

## **\* THE HISTORY OF SCOTTISH GATHERINGS AND GAMES \***

Long before colonists began to settle the New World, Scotland had a lengthy history and culture. In Scotland, Heavy Athletics Events were already being held at least 1,000 years ago! Historians believe that some of the Heavy Events originated during Druid times. Heavy Events began as tests of strength and conditioning for Scottish troops. A tree trunk would be made into a caber and tossed by the strongest military men. Smooth rocks from river beds would be heaved for distance. Lead weights would be tossed underhand over a bar more than twice as high as the athlete. The competitor who accumulated the most points from the contests would be the Heavy Events Champion.

The first historical references to the Heavy Events were during the reign of King Malcolm III (1057-1093). The Ceres Games of Fife, Scotland, are considered the oldest, continuous Highland Games, beginning in 1314. The English Government, during the Act of Proscription years (1746-82), however, outlawed all Highland Games, including the Ceres Games. The Act banned all Scottish culture, including the wearing of kilts and the playing of bagpipes! The Ceres Games also were not held during World War I and World War II. Even with these interruptions, the Ceres Games have been held annually for nearly 650 years!

Over the centuries, the Heavy Events evolved from military exercises into festivals for the Scottish public. With the addition of dancing, music, food and drink, the Highland Games were born. Surprisingly, most Highland dancers in the early years of the Highland Games were men. Over the years, however, more and more women competed in Highland dancing. Today, it is unusual to find more than a couple of men in a Highland dancing competition.

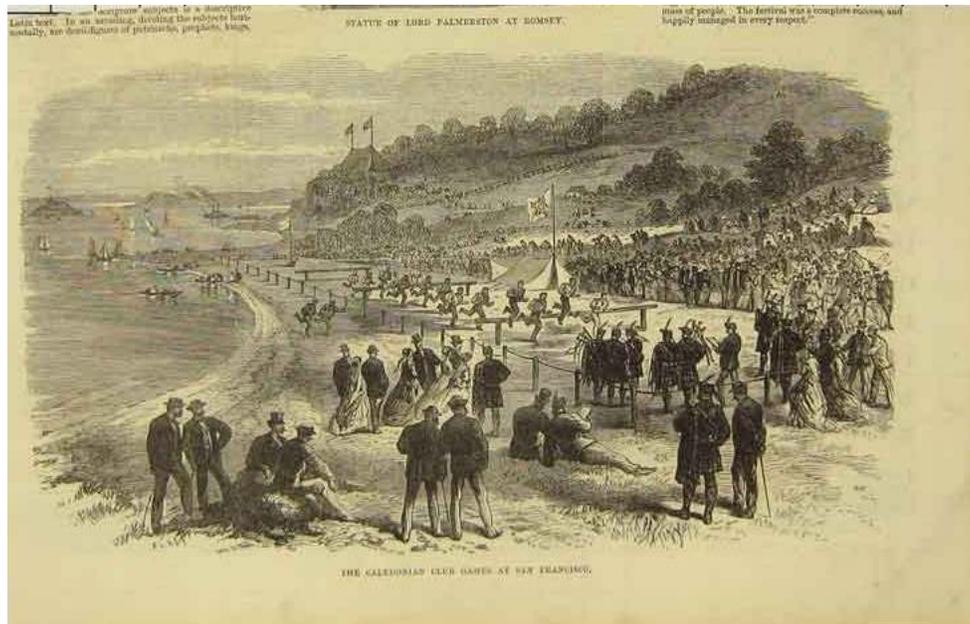
Just as women began competing in Highland dancing, they also began competing as drum majors, in individual piping and drumming championships, and, most dramatically, in the Heavy Events. Sausalito's own Shannon Hartnett broke the gender line by convincing Heavy Events organizers to allow women to compete, although only against other women. Hartnett won every competition she entered and has been the U.S. Women's Heavy Events Champion since women began competing in the Caledonian Club's games.

Now, Highland Games are held annually wherever there are enough Scots to produce an event; it is a traditional method of passing Scottish culture from generation to generation. During the past few generations, Highland Games have evolved into ticketed festivals. Games are held throughout the U.S., Canada, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and elsewhere.

## **\*THE CALEDONIAN CLUB OF SAN FRANCISCO'S GAMES \***

The Caledonian Club of San Francisco's Scottish Gathering and Games are the largest in the U.S. and, in some years, the largest in the world. It is not unusual to have more than 25 pipe bands at the event, plus hundreds of athletes, dancers and other participants.

The Caledonian Club of San Francisco was founded in 1866, a year after the end of the Civil War, and its inaugural Scottish Gathering and Games, a family picnic with athletic contests, was held in a field at 12th and Market Streets in San Francisco on Thanksgiving Day 1866.



*An old print, from the London Illustrated News, of the Caledonian Club Games held in Sausalito in 1868*

The San Francisco earthquake of 1906 could not stop the Scottish Games from going on, nor could two world wars or a Depression. In fact, the Caledonian Club's Games have been held for more than 60% of the years since the United States was founded! The 2012 Games will be the 147<sup>th</sup> continuous year of operation, which is the longest outside of Scotland.

The Games were held in Petaluma, north of the Golden Gate Bridge, after World War II, before moving to Santa Rosa, in Sonoma County. In 1994, the Games moved again, to the Alameda County Fairgrounds in Pleasanton, where they have been ever since. Current attendance at the Games is estimated at over 30,000 people during the two days of the event.

The Scots of the Caledonian Club and other organizations around the world have discovered the perfect way to preserve their culture and educate their young people, without being boring. In case you think there is nothing new in the Highland Games, visit a Celtic rock concert at the Games and see what Scotland's young musicians have invented - rock and roll with bagpipes and electric guitars! The Pleasanton Games are not just a cultural event for Scottish people, they are an event for the whole family, regardless of one's roots. Nearly everyone in the U.S. has a drop of Scottish or Irish blood in them, and it can be fully recognized at this event.

### **\* THE PLEASANTON SCOTTISH GATHERING & GAMES \***

Some facts:

This event is produced entirely by volunteers from the Caledonian Club of San Francisco.

The Caledonian Club does not take government funding or apply for foundation support. It is rare indeed when a nonprofit organization produces such a huge event without relying on funding.

These Games are always held on Labor Day weekend each year.

The annual format of this and other Highland Games creates consistency. People plan their vacation calendars to permit visits to their favorite games.

The format has proven to be an excellent way of educating children about their heritage. The very young have fun; it's like going to the fair. As they grow older, many want to learn how to play the bagpipes, toss the caber or compete in Highland Dancing.

Among the major events at these Games will be more than 20 pipe bands from the U.S. and Canada, including world-class grade I bands. A U.S. Marine Corps Band also appears annually. The Pleasanton Games is one of only two venues in the world where a U.S. military band and a grade I pipe band march and perform together as a single unit.



*The Marine Third Aircraft Wing Band playing with the Royal Scots Guards at the Games in 2009.*

The Games themselves include pipe band competitions and performances, Highland dancing competitions, Scottish country dancing and fiddle playing, athletics [heavy events], five-a-side soccer, rugby, shinty, birds of prey, historical re-enactments, sheep dog trials, musical entertainment, Scottish clans and associations, a children's glen, Clydesdale horses and Highland cattle, whisky tasting, Scottish food and drink, vendors of Scottish memorabilia, and Games attendees dressed in kilts and other traditional Scottish attire. There is also an Irish Pavilion, with vendors and Irish dancers.

For the history of Heavy Athletics at the Pleasanton Games, click [here](#).