

Thistle June 2017

Bill Thomas

The Scottish community in the Inland Northwest lost one of its most influential members in March 2017, on the passing of Bill Thomas.

Bill was active in all aspects of Scottish cultural affairs, but particularly of course in the piping community. In 1958, he founded the Shadle Park High School Pipe Band, which is still active today, and was their pipe major until 1978. In the late 1950s, he joined the Angus Scott Pipe Band, and served many years as their pipe major. For some years, he was the Piping and Drumming Chair for the Spokane Highland Games. In his honor, ASPB instituted the Bill Thomas award for the most promising young piper, which is awarded annually at the Games. Throughout his entire piping career, Bill was regarded as a mentor by other band members, continually helping others to achieve their best.

Born in Toppenish, Washington, on April 9, 1931, he grew up on the farm during the depression years, tales of which he enjoyed recounting. He graduated from high school in 1949, and served in the Korean War. After that, he went to Central Washington College of Education, and graduated in 1958 with a BA in Education. Moving to Spokane, he taught sixth grade at Westview Elementary from 1958 to 1988.

In recognition of his outstanding services in the Scottish community, the St Andrews Society of the Inland Northwest in 2012 awarded him their highest honor, the Order of the Thistle.

He is survived by his wife of 65 years, JaDean, his five children, and two brothers.

Nine Pint Coggies

Another sold-out show!

The Coggies put on their annual performance at the Jacklin Arts Center in Post Falls on April 8th. Before the concert even started, they had to put out more chairs to accommodate the growing numbers who kept coming in.

The program announced that this was a "Trip to Scotland" with a celebration of National Tartan Day (two days prior on April 6th) being the main theme. Accordingly, the music was predominantly Scottish in style, with jigs, reels, and strathspeys. Most of these were from Scotland itself, including the Shetlands, but there were also Irish and Quebecois items. In addition, there were several pieces from the Scandinavian countries, including the Swedish Trettondedags Marschen and the Finnish waltz Metsakukkia, meaning "Flower of the Woods." Mabel Vogt, Jan Clizer and Steve Riggan featured as soloists in three of the 15 sets. The audience's enthusiasm was rewarded by an encore of four Shetland reels.

The Coggies have been around for 11 years, led by Steve Riggan. They are a group of musicians of various levels who love and play Scottish music. They get together twice a week, once in Coeur d'Alene and once in Spokane, in the home of one of the members. They now number 27, and 18 played at their concert. Although the strings are the predominant instruments, including fiddle, viola and cello, the sound is rounded out by piano, guitars, mandolin, percussion and accordion.

The inspiration for the group was the San Francisco Scottish Fiddlers (SFSF), founded by Alasdair Fraser. Alasdair is the main force behind the growing popularity of Scottish music. The SFSF are musicians from all over the country, though predominantly the western states, who enjoy this genre of music and like to get together to play it. Several years ago Alasdair led the group of 120 musicians on a tour which came through our area, and this led to Steve Riggan and various other local musicians - some of whom play in the SFSF - to found their own local fiddle group.

Incidentally, when I talked to Steve about the group I referred to them as the "San Francisco Fiddle Orchestra"; Steve told me their correct title, saying that they avoided the word "Orchestra" to keep their identity informal.

Documentarian Tommie Dell Smith has just made a film " The Groove is not Trivial" celebrating the career and influence of Alasdair Fraser. She says " My goal for this film is to inspire people to live more fully by connecting and embracing joy as a part of our lives." A short trailer of the movie, which is coming to the Spokane/Coeur d'Alene area in the near future, was shown at the Coggies' concert. When the time and place of the performance are announced, a notice will be sent out the members of the St Andrews Society. For information, see thegroovemovie.com.

Northwest Regional Highland Dance Championships

On May 13th, it was Spokane's turn to host the Northwest Regional Championships in Highland Dancing. This is the qualifying championship for the U.S. Interregional Championship, (USIR) whose winners represent the best in the nation. This year the USIR will be held in Salt Lake City, Utah, from July 19 to 23.

The Championships are held under the auspices of FUSTA - the Federation of United States Teachers and Adjudicators, which promotes highland dancing in the USA. The overall governance of highland dancing is by the Scottish Official Board of Highland Dance (SOBHD), which is based in Scotland and set the rules of competition worldwide.

The Northwest Region comprises seven states: Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Utah, Washington and Wyoming. The host city for the annual championships rotates from year to year between four cities, so Spokane will not host again for a while.

The championships gather together the best dancers from each of the states within the Region - although this year Alaska, Montana and Wyoming did not send any representatives.

In highland dance, the dancers are graded into five categories: primary, beginner, novice, intermediate, and premier. When a dancer starts, he or she will be in the lowest category. To reach the next level requires placing in the top three in six different competitions.

At the championships, only the highest level - the premier dancers - compete: so these are the best of the best.

The competition is split into six age categories: 7-9, 10-11, 12-13, 13-14, 15-16, 16-17, and over 18. Those placing in the top three in each age category advance to the USIR.

This year the main organizers of the event, which was held in the West Valley High School auditorium, were Marie Grimes-Darling, Elizabeth Coyle, and the NW Regional Delegate to FUSTA, Ann Johnson.

Organization of the event is quite a big deal:

- For the championships, there are three judges, who independently score the dancers. The scores comprise 80% for technique, including footwork, use of hands and arms, etc.; 10% for timing, i.e. how well the dancer is in time with the music; and 10% for general deportment. To become a judge requires passing a rigorous exam. (Note that individual highland games may have only one judge, rather than the three required for the championships).
- The judges' scores are passed on to the scrutineers, who assemble the judges' scores. There are four scrutineers, one head scrutineer and three others. Again, this is a technical job requiring training and certification.
- To provide the music requires one or more pipers: in this competition, there were two, though only one plays at a time. The pipers obviously have to be professional pipers approved by FUSTA. Particularly important is consistency. In one age category there may be 12 dancers. Each "set" comprises three or four dancers, so there may be up to three or four sets. To be fair to all the dancers the music has to be the same for each of the sets.
- In addition to the above, there are the usual requirements for a competition: finding a suitable venue; putting together a program and getting adverts for it; handling dancer registrations; providing an announcer; marshaling the dancers so they are at the right place at the right time and go on and off stage in good order; and having refreshments available.

This year, 49 dancers were in the competition. However, those who have previously placed in the top three in the USIR are granted a bye so don't have to compete at the Regionals. There were three byes, including Spokane's Meghan Palmer who will therefore compete at this year's USIR but was not present this weekend.

The other dancers from the region competing to represent the Northwest were Kasey Hawkins in the 18 and over age group and Victoria Hawkins in the 12-13 age group, both from Coeur d'Alene; and Londynne Stratton from Spokane in the 7-9 age group. All made it through to the USIR - congratulations! Kasey and Victoria are instructed by Elizabeth Coyle, and Londynne by Marie Grimes-Darling.

There are four different events for each age group: Fling, Swords, Sean Truibhas, and Strathspey and Highland Reel. In the first three of these, the dancers perform as individuals. "Swords" has the two crossed swords, which the dancers have to avoid touching, and whose origin is reputedly the preparation of warriors for battle. The Sean Truibhas commemorates the shaking off of the trows after the 1746 ban against the kilt and tartan was lifted in 1782. The Strathspey and Highland Reel is danced as a set of four, and involves the movement of the reel and the interaction with the other dancers in the set.

After the Regional Championships, in the afternoon there was a competition for the pre-premier dancers. Most of the 35 dancers in the competition were from Spokane and the surrounding area, though there were also dancers from the West Side, from Oregon and from Canada.

It was a pleasure to see such a high quality of dance here in Spokane, and it is also encouraging to see how highland dance is flourishing in the region.



Dancers placing in the top three of their age category. Our region's dancers are Kasey Hawkins (back, third from left); Londynne Stratton (front, second from left); and Victoria Hawkins (front, second from right).

National Tartan Day

National Tartan Day is a predominantly North American institution, and is celebrated on April 6th, the date of the Declaration of Arbroath. The St Andrews Society has until this year not celebrated the occasion, though one of our members, Chuck Cook of Tacoma, has been very active in promoting it. After a question was raised at the 2016 AGM of the Society, Council decided that we should celebrate it.

Barbara Bley, a member at large on council, was the chief instigator and main organizer, and is to be congratulated on a job well done.

The event was held at Shadle Library on the afternoon of April 6th; Shadle Park high school is the home of the Highlanders, so Shadle seemed a very appropriate location. Our thanks to the library for hosting us.

Several members of Angus Scott Pipe Band, led by Pipe Major Jenel Thew, attended, and began the ceremony by piping in the Colors.

The Society's President, Greg Roth, opened the proceedings by extending a welcome and reading the proclamation of the US Government naming April 6th as National Tartan Day.

Peter Guthrie then gave a presentation on the Declaration of Arbroath. The Declaration was a letter sent by the Scots to the Pope in 1320, after 30 years of resistance against the efforts of the English to exert control over Scotland. Edward I of England, the "Hammer of the Scots", claimed sovereignty over Scotland following the failure of the direct Scottish royal line and the resulting disputed succession. After Wallace led the resistance against the English until his capture and execution, Robert the Bruce emerged as the leader and King of Scots. Edward I died in 1307, but his son Edward II pursued the English claim and led a large army into Scotland, which was soundly defeated at the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314. Still the English did not give up and recognize Scottish independence, which was only finally ceded in 1328. This was the background for the Declaration of Arbroath, which was an appeal to the international community, through the Pope, to back the Scottish claim to independence from England and in particular to support Robert the Bruce's claim to kingship. The Declaration has been likened in its importance to the American Declaration of Independence. Its most famous lines (translated from the original Latin in which it was written) are:

"for, as long as a hundred of us remain alive, never will we on any conditions be subjected to the lordship of the English. It is in truth not for glory, nor riches, nor honours that we are fighting, but for freedom alone, which no honest man gives up but with life itself."

Barbara Bley gave a presentation on the history and significance of tartans, followed by Doug Malcolm, who talked about colors and badges used by the Scots.

There were several exhibits concerning Scottish culture. Howard Hansen brought a collection of original Scottish swords and daggers, which drew a lot of attention. The Spokane weavers brought a loom and demonstrated some of the intricacies of actually weaving tartan cloth. The Highland Games Association had a booth to promote and talk about the Games. The Bremners had a genealogy and clan table.

The highland dancers, under the direction of Brielle Balazs, gave a demonstration of highland dancing, from the very young beginners to more experienced dancers. Dan Grimes provided the pipe music for the dancers, playing the fireside pipes. These are similar to the great highland pipes, but smaller and so more suitable for an indoor setting.

Tea, coffee and Scottish cookies, were available throughout the event.

The Society received very complimentary emails from the library staff and the weavers saying how much they enjoyed the event, a sentiment shared by everyone there. Keep April 6th, 2018 open on your calendars for next year's celebration.

Thanks to all who attended and participated in making this such a success.



Highland Games table



Howard Hansen's historical weapons

National Tartan Day

Bremner's genealogy table



Dancers



Angus Scott Pipe Band

Since our last report, the Angus Scott Pipe Band lost one of their longest members, and a man who had great impact on the Spokane Pipe Band community. Bill Thomas passed away on March 29, 2017. His absence is felt at all our practices. There will be a community celebration of Bill's life on September 30. For more information about this and to see other remembrances of his life you can visit the William Thomas Memorial Page on Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1892563567651621/>

As far as the band's activities, we have kept ourselves busy. April did not find us at many performances; we mostly spent the month grieving the loss of Bill and practicing music for events we have scheduled in May and June.

In May, we played at our usual graduation ceremonies at Gonzaga, St. George's and Whitworth. We also played around town at several Memorial Day events.

In early June, several members of the band played at the Mass of Christian Burial for Jack Stockton. Jack was always a huge supporter of our band and our visit to Jack and Dan's next St. Patrick's day won't be quite the same with him not there to lead us in.

Also coming up in June is the Bash on Ash, the all class reunion for Shadle Park High School. Angus Scott Pipe band has several graduates of Shadle Park as members and those who can will be participating in this event.

We are going to be spending the summer attending various Highland Games and other events around the area. One of the biggest is the Kimberley (BC) Pipe Band 90th Anniversary Tattoo in July. We were invited by the band to participate since our band was founded by Angus Scott who is from Kimberley, BC. His brother, Hamish, was in the Kimberley, BC, pipe band.

If you or anyone you know are interested in learning how to play the great highland bagpipe or want to be a drummer in our band please contact us through our website, www.aspband.com.

Annual General Meeting

The Society's AGM was held on April 30, 2017, at O'Doherty's downtown. The following is a summary of the proceedings:

- The Secretary provided the membership report. 12 new members joined this year, and we now have 271 members. Of these members, 152 are active in the Association or the community.
The Bylaws require a quorum of 10% of the active membership. This would require 16 members to be present. There being more in attendance, plus some proxies, the Secretary declared the meeting duly constituted.
- The previous years minutes were approved unanimously.
- The Treasurer, Doug Malcolm, reported that we have more cash in the bank than at this time last year, and the Society is in a very healthy financial condition.

Doug also noted that the Society's insurance may cover affiliates. If affiliates required insurance for one of their events, they should contact Doug.

Doug reported that the proposed budget for the year 2017-18 results in a slight loss of \$354. Given the Society's healthy cash position this is not cause for concern. Changes from this year's actual expenditures are an increase in advertising cost to \$1,000; a \$100 budget for Tartan Day; and an increase in scholarship awards.

- Greg Roth, the President, said that the Society had had a good year. He asked Marie Grimes-Darling to comment on Burns Night, which had gone well and made enough to cover the other expenses of the Society. He noted that we had put on a National Tartan Day event on April 6th, for the first time, spearheaded by Barbara Bley who made a few comments about the event. The meeting agreed that the event had been very successful and should be repeated next year.
- With respect to the election of officers, the Secretary explained the motion to waive the Bylaw limitation on terms of office. The limit is three two-year terms in the same office. However, in 2014 Doug Malcolm and Marie Grimes-Darling were elected for only one year in order to stagger the terms of office and avoid having all the officers leaving at the same time. They had therefore served 2 1/2 two-year terms. The motion to allow Doug and Marie to serve for a further term was passed unanimously.

The only nominations for the offices of Vice-President and Treasurer were Marie and Doug respectively. They were unanimously re-elected.

Greg said that the same group had now been running the Society for five years; his term as President ends next year, and there needs to be someone stepping up to take over.

- Cheryl McLean reported on the Highland Games, for which the planning was in progress. The Games will be on Saturday, August 5th, at the Spokane County Fair and Expo Center. Things were going well. As always, volunteer help would be appreciated.
- Anna Guthrie reported that the Scottish Country Dancers were still meeting every Thursday at 6.30 at the Greek Orthodox Church on N. Washington. Several new dancers had joined. On May 6th, the group was set to perform at the Riverview Retirement Home.
- Marie said that the highland dancers were hosting the Northwest Regional Championships on May 13, and several local dancers were competing in it. Kasey Hawkins said she was a new highland dance teacher setting up in Coeur d'Alene, and was establishing a Scottish studio in one of the malls there.
- Greg noted that we wanted to establish stronger ties with the other Scottish organizations in the area. The insurance assistance noted above was one such initiative.
- Greg said that scholarships were available for one-time assistance to help people who wished to further their own development or the development of Scottish culture, which would benefit the inland northwest in future years. Applications for scholarships were welcome.
- The Society planned to put on the usual events in the coming year: the picnic in July, Kirkin' in November, Burns Night in January, and the new Tartan Day event in April: as well, of course, as being involved in the Games in August. Greg welcomed other ideas, which members may have for the furtherance of the Society or the Scottish Community in the area.

One suggestion was for a greater involvement in Renaissance Fairs in the area

Council

Following the AGM in April, the officers of the Society are Greg Roth, President; Marie Grimes-Darling, Vice-president; Doug Malcolm, Treasurer; and Peter Guthrie, Secretary. Council members also include the Thistle editor (though Peter currently is already a member, as Secretary); and the webmaster, Clint Hill.

The officers may if they so wish invite other members of the Society to serve on Council as members-at-large. This brings diversity to the group, particularly where the member-at-large belongs to one of our affiliates. Currently members-at-large include Mark Loe, who is on the Games committee; Katie Roth of the country dancers; and Barbara Bley. At our last council meeting, we were pleased to welcome Gillian Sayer of ASPB to represent the piping community.

If anyone would like to serve on council, let us know. Any member is free to attend meetings of council. The next meeting will be at the picnic, detailed below.

Society Picnic

The Society's annual picnic will be held on Saturday, July 22nd, on the grounds of the Greek Orthodox church, 1704 N Washington, starting at 4.00 pm.

The picnic is free to all members and their guests.

The Society will be providing meats and a selection of scotch. Additional potluck offerings would be most welcome.

If you have instruments bring them along and play them.

Looking forward to seeing you there!

Highland Games

The Highland Games are coming up soon, on Saturday, August 5th at the Spokane County Fair & Expo Center, 404 N Havana. Gates open to the public at 9.00 am and the events last all day. This is the largest celebration of Scottish culture all year, so come on out and enjoy the music, athletics, history and auld acquaintance. As always, volunteers would be welcome for the day of the Games or for the setup and takedown days immediately before and after: call Catherine Hill at 927 0023 if you are interested.

Brexit

Another interesting quarter in British politics!

In March, Prime Minister (PM) Teresa May formally invoked Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union, which is the article declaring a country's intention of leaving the EU.

On April 19th, May called a snap general election for June 8th. In the British constitution, a general election has to be called every five years. However, the PM may decide to call an election before the five years has elapsed. Until fairly recently, this decision was the PM's alone, but now the decision has to be ratified by a vote of Parliament, which it duly was.

After the previous election in 2015, the Conservative party had an outright majority over all other parties of 17 seats (out of 650 seats in parliament). May based her decision to call the election on the polls at the time the election was called, which showed the Conservative party with a 20% lead over the Labour Party, the main opposition. The idea was to strengthen her hand in the Brexit negotiations.

The main reason for Conservative confidence was the nature of the leader of the Labour party, Jeremy Corbin, who was regarded as "toxic" to any success in an election. His views are very left wing, with nationalization of key industries, taxation of everything, and very generous social policies.

At the start of the campaign, Labour's share of the poll was 25%. By the time the vote was taken, Labour received 40% of the vote, a remarkable turnaround. The reasons behind this were the poor campaign run by the Conservatives, and the strong campaign run by Labour. Teresa May appeared out of touch, refusing to debate the other candidates and holding the media at bay. She came out with a manifesto, which included such things as curtailing social care for the elderly, which with an electoral following of older people was not too smart. Her cabinet could probably have steered her away from some of the missteps, but she tried to go it alone without consulting them. On the other hand, Labour used a lot of the social media such as Twitter and Facebook, which appealed to the younger generation: promising free university tuition and generous grants helped get these voters to the polls. The turnout for the election was 65 %, which is higher than normal for general elections (Brexit turnout was 72%).

The results of the election were as follows:

	2015 Election	2017 Election	Change
Conservative	330	317	-13
Labour	232	262	30
Scottish Nationalist	56	35	-21
Lib/ dems	8	12	4
Dem. Unionists	8	10	2
Other	16	14	16

Since the Conservatives no longer have a majority of the 650 seats, they have formed a loose coalition with the Democratic Unionists, a Northern Ireland party, who have 10 seats, in order to be able to form a government. This is a somewhat shaky arrangement in terms of the lukewarm commitment of the Democratic Unionists, and the fact that the two parties have only 327 seats in a house where a majority is 326.

So where does that leave Scotland?

Notice that the Scottish Nationalist party lost a lot of seats, mainly to Labour - which used to be the traditional voting preference for Scotland until the Nationalists gained strength. Although still the third largest party, they are much reduced in influence. The Nationalists announced during the campaign that they would be agreeable to teaming up with the Labour Party to thwart a Conservative majority. Their main campaign plank was to protect Scottish interests in the Brexit negotiations.

The idea of a second referendum on Scottish independence is still out there: on March 17th, the Scottish Parliament voted in favor of such a motion. The reasoning for the second referendum is that Scotland was largely in favor of staying in the EU, and a vote to remain within the UK while the UK is within the EU is a different proposition to staying within a UK divorced from the EU.

What happens next?

May has shot herself in the foot with the decision to hold an election and then a poor campaign, and has lost a lot of the confidence of her party. There is some doubt whether she will remain PM, though who might succeed is unclear.

As far as Brexit goes, it is still going ahead. Negotiations have started, with May promising to allow EU nationals now in the UK to remain with full rights, but the EU so far not reciprocating with regard to UK nationals currently in other EU countries. Labour is generally in favor of leaving the EU; the Conservatives are in favor by a small majority, but are split between the Stayers and the Goers, which is not helping their prospects.

Next thrilling installment will come out in September!