance.

Doug felt the band could use a new name. For a while it was known as "Caber Feidh", but eventually became the ANAVETS 60 Pipes and Drums. He seemed to have a gift of getting new people to join the band. The respect they all felt for him was a testament to him as a person.

Doug was also involved with the old Transcona Pipe Band.

Jack Reay was the band director of the ladies band, the Heather Belles. He asked Doug to assist him, and that was the beginning of a long association with the Heather Belle Ladies Pipe Band. When Jack retired, Doug took over as the director and spent many years guiding them to numerous competitions where they won many trophies throughout Western Canada.

He accompanied the band on many trips. They even went to Scotland to compete at the World's and Cowal. Mrs. Will traveled with him and was an avid supporter of the band.

When she could no longer attend all the functions, he retired from the band so he could always be with her.

Doug and Margaret also participated in Folklorama for many years. He held the position of “Mayor” of the pavilion for several years.

On a number of occasions, Doug participated as an instructor at the Saskatchewan School of the Arts at Fort Qu’Appelle, and at the Peace Gardens Summer Music Camp. He also assisted in the planning and running of many highland games throughout the province.

Later in life, even once he was no longer associated with a band, Doug was always available to help or advise pipers. When his wife passed away, he did his best to continue the traditions that had existed for decades – tea and cookies in the evening after a night of lessons.

Even in his early 80’s he continued to play for Mrs. Ena Sutton and her dancers. He was a very competent dance piper for decades.

Doug passed away at the age of 84.

Mr. Douglas Will spent a lifetime being a teacher, mentor and friend to hundreds of bagpipe players. His knowledge and patience were his legacy to all those who spent countless hours in his presence.

Thank you to William Ramsay, Doug Will’s nephew, for sharing his knowledge of his uncle’s life.