

The following is taken from a speech made by Howard Topp in May 6, 2017 to celebrate Founders Day. It outlines the founding of Saint Andrew's Society of Williamsburg and should be of interest to all members. Thanks, Howard!

### **2017 Founders' Day Talk**

Well, it's the 49th anniversary of the founding of our society. It's a scary thought to me ... being present at the founding ..... 49 years ago!

I was honored by Marshall Thomas when he asked me to give a talk for Founders Day 2017, in preparation for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary the following year. He asked that I describe the founding of the Saint Andrew's Society in Williamsburg and share remembrances about the founding and the early days. Well, let me take you back to Williamsburg in the mid-1960s. Oh yeah, Williamsburg was a very different place from today. Those were the days of "Bottle Clubs, "State "Blue Laws," mom and pop motels rather than National chains, the By-Pass Road was actually a bypass, and there were only a handful of stop lights. In the succeeding years Williamsburg has changed significantly.

I should probably begin any retelling of the those founding days by describing two unique and exceptional men who were the impetus behind the founding of our organization. These extraordinary men could only be described as "the odd couple": Bob Duncan and Dave Shepherd.

Bob Duncan was a well-respected community leader and Williamsburg banker ... Actually, unless I'm mistaken, the Peninsula National Bank on Duke of Gloucester Street was the only bank in town at that time. His family could certainly be described as a "first family," present in Virginia long before the American war for independence and the founding of the nation.

Dave Shepherd, however, was quite different. Dave was a native-born Scot who served in the Royal Navy during World War One, immigrated to the United States and worked with Dow Chemical in Michigan for many years. When Dow established a plant in Williamsburg, Dave was part of the initial team that was sent to the peninsula. He subsequently retired and opened a small Scottish shop on Bacon Avenue, just off Richmond road.

Yes, they were indeed an odd couple, but they shared a strong bond: a love of Scottish heritage and culture. Jointly, these two men provided the leadership necessary for the creation of the Saint Andrew's Society of Williamsburg.

If you were of Scottish descent and living in Williamsburg in the mid-1960's, Dave's "Shepherd's Scottish Shop" was the place to hang-out. The tiny shop on Bacon Avenue was a gathering place where Dave and his many friends would spend hours cheerfully talking about all things Scottish. On more than one occasion, Dave would

send me to buy beer at the Colonial Store in the Williamsburg Shopping Center. Now, if you do remember the Colonial Store ... you're three days older than dirt! All the while we chatted, Dave's tiny wife, Betty, wrung her hands and anxiously worried that sales were being lost.

Dave had belonged to a Scottish organization in Michigan and wanted to form a similar society in Williamsburg. Consequently, he had been in contact with several people who participated in Saint Andrew's and Scotia Society activities in other areas of the country. His most rewarding contact had been with an officer of the Saint Andrew's Society in Washington.

Meanwhile, Bob had contacted a man in the Savannah, Georgia, Saint Andrew's Society and persuaded him to share his administrative experience about such organizations. The most significant aspect of this contact was that it provided us with two valuable documents: the Savannah society's membership procedures, as well as a copy of the group's constitution and by-laws. These documents formed the basis upon which the early committees established the foundation for the Saint Andrew's Society of Williamsburg.

In 1967, Bob Duncan wrote the president of the Saint Andrew's Society of Washington, D.C. and asked for assistance in forming a Williamsburg organization. Their board of directors eagerly agreed, thus establishing a "mentoring" relationship that would continue for several years. Ten local men created the first working committee, a group that quickly expanded to sixteen. The first tentative plans for establishing the society began to be formed during the summer and fall of 1967.

In March of 1968, a team from the Washington, D.C. society came to Williamsburg to discuss with us the specifics of forming the society and to help us work out the details. With this invaluable assistance, a basic organizational structure had been developed, important guidance documents prepared, and a number of functional committees formed. Our dream of a St. Andrew's Society in Williamsburg had really started to take on form and substance.

Then, the grand day had finally come ... on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May, 1968, the founding members gathered in the board room of the Peninsula National Bank in Merchant Square on Duke of Gloucester Street. Can't think of any bank in Merchant's Square? Well, the building now houses the DoG Street Pub! The purpose of this meeting was to formally establish the Saint Andrew's Society of Virginia in Williamsburg.

In quick order the required legalities were accomplished. It was amazing! We finally had our own Scottish society! The date May 8th was designated as "Founders Day" and became the society's official birthday. With your permission I would like to read the names of the 27 founders: Ed Alexander, Jim Anthony, J.T. Baxter, David Clark,

Duncan Cocke, Don Donaldson, Bob Duncan, John Fletcher, Sonny Forbes, Arthur Gordon, Gil Granger, Russ Hastings, Gil Jones, Richard Lawson, Mac McGillivray, Phil Magruder, Tom McCaskey, Donald McConkey, Jack McPherson, Willie Monroe, Bob Pollard, Paul Ritchie, Dave Shepherd, John Stewart, me, Jim Whyte, and Ricks Wilson. I think that the interesting part of that collection of names is that they represented a broad spectrum of the local Scottish community. There were retired people ... as an example, Hugh Williams; there were senior officers of CW ..... Senior Vice President Duncan Cocke; there were professional people ... Dr. John Fletcher; both active and retired military were represented .... COL. Paul Ritchie; there were Merchants ... Ricks Wilson, college faculty members ... Jim Whyte. There were even three William and Mary undergraduates ... like Jack McPherson. The times, they do indeed pass, and all too quickly. With the passing of Phil Magruder last month, I am the only founder remaining on the active rolls of the organization. Speaking of Phil and his importance to the founding of our organization, in addition to all the contributions that he made in the months leading up to the founding, he was also unanimously elected to the interim Board of Directors ... one of only nine men so honored.

We had originally planned four social events for the society, but immediately expanded to five: There were two "formal" events: A Burns Night celebration, obligatory in any Scottish society, of course; a Tartan Ball ... Yup, you heard that right ... A Tartan Ball! It was the second formal event on our busy society's social calendar! We usually had a musical combo for ballroom dancing as well an opportunity for members to participate in Scottish Country dancing. There were active Scottish Country Dance groups in both Williamsburg and Gloucester at that time. The need for informal events resulted in two Ceildhs, one in the spring and another in the fall. We also designated a Kirkin.' eventually directing that it be held on or about St. Andrew's Day ... the 30th of November. What about Founders Day? Well, Bob Duncan envisioned that as an informal event, a cocktail party for the remaining founders hosted by the sitting board of directors.

There were other planned initiatives in the early days. One of these was to establish "The Saint Andrew's Society of Williamsburg Pipes and Drums" which was accomplished a few years later by the Rev. Doctor James Forrester from Newport News and the Canadian Liaison Officer at Ft. Monroe, Lt. Col. Alex Matheson. The band's name has changed over the years, but the Williamsburg Pipes and Drums is the lineal descendant of that original band. On a personal note, Carolyn and I were blessed to have Jim and Alex as the pipers for our wedding at Fort Eustis' Chapel of the Transportation Corps. Incidentally, making another connection to the founders, Jack McPherson was the best man at our wedding after his return from Viet Nam. The society also established a "St. Andrew's Society Color Guard" to participate in both society and civic events. Nattily attired in British Battle Dress jackets for cold

weather events and Army Khaki shirts during warm weather activities, the color guard was active for a number of years. I still have my Battle Dress jacket ..... Er, but seems to have shrunk somewhat in the closet. .

Stories of the early days? My favorite story concerning our two founders, Bob Duncan and Dave Shepherd is this one: Bob didn't like to drive his Cadillac out of town and would occasionally ask that I drive him to distant Scottish functions. On one such occasion Bob, Dave and I drove in Bob's Cadillac to Newport News for a kirkin' at Jim Forrester's Presbyterian Church. However, while returning to Williamsburg, we had a flat tire. The three of us got out of the car in full Scots regalia to assess the extent of damage. I had knelt down by the tire with Bob and Dave peering over me. At that moment a rickety Chevy pick-up screeched to a stop and a young man hopped out, reaching into the truck bed he pulled out a floor jack, and began walking toward Bob's caddie. Then, he suddenly stopped with a stunned expression on his face. He began to laugh. Seeing the surprised look on our faces he said, "Excuse me for laughing, gentlemen, but when I stopped I thought I was helping three little old ladies."

I am going to make a statement that I know many of you will find mind-boggling: Scots have occasionally been known to disagree ... both vehemently and loudly. When Bob Duncan was president, our board meetings were held in the bank conference room and were proper and gentlemanly conducted events. However, Paul Ritchie was much less formal. When Paul succeeded Bob as President, he proposed that board members host the meeting in their homes on a rotational basis. This practice is still observed by the board today. Well, at one of our early meetings in a home, the host and one of the officers engaged in a lively and vigorous shouting match. The following day the member wrote to the officer. "I was pleased to host the monthly St. Andrew's Society board meeting in my home, last night. You made an excellent point in our discussion that if I didn't like the way we did business I should resign. Therefore, I resign."

In the last vignette, I'd like to address the efforts that many of our members have made in service to others ... I remember the first one: a scarf in her clan tartan given to an elderly widowed Scottish lady. Over the years we've made charitable contributions to worthy organizations and established academic scholarships and educational grants for worthy students. I also remember Henry Wann's commitment to pick up the Scottish exchange student at William & Mary to bring to our activities. I don't think it mattered to Henry that the student was usually a pretty lassie, he was devoted to the sacrifice.

There is one service commitment that I'll always remember. Robert Anderson, also a native-born Scot, was a member of the society, but tragedy seemed to haunt this pleasant old man who enjoyed writing poetry. As a young man in the First World War, he had reputedly been the youngest "colour sergeant" in the British forces and

honored with decorations and medals for bravery. He subsequently immigrated to this country. However, his life here seemed overwhelmed with an unrelenting series of tragic events. His beloved wife died giving birth to their daughter.

Then his adored daughter was brutally murdered on the night she graduated from high school in Petersburg. For the rest of his life he grieved over his lost family, knowing that they could never be brought back. Some years later, his home was burglarized and everything of value was taken, including his treasured military medals. He eventually entered a retirement home in Richmond run by the Little Sisters of the Poor. Now, another society member in Richmond, Guy Nelson, was touched by Robert's heartbreaking life and tragic circumstances. By any measure Guy was truly an "eccentric," but in his heart he felt that there was one thing that the Saint Andrew's Society could do. That was to bring back Robert's proudest possession: his medals.

I had succeeded Paul and was the President of the society at that time. Guy called me, suggesting the society actively seek the replacement of the medals for Robert. I had previously served several terms as Paul Ritchie's Vice President and had learned from the master how a president should properly respond to such a suggestion: "That's a wonderful idea, Guy! You're in charge!" I asked him if he knew to whom he should write, he confidently responded, "Oh, the queen, of course!" Several weeks later he called back, saying that he had received an answer from Buckingham Palace and that the process to restore Robert's military awards was well under way. A short time later I was stunned when received a phone call from the British Embassy. They intended to send the senior military member of the embassy, the Naval Attaché, to make the presentation and asked me what sort of event I would consider appropriate. I immediately suggested the Burns' Night supper.

On that January night, Robert Anderson struggled to stand from his wheelchair to be presented with his medals by a Royal Navy Admiral in full dress uniform. It was an awesome moment; there wasn't a dry eye in the room. Anyone who attended that Burns' Night will never forget that moment. Like so many things that have occurred since the founding of our society, it was made possible because a Saint Andrew's Society member knew that something needed to be done.... and did it. Thank you.