

Highlanders Biography

The selection of a tartan (the plaid pattern of the cloth) became of paramount importance. Finally the members after much discussion decided that the MacBeth Tartan was our choice. The colors that make up the plaid pattern represent to us: Blue and Gold for West Virginia University, Green and White for Marshall University, Red, White and Blue for America, Green for the mountains of West Virginia, Black for our coal mines, Purple for the heather and thistle that dots the landscape of Scotland and West Virginia, Red, Green, and Gold for the Shrine, and White for Deity. No matter where we perform we receive many comments on how colorful our kilt is.

We had a fast, strong beginning, and here is our story.



A Highlander band had been the dream of several Nobles of Beni Kedem Temple for a number of years. Finally in the fall of 1992 the time was right to turn this dream into reality. By letter and word of mouth a small, but determined group of Nobles gathered together to explore the possibility of forming a Highlander Band. Deeming there was enough interested individuals; a club was formed and recognized by Potentate Pat Oshel.

Numerous obstacles had to be overcome. Of the Nobles gathered only one had experience in piping and one in drumming. In order to obtain the necessary skills to put a band together the members spent many Wednesday evenings with practice chanters in hand under the tutelage of the Kanawha Valley Pipes and Drums. Once we had acquired the necessary basic skills, we began meeting Monday evenings at the Temple. Progress was slow in the beginning as the bagpipe is a very complicated instrument to learn to play and master and Highland drumming is different from other types of music.

In the beginning we decided a Colour Guard would be a nice complement to the band to allow members who wanted to be a part of the band to participate while they were learning to play the pipes or drum. Next, money was raised to outfit the band. Many Nobles gave generously to help us become a reality; and even though our bagpipes had not

arrived from Scotland we set a goal to march and play at least one tune in the Cherry River Festival Parade in Richwood, WV August of 1993.

After much anticipation the pipes began arriving in April. Up until now we had only played the practice chanter. Now we were faced with a set of new challenges: 1) to remember the music, 2) to keep the bag filled with air, 3) to squeeze the bag when necessary, 4) to breathe normally, and 5) to march. We had three months to master all those things to meet our goal. The drummers now had to learn to march and play with the pipers.

Help was not far away as the KENA Highlanders from Fairfax, Virginia offered to visit and give us pointers on putting a Shrine Highlander Band on the street. We met our challenge by practicing at least two times a week and sometimes on weekends. The Beni Kedem Highlanders had made their debut in grand style. Most organizations thrive on competition as a benchmark for improvement. The Highlanders have been fortunate to compete with the best the Shrine has to offer.

In our first competition at the South Atlantic Shrine Association (S.A.S.A.) Convention we placed second to our mentors from KENA Temple. This encouraged us to practice harder and learn more tunes until we had put together a ten minute show. Every performance and parade helped us to improve and at the S.A.S.A. Convention in 1994 our hard work was rewarded with a first place. We have continued to occupy the top spot for the past nineteen years against stiff competition from KENA and khedive Temples.

In 1995 we went to our first Shrine Imperial Session in Indianapolis, Indiana and competed in Class B Bands and were awarded first place. One of our snare drummers, Charlie Hurt, competed in the Solo Drummers contest and took 1st prize. In 1996 there was only one pipe band class and we finished in fourth place out of four bands, but it still was a rewarding experience. In 1996 the Ben Kedem Highlanders requested and received unit status from the Nobility.

We continue to gain new members and expand our musical repertoire. We have been and will continue to be an active unit by performing as much as possible. For we are ever mindful that the Beni Kedem Highlanders represent Masonry and Shrinedom and by being visible in public may entice good men to want to become involved in the world's greatest philanthropy. We look forward to many prosperous years of performances and parades remembering that we march and play so that a child in need of medical care will be taken care of regardless of the expense, working toward a full recovery, and at no cost to the family.