

## President's Message

**D**ear Members,

That was a great night at the Christmas Party. Good food and company, and Santa blessed us with his presents (and presence). We had over 60 participants which is a new high water mark and I think everybody had a good time which provided for a truly festive night!



We are making the finishing touches to the Burns Night and it looks like it's going to be the best yet. Tickets are going fast! The editor of the Thistle Times will be giving the Immortal Memory, so it's sure to be a very professional affair, and our bud-din' celebrity Alex Sutherland will be the MC. Denise and her sub-committee have it all planned to the minute, to tantalise your Celtic nerve endings. I am very much looking forward to seeing you all there.

*Aw-ra-best, Keith*

Looking for a January 25th Event?

### BURNS NIGHT AT THE TAP ROOM

At Olive & 21st Street

Entertainment includes Pipers, and Greyfriars Bobby. Special Burns Ale!

*The honest heart that's free frae a'  
Intended fraud or guile,  
However Fortune kick the ba',  
Has ay some cause to smile.*  
from "Epistle to Davie"  
by Robert Burns

### Back in the early days...

**H**ow many flags does Scotland have anyway? Well, at least three! First there's the Union Jack which is a composite of the flags of the "United Kingdoms", and thus, contains the St Andrew's Cross. Then there's the sky blue and white cross of the St Andrew's Cross, which is considered Scotland's primary flag. The third is the "Lion Rampant". King William the Lyon invaded Northumberland in 1175 and was promptly captured by the forces of Henry II. He was released from prison by surrendering Edinburgh and Stirling Castles. Not the most heroic of Scots, but, he was the one who first chose the Royal Standard (Arms) of Scotland - the Lion Rampant

### inside...

*Events Program*

*Robert Burns (1759 - 1796)*

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*Toasts & Things*

*Other really good stuff!*

## Events Program. Come along and enjoy...

**D**espite the lack of snow (that night), Santa found a way to make it to our annual Christmas Party, at Country Day School. Everyone had a super time, with good food and fun & games all round.

*A big thank you to everyone who participated in making this another great night!*

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*We still need  
volunteers to  
help make this  
exciting program  
happen.*

*Please call:*

*D. Duffy 532-7587  
or  
P. Gowran 968-5429*

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### **ROBERT BURNS DINNER**

**at**

**MISSOURI ATHLETIC CLUB**

**JANUARY 28th, 1995**

**Cocktails start at 5:45pm**

**Dinner at 6:45pm**

**guest entertainer Christina Harrison**  
**originally from Glasgow, now living in Pennsylvania**

**Plus haggis, traditional toasts and music**

**Remember that numbers are limited so don't wait till the last minute to send your check and reservation form to:**

*Martha Steinbrueck, 21 Nantucket Island Court,  
Grover, Mo 63040.  
Tel: (314) 458-6287*

**February 27th: Guest speaker Maureen Meickle. At Country Day School.**  
Details in next month's Thistle Times.

#### **SPECIAL NOTES TO MEMBERS**

Members of the Society send sincere condolences to the Gowrans on the recent death of Peter's sister. Our thoughts and prayers are with you.

# Robert Burns (1759-1796)

**S**cotland has produced several literary greats, and the greatest of all was Rabbin Burns. His poetry and songs earned him the title of “Bard of all Humanity” around the world. The more familiar works of Burns are often quoted at this time of year (see our own Burns Dinner), but it is inspiring to explore his work and feel the power of his pen. The following excerpt from his address to the “Gentlemen of the Caledonian Hunt” (Edinburgh) shows the genius of the man, and is typical of his heroic support for Scotland in the face of rampant Anglicisation:

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**... I come to  
congratulate my  
country...**

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*A Scots Bard, proud of the name, and whose highest ambition is to sing in his Country's service, where shall he so properly look for patronage as to the illustrious names of his native Land; those who bear the honours and inherit the virtues of their Ancestors? The Poetic Genius of my Country found me, as the prophetic bard Elijah did Elisba - at the plough; and threw her inspiring mantle over me. She bade me sing the loves, the joys, the rural scenes and rural pleasures of my natal Soil, in my native tongue: I tuned my wild artless notes, as she inspired. She whispered me to come to this Metropolis of Caledonia, and lay my Songs under your honoured protection.*

*Though much indebted to your goodness, I do not approach you, my Lords and Gentlemen, in the usual style of dedication, to thank you for past favours: that path is so hackneyed by prostituted Learning, that honest Rusticity is ashamed of it' - Nor do I present this Address with the venal soul of a servile Author, looking for a continuation of those favours: I was bred to the Plough, and am independent. I come to claim the common Scottish name with you, my illustrious Countrymen; and to tell the world that I glory in the title. I come to congratulate my country, that the blood of her ancient heroes still runs uncontaminated; and that, from your courage, knowledge, and public spirit, she may expect protection, wealth, and liberty....* Your most devoted humble servant, **ROBERT BURNS.**

The following notes were taken from a commentary on Robert Burns by none other than Robert Louis Stevenson:

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**..they had already  
discovered nature,  
but Burns  
discovered poetry.**

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“...so the dabbler in verse rejoices to behold a waterfall, because he has learned the sentiment and knows appropriate words for it in poetry. But the dialect of Burns was fitted to deal with any subject; and whether it was a stormy night, a shepherd's collie, a sheep struggling in the snow, the conduct of cowardly soldiers, the gait of a drunken man, or only a village cockcrow in the morning, he could find language to give it freshness, body, and relief.....”

“...When we remember Burns's obligations to his predecessors, we must never forget his immense advances on them. They had already “discovered” nature; but Burns discovered poetry....”

# CALEDONIA CORNER

**H**APPY NEW YEAR! Hogmanay is over for another year, and we hope you had a good one. At one time, the first day of the Scottish new year was Handsel Monday (equivalent to the Monday after January 12th in the modern calendar: Handsel being the old Scots word for a gift, or tip). Up until the end of Queen Victoria's reign Jan 12th remained a holiday for agriculture, industry and service workers, in respect of the old custom. Today, the date has changed (to Jan 1st) but Scotland still celebrates Ne'erday (New Year's Day) with centuries old traditions. Of course it all starts a few days before the big event with the great "reddin'-up" when the house has to be cleaned and all the chores completed before the auld year passes. Then it wouldn't be Ne'erday without "first-footing" - originally a pagan offering ceremony, and then an event where the medieval clergy took bread, cheese and wine to the poor. Modern first-footing continues the ritual with a round of visiting friends and relatives to give them shortbread and their "New Year" from the family bottle! The first-foot is the person who first crosses the doorstep and he traditionally brings food and drink (to ward off hunger), and coal (for warmth). In some parts, salt (for wealth), an evergreen twig (life), red herrings (sea harvest), or a wheat sheaf (good crops) are also carried. The first-foot is always a man, because of the old superstition about women being unlucky on the fishing boats. Dark hair is also best since fair or red-hair

was associated with the Viking raiders (What, in St Louis!?). Of course, if by any chance the first-foot is not "correct" then evil fortune can be averted by placing a rowan-twig cross tied with red thread above the door.....

*Bliadhna sona* (Happy New year!)

**Up-Helly-Aa** is celebrated in the northern most areas of Scotland, and especially in the Shetland Isles, at end-January. This is a spectacular fire festival which combines the end of Yule, with remembrances of the Viking presence. Typically, there's a large parade, and everyone dresses up as some sort of Viking (like a Halloween with a Norse theme), and a mock long-boat is ceremoniously burned. Of course, after the flames die away, it's back to the party - just like Hogmanay!

## PROVERBS:

*A cock aye craws on his ain midden*

- it's easy to be brave on your own territory.

*Ca canny, an ye'll break nae graith*

- go carefully and all will be well.

**..it wouldn't be  
Ne'erday without  
first-footing...**

## Wha wad ken?

**F**irst to answer all three wins one of the Society flag pins.

1. When was "Bannockburn"?
2. What is the "Black Isle"?
3. Where can you find a statue of Robert Burns, in St Louis?

All replies to Jim McLaren  
2214 Stoneridge Terr Ct,  
Chesterfield, MO 63017  
or phone: (314) 532-5986

Congratulations to Alex Sutherland, for being first to answer correctly:

1. "Berwick Cockles" — sweets (candy).
2. Highest peak: Ben Nevis
3. Champion racing driver from Dumbarton:  
Jackie Stewart

Please send in any interesting questions, with your name / phone number.

# CALEDONIA CORNER

**U**nfortunately, we're in America and have to make an "synthetic" haggis for the festivities this month. Were we back in Scotland there'd be a chance of being invited to a "wild haggis hunt". Due to a decrease in the natural population, the season has been shortened to the week before Burns' birthday. However, some of the clans discovered that if you leave little bowls of whisky around the moor about the time of the first winter frost, the haggis drink it to keep warm - and it makes them breed like rabbits! So, if you know the right people it's still possible... What a majestic site it is to see a haggis hunt. First, the piper has to play just the right notes to attract the beastie, and then if you wear anything but tartan it'll see you and run away. (Haggis have strange eyes which match the plaid and hence you become camouflaged. Anyone not in tartan sticks out like a silhouette!).

The native, wild haggis is an animal-like creature with vestigial wings but it can't fly - kind of like a small ostrich. The main habitat is the sides of Scottish mountains and so they have evolved to maintain their equilibrium while moving very fast in this terrain - in other words, the three legs are all different lengths.

(If you can chase one onto a flat area it becomes easy to catch because then it can only run in circles). Of course, with all the lochs in Scotland, the haggis has become a proficient swimmer, with the help of it's vestigial wings. In the water they love to play around and sometimes swim in a line, with one on top of another at the front. Perhaps, this is why some tourist claim to have seen the Loch Ness monster - it was just a family of haggis having a day at the loch.

Wild haggis are largely unknown outside of Scotland. Some time ago there was an attempt to transport a breeding pair to Australia (presumably to save them from having to make synthetic haggis for the Burns Suppers!). This was quite unsuccessful because it is very difficult to determine the sex of a native haggis. The situation has worsened since sex is not often talked about in Scotland, so the secret of a haggis's sex has not been passed down through the generations.

It is known that just before giving birth the female makes a droning sound, similar to out-of-tune bagpipe drones. This uncanny sound seems to have two effects. First, it lets the other haggis know that some "wee yins" are on the way. Secondly, all the other creatures, like foxes and hedgehogs, run in the opposite direction, and so the newly born are protected from predators. The wee yins are born with their eyes open, and can run around within a day (unless it's flat ground which makes them dizzy: explained above). There's an old Celtic law that forbids hunters from taking a wee haggis so the "nature people" have never worried about them being clubbed or anything. Besides, if they are attacked by predators they emit a high screech, just like a bagpipe chanter with a bad reed - the effect is to temporarily freeze anything with ears. The wee yins nibble on heather shoots at a young age, but the mother still suckles them for a few weeks. Now here's the well kept secret: the male wee yins suckle on the right and the female wee yins on the left. If you can tag them while they're suckling then you'll know the sex later.

*By the way, wild haggis have never been known to eat tatties nor neeps!*

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*..the wee yins  
nibble on  
heather shoots  
at an early age...*

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# TOASTS & THINGS

**T**He 104th Congress of the United States of America just reconvened, among much political jostling. It seems that politics have not changed much since 18th century Britain, as we can see from the clever wit of Robert Burns:

*Far be't frae me that I aspire  
To blame your legislation,  
Or say, ye wisdom want, or fire  
To rule this mighty nation:  
But faith! I muckle doubt, my sire,  
Ye've trusted ministrations  
To chaps wha in a barn or byre  
Wad better fill'd their station....*

*O, would, or I had seen the day  
That treason thus could sell us,  
My auld grey head had lien in clay,  
Wi Bruce and loyal Wallace!  
But pith and power, till my last hour,  
I'll mak this declaration:-  
We're bought and sold for English gold'-  
Such a parcel of rogues in a nation!*

*I have ever observed that when once people who have nothing to say  
have fairly set out, they know not when to stop.*

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**Want to join the Society?** (for the first or even second time)  
Contact Peter Geery, 831 Westrun Drive, Ballwin, MO 63021  
Tel: (314) 227-2785

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**Thank you for your participation and help...**

**E**njoy reading our newsletter, the Thistle Times? We need you to continue sending in stories or jokes or even printed material of interest. Suggestions and ideas are also welcome — we want to do the best job possible for everyone!  
*Jim McLaren, 2214 Stoneridge Terrace Court, Chesterfield, MO 63017  
or call (314) 532-5986.*

*Many thanks to those who've already sent me some excellent material,  
and all your help in 1994. Let's keep it going in 1995.*

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**Such a parcel of  
rogues in a  
nation...**

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**You're making  
a difference...**

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