

The tale of a tartan

Pattern embodies weave of tradition in Bruce County

SOUTHAMPTON — Some time after Christine Paterson retired from 40 years of nursing in Kenora to her family home here six years ago, she began going through her father's old papers and found scraps of the Bruce County tartan.



Jim Algie
Sun Times staff

A former town councillor and Southampton reeve, Paterson's father, J. Frank Morton, worked as a dentist here for 52 years. He was a long-time Sun Times correspondent and served a term in 1957 as Bruce County warden.

Morton's deep interest in local history, however, stirred Paterson to search her father's files for clues about his role in the establishment of Bruce County's museum and, later, the county tartan.

That's partly what convinced her to join the local Women's Institute, which has sole authority now to manage the duly registered, patented Bruce County tartan.

Now a member of the institute's nine-person tartan committee, Paterson and other committee members maintain for sale a large collection of tartan souvenirs and memorabilia.

The Women's Institute price list names more than 100 separate items including woollens, teaspoons and towels, coffee mugs, ties and t-shirts.

There are boutonnières and tiny tams to pin on jacket lapels, "crunchies" to hold pony tails, kilt pins, pendants, crosses, chains and earrings.



Sun Times photo by Bill Henry

Spoons and a plate bear the distinctive pattern

Committee contacts

For more information about Bruce County tartan items, contact the following members of Women's Institute's Bruce County Tartan Committee for this year:

- **Bruce North** - Hester Cunningham (chairman), RR 6 Warton, NOH 2T0. Phone 534 0159.
- **Bruce South** - Largaret McInnes, 16 Thomas St., Teeswater. 392 6573.
- **Bruce Centre** - Christine Paterson, Box 541 Southampton, NOH 2L0. 797 3526.
- **Bruce East** - Phyllis Metcalf, RR 2 Cargill, NOB 1J0. 353 5402.

Prices range from \$1 for keyrings to \$29.89 per metre for regular-weight woollens and \$52.62 for kilt-weight material.

At one time, the institute distributed articles through area retail outlets, but in recent years it has maintained direct sales only through members. They raised \$6,000 by selling

tartan items at last September's International Plowing Match near Walkerton. And they'll have a booth again this year at the annual Women's Institute Craft and Hobby Fair at Southampton Coliseum, July 7.

A 1973 county bylaw gives the Women's Institute of Bruce County sole right, renewable at five-year intervals, to promote and sell the tartan. Proceeds support institute projects.

From the beginning of work on a county tartan, institute members were closely involved. Morton, who died in 1973, conceived of the tartan idea through pioneering work in the 1950s on the establishment of a museum.

"He was always interested in his community and its history," Paterson said.

She remembers taking long walks through town with her father and listening to his observations about the buildings and localities they passed.

Anyone familiar with the history of Bruce County settlement knows that a massive influx of Scots followed an

opening of former Indian territory in the mid-nineteenth century.

Morton's own early research counted 97 Scottish family names among the county's earliest European pioneers, Paterson said.

The long Women's Institute tradition of collecting local history through Tweedsmuir books made them natural supporters of the Bruce museum. Having worked with the institutes on the museum project, Morton turned to them again for help with the tartan.

"In 1962, he presented it to some institute members in Port Elgin. They then took it up to a rally at Park Head and they agreed to go for it," Paterson said.

"When they started, I don't think they had much idea what they were going to do," she said. "They thought they just had to design a tartan, have it woven and write to Scotland and have it approved."

"They found out they were into a lot more than they expected," Paterson said.

The committee began by

selecting colors to symbolize different aspects of Bruce County life — blue for the lakes, green for the forests, gold for grain, purple for rare orchids, etc. Then, they invited designs for the plaid. A variety of proposals was received.

Scottish heraldic officials objected, however, to the idea of registering just any old plaid. The act of registering a plaid pattern makes it a tartan and Bruce County managed the relatively rare accomplishment. See Tartan on page W2.



Sun Times photo by James Masters

Christine Paterson of Southampton wears some of her favorite Bruce County tartan clothing



Sun Times photo by Bill Henry

The tartan decorates neckties and string ties



Sun Times photo by Bill Henry

Even such jewelry items as crosses and pendants are decorated with the Bruce pattern

Song of the Tartan

*Hurrah for the tartan, the County of Bruce,
How gallant and showy to wear,*

With the red of the maples a-flame on the hills

'Mid the green of the pines that are there.

There's the gold of the waving grain fields,

The white of the pounding surf

That rides o'er our dark, blue waters

Like a horse on a mossy turf.

A gay matching kilt for the lad and the lass

And a suit or a stole for my dame,

A free swinging plaidie for Jamie and me

Dress all of our family the same.

Come people of Bruce and others beside,

Wear it with pride and a sense of your own,

For the story of our county is there for all to see

In the colors of our tartan proudly shown.

By Olive E. Hepburn