

Biography



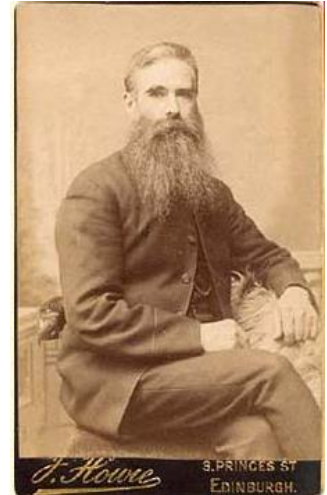
John CENTER (1830 – 1914)

Photographer and bagpipe maker of rare distinction

Scottish born John Center had three passions in life: his family; his career as a professional photographer and his calling as a bagpipe maker. His hand made bagpipes still command high prices today across the world and are a collector's item. Indeed, his will published after his death focused more on the disposal of his bagpipe business and tools of trade than on any other parts of his estate.

He was determined that his son, James, who worked with him at their Brunswick Street bagpipe factory had continued access to the rented factory and ownership of all his tools of trade, collection of timber and other similar items.

One of John's other sons, Joseph, who lived with the family at 135 Tinning Street, Brunswick in 1914 was also listed as a bagpipe maker. John's oldest daughter, Jane Isabella had married a bagpipe maker of some reknown, Robert Gillanders.



Robert had worked with John in Scotland and then went into business for himself after John moved to Australia in 1902 to join his brother William.

John had married Jean Senter (a version of the family name) in Kildrummy, Scotland in 1860. She was a distant relative and a dressmaker. John was listed as a photographer. They had ten children - all born in Scotland. The first two were born in Aberdeen and the rest in Edinburgh where he operated a bagpipe manufacturing business with his brother William.

Within a few years of marriage, John had combined his two work passions of photography and bagpipe and reed manufacturing. He became highly successful at both. His photographic calling cards, or 'card de visite', were used by many of the gentry in Edinburgh as the fashion was to visit one's friends during the day and leave a calling card as a memento of their friendship and to arrange a later face to face visit. So, the cards had to be well designed and attractive!

By about 1880, John had closed the photography business in Edinburgh and devoted himself solely to making bagpipes and reeds.

John was an excellent bagpipe player himself. It was often said that when John brought out his bagpipes and closed his eyes and played from memory, that he became carried away in his passion and his cap or bonnet would fall over his eyes without him noticing. An Edinburgh pipe major once composed a tune called 'Center's Bonnet' about this endearing habit.

After the death of John's wife in 1904, and then the death of his daughter, Jane Isabella in 1909, John and the most of the rest of his family decided to migrate to Melbourne. Soon after arriving, he set up

shop again, but this time just as a bagpipe maker. He was 78 at the time but his age was no barrier to him working at his trade.



The family lived and worked together in West Brunswick until John died in December 1914. He was 83. He was buried in the Presbyterian Section at Coburg Pine Ridge Cemetery where he was later joined by other family members. His bagpipes live on and are cherished by bagpipe players across the world.

Find out more

Cannon, R.D. *The Highland Bagpipe and its Music*, (1988)

Chambers, W & R. *Book of Days*, (1869)

Cheape, H. *The Book of the Bagpipe*, (1999)

https://www.thebagpipemuseum.com/Center_John.html

https://www.thebagpipemuseum.com/Center_3.html



*John Center aged 57
Veronika Ihlenfeldt*



Set of Center bagpipes-edinphoto.org.uk



Will of John Center

of 135 Tinning Street, Brunswick West, Melbourne, Australia.

I Give, Devise and bequeath my unmarried daughters, viz: Elsie, Christina, Mary Anne and Johan, that house at 135 Tinning Street, Brunswick West, to be a home for them while they remain unmarried and when they are all either married or have died the house and furniture to be sold and the proceeds divided among the whole family that may be alive at the time except the following-

To my daughter, Elsie I leave the piano, to Ella the organ, to Christina her mother's chest of drawers and work box, to Mary Ann the Grandfather's clock, to my son-in-law, John Senter, my watch and gold chain; to my son James I leave the good-will of the Bagpipe-making business with working plant consisting of Electric Motor, turning lathes, circular saw bench, turning and boring tools and the wood that may be hand bored and roughed down, and if he stays and works in the shop where the business is at present carried on, that he pays rent of 4/- per week and whatever material may be on hand, consisting of wood in logs, ivory, sterling and German silver, jewellery in glass case, to be valued, and that he pay over the value in money to my son William, and the house- 9 Walter Street, West Brunswick- I leave and bequeath to my daughter Johan for having kept the house for me for several years both in Scotland and in Brunswick without any regular wages and what money may be due to the firm and in the bank after paying all debts and funeral expenses to be equally divided among my family who may be alive then.

John Center

(The business was sold on to son, James Center, for £100)

From https://www.thebagpipemuseum.com/Center_John.html

1.	2.	3.	4.
			
			
<p>John Center - 37 North Pitt Street</p> <p>1865 to 1867</p>			

5.	6.	7.	8.
			
			
<p>John Center - 4 different styles of back, 3 different addresses</p> <p>1865 to 1880</p>			