

## Mr. Robert Fraser



*In his book *Pipers: a Guide to the Players and Music of the Highland Bagpipe*, Dr. William Donaldson describes three archetypal teachers: the ferocious, the coolly clinical, and the kindly and gentle. Anyone who had the good fortune to meet Pipe Major Fraser would recognize him instantly as a man who fit perfectly within the author's final category. Donaldson writes "The playing and teaching were mingled with hours of talk, and it became clear that there was more to piping than just music. It was a kind of initiation, an admission to membership- however junior- of an elite and fascinating company. Most obvious of all was his own utter commitment to and inexhaustible fascination with the art. He didn't teach piping, he was piping. He was gentleness itself. He smiled frequently and praised much, and he refused to charge for instruction."*

Bob Fraser was Pipe Major of the Lord Selkirk Boy Scout Pipe Band, an organization for boys under the age of 18 from the time of its inception in 1957 until his passing in 2012. When Mr. Fraser immigrated to Canada in 1957, he was approached by representatives of The Boy Scouts of Canada to start a pipe band for young boys. Their beginnings were humble, but through dedication and perseverance and the unflagging support of his wife Frances, the band slowly began to grow and develop.

In 2007 Mr. Fraser celebrated the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the LSBSPB (\*now known as the Lord Selkirk RFM Pipe Band) with his boys, both young and not so young. The LSBSPB spanned generations as well. Many fathers who learned to play the pipes or drums in the band returned with their sons' years later to introduce them to Scottish culture and music. Some remained on as instructors and currently, the majority of the instructors are alumni.

Mr. Fraser began playing the Great Highland Bagpipe at age 10, in the Arbroath Boys' Brigade, Scotland's version of the Boy Scouts, receiving free instruction from his tutors. His instructor challenged him to continue on this tradition and to this day, there are no fees charged for lessons, equipment or uniforms.

He was first a drummer and also learned highland dancing while he was a piper. He continued to encourage the boys to learn the art of highland dance and incorporated it into their performances. Because of injuries sustained in a fire as an infant where both his hands and feet were badly burned, piping was at first, a difficult task for him. His troubles were solved by his Pipe Major who suggested reversing the position of his left and right hand on the chanter. It worked.

Mr. Fraser served in the Royal Air Force during the Second World War in many locations in the east including Tripoli, Cairo, Iraq, Iran and Pakistan, and from India to Jordan. After the war, he and his wife, Frances, lived on the Isle of Lewis in Stornaway, where Mr. Fraser played with The Lewis Pipe Band. Following this, they moved with their young family to Alloa, where Mr. Fraser ran the Alloa Journal. Due to the health concerns of his children, it became necessary to leave the damp climate of Scotland for somewhere drier. He often remarked that the choice was Australia to become a Peach Farmer, or Canada where a position was available in the printing industry. Since he was already a trained and qualified printer, he chose the latter. In 1957, the family left Scotland and immigrated to Winnipeg.

Mr. Fraser was very involved in the local Scottish community; the United Scottish Association, Scottish Days and Highland Pageants, as well as Mug Pub, a pavilion that was very popular at Folklorama for a number of years. He piped for the Scottish Country Dancers at the ceilidhs that were held at Minto Armouries, as well as for Highland Dancers. He also held informal Scottish Country dancing lessons in his basement for friends, including the parents of the band members prior to the first band trip to Scotland in 1981. Mr. Fraser opened his home for band chanter practices, individual lessons for band members and adult learners and meetings of the band executive. Every night of the week would see some activity or instruction taking place at his home. There was always a cup of tea to be had, and his meringues were legendary.

He was also Pipe Major of the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders and, after leaving the Cameron Highlanders in 1972, he formed the St. Andrew's Society of Winnipeg Pipe Band; a band whose membership continues to have a strong contingent of alumni. He served as their pipe major until 2003.

Mr. Fraser was a successful Printer by trade and ran Public Press on Ellice Avenue. He was also President of the Graphics Arts Board of Canada and was involved in the development of the printing industry. He retired in 1985.

It is the view of many, however, that his greatest contribution has been to the youth and culture of Manitoba and Canada. His nomination in 2010 for the CBC's Champions of Change and advancement to the final 50 attests to this. <http://www.cbc.ca/change/2010/10/robert-fraser.html>.

A humble, unassuming gentleman, Mr. Fraser will always be remembered for his life-time commitment and dedication to The Lord Selkirk Boy Scout Pipe Band. He shaped and influenced the lives of thousands of young men and their parents with patience, compassion, and kindness through instruction and example. Many of the graduates of the LSBSPB have gone on to successful careers in every walk of life and become exceptional citizens. As well, alumni of the LSBSPB can be found in pipe bands all around the country, in every grade up to and including the grade 1 pipe bands, Peel Regional Police, Dowco Triumph Street, 78<sup>th</sup> Highlander (Halifax Citadel) and Simon Fraser University Pipe Band. Mr. Fraser passed away in 2012 and is survived by his children Sheila, Kevin and Rob, 7 grandchildren, and 16 great grandchildren, many of whom are accomplished pipers and highland dancers.

\*The Lord Selkirk Band's name has recently been amended to honour their founder. Lord Selkirk RFM Pipe Band, which stands for the Lord Selkirk *Robert Fraser Memorial* Pipe Band.

Respectfully submitted by Karen

Bowman

