

SCOTTISH ST. ANDREW SOCIETY OF GREATER ST. LOUIS



PRESIDENT'S EDITORIAL

Dear Members,

The Christmas Party was a smashing success with a great spread just to make sure we didn't lose any extra weight. The festivities continued with traditional singing, and carols led by Winnie on the piano. However, the big fellow dressed in red stole the show —he was certainly the center of attention for many of the participants, and one little lad had even brought his letter. Great job, Santa!



We're busy with preparations for the upcoming Burns Dinner which is really a "show" within a "show". We have the key elements of the traditional Burns Supper. However, these are combined with a celebration of the broader Scottish culture in the form of pipeband music, Highland dancing, and traditional songs.

We are making this a special edition of the Thistle Times with several articles on the life and works of Robert Burns. We are also dedicating this edition to the memory of Agnes Stirrat who passed away on December 24th.

Wishing each of you a great 1997, and looking forward to seeing you at our Burns Dinner on January 25th.

A guid New Year tae yin an a', Jim

Next



Event

January 25th, 5:45pm: Burns Dinner

At The Adams Mark Hotel, St. Louis

Cocktails start at 5:45pm: Dinner starts at 6:45pm

Entertainment includes the Invera'an Pipeband, Dance Caledonia, and various toasts to the Bard, Rabbe Burns.

Our guest performer is a native Scot and accomplished singer of traditional Scottish favorites, Alex Sutherland.

Be sure to send in your reservations early. (see attached form)

Events schedule for early 1997:

February 24th, 1997 at 7:00pm: Historical and contemporary clothing. At Country Day/Mary Institute School. *(there may not be another newsletter before this event so please note the date in your calendar)*

March: Open. We welcome any ideas and suggestions.



Mrs Agnes Stirrat (1914-1996) was quite a lady. Mother, grandmother, pioneer, business woman, Honorary Board member of our Society. We'll all remember her in some special way because she touched the lives of all of us, individually and through her role at the heart of our St Andrew Society in St. Louis.

Born in the great city of Glasgow who's proud people built the famous ocean-going liners, the Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth, Agnes and her husband William decided to sail the ocean also. Accompanied by three children, they left their native homeland in 1947 and set-out west, across the Atlantic, in search of a dream. Their travels ended with a train ride to St. Louis but their pioneering journey had just begun. Enduring the hardships of the first years, the Stirrats soon built their own grocery business and added two more children to their family. In later years they ran a travel agency, and were central figures in the community.

However, it wasn't just success in business that made Agnes a legend in her own time. It was the acts of kindness, like sheltering other Scottish immigrants until they found their own way, and the activities to promote Scottish culture in the St. Louis area that made Agnes a much respected member of the St. Louis community. Although Agnes embraced America, she never forgot her Scottish heritage. In fact, the Stirrats led a visionary group who founded our St. Andrew Society of Greater St. Louis (incorporated in 1973). Bill Stirrat was the first President and Agnes was on the Board in the first official year. Later Agnes became the first lady President of our Society. Elected a Life Member of the Society and Honorary Board member, Agnes continued to guide our St. Louis clan for over 20 years. Agnes Stirrat has now gone on another journey, but her memory and lasting achievements remain with all of us.

*Farewell, old Scotia's bleak domains,
Far dearer than the torrid plains
Where rich ananas blow!
Farewell, a mother's blessing dear!
A brother's sigh! a sister's tear!*

*A grateful, warm, adieu!
I, with a much-indebted tear,
Shall still remember you!
All hail then, the gale then,
Wafts me from thee, dear shore!
It rustles and whistles —
I'll never see thee more!*

A graceful sunset behind Castle Stalker on beautiful Loch Linnhe on the west coast, just 80 miles from Agnes' native Glasgow, and a few selected stanzas from Burns' "The Farewell".



What is a Burns Supper...

Never been to a Burns Supper? Well now's your chance. Here in St. Louis, the St. Andrew Society incorporates the main elements of the annual ritual of celebrating the life and works of Scotland's national poet into a grand evening of Scottish culture — including pipeband, dancing and a guest singer. We celebrate our Burns Dinner on the nearest Saturday to January 25th which is the anniversary of the poet's birthday — and it's right on this year!

The evening consists of the traditional haggis, a helping of Burns' more famous poems and songs such as 'Bruce to his Men at Bannockburn', 'Ode to a Mouse', 'A Red Rose', and the traditional Burns supper speeches, both serious and funny. Before the dinner begins, the 'Selkirk Grace' is said as Burns rendered it at the home of the Earl of Selkirk at St. Mary's Isle, Kirkcudbright. The master of ceremonies for the evening asks the company to stand for the arrival of the haggis. A piper leads the procession, followed by the chef carrying the haggis on a platter and lastly the person who will recite 'To a Haggis'. The assembled company gives a slow handclap as the Haggis makes it's way to the podium. The address 'To a Haggis' (composed around 1786) is given and as the line 'An cut you up wi' ready sleight' is reached, the haggis is slit open with a knife. The address finished, the piper and chef are given a dram of the whisky and everyone drinks a toast to the haggis. In Scotland haggis is usually served as the main meal with mashed turnip (champit neeps) and potatoes (tatties). Here in St. Louis, we serve a taste of the haggis as an appetizer with crackers, just to let everyone sample the magnificent beast.

To a Haggis (First verse)

*Fair fa' yer honest, sonsie face,
Great Chieftain o' the puddin'-race!
Aboon them a' ye tak your place,
Painch, tripe or thairm,
Weel are ye wordy o' a grace*

After dinner the speeches and entertainment begin. The major speech of the evening is the 'Immortal Memory', which normally lasts about 10 to 15 minutes. The speaker illuminates Robert Burns' achievements and his contribution to Scotland. Sometimes a particular facet of his life is examined, whether his rigorous early days, his time in Edinburgh or the end of his life in Dumfries. The speaker might prefer to consider what Burns' attitudes might be today, or reflect on some of the qualities that made the man and the poet. The speech encourages the listener to read Burns and reflect on his life, works and opinions.

The 'Toast to the Lassies' is the first of two short speeches in which the men and women alternately lambaste one another with their different defects and attributes. The first toast is a witty, fun-packed look at the 'fairer sex' as Burns saw them and as they are seen today, from the ugly, nagging wife in 'Willie Wastle' to the temptress Clarinda. It ends on a warm, affectionate note, praising the lassies as Burns surely would, whereupon the men rise and drink the toast to them. The 'Response' is the ladies chance to retaliate by sighting men's foibles and weaknesses and pointing out their own superiority and fidelity and like the speech before normally ends on a conciliatory note.

These are the traditional speeches which are the main purpose of a Burns Supper. At our Burns Dinner we incorporate these but the evening is not just about speeches. The entertainer (Alex Sutherland), poems, songs, pipers (Invera'an Pipeband), dancers (Dance Caledonia), camaraderie, (and did we mention scotch?) that pack this evening are vital components of a memorable experience of

Robert Burns...

In a small two-roomed, thatched cottage at Alloway (near Ayr), on January 25th, 1759, Robert Burns was born. His father, William Burnes, was a farmer and his mother, Agnes, was a great storyteller and had a fine singing voice. The hard farm work ethic combined with his mother's influence led young Rabbie to become one of the greatest poets in the world.

Tributes to the great Bard abound. The following is a different view of the life and works of Robert Burns, showing the chronological order of events (times are approximate, since different books give different dates for certain events):

- 1759 ⇨ Robert Burns born to William and Agnes Burnes: eldest of seven children.
 - 1766 ⇨ Burnes family moves to Mount Oliphant, a 70 acre farm near Alloway.
 - 1777 ⇨ Burnes family moves to Lochlie, Tarbolton, a 130 acre farm (near Ayr).
 - 1780 ⇨ The Tarbolton Bachelors' Club formed (debate club) with Burns as President.
 - 1781 ⇨ Robert Burns works as a flax dresser in Irvine, with his uncle Alexander Peacock.
 - 1784 ⇨ William Burnes dies, Robert moves to Mossgiel to farm with his brothers.
 - 1785 ⇨ Birth of Elizabeth. Burns' daughter by his mother's servant Betty Paton.
 - 1786 ⇨ Kilmarnock Poems published: Burns' has affair with Jean Armour and she becomes pregnant: Jean's father will not approve a marriage: Burns plans to emigrate to Jamaica, but never makes it.
 - 1787 ⇨ Poems published by William Creech in Edinburgh.
 - 1788 ⇨ Burns returns to Ayrshire and marries Jean Armour: Jean has twins: Burns commissioned as exciseman in addition to working a small rented farm at Ellisland. Burns visits Edinburgh for last time and says farewell to Clarinda (Mrs Nancy McLehose).
 - 1789 ⇨ Burns' son Francis Wallace born.
 - 1790 ⇨ Burns was riding over 200 miles each week on excise duty: Tam o' Shanter completed.
 - 1791 ⇨ Burns' daughter Elizabeth born to Anne Park (in Dumfries) and son, William Nicol, born (at Ellisland)
 - 1792 ⇨ Appointed to the Dumfries Port excise: 4th volume of the Scots Musical Museum published with 60 of the songs written or revised by Burns: Burns' daughter Elizabeth Riddell born: Burns accused of political disaffection.
 - 1793 ⇨ Second edition of Edinburgh Poems: first set of Thomson's Select Collection published: moved to Mill Vennel, Dumfries — this is now called "Burns House" and is a National Monument.
 - 1794 ⇨ Burns appointed supervisor of excise: son James Glencairn born.
 - 1795 ⇨ Burns joins in organizing the Dumfries Volunteers: becomes ill with rheumatic fever.
 - 1796 ⇨ Burns struggles through illness but eventually dies on July 21st: son Maxwell born on July 25th.
- Although famous today, Burns never made a fortune from his work. As he lay dying he told his wife *"I'll likely be more thought of a hundred years hence, than I am at present"*.



One of the most famous songs in the world is "**Auld Lang Syne**", and Robert Burns is often credited with writing it. However, it appears that some older original versions were around even before he was born. Some say that Frances Sempill wrote the words and that it appeared in Watson's Collection in 1711. Others say that Sir Robert Aytoun (1570-1638) is the author of the very first version. Burns is reported to have told a friend that he heard an old man singing a song from olden times and that he modified it, and added the second and third verses. The Burns version we use today was written in 1788 and published in 1796.

Burns, Dad-Style...by Anna Duffy

Everything I know about Burns, among many other things, I learned from my Dad. One of the truly great gifts he gave me was how to truly, madly and deeply appreciate the poetry of the Man himself -- Rabbie Burns. However, I have to admit that his methods might be considered somewhat eccentric by some. Are you ready for this? My Dad used to recite Burns while wandering about the house in his underwear. It's true and it made quite an impression!

"Daaad!" my brothers and I would shout, pathetically ignorant of the poetic jewels that were being showered upon us, "Stop! Please!"

"Jim," my poor mother would beg, "would you *please* give it a rest?"

"WEE SLEEKIT COWRIN TIM'ROUS BEASTIE . . ." bellowed Dad as he pulled on his trousers . . .

"THOU NEED'NA RUN AWA SAE HASTIE," he declaimed, as he straightened his tie . . .

"**WI BICKERIN' BRATTLE!**" he finished. We would heave a collective sigh of relief and he would turn to us with an innocent-looking smile and say "Oh, you want to hear it again!"

*"Wee sleekit cawrin tim'rous beastie
O, what a panic's in thy breastie!
Thou need'na run awa sae hastie,
Wi' bickerin brattle!"*

The problem was in those days, that he had a tendency to repeat the same parts of the poems over and over again, so that my education, although thorough, was not broad. My curriculum was extended somewhat, however, when 'Tam o' Shanter' came on the scene. We'd fair had it up to the eyeballs with 'Odes' of any shape and size, whether they were to mice, women or haggis; it was time for some variety. The first twenty lines of Tam o'Shanter were agony, but myself, the other members of my family and most of our close friends now have them completely off by heart.

"WHEN CHAPMAN BILLIES LEAVE THE STREET," the ominous voice would call from the deepest recesses of the house. We would groan with resignation, and start mouthing the words along with him.

Just recently I realized that it's time to give Dad credit for the treasures he has given us. On Christmas day, we were all sitting around the table waiting to start eating, when someone called for grace to be said. Dad obliged with pleasure: "*Some hae meat . . .*" he said. "*And canna eat,*" we all joined in and continued with the Selkirk Grace, "*And some wad eat that want it: But we hae meat, and we can eat, Sae let the Lord be thankit.*"

We were all laughing as we tucked into our turkey and mashed potatoes. For me, it was the best moment of the meal. We should never underestimate the power of Burns' poetry to bring people together -- no matter who they are, and how many differences they have concerning the recitation of poetry at unbelievably high volumes.

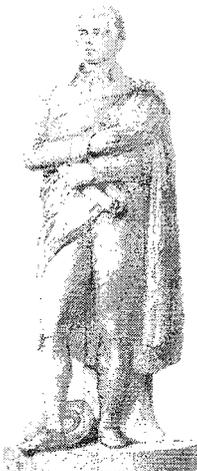
I was just stepping out of the shower yesterday and toweling dry when from out of nowhere a voice boomed: "*Fair fa' yer honest sonsie face . . .*"

It took me a few moments before I realized that it was me. Like I said, my Dad taught me *everything* I know about Robert Burns.

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From the Bard himself:

Ye banks and braes o' bonny Doon,
How can ye bloom sae fresh and fair;
How can ye chant, ye little birds,
And I sae weary, fu' o' care!
Thou'll break my heart, thou warbling bird,
That wantons through the flowering thorn:
Thou minds me o' departed joys,
Departed — never to return!
from "The Banks o' Doon" (third version)



Statue of Burns by John Flaxman

But stooks are cowpit wi' the blast,
And now the sinn keeks in the west,
Then I maun rin amang the rest,
An' quat my chanter;
Sae I subscribe mysel' in haste,
Yours, Rab the Ranter.
from the "Third Epistle to J. Lapraik" (1785)

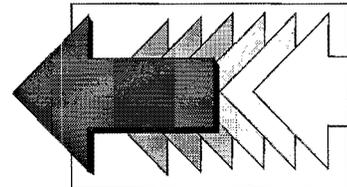
O Scotia! my dear, my native soil!
For whom my warmest wish to Heaven is sent,
Long may thy hardy sons of rustic toil
Be blest with health, and peace, and sweet content.
from "The Cotter's Saturday Night"

Know anyone who'd like to join

Know anyone interested in joining, send us their number.

DUES & Leads To: Peter Geery, (314) 227 2785.

831 Westrun Dr., Ballwin, MO 63011



Wishing You a Very Happy New Year....

Hope you all enjoyed reading our very own newsletter, the Thistle Times.
Many thanks to Jim Duffy and his daughter, Anna, for major contributions.
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