

The Tattler

Summer 2015 Edition

Words from the President

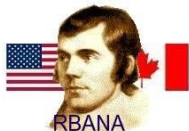
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Contacts:

Editor:
Colin Harris
92 Avalon Rd
Winnipeg MB
R2M 2L5
editor@rbana.com

Webmaster
Ron Ballantyne
3214 Spruce Ave.
Burlington ON
L7N 1J2
contact@rbana.com



The Robert Burns Association of North America

Affiliated with the Robert Burns World Federation Ltd
Kilmarnock, Scotland
Club #1024

The recent Conference and AGM in Calgary was a great success, and on behalf of RBANA I'd like to thank Tony Grace, Ian Denness, Trekker Armstrong, Jamie Osborne and the rest of the team for their efforts. Both dinners were splendid. The seminars were the highest quality ever and also the best attended, rightly so.



In This Issue:

President's Message	1
Royal Mail Erect Burns Plaque ..	2
Burns & Reggae	3
RBANA in Calgary	4

As ever at these events, in addition to the formal events, it was a great pleasure to meet old and new friends, and the warmth of the welcome in Calgary was exceptional. One unexpected thing that happened was that Ken Montgomery and Bill Cocks from Medicine Hat kindly took George McLellan and me to see the impressive statue of Robert the Bruce in Calgary that is identical to the one we've all seen at Bannockburn. A wealthy Calgary lawyer funded both. Many of you know that Calgary was a regular stomping ground of mine in my day job in the oil and gas industry, yet I never knew of the existence of this statue.

At the Conference Willie Gibson presented me with a lapel badge and tie from Prestwick Burns Club in Ayrshire, which he has recently joined on relocating there, not knowing that I was born and raised in Prestwick, so that was a most special gift for me, as was a Life Membership of Irvine Burns Club which I also received recently, indeed an honour. On a personal note I appreciated the concern everyone at the meeting showed about the severe flooding that hit Houston just before the Conference.

The only sad news in Calgary was that Allison Tait, CEO of the Robert Burns World Federation, is leaving to take up a new position. We will all miss her so much. Good luck Allison!

We are already under way with planning the 2016 and 2017 RBANA Conferences in Dallas-Fort Worth and Medicine Hat, both new locations for us which we are excited about. We are actively looking for a US venue for 2018. So please contact me with any suggestions.

Although Ron Ballantyne has agreed to stay on for a while we are still looking for a new Webmaster.

The main challenge facing RBANA going forward, in common with many societies is the graying of the membership. It was refreshing to see a number of younger folks playing a key role in the Calgary meeting. To further generate interest, we need to run a more diverse programme of Burns events.

(Continued on page 2)

Words from the President

(Continued from page 1)

Just before I left for Calgary, Tony Grogan told me that in July the Winnipeg Club is taking over a “chippie” in the city for a different kind of Burns (Fish) Supper following their meeting to mark the Bard’s death anniversary. That is the kind of thing that can generate publicity and interest in our movement.

We missed Tony and his wife Renate in Calgary. They both have health issues that preclude them travelling. We wish them well. I’d like to wish you and yours a good summer.

Keep promoting Burns!

Yours Aye

Robert Boyd
President

Royal Mail Erects Plaque to Honour Burns Birthplace

A plaque to the Bard has been installed onto a post box at his birthplace

A PLAQUE in tribute to Robert Burns has been unveiled on a postbox in the Bard's birthplace.



The Royal Mail revealed the special decoration on a letter box in Alloway, Ayr, to mark the 50th anniversary of its special stamps programme.

Fifty plaques are being installed on post boxes across the UK, each featuring a popular stamp associated with the area.

Robert Burns has featured on three sets of special stamps, in 1966, 1996 and 2009.

A plaque to Robbie Burns has been installed onto a post-box outside the Alloway Post Office

The stamp selected for the postbox opposite Burns Cottage is from the 1996 commemoration of the bicentenary of his death.

It features the words "wee, sleekit, cowran, tim'rous beastie", the opening line from his famous poem To A Mouse.

Stamps on other postboxes include Winston Churchill, Bagpuss, Dylan Thomas and Sherlock Holmes.

Graeme Campbell, Royal Mail delivery office manager for Ayr, said: "The UK's towns and cities have influenced stamp designs over the past 50 years.

"We are proud that one of our postboxes in Alloway features the stamp of Robert Burns.

"We hope that all our customers and visitors enjoy this special stamp plaque and might even take a photo as a memento."

A total of 2,663 special stamps have been issued since July 1965, with each design approved by the Queen before it is issued.



Artist Mixes Burns and Reggae in Venice

Scottish artist Graham Fagen has brought the words of Robert Burns to La Biennale di Venezia, the largest and most prestigious visual arts exhibition in the world.

Burns' 1792 song *The Slave's Lament* can be heard drifting through the rooms of the Palazzo Fontana on the Grand Canal (at right.)

The 16th Century palace was once the birthplace of a pope and this summer plays host to Fagen's exhibition for the Scotland + Venice project, an entirely new body of work devised for the rooms of the historic palazzo.

Fagen, whose work combines video, performance, photography, and sculpture with text and music, has been working with the composer Sally Beamish, the classical musicians of the Scottish Ensemble, and the Jamaican reggae singer Ghetto Priest to bring new life to Burns' historical work.

He filmed and recorded the musicians at work in Glasgow's City Halls and British reggae producer Adrian Sherwood mixed the music.

Fagen grew up in Irvine in Ayrshire and his Venice exhibition reflects the impact of reggae music on his life as well as his ambivalent feelings about Burns, who was such an important feature of local culture.

Jamaican reggae singer Ghetto Priest worked with Fagen on the project.

"When you hear the *Slave's Lament* sung by Ghetto Priest with such conviction you realise that Burns was capable of great empathy with the character of the slave." Fagen says that the vocalist "has a very strong affinity with the song."

The Burns poem is a famous statement against slavery, but when he was young the poet had been driven by economic hardship to consider leaving for the West Indies where he would have worked overseeing slave labour on a plantation.

Burns published a volume of poems to try to raise money for his ticket to Jamaica. That book became the famous *Kilmarnock* edition. The success of his

poetry meant he never left Scotland.

Sally Beamish says she is "excited" to be collaborating with Fagen at a significant moment in his career.

She says: "Our collaboration highlights the impact Scottish folk songs has had on both of us - and I am



honoured to take part in this extraordinary opportunity with so many inspirational artists and musicians."

The exhibition runs from 9 May to 22 November and is funded by Creative Scotland. It is supported by British Council Scotland and the National Galleries of Scotland.

It links Venice with a much smaller port in Scotland - Arbroath.

Hospitalfield Arts in the Angus town came up with the proposal to commission Fagen and its Lucy Byatt has curated the exhibition.

The historic Hospitalfield House mansion was bequeathed to a trust by the 19th century painter Patrick Allan-Fraser and is now an arts venue.

The Arbroath connection is maintained in Venice by providing hospitality to the world press in the form of its best known ex-



Reggae singer Ghetto Priest with artist Graham Fagen

port: the smokie.

Byatt says: "It's an opportunity to give Graham the platform that he needs at this stage and now I am really looking forward to inviting audiences in."

She will bring a version of the exhibition to Edinburgh in Spring 2016.

Calgary Welcomes RBANA

RBANA's Annual General Meeting and Conference was held at Calgary's Carriage House Inn at the end of May. The Calgary Burns Club are to be congratulated on hosting a most successful and enjoyable event.

The weekend kicked off, as usual, with the golf tournament on Friday morning and Ronnie O'Byrne again was the winner of the day.

The Federation President Jim Thomson sent his apologies, as he was unable to travel due to recent heart surgery. However, there was still a strong representation from Scotland, with Jane Brown the immediate Past President, Alison Tait, the Federation CEO, Bill Dawson the Burns Chronicle Editor and a Past president, his wife Leslie, Willie Gibson and Professor Gerry Carruthers. Bill & Leslie were celebrating their 40th wedding anniversary.

While registration was underway in Friday afternoon, the Board of Directors met in the Lincolnshire Suite.



Later in the same suite a wine reception was held for delegates (left).

The evening took the form of a Ceilidh with 90 in attendance.

The delegates and guests gathered in the lobby of the Windsor Ballroom for cocktails (right) and were ushered into the ballroom with a Grand March, led by Ron Pratt & Henry Cairney.

Following an excellent dinner we were entertained by the Calgary Burns Club Singers, and the Calgary Fiddlers, a group of teenage musicians and Dancers. The Calgary club had provided the material for the mini kilts worn by the girls, prior to their going on a major tour.

There were, as always, several individual contributions to the entertainment, including a reprise of Jane & Willie's 'My love is like a Red Red Rose', followed by Ron Platt's enactment of Holy Willie's prayer in appropriate costume. Following some Ceilidh dancing, the night was rounded off with a rousing Auld Lang Syne.

On Saturday Morning the AGM was held in a sec-



tion of the Windsor Ballroom and President Robert Boyd efficiently guided us through the business within an hour.

After the lunch break the conference commenced with the Jim Connor Memorial Quiz, moderated, for the final time, we learned, by Jim Cunningham. U.S. Director George McLellan has volunteered to take on the role next year.

Ronnie O'Byrne scored the highest to win the event closely challenged by Les Strachan & Bill Dawson.

We were then treated to three excellent seminars, including, **Burns & Edinburgh** by Ronnie O'Byrne, and **The Publication of Tam O'Shanter**, by Bill

Dawson, who researched hitherto unknown details of the events and has now put to rest many questions.

The closing session by



Calgary Welcomes RBANA (continued)

Prof. Gerry Carruthers explored the way Burns character and works had been manipulated by both sides in the independence debate, repeating what had been done before to bolster patriotism and recruitment in past wars.

In the evening we again gathered for cocktails in the lobby of the Windsor Ballroom, then moved into the Ballroom where the M.C. Ian Denness guided us through the formal introductions, national anthems and welcoming address by the new Club President Paul Armstrong.

The formal Burns supper followed the tradition of the Calgary Burns Club in which each course is introduced by a 'remove'.

The haggis was paraded in, led by the Pipe Major of the Calgary Police Pipe Band and the haggis was addressed by the youngest member of the club, Jamie Osbourne (right).

While we relaxed with our coffee, the Calgary Police Pipe Band & Dancers entertained us with traditional music and highland dance, taking us to the inter-



Ceilidh Dancing Friday night

mission. One of the many other events going on at the hotel that evening was a 90th birthday celebration. The birthday girl and her daughter, upon seeing the pipers, crept in and she was thrilled to be allowed to watch the performance.

When we returned, the Calgary Burns Club Singers warmed us up with the Star of Rabbie Burns and a couple of other songs which led us into the formal toasts. We were all surprised when after the toasts, we were advised that Alison Tait was leaving the post of Federation CEO and would not be replaced. She will be sorely missed!

The award for the golf tournament was presented to



Ronnie O'Byrne, then Elma Connor presented Ronnie with the Jim Connor Memorial trophy.

There was some hilarity as the quiz consolation prizes were awarded.

Jim & Jean Cunningham entertained us with an amusing

toast to the lassies and the reply, interpreting a 1950s article on what a wife's responsibilities were and how she should attend to her husband. The humour caught the spirit of the evening and spilled over into Sandy Paterson's Immortal Memory.

After recognizing Absent Friends, Maureen Hutchins



Bill Dawson (above) and Gerry Carruthers (left) presented during the seminar

Calgary Welcomes RBANA (continued)

and the Calgary Burns Club Singers sang the song 'Absent Friends'

The company formed a circle around the Ballroom and joined in a rousing Auld Lang Syne.

On Sunday Morning a large group gathered in the Lincolnshire Suite for a short ecumenical service led by individual RBANA member Rev. Debra Brewin-Wilson, who also led the singing of the hymns, set to familiar Burns' tunes, with her Clàrsach {Scottish Harp}.

We then took our leave, looking forward to the next conference in Dallas on April 22nd to 24th 2016.

The clubs participating this year were:-

The Calgary Burns Club,

Scheihallion Scottish Heritage Society (of Calgary),

The Medicine Hat Burns Club,

The Halton Peel Burns Club,

The Robert Burns Society of Doon,

The Winnipeg Robert Burns Club,

and The Heather & Thistle Society of Houston

Five Independent members,

plus the 6 visitors from the UK.



The Calgary Fiddlers (above) and the Calgary Police Pipe Band (below) both entertained over the weekend



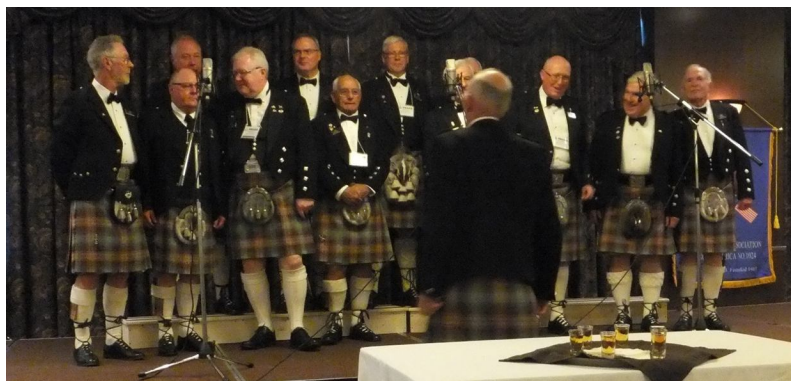
Calgary Welcomes RBANA (continued)



Ron Pratt as Holy Willy on Friday



The Medicine Hat cronies with friends Jane Brown and Robert Boyd



Calgary Burns Club Singers entertained on Saturday



The Jim Connor Memorial Quiz Trophy (left) presented (upper right) to Ronnie O'Byrne

Jim Cunningham presented the Consolation prizes to Alison Tait and Jane Brown (lower right)

