

A Letter From Miss Annie Johnston of Barra – 1929

This letter was written in Gaelic by Miss Johnson and originally published in Gaelic in the June, 1929 edition of "The Clan MacNeil News" and reprinted in a recent issue of Mosgladh, the official organ of the Scottish Catholic Society of Canada.

The letter itself was received by J. A. MacDougall, Glace Bay, from Miss Annie Johnstone, the Gaelic teacher at the Castle Bay School of Barra. The part referring to the mark of appreciation to be shown to by the people of Barra to the Chief, the MacNeil of Barra in New York, will be particularly interesting to the members of the Clan MacNeil Association in Cape Breton:

This is a translation of the original letter.

Castle Bay, Barra, January 14, 1929

Dear Friend:

I am indebted to you for your kind letter that I received about Christmas and also for the copies of Mosgiadh that accompanied it. It is an excellent paper and well deserving of support. But alas! How sad! The Highlanders are exceedingly neglectful in regard to the Gaelic language. Undoubtedly they love to hear the stranger praise their language, and incidentally themselves. Likewise, they love to hear the sweet Gaelic songs, but when it comes to make the least effort to read or write it or take any interest Gaelic books or papers, it is entirely different. To these they prefer the "Glasgow Herald" or the "News of the World" where they find the harrowing accounts of crime for which the fickle mind of today craves.

Although, thank God, Barra is practically free from the hustle and bustle of the greater centres, yet we occasionally find a bit of the confusion of the world coming to us, and unless we ward it off we shall be some day swept into the very midst of it. Far away. the day may be. I shall now have to tell you how greatly the Barra Agricultural Society, as well as the people of Barra, appreciate the generous assistance the Clan Macneil Association of America gave the Agricultural Fair of last August. They are indeed kind and generous hearted. And the silver cup, the gift of the true gentleman, The MacNeil of Barra himself rendered the offering more acceptable. Well may we be proud of our kinsmen. To show tangible proof of their appreciation and gratitude the society undertook the making of a real Highland Costume for the Chief. Real Barra wool was then carded, spun and woven by willing hands and then dyed with natural colouring of the lichen of the island. Then there was the merry gathering for the waulking St. Andrew's night, and pleased indeed would the Chief be were he listening to the praise of himself, and noble deed of his ancestors in sweet Gaelic songs. (Here follow lines of various waulking songs; a translation of which would be impossible).

All present were delighted with the real Macneil night, and their earnest wish was that The MacNeil would long live to wear his costume of genuine Barra (paper damaged) The evening was brought to (paper damaged) by the younger people enjoying (paper damaged) gram of dances.

With best wishes to the Barra people in Nova Scotia and the hope that should any of them visit the island they will call at the Glen.

Your friend,

Annie Johnstone