



THE NEWSBEAT

MMXXV Spring/Summer 2025

Newsletter of the Macfie Clan Society of America

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The Macfie Society of America is a member of The Council of Scottish Clans Association, Inc.

Looking to get more involved in the Macfie Clan Society?

We are in need of members to serve as Membership Coordinator and as Webmaster. If you are interested in volunteering with our amazing group, contact

Ginger McAfee
gmacfee45@gmail.com

Included in this issue:

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*featuring Jarrett McPhee of New England Stone Lifting

Dues Schedules

Dues are renewed each June.

Family	\$25.00
Individual	\$15.00
Individual (over 65)	\$7.00
Associate	\$10.00
One time:	
Sponsorship	\$500.00
Life Membership (over 65)	\$200

Annual dues are payable each year on June 1, (unless you have joined within the past 6 months or so, in that case your dues will be payable the following year) Please check your membership card to see when you need to renew.

Thanks to all those who faithfully renew their membership each year. Your dues help us to print and mail newsletters, maintain our website, and have a presence at many of the larger games in the country and get to know other Macfies around the country. We encourage you to attend as many Scottish Games as possible, and if you would like to convene, the society will pay half of the fee. The society can also provide a banner and items for the table. Contact Ginger gmcafee45@gmail.com for more information.

Ceud Mile Failte (One hundred thousand welcomes)

To our newest Society members:

Jerry McAfee, Hannibal, MO
Henry Bowden, Turtle Creek, PA

We extend a very heartfelt welcome and hope to meet you at some of the Scottish Games or at our annual meeting during the Stone Mountain Games in October.

Macfie Merchandise for Sale

Kilt Pin - \$16.00
Badge - \$16.00
Black T-shirt - \$16.00

Minimal postage will be added to each order.
Send order and payment to:

Ginger McAfee
420 Ash Drive
Baxter, TN 38544
gmacfee45@gmail.com

The *Sgian Dubh*: A Short Knife with a Long History

Jacob Dorris // 16 March 2025



Early example of an 18th-century sgian dubh. Museum reference number A.1946.59 from the National Museums Scotland, www.nms.ac.uk

The *sgian dubh* is inseparable from modern Highland dress. Visit any Games, Scottish festival, or kilt-adorned *ceilidh*, and you will spot these accessories by the dozen, in just as many materials and styles. They are as central to the event as a pipe-and-drum band or Mel Gibson's blue-and-white face paint from *Braveheart*. However, these knives were not always such an established tradition. As with anything Scottish, the *sgian dubh* has a winding history, with generations of adaptation and development that reveal the heart behind Scottish clans and heritage. My goal in this article is to explore some of this history, to see how the *sgian dubh* has changed since its pre-Victorian origins, and to find out what has made these knives such a key part of life for centuries of Scotsmen.

The *Sgian Dubh*: A Short Knife with a Long History (cont')

The modern footprint of the *sgian dubh* is quite consistent: a short (3–4 inch), single-edged knife with scalloped filework on its back edge, worn in an ornate sheath tucked into a Scot's kilt hose on their dominant leg. Their hilts are usually carved from antler or bog oak (or in newer knives, molded from plastic), and can be decorated with clan crests, Celtic knotwork, or large gemstone pommels. The Gaelic name is translated as “black knife” or “dark knife,” often attributed to the very dark-stained bog oak which formed traditional *sgian dubh* hilts; other historians point to the ‘secret and shadowy’ nature of these small knives as concealed self-defense weapons. The *Sgian dubh* is recognized as a cornerstone of Highland weaponry, alongside the mid-sized dirk or the larger basket-handled sword and targe (shield), and it shares structural and stylistic details with the dirk, such as its scalloped blade and similar handle designs. The hilt of a *sgian dubh* is one of the most personal and customizable pieces of male Highland attire, and a well-crafted knife may be passed down as an heirloom through many generations of Scots.

The knives we now identify as *sgian dubh* do not arise from a single design or template. During the 17th century, Scots employed a variety of small, rugged and utilitarian blades for bushcraft and self-defense. Some sources recognize a predecessor in the *sgian achles*, a slightly longer but otherwise similar knife which was tucked under the wearer's armpit for easy access—hence its Gaelic name, “armpit knife.” Other similar knives known as *gralloch* were a part of the Highland hunting toolkit, often used for skinning and cleaning game. These knives were daily tools, so distinguishing between specific categories and roles was likely less structured than under our modern conventions.

One common story of the *sgian dubh*'s origin focuses on its shift away from pure utility, toward a ceremonial purpose. When a Scot entered a friend's home, he may have removed and revealed his hidden weapons as a sign of peace and respect to his hosts. From there, his self-defense knife would be kept on his person to show that he was ready and willing to defend the home if called upon. The knife would need to be stored somewhere visible and secure...such as at the top of his sock. As this custom became more widespread, the knife gained a shorter and flatter profile to fit its new carrying location, with decorative hilts added to take advantage of this new visibility. The *sgian dubh* thus developed from a sporadic and functional multitool to an ornate accessory, worn by Scots across clan and family lines.

Whether or not this particular origin is true, the steps of the *sgian dubh*'s rise to stardom are well known. This knife gained its fame alongside the now immediately-recognizable Highland mens' outfit, which itself developed during Victorian times. This was a period of rapidly strengthening Scottish identity and nostalgia, among a people who had been heavily restricted and stripped of their traditional culture by the British government. The kilt, tartan, and clan banner spread over the United Kingdom like wildfire, bringing along the kilt hose and *sgian dubh*. The knife became more standardized, with its scalloped blade and flattened hilt forming the footprint of a unique and recognizable icon. As the blade's accessory and showpiece role overtook its utilitarian roots, embellishments and decorative pommels became increasingly common, in some cases featuring large gemstones and silver or gold inlay. In the most extreme case, the “safety *sgian dubh*” was

developed to replace the knife's blade with a hollow, fused sheath, removing its functionality as a knife but enabling safer wear and travel for Scots attending formal events.

Naturally, a knife which has lost its blade must fill a different role than self-defense or whittling. The *sgian dubh* does not exist in a cultural vacuum, and much of what keeps it alive today is its historical significance and uniquely Scottish roots, whether or not the modern knife retains its original purpose. What drew me to study these knives is the meaning attached to how they are worn—they represent honor, clan kinsmanship, and your willingness to risk your own safety during another person's time of need. Such short, ornate knives are commonly used across the world, but the Scottish “sock knife” is set apart as a symbol of self-sacrifice and loyalty among families.

Like most parts of Highland dress, manufacturing the *sgian dubh* has become an industrial process at a massive scale. While this may spark criticism of the blades' craftsmanship, it has also made them more available and affordable than ever. Of course, someone looking for a high-end knife can invest as much time or money as desired, and it is always good to support local bladesmiths and help keep Scottish artists in business! But for those who are just assembling their first set of Scottish attire, you can find a workable blade online or at any Scottish festival, likely for less than the price of two meat pies and an IRN BRU.

Scottish heritage is global, and every day, new families are tracing their ancestral roots and looking for ways to connect with their clans all over the world (except, to my knowledge, in Antarctica—if you start a Clan MacFie Society of the South Pole, please let us know!). Welcoming these newcomers with friendly communication and low-cost ways to participate in Scottish festivals or Highland Games can only make their clan connections stronger. Every tartan-clad and *sgian dubh*-donning Scot is a benefit to Clan MacFie, and to the preservation of Scottish heritage worldwide.



Sgian dubh and leather sheath owned by the author, created by Tom Allen (Stone Mountain, GA). Features 3.5" blade, a handle of walnut and burl maple from the Eastern U.S.A., a nickel silver hilt, spacer, and pommel, and embedded Clan MacFie crest and motto, “Pro Rege.”

IT'S GAMES DAY!

Attending the Games and don't know what to wear?

Dressing up is a big part of going to any Highland Games and the kilt, in particular, is symbol of tradition and competition! The Scottish Highland Games Association even states that all events competitors must wear a kilt when they compete. Whether you are competing or spectating, it is always more fun to make sure you look the part, while of course being ready for any weather thrown at you.

For men, the most iconic piece of Scottish attire, and the common outfit of choice is the kilt. When ordering a kilt, options such as style, fabric, and a tartan that reflect your clan affiliation are unlimited. Many clans even have several weave colorways to choose from such as Modern, Ancient, Weathered, Dress, or Hunting. Pair this with a clan t-shirt for comfort, a Jacobite shirt for tradition, or a jacket or waistcoat for formal dress. And don't forget to pop on your sporran, pull up your hose and straighten your flashes! Kilt pins and sgian dubhs are also a great way to give your outfit a custom touch.

Many women also opt for the traditional kilt to celebrate the Highland Games. Available in a variety of lengths, it can be paired with a jumper or t-shirt, or even a jacket if you prefer a more formal look. If the kilt is not for you, a tartan dress is another great option for your Highland Games event. However, if your style is better suited to an understated pop of tartan, you can simply accessorize with a traditional tartan sash or scarf and a clan brooch or pin.

In International Clan News: SETTLING THE CLAN NAME

"The Lord Lyon has decreed that we settle the name of our Clan. There are no official records at the Court regarding a prior process of determining our name.

Please see all documents (at www.clannameandcommandersearch.com) regarding information, eligibility, and forms for participating in submitting your preference for the Clan name.

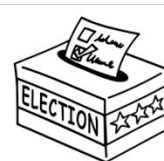
Round 2 submissions are open from 29 April 2025 until 30 June 2025 (UK time). All preference submissions must be received (whether via email or regular mail) by 30 June.

You will need to download submission forms, fill them out, save them, and return them via email or regular mail using the instructions provided."

If you voted in Round 1, you received an email containing a code. If this code is known, select Form 1 to submit your vote. Participation in Round 1 is not necessary to vote in Round 2. Simply select Form 2 to cast your vote.

Visit www.clannameandcommandersearch.com for forms, eligibility requirements, and submission instructions.

2025 Clan Macfie Society of America Election of Officers



These ballots are for election for officers in the Macfie Society of America, (Not for Selecting the Commissioner/Chief of the International Clan Macfie). If you have a family membership, then everyone over age 18 can vote. Simply make copies for each eligible member. If you have an individual membership, then only the member can vote. Write-in votes are also accepted, but please only vote for one candidate (either the one nominated or one write-in name) per position. **Please Note this important change in who will be accepting the returned ballots:** Thomas Burrows will be moving out of the country, so **PLEASE send your completed ballot to AMY FEE, 2667 W. Avenida Azahar, Tuscan, AZ 85745**. The deadline of receipt is **September 15, 2025**. Amy will collect the ballots, and place the unopened ballots in a sealed envelope. The votes will remain confidential and unseen, to be opened at the 2025 Annual Business Meeting, held at 3:00pm on Saturday, October 18th, at the Stone Mountain Highland Games. If Amy is unable to attend the meeting in person, the sealed ballots will be mailed to Jim McAfee prior to the games.

Vote for officers 2025

President

_____ Michael McAfee
_____ (Write in)

1st Vice-President

_____ Amy Fee
_____ (Write in)

Treasurer

_____ Amy Fee
_____ (Write in)

After making your selection, mail the ballot to:

Amy Fee
2667 W Avenida Azahar
Tucson, AZ 85745

Please mark Ballot on the outside of the envelope. She will bring all the ballots to the annual meeting and they will be counted.

Clach MacPhee

A Relic of Epic Proportions

Throughout history, men have demonstrated superior strength and power by lifting stones. They found and transported huge hunks of rock, each easily weighing as much as a fully grown man, to be set in public fields and lifted by anyone who wanted to demonstrate their prowess. They pushed themselves and challenged one another to lift heavier and hold higher, with the victor receiving all the respect and honor that comes with such a quest.



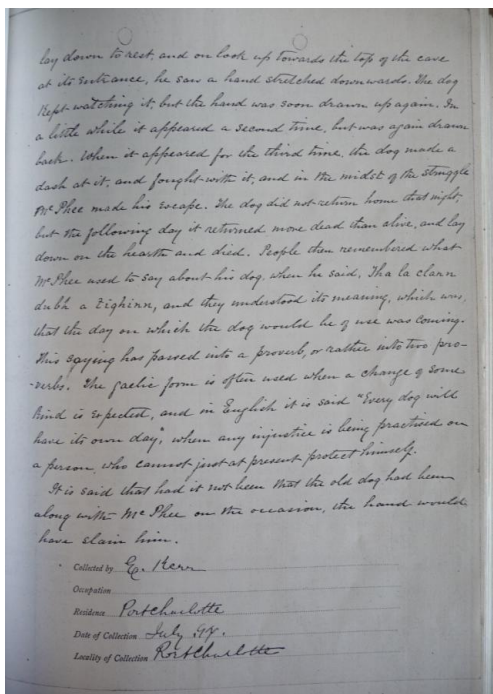
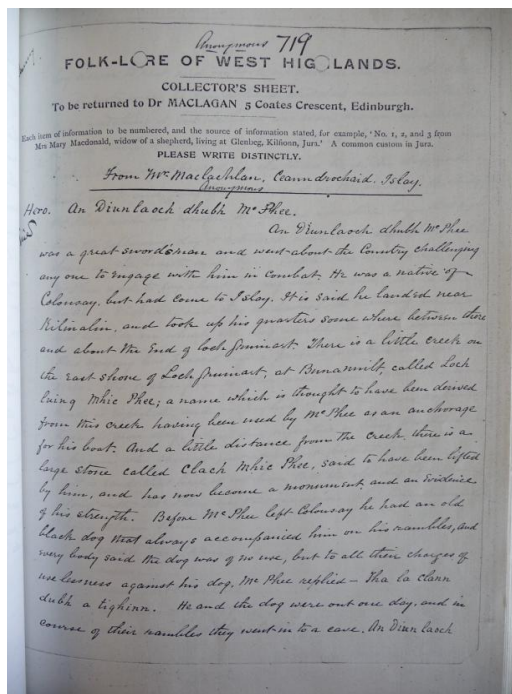
The 191 kg Clach MacPhee, where it stands overlooking Loch Gruinart.

In 2024, an ancient lifting stone was discovered on the Isle of Islay, carving out a place for Clan Macfie in this storied history. *Clach MacPhee*, weighing in at 191 kg or 421 lbs, sits on a hillside overlooking Loch Gruinart. This stone of strength had been lost for generations, and its recovery comes alongside the story of one of Clan Macfie's most famous—or infamous—athletes.

According to a record dated July 1894, Dubhaltach MacPhee, a man of considerable strength and stature, left Colonsay for Islay. Upon reaching these shores, Dubhaltach went about the countryside challenging anyone who was willing to match his skills with the sword, or to match his might by lifting a massive stone. With his departure from the isle around 1624, the stone gained his name—*Clach MacPhee*—and stood as a monument of his strength. *Clach MacPhee* continued to be used as a stone of strength by Islay's locals for years afterward.

With the passage of time, Clach MacPhee fell off the radar and was only rediscovered in 2024, 400 years or so after the last lifting by Dubhaltach MacPhee. Thanks to the work of Niall Colthart and others, Clach MacPhee once again holds a place of significance as a 'Clach cuid fir' (Gaelic for 'manhood stones'), bridging centuries and standing as the connection between Irish and Scottish stonelifting history.

Colonsay is also home to a stone of strength, not to be confused with the standing stone that honors our last clan chief. Formally known as *A' Clach Thogalaich*, the Colonsay Stone rests near the last hole of the island's golf course and weights in at 112 kg, or 247 lbs.



Pictured here is the document that led Niall Colthart to Clach MacPhee, or *Clach Mhic Phee*, as it appears in this document. The information was collected by E. Kerr in July 1894, recounted anonymously and recorded as part of a "Folk-lore of West Highlands" project.

Interesting to note, the document also references MacPhee's black dog... a longstanding legend passed down for centuries.

JARRETT MCPHEE AND THE HISTORIC LIFT

Some men study history, while others become part of it. The latter would be the case for Jarrett McPhee, when he became the first McPhee in 400 years to put wind under a newly unearthed clan relic, the *Clach MacPhee*. When he began planning a trip to lift stones of strength along the whole of Ireland, no one could have foreseen how years of training and the building of a stonelifting network would lead to the most impactful moment in Jarrett McPhee's lifting career to date.

In June 2024, two stonelifters—David Keohan and Jamie Gorrian—revealed the rediscovery of an ancient stone bearing the name MacPhee on the Scottish island of Islay. This set off a whirlwind of shifting plans for Jarrett McPhee and his wife, Emily. After all, how does one named McPhee pass up the opportunity to lift an ancient stone with clan connections? With travel plans emerging and the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to revisit history becoming a reality, Jarrett sent his training into overdrive.

Three months later, on 20 September 2024, Jarrett and Emily boarded a ferry in Northern Ireland and headed to Islay. It was an unusually beautiful day in Scotland, and after a short ride around the island, they arrived at the recently rediscovered stone. According to Jarrett,

“We got to the stone and it is very obvious that this is the *Clach MacPhee*. There is no other stone that looks like it.

There is no other stone around it. Like, it is sitting above the high tide line. It has definitely been carried from somewhere and, it's just there. And you see it and you're like, this is obviously the stone that has been talked about in the story.”

Upon first seeing this intimidating monster of a stone, Jarrett had his reservations. One of this size is in a class of its own; few are able to get wind under a 191 kg stone, and even fewer share the name MacPhee. In addition to the stone's huge mass and brutally jagged surface, *Clach MacPhee* had weight behind it—the weight of the family name, of 400 years of anticipation, and of the personal investment of friends and family.

“There are very few stones I get anxious about, this one I was so worried about. Because I didn't want to let everybody who rallied behind me down, all of the people who worked to make that little section of the trip happen....And then also there is the fact that it was the MacPhee stone. And this is...it's an 8 year arc that I was on and this felt like the culmination of the first part of it.”

From the first touch, the stone was proving to be a formidable opponent, ripping into Jarrett's hands and arms. But Jarrett is experienced, and he knows that the battle isn't between athletes, but between himself and the stone. One like *Clach MacPhee* requires a methodical approach: analyzing the balance of mass, a few small lifts to wedge it off the ground and work out the math, and a mental fortitude that cannot be broken. Even after accomplishing a technical lift, Jarrett was determined to heave *Clach MacPhee* higher. He repositioned the stone and brought it to lap, and with confident effort, he stood with the beast of a stone that shares his name.

Is Jarrett satisfied? Definitely not, as each stone carries unfinished business. But the significance of that lift, surrounded by family and friends, was not lost on him.

“I couldn't have asked for a better day. I had a cheering squad. I had friends that traveled thousands of miles to be there with me...the thing that I loved the most was everybody was just talking and laughing and having fun and talking about the island and how beautiful it is and what Scotland is like, and I can hear them over here, and I'm just standing here staring at the stone. And every time I went to take an attempt, everyone got so quiet and you could hear a pin drop...that's just a really cool thing...I'm very lucky to have such good people around me that help support everything that we're doing. It's a wonderful testament to this community.”



STONELIFTING IN THE UNITED STATES

This drive to set a goal, to achieve it, and to build a community around it is what makes Jarrett McPhee a great ambassador for the sport of stonelifting in the U.S., a country building its own tradition of stonelifting today.

“There is a large history of stonelifting around the world. All sorts of countries have it: Scotland, Ireland, Iceland, Greece, Spain, Japan, there’s some in the Polynesian islands...they’re literally all over the world, and there’s always a history of strength, and always a history of people doing stonelifting as part of their community. Come over to America, and there’s really not that history.”

Jarrett cites a few causes of this, many centered around our nation’s history and culture. During the era of European colonization, much of the Native Americans’ oral history was destroyed, leaving a void where many traditions like stonelifting might otherwise have been preserved. Americans also tend to celebrate individual achievement, whereas stones of strength have always been a community affair, with collective strength being highlighted. In some cases, the few stones we find in the U.S. have also been tainted by dark history—particularly related to the trans-atlantic slave trade—which discourages modern stonelifters from restoring and preserving them.

All of this puts American lifters in a unique situation, and one which Jarrett does not take lightly. He and his training partner Steve Sharp co-founded a one-of-a-kind organization to help bring this ancient sport into the New World: New England Stone Lifting, a “curated collection” of lifting stones placed and maintained by a community of passionate lifters. NESL manages an active map of dozens of stones from Connecticut to New Hampshire and Maine, with locations added all the time. Jarrett and his fellow athletes highlight places of natural beauty, enshrining them with stones that analogize the shapes, lifting techniques, and local focus of existing stones of strength across the world. Bringing the heart of traditional lifting into the new ground of the United States is intentional; as Jarrett puts it, “we’re creating future history by building community now.”

Of course, trying to develop an American basis for stonelifting would be fruitless without a community to support the sport, and Jarrett offers an open door for anyone wanting to join in this ‘future history’. “Anybody who sets a stone is participating in this project,” he says; “find a place that you think is beautiful that you like to go, like a hiking trail, on a mountain, a field, by a river, something like that, and you’ll find stones. Our entire bedrock is stones. You’ll be able to participate in this endeavor.” As Jarrett points out, there is no governing body or officiating authority for stones of strength, unlike the stringent requirements of the Highland Games and other sports. This freedom means that, regardless of age, gender, experience level, or physical strength, everyone can be part of the same stonelifting group. NESL is built on this idea, and Jarrett organizes “‘try it’ events” which welcome aspiring lifters across all demographics to give stonelifting a shot in a welcoming community. As he puts it: “one of our rallying calls is, ‘stones are for everyone,’ and we truly believe it.”



WHERE TO FIND MORE INFORMATION:

To learn more about stonelifting and to follow Jarrett and New England Stone Lifting, check out www.jrtmcp.com/nsl or on Instagram @newenglandstonelifting. His website features training plans and a map of New England’s stones of strength, and is a great jumping off point for anyone interested in joining in this history-making journey.

Jarrett has also been featured on several podcasts. For his first-hand account of his experience with Clach MacPhee, visit ***Stones of Strength Podcast - Episode 18*** and ***StoneLore Podcast - Episode 1*** (available on Spotify, Apple Podcast, YouTube, and other platforms). And last but DEFINITELY not least, NESL will be launching a movie on May 30th! This is an exciting community, and we are proud to have such strong representation for Clan MacFie!

We’d like to extend a special thanks to Laurie McPhee for putting this story on our radar, and also to Jarrett, for so willingly giving of his time in speaking with us.

Upcoming Events:

TARTAN DAY, April 6, 2025

Rocket City Scottish Festival and Highland Games, May 3, 2025, at Sharon Johnston Park in New Market, Alabama (Clan convening)

International Macfie Day, May 27, 2025

Georgia Mountain Scottish Festival and Highland Games, June 7 & 8, 2025 at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, in Hiawasee, GA (this used to be the Blairsville, GA Scottish Games)

Maine Highland Games & Scottish Festival, August 16 & 17, 2025, at Windsor Fairgrounds in Windsor, Maine, hosting the 2025 Scottish Heavy Athletics Men's World Championship and special guest, Outlander star, **Graham McTavish**

New Hampshire Scottish Festival and Highland Games, September 19-21, 2025, at Loon Mountain Resort, Lincoln, New Hampshire

Stone Mountain Highland Games and Scottish Festival, October 17-19, 2025 at Stone Mountain Park, Stone Mountain, GA (Clan Convening - **2025 Society Annual Meeting**)

There are MANY other Games around the US that we do not yet have anyone convening a tent to represent Clan Macfie. If you are interested in hosting a tent at a Scottish Highland Games in your area, please contact Ginger at gmacfee45@gmail.com for information.

For a more extensive listing of Scottish Highland Games in the US, visit
www.hIGHLANDgamesandfestivals.com

The Clan Macfie Society of America

Dr. Jim McAfee, President

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