

CELTS AND CALEDONIANS

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The Role of Sport in Oakland's Saint Andrew's Society

Between 1820 and 1900 the United States government recorded the arrival of almost 370,000 Scottish immigrants. Scots who settled in San Francisco formed a number of social and benevolent clubs. The first was the Saint Andrew's Society in 1863. Three years later, San Francisco's Caledonian Club was established. This organization was different from the earlier-formed benevolent society in that it encouraged traditional highland games. The Caledonian Club became San Francisco's largest Scottish organization. By 1890 it had over one thousand members.

Scots also settled across the San Francisco Bay in Oakland. The first Scottish association in the East Bay was also a Saint Andrew's Society. On May 3, 1878, sixty charter members attached their signatures to the bylaws of the new organization. Oakland's Saint Andrew's Society, like the Saint Andrew's Society in San Francisco was formed with benevolence as its primary function.

From its origination through 1900, the Oakland Society sponsored regular social functions. Because the Society was formed with the purpose of making benevolent donations, it is important to note that these occasions often netted the organization significant sums of money. A social might consist of listening to poetry recitations and rousing and patriotic songs, a debate, lectures, a Burns' supper, a grand invitation ball, or a Saint Andrew's Day dance.

Indoor socials were not the only type of event that interested the Society. On May 6, 1880 a member suggested that the Oakland Society might sponsor a "pic nic". Putting on such an event would almost certainly have been attractive to Oakland Society for more than the opportunity of sharing a day with fellow members and their families and friends in the healthful outdoors. Scottish picnics, or gatherings as they were often called, had for other local Scottish associations become very financially rewarding. Sporting contests were central to these occasions. The first Bay Area Caledonian Games had taken place in San Francisco in 1866. By 1869 the Games were receiving significant coverage in the press and drawing several thousand spectators. Monetary prizes were awarded for doing well in such events as throwing the heaviest stone, the pole vault, the caber toss, and runs of varying distances. By the 1880s, most of the events were open to "all-comers" and the games were attracting the city and state's most prominent athletes.

On July 7, 1880 the *Oakland Tribune* reported that the 1st annual picnic of the St. Andrew's Society of Alameda County had occurred' on July 4 near Berkeley. Most of the traditional sports took place. While the day was enjoyable for the Society's members and guests, less palatable news concerning the gathering was presented at the Society's July 15 meeting. It was announced that the occasion had resulted in a financial loss. Losing money due to a social occasion was not taken lightly by a group that was established to distribute funds, goods, and services to needy Scots.

The Society's members did not broach the subject of a picnic again until 1888. During May of that year, a July 4 gathering was suggested. This was, however, quickly voted down because it was learned that at least two of San Francisco's Scottish organizations were planning large gathering in the East Bay during that same summer. Three years later, interest in an outdoor social had been rekindled. Some members were so concerned at this development that they insisted the Society's *Minute Book* records dealing with the gathering of 1880 be read back for the members' benefit. Despite the dissenting voices, the picnic and games were held. As was probably expected by some members, the function again served to drain the Society's finances.

These experiences indicated to the membership of Oakland's Saint Andrew's Society that hosting the type of Highland gatherings that had become popular in the United States during the last half of the nineteenth century was an economically questionable practice. The older and more experienced San Francisco Scottish associations were regularly holding their well established, bigger, and more famous Scottish gatherings at the choicest times and sites in the East Bay and these events were evidently fulfilling the local Scottish and general public's desire for this particular brand of entertainment. With their benevolent mission in mind, it is clear that Oakland's Scots decided that it would be in the best interests of their comparatively small benevolent society not to try and compete with their ethnic neighbors from across the San Francisco Bay. Constantly aware of their financial situation, the East Bay's Saint Andrew's Society focused its attention on the non-sport socials that in the past had served it so well. These were enjoyable for its member and provided money to be used in the Society's benevolent endeavors. The disappointing gathering of 1891 was the Society's last try at combining social and sporting activities. It was realized that attempting to sponsor such events could threaten the Society's *raison d'être*. Scottish sporting affairs would have to be left in the hands of San Francisco's Scots.