

SUNDAY

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# FEATURE

■ 8C CENTRALIA SENTINEL



**EVERYBODY DANCE** — Following the singing of “Auld Lang Syne,” members of the St. Andrews take to the floor to try out a few steps themselves.





**HERE COME THE PIPERS** — The highlight of the evening is the performance by the pipes and drums of the St. Louis Inver 'an Band, which plays at all of the society's Burns' dinners.



**CENTRALIA CONTINGENT** — Among those attending the dinner from Centralia were, **STANDING, FROM LEFT:** Todd Davis, Chuck and Lydia West, and Gary Phillips. **SEATED:** Kim Davis, Delores Phillips and Michael Hall. Chuck West, Michael Hall and Kim Davis play the bagpipes in the Celtic Pipes and Drums of Southern Illinois. Todd Davis plays the drums in the band and also sings. The group is looking for additional members and bookings.



# Scots in St. Louis hold their annual celebration of Robert Burns' birthday

BY JUDITH JOY  
Sentinel Features Editor

ST. LOUIS — Every year on Jan. 25 or thereabouts, Scots throughout the world celebrate the birthday of their national poet, Robert Burns (1759-96). This year the celebration, sponsored by the St. Andrews Society, was held at the Frontenac Hilton and, as usual, it was a gala event.

Although the ladies, many of whom were decked out in long dresses, looked elegant, it was the men who were the real center of attention. Sporting kilts in their family tartans, short black jackets, and white woolen knee socks with ghillies (a type of laced shoe that ties around the ankle), the men strutted about in their finery, conscious that for once they outshone the fair sex.

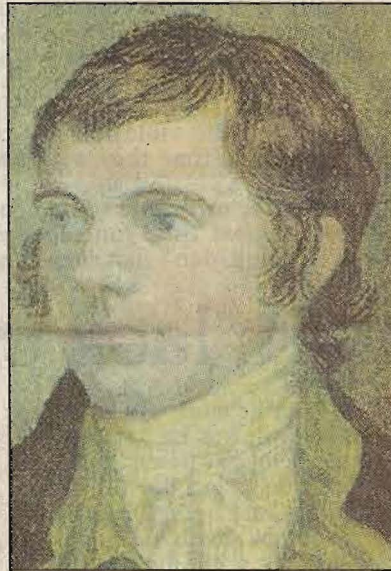
The evening began with the singing of our national anthem followed by "God Save the Queen," a formality honoring an allegiance not always shared by Scots, considering the number of battles fought against the English. After some flowery toasts and a solemn invocation, it was time to begin dinner with the traditional piping in of the haggis.

On visits to Scotland I have always avoided eating haggis, but this evening it seemed there was no way to avoid at least having a taste for the sake of politeness. According to Webster's, haggis is made from the chopped heart, lungs and liver of either a sheep or calf mixed with bits of suet, chopped onions and oatmeal, and boiled in the stomach of the animal.

Each table had its own tray of haggis, which had been prepared by members of the St. Andrews Society. The haggis looked some-

what like a meatloaf and, spread on crackers, tasted something like a pate. I wondered to myself if this is what cat food tastes like, as it looked a bit like Friskies without the gravy. However, I managed to eat a small amount and occupied myself by reading the "Address to a Haggis" while the others at the table passed the dish around for seconds.

Burns' poetry has a wonderful lilt and is best appreciated when



Robert Burns 1759-96

read aloud. But it is difficult to understand because he uses a Scottish dialect that makes it necessary to refer continually to the footnotes if you hope to glimmer any meaning from the stanzas. The first stanza of "Address to a Haggis" will serve as ample illustration:

"Fair fa' (good luck) your honest, sonsie (cheerful) face,  
"Great chieftain o' the puddin' race!

"Aboon (above) them a' ye tak yer place,

"Painch, (intestine) tripe or thairm (guts):

"Weel are ye wordy (worthy) o' a grace

"As lang's my arm."

One of the secrets of Burns' popularity was his ability to express the injustices that ordinary Scots experienced in being victims of a system, based on the power of the nobility and the church, from which they could not rise. Burns' father, like many Scots, was a tenant farmer, who struggled his entire life to care for his family and make an honest living, yet who died bankrupt and in poverty.

Burns received a rather decent education for the time, but when he was 25 his father died and he was left as head of the household. Meanwhile, Burns had begun writing poetry for his own amusement and that of his friends. His first book of verse, chiefly written in Scottish dialect, was published in 1786, two years after his father's death.

Burns' fondness for the ladies got him into trouble on more than one occasion. He had already fathered one child by a servant girl at the farm when he fell in love with Jean Armour. Armour was carrying his child — it turned out to be twins — when he went to her father to ask for her hand in marriage. Because he had already required a reputation for his anti-Calvinist ideas, Armour's father refused to allow Burns to marry his daughter.

Fortunately the success of

Burns' volume of poems was such that the Armours relented and the two were eventually married in 1788. But despite his success as a budding poet, Burns was still a struggling farmer, barely making a living from the cold and stony Scottish soil.

Fortunately he obtained a post with the excise service and this position sustained him for his remaining days. Burns died at age 37 as a result of rheumatic heart disease contracted in childhood and compounded by the twin burdens of too much hard, physical labor and an inadequate diet.

In addition to writing much original verse, Burns collected and preserved much of Scotland's

folk music, which might otherwise have disappeared. Such songs as "O My Luve's Like a Red, Red Rose" and "Auld Lang Syne" have their origins in the folk tradition but were adapted by Burns, who made them his own.

Perhaps more than any other writer, he evokes the spirit of Scotland, the character of its people, and the ruggedness of the highland landscape. Although he is most famous for his love songs and verse with ironic humor, my personal favorite has always been the poem "To a Field Mouse," in which a farmer unwittingly destroys the nest of a mouse with the coulter of his plow. Who but a man of great compassion and understanding could write with

such sympathy about the plight of a humble mouse whose "wee bit housie" is in ruin and close with the oft-quoted lines: "The best laid schemes o' mice an' men gang aft a-gley."

For 29 years the St. Andrews Society of Greater St. Louis has used the occasion of Burns' birthday to celebrate its Scottish culture with performances of traditional music and dance. For many years the dinner was held at the Missouri Athletic Club in downtown St. Louis. When they outgrew that facility, they switched to the Adams Mark for four years until they were forced to find a larger facility.

This year's dinner was attended—  
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ed by 398 people and as usual the music of the St. Louis Invera 'an Pipe Band was one of the highlights of the evening. The band performs at many highland events and will be among the performers on Oct. 12 when the St. Andrews Society sponsors a day of Highland games at either Forest Park or Faust Park — the location is still undecided.

Geoff Chaboude, the society's membership chairman, said the day's events will include games such as the caber toss, sheaf toss and hammer throw. There will be a display of sheep herding and Highland cattle, Scottish dancing by the wonderful young teen-agers in Dance Caledonia, who performed at the dinner, and several bagpipe bands. Also performing folk music will be Ed Miller, a native of Edinburgh who now lives in Austin, Texas. Miller, who sings both traditional Scottish ballads and contemporary folk songs, hosts a folk music program on the National Public Radio station in Austin.

Anyone interested in joining the St. Andrews Society, which has members on both sides of the river, can contact Geoff Chaboude in St. Charles, Mo. His phone number is (636) 519-7979, e-mail: jeffcktj@aol.com.



**ST. ANDREW** — The patron saint of Scotland, the apostle Andrew was said to be crucified on a diagonal cross. The sign of the cross appeared in the heavens to Achaeus, King of the Scots, before battle. After victory, Achaeus made it the Scottish emblem.



**COUNTRY DANCING** — Prior to the dinner the Highland Mist Country Dancers performed traditional country dances.