



The Tattler



Summer 2024 Edition

President's Message

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The Robert Burns Association
 of North America

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

Greetings fellow Burnsians,

I trust that this message finds you all hale and hearty having enjoyed a wonderful summer. My travels in June and July have taken me on a road trip to Florida and a plane journey to the UK for a two-week visit, neither of which conflicted with my ability to attend the regular monthly meetings of the Burns Club of Atlanta. While in the UK, I took a few moments to recognize the 228th anniversary of the Bards passing by reading his poem ‘A Prayer In The Prospect of Death’ which he most likely wrote in 1781. With the Bard in mind, I was also delighted to have been invited by the New Cumnock Burns Club to participate as their guest on their Podcast “My Life with Robert Burns.” Douglas McKenzie and Jim Thompson were both extremely gracious hosts, and we had a great blether recording the 120th Episode. If you haven’t watched any of their previous interviews which are available on YouTube, I thoroughly recommend them to you. They managed to get me singing and reciting Burns as part of the episode! Turning now to the ongoing management of RBANA I know that you may all be aware that it has become the custom since 2020 for the Board of Directors to meet through the power of Zoom, on a monthly basis. We have changed this format for 2024



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President's Message (continued)

and now the Board meets every two months with the Executive Committee meeting as a group on the off months. This has allowed us to streamline the work of the Board, and we are already seeing an increase in the productivity and efficiency in this approach. The Regional Directors are kept fully apprised of all the discussions that take place in the Executive Committee through copies of the minutes of the meetings. We still have one vacant US Region Director role, and we expect to fill that in the next few weeks. I am still recalling fond memories of the events in Mt Holly as preparations ramp up for the 2025 AGM and Conference in Atlanta on May 9 through 11. The Board and members of the Burns Club of Atlanta are excited about hosting the 45th annual gathering and we have a number of interesting attractions that will be offered in the program. An extremely key component of any visit to Atlanta for the Burns commu-

nity is of course, the Burns Cottage in Ormewood Park where we plan to hold the Friday night Ceilidh or more appropriately for the South, the BBQ! We are close to confirming the host hotel and will be sharing registration details very soon. I hope you will enjoy this edition of the Tattler.



Yours in Burns,

Mark Ferguson
President, Robert Burns Association of
North America

Think
Burns

SJCS Host Tom MacIver Whisky Tasting Event



The South Jersey Celtic Society held a very special Whisk(e)y Tasting on Sunday, August 4th, 2024. The tasting was held in honor of our co-founder and friend Tom MacIver, who passed away from Alzheimer's

disease one year ago. The Whiskey was gifted by our friends at Buffalo Trace and consisted of four their finest Straight Kentucky Bourbons from their Col. E. H. Taylor Jr. line of Kentucky Straight Bourbon including: their *Small Batch*, *Bottle in Bond** (*BiB*; *Single Barrel*, *BiB*; *Barrel Proof*, (131.1 proof); and there very rare, limited release (2017) *Four Grain*, *BiB*. A Fifth Bonus Bottle donated by John Companick rounded out this otherwise Verticle tasting was a bottle of *Weller Antique 107*.

A surprise visit from our very own Charlie Zahm kicked off the evening with several songs including some of our favorite Whisky Drinking Songs.

Spellbound Brewing hosted the evening and opened up the outside deck for a proper pairing of Col. Taylor with our favorite cigars All proceeds have been donated to the *RBWF*

Box O' Burns Alzheimer's / Dementia project in the name of Tom MacIver and the SJCS. SJCS plans to make this a recurring event annual event.

*To be labeled Bottle in Bond, the whiskey must be the product of only one distiller, one distillery, during one distillation season. Additionally, the Act required that bonded spirits were supervised by the U.S. government for at least four years and to be bottled at least 100 proof, in federally bonded warehouses



The Tattler encourages all clubs to submit news of club events or activities. As well, all members are reminded they are welcome to submit articles or essays on Burns or Burns related topics for publication.

The deadline for submissions for the Autumn Edition is Friday November 15.

The edition will be published and distributed December 1.

Medicine Hat Commonwealth Garden Party



Well, thinking outside the box, as our Club has often done, it appears we have pulled off another winner. Where the Executive wanted to host another summer event, this year we decided to host a special

'Commonwealth Garden Party' on August 10. We decided upon the garden patio at the Clarion Pointe Hotel and chose this venue as we wanted something different to host a very special East Indian curry fest. We also wanted to include

special.

Peggy Grant (right) who managed the bar sports a new Club sash that is the recently introduced Glen Affric tartan. This new tartan is based on the tartan found in a Scottish peat bog at Glen Affric in the Highlands some 40 plus years ago.

That tartan is believed to date back to 1500 to 1600 and is classified as one of Scotland's oldest known tartans.



First, complimentary welcome drinks, (l) this was followed with Samosas & Chicken Pakora Appies (r)



The guests mingle, and what a mixed group we had. It was great!

some proper and unique entertainment. So, utilizing the involvement and management skills of Club member and fellow Order of the Monkey (Monkey) recipient Ritesh Sharma, who is also the GM of the Clarion Pointe, Ritesh arranged the menu. Further, he decided the servers, all originally from India, would wear traditional dress. Ritesh also arranged for us to have three East Indian dancers that we later learned were students at the Medicine Hat College. It was clear that Ritesh also wanted this event to be

Our traditional Club Whisky Bar was transformed into a new 'Pimm's, Gin & Whisky Bar'. Here we offered three Pimm's based cocktails, three different gin drinks using three different gins, those being Hendricks (Scottish), Gordons (English) and Empress (Canadian), and three different whiskies, an award winning Indiri Indian malt whisky, an 18 year old Glenfiddich and of course, the Club blend Monkey Shoulder.

We were proud to include the East Indian Dancers, identified as Komalpreet, Jyoti and Rajveery. They were also happy to be involved so they could show off some traditional Indian 'Joy' dances.

These Lassies were sponsored by Ken & Brenda Montgomery. It also wouldn't

have been a Club event if we didn't have our Club pipers perform. Special thanks to Malcolm Sissons, Club Piper and Rab Cowan, Club President and the Club's back-up piper for their efforts.

Where the appies were served to the tables, the main meal was buffet and there were lots to eat; including as much Butter Chicken, Beef Curry, Lamb Vindaloo, Ceaser salad, rice and Naan bread as you could want. The desert was Gulab Jaman, and that was also served to the tables. Those attending were very impressed!

MHBC Commonwealth Night (continued)

The feature event of the night was a trivia quiz. We heard this was a new and very popular post COVID rage, and we were right. Here we



Table 5 starts to ponder, and the other tables, including table 1 do likewise

brought in Brainteaser Trivia hosted by Randy Gant. Randy got all the tables involved and thinking. There were many tricky questions and it was clear those attending were not only involved but loved the challenge.

When the scores were tallied, the winning table was Table 5 that included President Rab Cowan, his daughter Shelley Kalewski, Malcolm Sissons, John Sharps, John Barrett, Don Girling and Kevin and Mavis Conrad. The grand prize won was a special and fully loaded basket of treats and goodies donated by Gold Star Liquor.

Then there was the Club raffle featuring a special Indian rum and malt whisky donated by Bob's Liquor, a round of golf for two donated by



The winning trivia team receives their prize, then the draws commenced for the raffle

the Medicine Hat Golf & Country Club, custom blended coffee donated by Mathew



Hill and Pool House Cafe & Roastery, a special red and white wine donated by Ken & Brenda Montgomery and a special bottle of the multiple award winning Indiri Indian malt whisky donated by

Trackside Liquor, the Club's official procurer of alcoholic beverages.

To conclude, what a spectacular and fun night out! We had people from all over the world attend including Scotland (of course), other parts of the UK, Ghana, Brazil and even Bow Island (John Cameron). We also saw many new faces and many who are interested

in attending our Jolly Beggars event in October and possibly becoming an active Club member. Many positive reviews have been received and continue to come in, and it appears clear the Club should host a Second Annual Commonwealth Garden Party next year.

And finally, thank you so much to all our Club members who supported this special event and encouraged others to attend. I note we had **FIFTY** people attending. Club members attending were Andy Cowan, Rab Cowan, Malcolm Sissons, Bill Cocks, Ken Murdock, Mathew Hill, John Cameron, Kevin Conrad, Kenny McMillan, Mike Mudie, Steve Kelly, Scott Schall and myself,

Thanks again, and remember to be involved and support **YOUR** Club! Respectfully submitted by the Medicine Hat Burns Club's most humble secretary

Ken Montgomery



President Rab relaxes with a pint.



Malcolm & Rab do their thing (left) and the East Indian Ladies (right) were brilliant!

The Cameron Report



Good day everyone, please note, as I write this, that Two Hundred and Twenty-Eight years ago, 1796 on this day was the date of Robert Burns' death, and his legacy carries on, much to the chagrin of England.

This has been a bit of a chaotic year so far, for the Winnipeg Robert Burns Club, with the Holiday Inn pricing us out of our venue of a dozen years.

Colin, along with myself and Darlene attended the 2024 Robert Burns Association of North America in May. A great time was had by all.

In June, Darlene and I attended the Manitoba Highland Gathering in East Selkirk, north of the city, Colin, as per usual, manned the club's information table. (below, left) The St Andrew's Society of Winnipeg were also in



attendance with a tent. (above, right, with Colin, Vice President Dwight MacAulay and Membership Chair and Treasurer James Munro)

Folklorama started up again in August, and Darlene and I manned the Burns Table for three of the evenings. Colin manned both the



Burns Table, with Janet Thompson on the other nights, along with others, and the Saint Andrew's Society table on the night's Dar-

lene and I were at the club table.

We are still trying to finalize a venue for this upcoming Burns year...entertainment for October is already planned and obtained.

The St Andrew's Society has been busy with the 'Pop Up Piper,' playing at various locations throughout the Summer, and have a "Membership Mixer" planned at the Cargo Bar, in Winnipeg's largest and oldest park at the end of August.

Our Burns Club will be having our AGM on the 3rd Saturday in October at the Norwood Hotel.

The St Andrew's Society are preparing for their annual dinner in November, where they will welcome Winnipeg Mayor Scott Gillingham as guest speaker.

In closing, let me wish you all a good end of summer.

Submitted by

Charles H. Cameron
President: Winnipeg Robert Burns Club
Director Central Canada for RBANA



THE ST. ANDREW'S
SOCIETY OF WINNIPEG

Robert Burns: The Legend

Editor's note:

This issue's contribution from U.S. Director George McClennan is from an address he delivered many years ago.



The Legend of Robert Burns is not easily encapsulated in a few words, certainly not even in one paragraph or two. He falls into several categories that have been explored and examined by biographers and writers for decades without an agreed conclusion because there's no easy conclusion. He was a man of many facets. Looking at him from the strict Calvinist religious position he was an immoral rogue. Historians saw him as a preserver of Scotland's heritage the English worked so hard to erase, and intellectuals saw him as a literary wonder. No one doubted his genius First and most notable is the singular fact that he was a handsome devil who didn't have to go after the lassies because enough of them fluttered their eyes at him to satisfy their raging hormones. "*An hour a night with Burns was more than all day with another man.*" The list of wee bairns he left in his wake speaks volumes as to his views of the natural instincts of folks as compared to the strict morality demanded by the Kirk. Life after all is life and it can't be ignored. Second, he was a farmer whose family, like all crofter families of the era, scrapped their survival from hardscrabble fields in an often unforgiving environment to avoid the "*iron grip of Want and Woe.*" Crop loss insurance was unheard of but loan repayments were due on demand. Penury and poverty were the crofters constant companions and Burns as the plowman he was, labored in the harsh elements suffering physical ailments and other illnesses to his body that affected not only his thinking but inflamed his desire to succeed, not only for his own satisfaction but for his family's survival as well. His gift for writing was his vehicle to achieve that



goal but, he was fortunate because his family survival became almost totally dependent on his government salary from the Excise. Third was his undoubted natural genius. Despite a lack of a higher education beyond what his parents afforded to him and what he obtained himself by his own initiative, marked his natural intellect. He was a voracious reader. He poured over newspapers from London and Paris, Belfast and Edinburgh, and compared what he read and understood, especially the developing French and American revolutions, with the snobbish society class that considered themselves his betters at home. He examined the usefulness of political radicalism and saw its failures on one hand and its success on the other. He drew conclusions that frightened his government and he realized, almost too late, the dangers to his family's existence and withdrew his quill from the inkwell of his potential destruction. His powers of observation, his musing with his peasant folk fellows, recorded lives in harmony with their situation. He lived within, and resisted the intolerant world of strict Calvinism that punished sinners and demanded religious adherence that many couldn't fulfill. Suicides were many! Forth, is the supposed alcoholism that clings to his legend like a dark shadow. In the Scotland of Burns' era, lacking TV, theaters and other social amusement, taverns and ale houses fulfilled a community need by providing a place where men could associate, discuss the politics of the day, read and share antidotes of the day and enjoy a pint. Like all farmers and laborers of those times, Burns did too. With Burns' rising fame and notoriety, his many invitations to the salons of Edinburgh's rich and famous introduced him to the quaint custom of endless after dinner toasts. Guests would offer toasts of one kind or another to be returned by the special guest,

Robert Burns: The Legend (continued)

Burns of course, as tests of his intellect and impromptu rhyming skills. This went on until the hosts and his guests fully inebriated, slid off their seats to congeal as pools of drunken flesh congealed on the floor below. They could sleep until late the next day, Burns could not! During his year in Edinburgh, this was nearly a nightly occurrence. Not to minimize his association with groups like the Crochallan Fencibles and others, the record also show his frequent visits to the taverns and ale houses off the High Street where he could associate with his kind and enjoy a pint or two. So, yes, Burns did like his adult beverages, but was he an alcoholic as we know the term today? Probably not! Alcohol served two main purposes. It provided relief from aches and pains of daily existence and it substituted for water, almost always polluted! His body was afflicted with ailments common to his time and good strong drink often helped! Writers and biographers of Robert Burns, almost from the moment of his death and right up to today, have either sentimentally lionized him for his contribution to the preservation of Scottish culture or criticized him because he was not one of them! "*Titled knaves and idiot greatness*" by their snobbery, they failed to reconcile his roots with his genius. Others criticized him for his satirical assaults against the Kirk, and some trembled at his none too subtle but radical attacks against the very Government he worked for, glamorizing as he did, the revolutions in France and America, as well as the rebellion in Ireland.... Burn left a written evidentiary trail with some of his odes, epistles, letters, window pane scratching and overheard public mutterings sometimes of a seditious mature. It was his fame and popularity and the political protection afforded to him by his keen admirers, including those in the excise service, that saved him from the gibbet or transportation. Apart from his apparent wenching and political radicalism, what often goes unremarked was his complete dedication to his family. Many biographers have recog-



nized Burns' bawdy songs and poetry for what they were; not simply excursions into moral turpitude but real reflections of Scottish life revealing the drudgery and the ever present specter of poverty facing the hard farm existence when and if it failed. He wrote as well on the simple pleasures found in the Cotters' cottages and the tavern and ale house that aroused the admiration and sympathies of his growing audience. Burns covered all aspects of Scottish life and spared no one who fell afoul of his offended senses. Some friends attempted to hide his more felicitous product from polite society by refusing to publish them and some well meaning friends actually destroyed his more lurid poetry lest the Bards name should be tarnished for perceived moral depravity. What could not be hidden however, was the trail of spoiled women and wee bairns he left in his wake! While the folk of croft, village and town openly applauded and laughed at his poetic contributions that truly reflected their existence, especially the bawdy he rescued from their own oral history and the tawdry diversions from their otherwise dull existence; the educated Gentry 2 applauded him for his literary and composition genius, ignoring what many of the upper class gentry practiced but didn't brag about, sex. Those issues were still the objects of scorn and close censure by the strict but abating authority of the Calvinist "Olde Lights" church. Many of his poems as we know, were direct assaults ridiculing individuals of the Kirk he saw as hypocrites and some coofs of the gentry he saw as idiots. There he succeed with his humorous epitaphs that excoriated both the clergy and some in the gentry with equal measure, but, not so for the lassies who shared his bed or haystack and suffered with him the sting of Kirk rebuke and public humiliation on some Sundays, sitting on the cutty stool of repentance to be publicly berated by the Kirks elders. That unhappy experience was a driving point for his anti-kirk assaults on hypocrisy. They knew it too and came to fear his poison pen while everybody in the community knew, and laughed! His contributions to British literature of the time superseded the disdain some tried to heap upon him because he was, in fact, a rising rock star on the Edin-

burgh scene, even if only for a short time. His well earned notoriety installed him forever on the high pedestal as Scotland's Bard, along with Fergusson. Burns was twenty-seven when he was invited to the Edinburgh Literary scene so the 'swells' could marvel at his novelty, jest at his commonplace status and test his genius. They didn't really believe he was genius possessed because a simple plowman farmer from the peasant class couldn't possibly rise intellectu-

ally above his social station. But he surprised 'em all! Burns' legend is no longer overshadowed by the distortions of early biographers. If nothing else he is the inspiration for people around the world to participate in annual celebrations on his behalf. Who else in history enjoys this singular honor? So, enjoy your Burns as you do your wine.

Review of *Hag Storm* by Victoria Williamson, Pokey Hat, an imprint of Cranachan Publishing Limited,

Editor's Note:

Attendees at the RBANA AGM will recall mention of a Burns related book "Hag Storm" which had been sent, by the author, to a number of club secretaries. While it is has not been the practice of RBANA, or the Tattler, to promote any specific book, the fact that the author is committing 20% of her royalties to the Burns Federation, makes this an excep-

tional reason to do so at this time. The Federation are also promoting a book launch in October at the Burns Birthplace Museum in Ayr.

The book can be ordered directly from the publisher Cranachan Publishing:

<https://www.cranachanpublishing.co.uk/product/hag-storm-by-victoria-williamson/>

It is also available through Amazon

This enchanting but scary book would be a perfect read for those who love Halloween and all things that could give one a fright! It's perhaps not recommended for a normal chapter book reader of younger years. I know that I will not be recommending the book just yet to my 11-year-old granddaughter, an avid reader of the *Babysitter's Club* book series. Yet, fans of the more gruesome so-called "children's books" would find it a great macabre read, full of hideous witches, eerie storms, a haunted, abandoned church and a creepy maiden aunt who makes straw effigies of her relatives. This reviewer (I must confess, not a fan of spooky tales), however, was fascinated by the de-



lightful writing, historical characterisation of 12-year-old Rab Burns, the backbreaking work he and his younger siblings do on their family's farm, and his obvious sense of responsibility for the welfare of his family. The book's blurb poses the question: "Can Rab save his sisters from the clutches of the witches' coven before their Halloween ceremony in the old kirk?" The writer's clever weaving of references to Burns' classic poem *Tam O'Shanter* will surely be particularly appealing to Robert Burns' Club fans of all ages.

Gayle Moore-Morrans

Gayle Moore-Morrans is a member of the Winnipeg Robert Burns Club, and a writer, editor and publisher. Her company Moormor Publishing has a number of Scottish themed books, most with reference to Scottish songs, Robert Burns poetry, Burns Clubs and/or Burns suppers. *Beyond the Phantom Battle: Mystery at Loch Ashie*, a novel of adventure, fantasy and romance set in Scotland *From Poverty To Poverty: A Scotsman Encounters Cana-*

da, a memoir 1932-1970 *Came To Canada, Eh? Adventures of a Scottish Nomad*, a memoir 1970-2004 *Jake, Little Jimmy & Big Louie*, a chapter book about a boy and two birds plus the future *Mexican Follies*, a memoir and travelogue 2004-2008 (anticipated to be published by October 2024)