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## The Formation of the Mildura Pipe Band

In November 1919 the Mildura Districts' Fire Brigades hosted the North Central Fire Brigades' Demonstration. The Maryborough Pipe Band and assorted Scottish entertainers were brought to Mildura and conducted a series of extremely popular 'Scotch Concerts' throughout the district, in aid of the district hospital services. The MILDURA TELEGRAPH of 18 Nov, 1919, reported with great enthusiasm that 'the stirring strains of the pibroch roused the blood of the Scots in the community and they appeared to be having the time of their lives listening to the familiar airs of their native land.'

Over the next two years, there was a lot of talk about starting a local pipe band. Nothing concrete, however, was done until Herb Woodhead, the Secretary of the Mildura Workingman's Club, placed a small ad in the Sunraysia Daily on May 8, 1922 addressed to "Pipers of Sunraysia", inviting them to a meeting in the Workers' Committee Room the following Monday, May 15. Ted Walpole, who later played in the band, chaired that meeting, and a further meeting was arranged for the following Saturday, 20 May, to get firm numbers and elect a provisional Committee to 'perfect their arrangements for launching the band.'

The Scots were characteristically canny in their choice of the steering committee to get the new pipe band moving: the Mayor of Mildura, E.T. Henderson, was elected as President, Herb Woodhead was elected Secretary, and the Treasurer was Maurice J. Kelly. Mr Kelly was the President of the King's Birthday "Grand Carnival" Committee - a major entertainment and fund-raising event, held over the June long weekend, and featuring a band competition, numerous concerts, street parades and sporting fixtures. His influence provided the opportunity for the first series of parades by the new pipe band. The newly-created district newspaper, the SUNRAYSA DAILY was also enlisted to publicise the band and the various fund-raising activities associated with it.

Over the next few weeks, word of the new pipe band spread amongst Sunraysia's Scottish community. As the Mayor said, "The residents had not known that there were so many pipes lying silent in the settlement". A Drum Major - Donald MacLeod, a highly decorated World War veteran - and a Pipe Major - Danny McPherson - were appointed, and band practices were begun; and a local Caledonian Society was formed to raise money and support for the pipe band, and to promote Scottish culture.

The Maryborough Pipe Band and various other Scottish entertainers were invited back for the 1922 Grand Carnival (June 3,4,5), and were astonished to find themselves greeted at the station at 6.30am. by 'almost every Scot in the town' (according to the SUNRAYSA DAILY). They were escorted to a Civic Reception by a new pipe band consisting of seven pipers and four drummers, wearing various degrees of Highland dress. (The SUNRAYSA DAILY reporter, who found it difficult to restrain himself from breaking into what he no doubt considered to be Scottish dialect, wrote that "they looked 'verra gallant an' heelan' in their kilts, though some o' them had tartan plaidies, some o' them had nane ava'.") [Picture 1922 band]

At the Civic Reception, it was explained that "some four to six weeks ago



there had been no pipe band in Mildura" ...[but]...the lads had played together as though they had been playing for months", at which Neil McInnis, the guest comedian from Melbourne, interjected, "And all different tunes!" When the laughter subsided, Mr McInnis, who had visited the district in 1919 and was "accounted by many a second Harry Lauder" according to his press release, donated a guinea to start off a uniform and equipment fund for the new band.

The two pipe bands performed at numerous functions over the long weekend, together with the Mildura Brass Band and various local and imported artists.

Over the next months Pipe Major McPherson conducted regular classes in piping and in Highland dancing; a Juvenile Band of learners was begun; and the newly-formed Caledonian Society organised concerts and other fund-raisers to outfit the band (red McPherson tartan in honour of the Pipe Major), and to subsidise a trip to the Maryborough Highland Gathering to be held on New Year's day, 1923. There, the band won the Novice sections in piping and marching.