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FEELING THE BURNS

NEWPORT, OR - He was a poet who died well before the age of forty: yet Robert "Robbie" Burns (roll your r's when uttering his name) is considered one of the pre-eminent Scotsmen of all time, ahead of kings, warriors and yes, even the original "Braveheart."

During his short life (1759-1796), he was a poor farmer, a tax collector, a devoted Mason and a staunch churchgoer. He was also an admitted womanizer with thirteen children by five different women, the last born the day of his burial. But working just a few decades after the failed Jacobite rebellion in Scotland and the outlawing of almost all things traditionally Scottish, including the wearing of tartan, Burns's work - in the Scots dialect - is prized as a monumental step toward saving the culture.

Burns's poetry and songs concerned mostly everyday occurrences. Reading his poems seems to demand speaking the words aloud for better understanding, but beware: for American tongues, this can be torturous. Consider the opening from his first famous poem, "Tam O'Shanter:"

*When chapman billies leave the street
An droothy nee bors, nee boors meet
As market days are wearin late
An folk begin tae tak the gate
While we sit boozing at the nappy
An getting fou and unco happy.*

As the above illustrates, Burns was also known for his affection for strong spirits, common in his day. Other poems were written as an apology to a mouse flushed out of its home, in praise of the Masonic order, and to Scotland's infamous national sausage dish, the haggis. Some of his love songs are still widely sung and recorded. Our greatest, mostly unknowing, tribute to Burns comes on New Year's Eve, when the turn of each year has millions singing his remembrance of times gone by, "Auld Lang Syne."

Scots and those of Scottish descent give tribute in another way. Newport-based Celtic Heritage Alliance (CHA) joins groups all over the world in hosting a Robert Burns Supper on or near his birth date of January 25. Locally, CHA's second annual supper will be held on the evening of Saturday, January 12, 2013, 7:00 - 10:00 p.m. at Newport's Shilo Inn Ballroom.

The event of celebration, good eating and frivolity will follow the prescribed course for a Burns supper, including bagpipes, readings of Burns' works, multiple courses of traditional Scottish dishes and the great ritual of "piping in" and presenting of the haggis; a large, savory sausage filled with lamb, oatmeal and spices. This is accompanied by the reading of Burns' "Address to a Haggis," of course. Guests also have the option of participating in a Scotch whisky (yes, without the "e") tasting of a fine selection of single malts presented by experts throughout the supper.

Dress is semi-formal, with wearing the tartan appreciated - expect to see several guests in full Highland evening rig. Some of the content is serious - good Scotch is no joke to those who cultivate the practice! But the evening is one of fun.

A bit different from your average dinner at the beach? Indeed. But attending a Burns Supper is a way of connecting those of similar heritage, or those who merely appreciate it. It seems to be popular: CHA's first supper in January 2012 was sold out. This year, the event is limited to 75 participants and another sellout is expected.

For more information, call 541-574-7696; to order tickets in advance, see CHA's website: www.ncfhg.com. The Burns Supper is a fundraising event for CHA, a §501(c)(3) organization and new member of the Oregon Cultural Trust. Funds raised will go to support the annual Newport Celtic Festival and Highland Games at the Lincoln County Fairgrounds in June, one of several events hosted by the CHA.

Put on your tartan sash January 12 and join your fellow Scots and Scots-lovers for a feast: accompanied by music and the work of the man voted the greatest Scot of all time.

*"We'll tak a cup of kindness yet,
For auld lang syne!"*

--Jill M. Lyon

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