

The Robert Burns Association of North America, 2013 AGM & Annual Conference.

When the Conference in 2012 wound up, we were hopeful that in 2013 we would meet together in Vancouver. However with no “support on the ground” and the high costs in that location your executive committee again requested the committee who ran last year’s conference to come up with an alternative plan. Niagara on-the-lake seemed to fit the bill for location, but as there were no suitable venues that could host a conference so the committee settled for Niagara Falls Ontario.

The Four Points Sheraton Hotel, which overlooks the Horseshoe Falls, offered the best facilities & rose to the challenge. This year we were honored by the presence of the Robert Burns World Federation resident Robert Stewart, his wife Frances, their friends, George & Mary Letham from the Cupar Club and Past President and Honorary RBANA members Jim & Eileen Robertson .



Most of the 50 delegates arrived on the Thursday and the weekend kicked off with the golf tournament on Friday morning. Seven hardy souls ventured forth in 10°C blustery conditions and claimed to have a great time! Ronnie O’Byrne again was the winner of the day.

While registration was underway in Friday afternoon, the directors met in the boardroom, followed by a wine reception in the hospitality suite.



Dinner in the evening took the form of a Burns Supper and there were 100 in attendance.

Board member and President of the Halton Peel Club Alan McKenzie was the MC. Bill Molloy from the Niagara Falls Club addressed the haggis with great aplomb and an impressive Immortal Memory was delivered by Les Strachan from Bedford Virginia. This was well received and the text has been inserted in the “Burns Studies” section of this website.



Tony & Sheila Grace, from Calgary, provided us with an amusing toast to the Lassies and the reply. Music for entertainment & dance was provided by Joan Ballantyne, the band Itsjustus and Bob Ritchie our Piper. A special guest, singer Nils Brown, accompanied himself on his guitar & performed Burns’ songs to the settings from Thomson’s Scots Musical Museum . He also joined the band & Joan in several pieces. Ronnie O’Byrne, Bill Molloy & Alex Crawley regaled us again with their comedic rendition of “Willie Brewed a Peck ‘O Maut”. Others added to the evening with poetry and song.



Altogether a great evening.



On Saturday morning the delegates assembled for the AGM. The Secretary Don Rennicks was absent, due an injury so Vice President Robert Boyd stood in as Secretary.

When Robert Stewart brought greetings from the World Federation he invested both May & Alex Crawley as Honorary Presidents of the World Federation .

We reassembled in the afternoon for the study sessions.

The first seminar was by Dr. David Murray on “Burns, Germany and a’ That. We were surprised to learn of the interest there in Burns and of his influence on Germany.

Did you know that Bismark proposed to his wife by singing “My Luv is Like a Red Red Rose”??

That seminar was followed by the Jim Connor memorial Quiz.

Jim Cunningham prepares an excellent and challenging set of questions.

There was a lot of competition but the trophy was again won by David Murray of the Halton Peel Club.



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The second seminar "Burns Musical Connections" was presented by Nils Brown & Ronnie O'Byrne. Nils has researched the 'Scots Musical Museum', so he sang for us and described the music that Burns chose for his lyrics.



At the Saturday evening Formal Dinner, following the speeches and greetings the award for the Golf "tournament" was presented by Tony Grogan and the Burns quiz by Elma Connor.



Joan & Nils again provided us with great music and the opportunity again to dance. There was not much space left on the floor!



Ronnie O'Byrne offered his special rousing rendition of "Scots Wha Hae" and during the singing all the men in the room spontaneously joined Jim Cunningham with the bodhrán and paraded around the floor. Quite a sight!

A highlight of the evening was the duet "Time to Say Goodbye" sung by Joan Ballantyne & Nils Brown to wrap up the entertainment.



Nils then sang Auld Lang Syne to the original set tune, then we all joined hands for the one we all know, to close the evening.

On Sunday Morning we attended a short ecumenical service led by Rev. Bob Docherty of the Halton Peel Club and then took our leave, looking forward to the next conference in Columbia, South Carolina on April 25 & 26 2014.

Credit and thanks are again due for the organization and efforts by the Conference committee, chaired by Jim Cunningham, with Jean Cunningham, Ron & Chrys Ballantyne & Ronnie O'Byrne

The clubs participating this year were as follows:-

The Halton Peel Burns Club

The Robert Burns Society of Doon, The Robert Burns Society of Kilmarnock Ontario

The Winnipeg Robert Burns Club, The Heather & Thistle Society of Houston

The Niagara Falls Burns Club, The Robert Burns Society of Annapolis

Scheihallion Scottish Heritage Society, Calgary Burns Club

Six Independent members, plus the 6 visitors from the UK.

Here is a sample of some comments received after the conference:-

The Conference organizers excelled themselves this time.

The seminars were first class, the entertainment was great and the food excellent as usual. The 'find' of Nils Brown was inspirational.

His talent and ability are remarkable and I think we were all in awe of what he did for us. The music was terrific.

The duet Joan Ballantyne did with Nils Brown. That was beyond words.

Scott Reid, Kilmarnock ON. Club

Congratulations on yet another very successful Conference. The programme, was excellent and very enjoyable throughout the weekend.

May Crawley, RBWF Director for Canada