The Spectator

The Quarterly Newsletter of Saint Andrew's Society of Williamsburg

Special Edition Fall 2011

President's Message

Lads and Lassies,

This special edition of the Spectator is a real treat! Whether you have never been to Scotland or are a regular visitor you will enjoy reading about the travels of Susan and Martha Speirs; the places they went and the people they met. And seeing the pictures they took!

Many thanks to Susan Speirs for writing about her travels and thanks to our editor Marshall Thomas for putting together this edition. The regular fall edition of the Spectator will be available soon.

I look forward to seeing all of you at the Fall Kirkin of the Tartans on the 23rd of October and at the Christmas Luncheon in December. Details will be sent to you later. I hope you are having a wonderful fall,

Yours Aye,

Jamie Alexander Griffin
President
Saint Andrew's Society
Williamsburg, Virginia

Trip to Arran and Bute, by Susan Speirs

From the editor: My two cousins, Susan Speirs and her sister Martha Speirs visited Scotland in June 2011 to see the old family farm in Clachaig, Arran, and another old family residence in Bute. Neither place is currently inhabited by Speirs family members but the former family farm was up for sale and this was what triggered the visit. There were no plans to purchase the farm but it did give my cousins an excellent chance to do in-depth family research and learn more about our ancestral homelands and residences which they had never seen. The reference to 'Arthur's book' is to a genealogical study of the Speirs family written by my brother Arthur Thomas. Following is Susan's account:

Dear Speirs cousins,

I thought since school wants me in tomorrow for workshops I have procrastinated long enough on this Scottish trip project. I will tell you all about my trip to Scotland and England with Martha Speirs. I must tell you that it was extremely successful and I would recommend it to all of you. The success was greatly helped by my Glaswegian friend Carol's ability to navigate much of the trip with her planning and driving and by our contact with Jim Climie at the farm given to us by cousin Martha Alice. I will narrate the main events of the trip. Of course missing will be the many bottles of wine and the scotch tastings which did indeed add to the tour. As good Scottish descendants we felt we had to educate ourselves on the highly praised single malt scotches of which Arran is so renowned. Many farms including Clachaig had a kiln/distillery on the premises. But more of that later.

Martha and Carol and I had a great meeting in Glasgow and all went to Carol's house in the West End and celebrated our arrivals, Martha from Africa and me from CA/Boston. We got up bright and early and drove over to Androssan on the coast and got in the queue for the Arran ferry. This is only about a half an hour from town and easy to access. The ferry ride was uneventful and we arrived well before lunchtime and went directly to the library where Martha was able to find out that the genealogical records were kept at the Arran Heritage Museum on the island and that they had an expert in the families of Arran. We contacted her and met her the following day.

Grace is 84 yrs young and was an incredible resource. She printed out many records that she had...tax records, census information, and birth and death records, etc. She is a true jewel...she also told us that she accesses many of the files from the Mitchell library in Glasgow where she still goes occasionally to read records. Martha was able to get an appointment to use the files at the Mitchell when we returned to the city later in the week. She also told us that much of the history of the Scots is on the internet at

a site called Scotlandspeople.gov and Scotlandsfamily.com. The Government site lists family records from 1513-2006.

Clachaig and Vicinity – Clachaig Farm is near the road in center of map.

We drove down island to Whiting Bay and had lunch in a cute little modern cafe. After lunch we then drove out to the farm and met with Jim Climie. He is a quiet unassuming man who sat us in his kitchen and talked to the three of us for a long time. I was seated in front of his Aga heater and thought I was returning to hot flashes for much of that sitting! It was well into June and one would think they would let it up but no..... Jim is selling the farm and its 341 acres. He is 67 and has decided that he has had enough. It sounded to us like he had an epiphany on a sailing trip in Greece. He was truly hoping to sell soon. In addition, it did not seem like a woman lived there so he was quite alone... anyway, we didn't pry. He did say that his two daughters were not interested in the farm and lived on the mainland.

Our conversation then turned to the history of the farm from the 20th century for the most part. He made it clear that the Speirs came over from the mainland to run the farm as tenant farmers for the estate of the Duke of Montrose. The last direct family member that we could identify was a Willy Speirs in the late 1950's. Jim said everyone was glad to see him go as he was a bit tipsy most of the time and let the farm go quite badly. Johnston Speirs who was a distant cousin had been running a farm on

the north of the island and then came down and took over Clachaig. He was the farmer who sold to Jim in 1966. At this point he was able to actually "sell" the farm which was not allowed earlier. One would have to read up on the tenancy rules to see when the changes happened but he said in the 50's there would have been no money changing hands or going into the family coffers as it would have been part of the duke's estate. It did sound like Jim had to buy it from Johnston but like I said we would have to look up the changes in the laws.

It seems as if there are no more Speirs on the island except for one woman who Martha connected with on the phone at the museum. She was born a Speirs and lives in the northern part of the island but she was distant in many ways and we didn't get much from the conversation.

The Clachaig Farmhouse

We had a lovely tour of the farm, walking around the house and barns then off to the lanes, climbing gates and walking around with Jim hearing many stories about the farm. The beach below the house is supposed to be one of the two "naturist" beaches in Scotland..... so cold I don't think he gets many of the nudies though! We also saw (from a distance) a cottage down by the water where he said the young couples would

live after they were married and he said at one point there were something like five couples there. It was not a big place.

We saw many lovely wild yellow irises and tons of foxglove everywhere. The front yard still has the sundial you can see in the old pictures of the house and also a cannon! I asked Jim where his telescope was for the nude beach and he said oh in the living room. Truly, I think he was kidding but you never know. The house has not had much modernizing and if you look at the front of the house it has two ells or wings on either side of the main structure. Looking up at it from the sea, the wing on the right side is currently rented out as a small flat and the left wing is the old milking parlor, so even though it looks like a large house it is quite broken up and only has a couple of bedrooms. He still farms and has hayfields and beef cattle. No more dairy and had gotten rid of his sheep the previous year. He had some great little calves and was waiting for 16 more that week! I think he said he had around 300 head of cattle.

Clachaig Farmhouse

There are so many fields and the beauty of them is astounding. You see a neighbor's house off to the north of the fields and he said they have updated the main house there

and rent it out for reunions. Many rentals out there. There are many great places to stay on the island in one town or another. Carol booked us into the Glenisle Hotel in Lamlash as a friend of hers stays there and had recommended it. It was great and had very nice food and drink. Anyway, I'm getting off the farm tour....

After we saw the land in front of the house going down to the sea, we came back and crossed the road and toured the large building that was the grain kiln. The distillery building was older and the roof had caved in totally so you can only see part of the walls where that had been located behind the kiln. I took many pictures of the kiln building and he had a great old letter with the story about the boy who took the wagon to Brodick to get the beams for the building. It is that type of information that made the tour fun as he did have some historical data even though he was not family.

He drove us up the hill across the street from the farm and showed us the area called High Clachaig. He told us about how many of the houses up there had been small farms that had been affected by the rule changes during the "clearances." From that vantage point he was able to point out the local church where we could go take pictures of the graveyard and as you will see we did lots of that.

View from High Clachaig

One of the most interesting stories that came from him was the split in the family when several family members became part of the "Wee Free" movement. My take on it was that when the local church became fundamentalist that is when they asked Rev. Charles Stewart to come and give services in the living room at Clachaig. He was a father-in-law to one of the resident Speirs. The group who became Wees were then centered around another farm nearby where they became known as the Bennicarrigans. The woman Martha spoke to on the phone about being born a Speirs was quite insistent that she was not one of them. She was from the Clachaig line! Jim did say there are still many of these fundamentalists in this neighborhood and he went to an old farmer's funeral lately and came back to have nightmares from the fear they tried to put in the congregation, holding up bones and telling everyone how they would burn in the afterlife because they were all sinners etc. So he was still quite upset with them!

The sea with Ailsa Craig, a bird sanctuary, in the fog.

Next, we went and explored Lagg cottage on our way out. He has that for sale for about 100,000 Pounds and we thought we would check it out. He had started to renovate it but the man who had been living there and I think doing some of the work, had left so nothing more has been done. This cottage was used for a retirement cottage

for the family elders and it is right on the road, on a severe curve coming up from the little village of Lagg.

Susan and Martha at Lagg Cottage

Looking for a buyer

Lagg is a cute village and has a lovely Inn and a few other establishments and a school but that's pretty much it. You will see a few good pictures of Lagg cottage and they look very similar to the one in Arthur's book, not many changes! We left the farm and Jim behind and went on to the graveyard and found many Speirs graves and many Stewarts as well.

After running around the graveyard in the rain, we went to stay at The Glenisle Inn and do some R&R and thinking about all we had learned and seen. It was great to have my friend Carol along as occasionally she had a few issues with the heavy Scottish accents and some expressions we wouldn't have known, so she was our translator! The next morning we toured the southern part of the island and ended up at the museum where we met the genealogical jewel of the island, Grace...I've forgotten her last name but I know we have it somewhere. probably on Martha's papers. She made it clear to us that the Speirs family were just there for about 100 years or so and they were not natives to the island. rather tenant farmers. Kind of reminded me of New England, when do you actually become a native!

The Church near Clachaig

We didn't stay on Bute too long as the weather was gloomy and we took the ferry back to Glasgow that night and reunited with Carol's partner Peter and had 3 nice days getting to know the sights and sounds of Glasgow with our wonderful guides. Peter is a constant traveler as he contracts with the World Bank as a consultant in development and has many great tales from around the world. When Martha told him she was interviewing for the job in Baku he was all over it! He said the old town there reminded him of Paris and at that point I knew our francophile was hooked. For those of you who don't know, she did a couple of interviews for the position of library director at the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy and they flew her out there in July for a few days and hired her. She will start in December after moving her almost seven years of "stuff" out of Yola. Guess I know where next summer's trip is for me!

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to ask...I might remember something that I didn't include, God knows I should have written more down as I probably forgot some important information. I know Carol and Martha took some good notes when we had our conference with Jim in the hot kitchen... that's my excuse and I'm sticking to it!

Best to all, Susan.

Docks at Rothsey

Saint Andrew's Society of Williamsburg

Application for Membership

Full Name: _____

Are you, applying as a new member ☐ or as a Spouse ☐ Son ☐ Daughter ☐ in the same household of a current member (check one)?
Member's Name if you are a spouse/son/daughter: _____
Address: _____
Telephone(s): _____
E-mail: _____
Date and Place of Birth: _____
Schools/Colleges: _____
Business or Profession: _____
Spouse's Name (if not a member): _____
Names and Ages of Children: _____
Nature of Scottish Ancestry: _____
_____
Scottish Interests – (History, Literature, Arts, Clan Affiliation etc):
_____
Clan Affiliation or Membership: _____

Date: _____ Signature of Applicant: _____

To the best of our knowledge, the above applicant is of sound character, over the age of 21 years and is entirely suitable to membership in the Society. Applicant will actively participate in the functions of the Society as circumstances allow and will perform conscientiously any duties undertaken.

Sponsor: _____ Date: _____
Co-Sponsor: _____ Date: _____

Checklist for Membership:

Initial Individual Membership in a Household– Initiation ($20.00) plus First Year's Dues ($40.00). Total of $60.00.

Additional Membership within same household – Initiation ($20.00) plus First Year's Dues ($20.00). Total of $40.00.

Your check made out to: St. Andrews' Society of Williamsburg
A Small Photograph of you suitable for digitization.

Completed Application with address, phone number and e-mail address included.

NOTE: All memberships are individual and only one applicant per application.