

BAGPIPE MUSEUM

By Ken McNaughton

After I moved to Maryland from New York in 1993, I could walk from my home to the only bagpipe museum in the USA.

Figure 1. As you ascend Oella Avenue the old mill building looms on your left.



The museum was housed in the old Oella Mill, across the Patapsco River Bridge and up Oella Avenue, about a mile from Historic Ellicott City. This is where the Union Manufacturing Company, the first textile company to be chartered by the State of Maryland, built its water-powered mill on the banks of the Patapsco River. Founded in 1808, the company briefly achieved renown as the largest cotton mill in America; its 1.75-mile (2.8-km) millrace was the longest to serve a single mill in America. The Union Manufacturing Mill experienced fire and flood and good and bad times. The village that grew up around the mill was called Oella, supposedly after the first woman to spin cotton in America.

Figure 2. The Patapsco River swirls by the remains of a former bridge across the river to the railroad.



The bad times led to the auction of the mill, its village and surrounding land in 1887. William J. Dickey bought the property and gradually shifted production to woolens. The mill burned down at the height of wartime woolen production in 1918 and was promptly rebuilt. It went on to achieve the distinction of becoming America's foremost producer of fancy menswear woolens. The demand for these fabrics dropped with the introduction of synthetics and double knits and the trend to casual dress. The Patapsco River continued to provide power to generate electricity until 1972, when the W.J. Dickey & Sons Company ceased manufacturing in Oella, the mill closed, tropical storm Agnes flooded the power plant and the complex was sold to a machinery dealer.

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The company sold the mill village, *exclusive of the mill*, to Charles L. Wagandt, a great-grandson of William J. Dickey. The new owner formed the Oella Company and went to work with architects, engineers, land planners and Baltimore County officials. Working with county, state and federal governments and with the help of local residents and

political leaders, the Oella Company finally received public water and sewer services for the community in 1984, and could begin its revitalization in earnest.

When I relocated to this area in 1993, the mill itself was a brick, steel and concrete shell housing a labyrinth of hallways and passages, large and small rooms, huge dusty wooden floorboards, blind alleys and mysterious stairways. The Patapsco River floated by as it always had, but inside a host of human entrepreneurs gobbled up space and showed their wares and their creativity.



Figure 3. In 1993, I bought a table and three chairs for my new house from an antique boutique in the Oella Mill.

In the transition period I rushed into an antique boutique on the ground floor and grabbed some items for my new empty apartment, including a round table with three chairs, for me and my two children, Aurelius 19 and Candace 17, who I hoped would be around. The black wooden set was perfect for the kitchen, made in Romania and imported, coincidentally, by *Union Imports*, 303 Fifth Avenue, New York.

Figure 4. Jamie Jensen rented a floor in the west wing of the mill for his sculpture studio.



I kept going back to the mill, exploring the floors, getting lost on the stairways, finding new gigantic halls, discovering new vendors and meeting new people. I made a friend when Ruth Leaf, who lived nearby, opened a little coffee shop. The Dorfman Museum Figures rented space; I could wander around and see life-like replicas of famous people, even witness them being made. A sculptor, Jamie Jensen, rented a floor in the west wing, where he built his creations, exhibited his

finished items and those of other artists, and threw annual Halloween parties, where we danced to live local bands. In 1995 I dressed as Birth, Marriage and Death, with white ballet tights and slippers, Ecuadorean wedding shirt and a death mask; my friend Katie wore a leopard-skin pillbox hat, à la Bob Dylan.

And then, right at the front of the mill, above the main entrance doorway, appeared the Bagpipe Music Museum, the only one in America. With intense interest in my Scottish family history, I met and chatted with the owner, Jim Coldren. He had assembled a hundred sets of pipes, dating from the 1850s to the late 1980s; 37,000 index cards listing bagpipe tunes; more than 500 bagpipe records; 500 bagpipe audio tapes; 225 bagpipe

CDs; and a shelf of videotapes featuring bagpipe music. Pipers came from all around to talk, play, research and reminisce.

JAMES R. COLDREN

James Raymond 'Jim' Coldren, founder and proprietor of the Bagpipe Music Museum and the first Bagpipe Music Index, was born on August 4, 1924, in Evanston, Illinois, to Raymond Beecher Coldren and Marie Harris Coldren [1, 2]. He attended Evanston Township High School, where he wrestled and played trombone in the marching band. On graduation he enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Force, serving most of his time with the chemical air corps as a toxic gas handler in the Philippines.



Figure 5. Jim Coldren playing bagpipes.

After the war Jim enrolled in the mechanical engineering program at Northwestern University in Evanston. There he met his first wife, Patricia Ann Hoopes, a journalism major; they married in 1950. After graduating, Jim began his professional career as an engineer and developed an interest in bagpiping. He was a member of the Thistle Gildry Pipe Band in New York City in the 1960s, playing alongside the eventual United States Attorney-General William Barr, serving mostly as a bass and tenor drummer. As his interest grew, he became more involved in the business aspects of piping.

Coldren established the Pipers Supply Company; published the first complete index of bagpipe tunes, called the *Bagpipe Music Index*, in 1966; sponsored a recital by Pipe Major Donald MacLeod; published *The New York Sessions*, a recording of MacLeod's tunes; and published the fourth book in the Donald MacLeod Collection of tunes. MacLeod (1917-1982) was a Scottish bagpiper, British Army Pipe Major, composer and bagpipe instructor. Coldren's first wife Patricia died in 1969, forcing him to drop out of the band to concentrate on his work and raise their five children. While living in southern New Jersey he joined the First Highland Watch Pipe Band of Willow Grove, Pennsylvania. By the time he retired, as a leading designer of plastic containers for the Johnson & Johnson Company, he had amassed one of the world's largest collections of bagpipes and printed and recorded pipe music, which eventually became the Bagpipe Music Museum.

In 1984 he married Virginia Whitmore Kelly. When he and his wife were considering moving to the Charlestown Retirement Community in Catonsville, Maryland, Ms. Kelly's daughter, Lisa Wingate, suggested the Oella Mill as a suitable location for Coldren's dream of opening a museum for his collection. At the grand opening on 7 September 1997, Coldren was 73. The museum displayed the bagpipes and encouraged hands-on access to them, so pipers and museum visitors could play the different sets, explore their nuances and expand their knowledge about the instruments. The museum was also open to local bands and dance troupes, and there Jim occasionally hosted a piping and drumming *cèilidh*. He enjoyed an international reputation as a leading scholar of the bagpipe and piping and drumming music.

Figure 6. At the end of the 2000s while searching for a permanent home Coldren occupied this stone house for former millworkers adjacent to the Oella Mill.



The mill was sold to developers and the former tenants started moving out by the end of 2004 [3]. Several times I saw Coldren at the rear of an adjacent stone house, and wondered if he stored all his bagpipe treasures there. In 2008 he moved to West Branch, Michigan, where he lived near his daughter P.J. For as long as he could, he enjoyed his music, his children, his cigars and a drink. He died on June 11, 2011, aged 86.

The Southern Management Company undertook a thorough and sensitive rehabilitation of the old mill building, now home to The Residences at Oella Mill, comprising modern rental studios and one- and two-bedroom apartments [4].

Figure 7. The main entrance to the Residences at Oella Mill is on the east side; a large north wing can be glimpsed to the right. The bagpipe museum had been located above the concrete doorway.

Bagpipes are a woodwind instrument using enclosed reeds fed from a constant reservoir of air in the form of a bag. Though the Scottish Great Highland bagpipes are the best known in the Anglophone world, bagpipes have been played for a millennium or more throughout large parts of Europe, northern Africa and western Asia, including Turkey, the Caucasus and around the Persian Gulf. A set of bagpipes minimally consists of an air supply, a bag, a chanter and usually at least one drone. Many bagpipes have more than one drone (and sometimes more than one chanter) in various combinations, held in place in stocks—sockets that fasten the various pipes to the bag.



Dozens of types of bagpipes today are widely spread across Europe and the Middle East, as well as through much of the former British Empire. The name bagpipe has almost become synonymous with the Great Highland bagpipe, overshadowing the great number and variety of traditional forms of bagpipe. Despite the decline of these other types of pipes over the last few centuries, in recent years many have seen a resurgence or revival as musicians have sought them out. The Irish piping tradition, which by the mid 20th century had declined to a handful of master players, is today alive, well and flourishing, a situation similar to that of the Asturian gaita, the Galician gaita, the Portuguese gaita transmontana, the Aragonese gaita de boto, Northumbrian smallpipes, the Breton biniou,

the Balkan gaida, the Romanian cimpoi, the Black Sea tulum and the Scottish smallpipes and pastoral pipes, as well as other varieties.

Half of the pipes that Jim Coldren collected were of the Great Highland Pipes, with three tall drones playing a steady chord for the melody played on the nine-note chanter. But he also had a set of Sicilian bagpipes and a playable replica set of a Renaissance bagpipe illustrated in a painting by Peter Bruegel. There were miniature and half-size pipes made for playing indoors, bellows-blown Irish uilleann (elbow) pipes and Irish Brian Boru pipes with keys like a saxophone to increase the range of notes. Maybe the collection has been preserved, perhaps to re-open, at some stage, to the sound of the pipes.

REFERENCES

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4. The Residences at Oella Mill, A Southern Management Community.

NOTES

I am very grateful to Lisa Wingate who read the draft of this article and offered many helpful changes. This work is copyrighted and may not be reproduced in whole or in part in any medium without written permission from Ken McNaughton, 3778 College Avenue, Ellicott City, MD 21043; phone/fax: 410-418-9340; kjmcn@comcast.net (21 November 2018). High resolution photos are available on request.