

# *The Sgian Dubh*

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## Clan Morrison Society of North America

<https://clanmorrison.net/>

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**Morison, Murison, Gilmore, Gilmour, Brieve, MacBrieve, Judge**



Photo by Karisue Wayson

## **Merry Christmas from Alexandria**

Clan Morrison helped kick off the Christmas season in the Washington DC area Dec. 2, marching in the 52nd annual Alexandria Scottish Christmas Walk, a festive event that has drawn up to 30,000 spectators to the Northern Virginia town founded by Scots in 1749.

# A Scotsman's first Christmas in America

By Andrew Morrison

*Andrew Morrison, the viscount Dunrosil, gives us a glimpse of a Scotsman's surprise encounter with Christmas in America in his first tinsel-trimmed, sugar-cane holiday experience in his new home in Texas.*

I moved to the United States in 1981, when I was working for a British bank. Not long after that I met a man in Houston called Tommy Smith, who, upon learning I was a Scot, proudly told me he wore a kilt once a year – “at Christmas, of course.” He added that his family loved to celebrate a “traditional Scottish Christmas” in his house.

This was a strange, new experience for me – almost as strange as learning about American football at about the same time. I got a bird's eye view of the gridiron as I saw my first NFL game from the Owner's Box at the Houston Astrodome, courtesy of Tommy's father-in-law, Houston Oilers' owner Bud Adams.

## No Tartan at Christmas

As odd as American football to a Scotsman in his 20s, an American Christmas with pipes and kilts and all things Scottish was even curiouiser. When I was a boy, Christmas was not in the slightest way associated with tartan or kilts. It was not even a holiday in Scotland. For 400 years from 1560 when the Church of Scotland became officially Presbyterian until 1958, Christmas, Easter and the rest of the Catholic liturgical calendar were supposed to have been banished from the lives of God-fearing Protestant Scots. If anything, it was more acceptable to celebrate the old Celtic and Norse pagan festivals like Samhain (Halloween) or the Yuletide winter solstice than anything as “papist” as Christmas. Hogmanay was the big winter festival and New Year's Day the public holiday in Scotland.

It was the same in America – at least in Protestant communities. The Puritans and later the Baptists took the view that if it wasn't in the Bible, it wasn't Christian. It was widely assumed that the date on which Christmas was celebrated was chosen because it was already a big festival in ancient Rome, the Saturnalia. In a process called “syncretism,” the church sensibly took over a popular feast and gave it a Christian name and meaning.

The Puritans wanted none of that!

So, what changed and when? Immigration, nation-building and ... department stores. The 19th century saw a massive increase in immigrants from Europe, many of them Roman Catholic, bringing their own traditions with them.

Soon Boston, for example, changed from a fiercely Puritan city to one associated primarily with Irish Catholics. Some academics have suggested that Congress designated Christmas as a federal holiday in 1870 partly to help unite a nation recovering from the Civil War. But most give credit, or blame, to the new department stores that started to grow in the late Victorian era. They saw a tremendous commercial opportunity to boost business during the winter months – sugar frosting holiday sales with sugar-plum fairies, Santa Claus and “A Miracle on 34th Street.”

When some people talk about getting the commerce out of Christmas and returning it to its traditional, “real” meaning, they forget that the reason it's such a gigantic holiday in the United States at all has more to do with commerce than religion. Baptists in my adopted state of Texas resisted the new holiday even after 1870, but eventually embraced Christmas as the most important Christian holiday after Easter. Texas declared Christmas an official holiday in 1879.

**Thank the Highlanders**



Today of course people decorate their Christmas trees right after Thanksgiving, beam swirling lights of snowflakes and snowmen on the front of their homes and some still hang their stockings with care. For others it is one long alcoholic binge with a Christmas party every night.

Then suddenly on Dec. 26, it's all over. The sparkling trees that held such a promise of Christmas morning stand in the corner ready for curbside pickup. Gifts are returned. The whole place goes into one long hangover-fueled fit of remorse, with New Year's resolutions to live clean, get fit and lose weight.

Tradition? Hardly. Advent, the liturgical season leading up to Christmas, was supposed to be a time of quiet reflection and preparation, like Lent. The holiday began on Christmas Eve and lasted for 12 days, as the song says, ending on Jan. 7, Epiphany, when the Wise Men were supposed to have come to visit the baby Jesus. Twelfth Night was when you took down the decorations.

Bah, humbug! What about Tommy Smith and his kilt? How did tartan become associated with Christmas? Let's thank the Highlanders driven from their homes after Culloden and the Clearances. Many arrived in America bringing pipes and tartans and their love of making merry in the winter, even if they were not specifically celebrating Christmas.

However, Americans saw these new immigrants celebrating with great gusto during the Yule or Hogmanay and made their own connection with Christmas.

The lesson, I suppose, is that our traditions don't have to be old to carry meaning for us. The Kirkin' o' the Tartan dates to World War II in Washington DC, not to olde Scotland. And that's OK.

Many families make up their own traditions, ways of celebrating and being together, which they follow every year. These traditions carry real meaning for them. Whatever form it takes, I wish you all a "traditional" Merry Christmas.

Nollaig Chrìdeil!



## Christmas greetings from the chairman

As this year draws to an end, the Clan Morrison society has seen a great many changes. It is evident that we are taking steps in the right direction. However, the

society cannot become complacent lest we lose all of our progress. Going into next year we look to continue building on the foundation we are laying for our future.

Chief among our projects is the restoration of the bridge at Dun Eistean. In 1999 the Clan Morrison Society of North America undertook a fundraising campaign to help pay for an archeological study of the stronghold of the Morrisons of Ness. The society is coming to you once again. This time to preserve the bridge that allows access to this culturally significant site.

This however is a project for next year. Right now, I want to recognize and thank all of you for helping us rebuild in 2023.

From my family to yours we hope that you have had a wonderful holiday season thus far and that it continues into next year.

– **Michael Morrison, Chairman**



The bridge to Dun Eistean, the ancient stronghold of the Morrisons/Gilmores, is in need of costly repairs. The Clan Morrison Society of North America helped raise money for the bridge, which opened in 2002. The society is considering how we can help again.

# Send us a Sign

*Morrison, Gilmore places and things*

Sometimes a detour leads you to a discovery that leads you to a mystery.

Chris Gillmore, a former chairman of our Clan Morrison society, came across one quite by chance recently when he stopped at a traffic light on a detour through Elizabethtown, KY.

He spotted the sign of Morrison Lodge No. 76 of the Free and Accepted Masons and snapped a picture for our website: he had no idea that he was photographing one of the most haunted sites in Kentucky.

Ghost hunters believe the Morrison lodge is visited by the spirits of a little girl, two women who died there and Civil War soldiers.

Paranormal investigators posted their quests for proof of hauntings on YouTube. <https://www.touretown.com/articles/post/is-the-morrison-masonic-lodge-haunted/>

The lodge celebrated its 200th anniversary earlier this year. It sits grandly on Mulberry Street in an architecturally unique building listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The lodge's current headquarters is a 1913 building of the Arts-and-Crafts style.

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***This is the first of a regular feature on the mark of Morrisons, Gilmores and other names associated with the clan. Please send photos to [jamesellismorrison@gmail.com](mailto:jamesellismorrison@gmail.com).***



Your input is needed in order to be publish this newsletter. Please send any articles, timely event listings, travels in Scotland, photos, photos from your area Scottish Highland Games, or notices for the, "Flowers in the Forest" to: James Morison at: [jamesellismorrison@gmail.com](mailto:jamesellismorrison@gmail.com) Please include Sgian Dubh in the Subject line.



# Tossing the Haggis better than eating it

## *Your new editor admits his bias against the uneatable dish*

**By James Morrison**

As a young reporter, I loved to cover the Virginia Scottish Games in my adopted hometown of Alexandria, Va., a city founded by Scots in 1749. We, of course, had all of the traditional events, but the organizers of the games thought it would be such fun to get the reporters involved, too. So, they wrapped us in kilts, stood us on a half whisky barrel and gave each of us a frozen haggis to throw.

Years later I tasted one. I have never been a fan of liver, much less the other stuff in Scotland's most iconic dish. So every Burns night when the haggis is passed around, I pass it on and have another scotch.

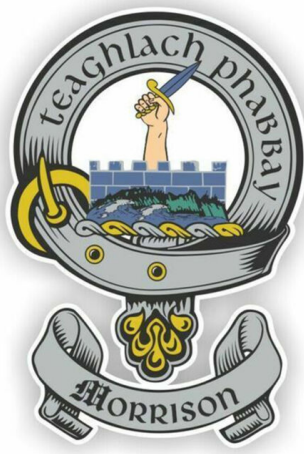
I have probably outraged many fellow Clan Morrison members by disrespecting the haggis, but I thought you should know. (By the way, I love all other things Scottish, even black pudding.)

This is my way of introducing myself to you as the new editor of the Sgian Dubh. I am a retired journalist, having served as a local reporter, a foreign correspondent, deputy foreign editor and diplomatic columnist. I spent 30 years at The Washington Times, where I was the correspondent in London in the 1980s. I first visited Scotland to cover a hunt for the Loch Ness Monster, but that is another story.

I joined the society in 1998, a few years after I bought my Morrison red kilt. My goal as editor is to bring you a quarterly newsletter to keep you informed about the society and to involve you. Submit photos of you and your clan tent at your games and any other photos you might find interesting. Identify your colleagues in your photos with their names listed left to right. Tell me where the photos were taken and when, and who took the pictures so I can give them photo credits. Email contributions to [jamesellismorrison@gmail.com](mailto:jamesellismorrison@gmail.com).

I am honored to be your editor, and I thank the chairman for the appointment. Finally, I wish all of you a Merry Christmas and Happy Hogmanay.





## CMSNA Executive Leadership

**The Chief of Clan Morrison:** R. Alasdair Morrison of Ruchi

<b>Chairman:</b>	<b>Vice Chairman:</b>	<b>Treasurer:</b>
Michael S. Morrison	Vacant	(Michael S. Morrison, Acting)
<b>Membership:</b>	<b>Secretary:</b>	<b>Historian:</b>
William Broome	Bob Morrison, M.D.	Edmund Potter, PhD
<b>Chaplain:</b>	<b>Newsletter Editor:</b>	<b>Scholarship Director:</b>
Vacant	James Morrison	Robert S. Morrison
<b>Past Chieftain:</b>	<b>Webmaster:</b>	
Anne M. Morrison	William Broome	

**Past Chairmen:** Anne Morrison, Chris Gillmore, Arthur Morrison, Edwin F. Holcombe Jr., Jim Morrison, Gerald B. Morrison, Jeffrey Moore, David H. Blain, David R. Gilmour

**Members at Large:** Jan Tremblay, William Hal Morrison Jr.

**Chairman's Advisory Committee:** Edwin Holcombe Jr., Jim Morrison, Robert "Bob" Morrison, David R. Gilmour, Chris Gillmore, Jennifer Wolcott

# **Clan Morrison Society Scholarship**

The Clan Morrison Society of North America offers scholarships for continuing education in fields of interest to our Scottish heritage.

## **Program Intent**

The society awards these scholarships to help preserve the unique traditions, memories and skills associated with historical Scotland. As the descendants of Scottish clans and families, we hope that each new generation will keep our shared heritage alive and pass it on to the next.

## **Fields of Study**

Fields of study that are acceptable to the scholarship program are broadly any that help preserve the unique traditions, memories and skills associated with historical Scotland. The society will consider all fields of study but will approve them only if their primary objective is clearly to promote and/or preserve Scottish heritage.

Such fields of study include but are not limited to: the performing arts such as piping, drumming, playing Scottish tunes on traditional Scottish musical instruments, singing Scottish songs, and Scottish dancing; weaving; kilt making; Scottish athletics, cooking, woodworking, and smithing; fabricating traditional Scottish attire and weapons; history; genetics (DNA studies), genealogy of Scots; Scottish archeology.

The application is available in the Documents section at [clanmorrison.net](http://clanmorrison.net).



# Scottish games near you

*Get prepared for the upcoming season of Scottish games and festivals*



**The caber toss at the Grandfather Mountain Highland Games in 2021 in North Carolina**

To find Scottish games and festivals near you, check out these websites.

<https://highlandgamesandfestivals.com/u-s-events/>

<https://highlandgamesandfestivals.com/events-in-canada/>

## Membership due; Printed edition ending

If you have an annual membership, you must renew your dues by Jan. 31, 2024; but the cost is still only \$15 a year, despite the price of nearly everything else rising these days. If your membership card ends in 2023, please use the form on the next page to sign up for another year with The Clan Morrison Society of North America. You also have the option to sign up as a life member.

If you have any questions about your status, contact Membership Director Bill Broome at [bill@clanmorrison.net](mailto:bill@clanmorrison.net).

While we have been able to hold down the membership dues, the cost of the printed edition is another issue. The September edition of the colored printed newsletter cost more than \$650. That covered the cost of printing, stamps and mailing. In addition, one society member was spending a great deal of time running to the printers, folding and addressing the newsletters, and delivering the final edition to the post office. Remember, we are all volunteers.

This printed edition is in black and white and limited to eight pages to save money. The final print edition will be in the spring; all further editions will be sent by email. Please make sure to send your email address to Bill at [bill@clanmorrison.net](mailto:bill@clanmorrison.net) so we can get you on the list for the electronic newsletters.

“Electronic newsletters sent by email can be as large as we want and in color,” said Chairman Michael Morrison, in explaining the reason for the change. “With this in mind, the Executive Committee has decided that the spring edition will be the last newsletter sent in printed format. We will be moving to a fully electronic newsletter.