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# Thistle Epistle

## March 2026

### **Burns Night**



Burns Night this year turned up with a bit of a surprise. For the past few years since the end of COVID it has proved a very popular event, and we have sold pretty well all the available seats: 240, which is the maximum that Mukogawa Commons will hold while still having enough space for a dance floor.

This year we were only at 75 percent capacity. This did come with some advantages, such as a less crowded dance floor and easier logistics. And, of course, 175 is still a very respectable attendance figure for a Burns Night. The downside was financial. Our caterer reduced her quote in line with the actual attendance; however, although Mukogawa reduced the hall rental cost due to the lower attendance numbers, the cost per person was still quite a bit higher than we had budgeted. The bottom line was that Burns did make a small contribution to the Society's finances, but not enough to cover the Society's other costs. The good news is that we have cash reserves so our financial position remains strong.

Apart from the lower attendance, Burns Night 2026 can be considered a great success. Jason Gordon gave his usual dramatic address to the haggis, Angus Scott Pipe Band gave an excellent performance, and the Shadle Park High School pipers, drummers and dancers deserve special mention for how far they have come over the past year. The social dancing attracted an enthusiastic crowd, and everyone had fun!

We received some suggestions from those in attendance about what we could do differently, which we appreciate. Council has reviewed these and will put some into practice next year. If any of our members have any other suggestions, please email us and let us know.

### **Milling Frolic**

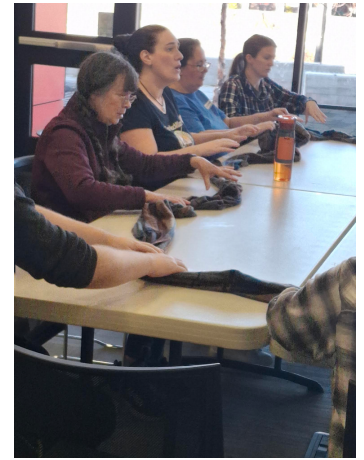


Jessica Bruner started the Society's Gaelic Conversation Group last year, and its monthly meetings are still going strong. She decided to celebrate Seachdain na Gàidhlig—World Scottish Gaelic Week, which ran from February 23 through March 1—with a first ever Milling Frolic on February 28. She writes:

“About 25 to 30 people joined the Scottish Gaelic Conversation Group at the Spokane Valley Library. We spent about two and a half hours together, singing and working the cloth with a break

in the middle for tea and shortbread. We learned and sang five traditional waulking songs together, and everyone had a great time.

Waulking—or milling as they call it in Nova Scotia—is the traditional Highland process of softening and fulling woolen cloth after it’s been woven. Into the first half of the twentieth century, a lot of household textiles and clothing were still being made with handwoven cloth. When the cloth comes off the loom, it’s loose and stiff and needs to be finished to make it softer and hardier against cold, wet, and wind—very important in the Scottish Highlands and Canadian Maritimes! In many cultures, this was done with water mills. In the Highlands, finishing cloth was a community work party where everyone would gather together, sing to make the work more enjoyable and maintain the rhythm needed to make the fibers soften and pull together. The songs are very rhythmic and reminiscent of sea shanties or rowing songs in feel. Since this work was primarily done by women, many of the songs reflect the women’s lives from the times when they were written.



These songs are an integral part of the Scottish Gaelic song tradition—and story and song are both very important to Gaels—and hosting this event tied in well with the theme of World Gaelic Week—Use It or Lose It! By learning and singing the songs, we are in some small way participating in keeping the language and culture alive.”

The Gaelic Conversation Group meets on the third Wednesday of the month from 6:30 to 7:30 pm at the Spokane Valley Library, 22 N Herald Rd, Spokane Valley, in the Diane E. Zahand Community Room East.

### **National Tartan Day**



The Society’s annual celebration of National Tartan Day is coming up soon: Saturday 11th April, 2026, from 11:00 am to 4:00 pm, at Shadle Park Library, 2111 W. Wellesley, Spokane WA 99205.

National Tartan Day was established in North America to recognize the contributions of Scots to Canada and the United States. The concept started in the 1980s in Nova Scotia, Canada - see the article in the December issue of the Thistle which emphasized the strong Scottish influence in that province. It was formally established in the USA by Senate Resolution 155 on March 20, 1998.

The official date is April 6th, which was the date when the Declaration of Arbroath was signed in 1320. The Declaration was Scotland’s document of independence from England, and is the forbear of the US Declaration of Independence.

St Andrews Society began celebrating the day some years ago, thanks to the efforts of Barbara Bley who started it and was the organizer for several years; see the article on her later in this issue of the Thistle. Our celebration is timed to be on a Saturday as close as possible to April 6th, given the constraints of room availability.

We will be celebrating all aspects of Scottish culture, including: piping and drumming, dancing, poetry history, pictures of Scotland, Scottish attire, and more.

We hope members and their friends will come and join us. All are welcome, and it is free! Light refreshments will be served.

### **Annual General Meeting**



The Society's Annual General Meeting will be held on April 26th, 2026, at O'Doherty's, 525 W Spokane Falls Blvd, Spokane 99201.

There will be the usual social hour from 4:00 pm, followed by the business meeting at 5:00 pm. Bear in mind that although this meeting does include the formal section, required to remain in good standing as a 501(c)3 non-profit, it is as much a social occasion and a good chance to talk to other members.

All members are encouraged to come, hear what the Society has planned, and provide feedback.

It is important that we establish a quorum. So, if you cannot attend in person, you are encouraged to send in a proxy. Proxies may be paper, in which case they should be signed, and sent by mail to the Society's mailbox, or carried by another member; or by email. The proxy should name the person who may exercise the proxy, either someone who is present at the meeting, or the Secretary or one of the officers.

### **Agenda**

1. Call to order
2. Establishment of quorum
3. Approval of minutes of the last AGM, held on April 27th, 2025
4. Treasurer's report
5. Membership report
6. President's Review of the past year
7. Election of officers

Two positions are up for election:

- President
- Secretary

Nominations have been received for Caleb McDougall for President, and Saree Gregory for Secretary to replace Anna Guthrie who is not seeking reelection..

Caleb has been the Vice-President for the past two years, having been initially appointed to fill the vacancy in the position, and then elected last year. He is part-way through his two-year term.

Saree founded and runs Society's Genealogical Group, and has been active in all aspects of the Society.

In the event that Caleb is elected President, this would result in a vacancy in the office of Vice-President. The Bylaws state that a vacancy in any office other than President may be filled by appointment by the President.

Nominations may be made by any member for either of the offices up for election, providing the nominee is a member of the Society and is willing to be nominated. Such nominations may be made in advance by email to the Secretary at inlandnwscots@gmail.com, or be made at the meeting.

Members are also invited to put forward their names for consideration for the office of Vice-President, in the event that office becomes vacant.

8. Plans for the upcoming year 2026-7  
Budget for the year 2026-7
9. Affiliate reports
  - Highland Games
  - Angus Scott
  - Lake City Highland Dance
  - Spokane Scottish Country Dancers
  - SAMS
10. Topics from the membership  
Any member may bring up questions, concerns or suggestions.
11. Adjournment

### **Volunteers**



A society like St Andrews Society of the Inland Northwest does not run itself. We need members who are willing to step up and help out.

We have been lucky over the years to have a core of people to do the organizing work, and to have new members coming on board from time to time. However, there is always room for new people and new ideas, so we invite members to come forward and volunteer their services.

Right now we have a need for a webmaster. Chris Barton has done a great job over the past few years, but increasing work responsibilities mean that he needs to step down as webmaster and pass the baton on to someone else. We are looking for someone with experience in website development and maintenance. Chris has graciously agreed to mentor an incoming person for a period until they become comfortable in the position.

You may have noticed from the article on the Annual General Meeting that most of the names of those nominated for office have been around for a while. Although we have nominees for the offices up for election, we would very much welcome nominations from members who have not yet been involved in the Society's organization. Also, if members have some particular skill-set which they think would be useful to the Society - such as advertising or Thistle editor - or have ideas for other ways in which the Society can fulfill its mission of propagating Scottish culture in our region, we'd love to hear from you.

### **Idaho picnic**



When we carried out our member survey, just over a year ago, one comment we received was that although our name says "of the Inland Northwest", our activities are largely



confined to Spokane. We do, of course, have some members from North Idaho, and our affiliate, Lake City Highland Dance, is based in Coeur d'Alene, so we decided to try having a picnic on the Idaho side of the State Line.

The date chosen is June 6th, which is one of the few weekends when the Lake City Highland dancers and their families are not involved in competitions. The venue will be the home of Charlie Bond, in Hayden. We plan to have a family event with lawn games, kids' games, music, and maybe some ceilidh items.

Although the event will be in Idaho, we hope that our Spokane members will also come to it. More details will be provided later when arrangements are firmed up.

### **Highland dance**



This month has been busy and exciting for Lake City Highland Dance and the Highland dance world. We were honored to welcome Mrs. Diane Krugh, a world-renowned teacher and judge, to adjudicate our exams at LCHD this year. For the testing, our dancers are judged according to a set standard rather than against other dancers and receive a medal, certificate, and written feedback for the performance. All the students at LCHD passed their exams and most received very high marks this year.

There wasn't much time for us to relax after medal testing though, as St. Patrick's Day was the next Tuesday! We started off the weekend with two fun performances at senior centers in Spokane Valley. Next, everyone braved the snow and slush to walk in the St. Patrick's Day Parade in downtown Coeur d'Alene. Along with the parade, we ran around town to four more performances and were invited to dance at the grand opening of the new Raising Cane's in Coeur d'Alene! The Highland dancers at Shadle Park High School, taught by Megan Sargent, also enjoyed a fun St. Patrick's weekend with the Spokane St. Patrick's Parade and some performances.

Coming up for the dance world, LCHD will be celebrating our 10-year anniversary Showcase at Ridgeline High School on May 31st. Shadle Park dancers and our founder Kasey Hawkins will be performing as well. Tickets for the show are available on the LCHD website at [www.LakeCityHighlandDance.com](http://www.LakeCityHighlandDance.com). We look forward to many more performances and plenty of competitions this spring.

*Victoria Hawkins*

### **Barbara Bley**



We are sorry to report the passing of Barbara Bley. Barbara was a long-time active member of the Society. She came to an Annual General Meeting some years ago, and asked if we had any plans to celebrate National Tartan Day. At that time we didn't, so she set about organizing an annual event in April, which has continued to the present day.

Not content with organizing just the one major event, she then stepped up to take on the position of Vice-President, who is responsible for organizing Burns Night: which she accomplished very successfully.

Last year she moved to the other side of the State. However, there she encountered health problems which made it difficult to join new groups and make new friends. She was considering moving back to Spokane, where she had so many friends, but unexpectedly passed away before she could do so. Those of us who knew and worked with her will greatly miss her.

### **Olympic Curling Stones**



Curling at the Olympics has gone from a minor sport to one featured quite prominently on TV during the 2026 Winter Olympics, and I have to confess that I watched quite a few of the curling matches in February. There is something appealing about the quiet focus, the team discussions, the urgent calls of "Sweep!" and the self-policed scoring. During my TV time I got to wondering where all those stones came from - apparently 128 were made for the 2026 Olympics.

Not surprisingly, they came from Scotland where the sport first started; evidence dates the sport to at least 1511 in Scotland, with the first written reference to a curling contest dating to February 1541, which probably makes it one of the oldest team sports around. Early players used smooth rocks from the riverbed, sliding them on frozen lochs and ponds. Curling stones today are still referred to as rocks.

Modern day stones are made from a variety of granites but the best stones, used for high-level competitions, particularly the Olympics, are made from granite sourced from the tiny Scottish island of Ailsa Craig. This is a famous uninhabited bird sanctuary in the mouth of the Firth of Clyde, about 10 miles off the Ayrshire coast of Scotland, and the island's granite has been producing the best stones for over a century.

Kays of Scotland holds the exclusive rights to harvest the granite from the island, of which there are two kinds used: Ailsa Craig Common Green and Ailsa Craig Blue Hone granite. Used together they produce the perfect stone, Common Green for the body for its heat and moisture resistance and, more importantly, because it does not splinter or shatter upon banging into another stone, while the Blue Hone granite is made into an insert to create the running surface. There are great videos on

the Kays of Scotland website, [kaysscotland.com](http://kaysscotland.com), that show how an Olympic curling stone is



created.

The average weight of an Olympic curling stone, is about 42 pounds, with a 36-inch circumference and a height of 4.5 inches. If you wanted to buy one it would cost you around \$1,000 dollars this year. If you are a fan of the sport, and like the idea of owning your own stone, you can buy your own mini-curling stone for roughly one-tenth of that price. (This could also be a great gift for that special curling fan in your life.) After the conclusion of the Paralympic Winter Games in March, these full-size stones will be returned to the manufacturer in April 2026 and transformed into a limited edition of 2026 Olympic Licensed Product mini curling stones, offered for sale on a first come, first served basis. I won't be buying one, but don't let that stop you!

*Anna Guthrie*

### **COSCA**



The Council of Scottish Clans and Associations (COSCA) sends out a newsletter from time to time. The January issue has two articles which may be of interest to members.

The first, by Charles Lord Bruce of the Standing Council of Scottish Chiefs, concerns the relationship between Scotland and the Scottish diaspora - those people of Scottish descent living elsewhere, particularly in the USA and Canada, but also other countries which welcomed Scottish emigrants, such as Australia. He begins with a quote from John Bellassai, COSCA's president, in 2018:

“For too many years American Scots and native Scots have been talking past each other...Most native Scots have taken a left-brain approach that stresses the economic benefits of Diaspora engagement...At the same time Diaspora Scots have taken a markedly right-brain approach: we demonstrate an emotional attachment to Scotland, its culture and heritage at every opportunity...”

Diaspora Scots are an authoritative source of value, identity and loyalty to Scottishness. Of all the countries which experienced emigration, the Scots have retained the most enduring sense of family and kinship. Most diaspora Scots identify with a clan or family. Genealogical research has strengthened this feeling.

The Standing Council aims to forge stronger links with associations in diaspora countries. However, the Standing Council also aims to provide an authoritative source of information on clans and Scottish families - not all those who feel an affinity to Scotland are necessarily members of clans.

The second article, by the Chief of Clan Gregor, concerns the wearing of tartan after it was banned following the defeat of the Jacobites in 1746. He points out that tartan appears in many portraits painted between 1746, and 1782 when the Proscription was lifted, both by those who supported the Jacobite cause but also by loyalists to the Hanoverian regime. The 1746 ban was intended to abolish tartan as a symbol of insurgency. However, allowing its use in the military tended to promote its use, since many of the Clan Chiefs raised Highland Regiments which wore their tartan. Since Britain was at war for most of the period between 1746 and 1815 and the highland regiments conspicuously distinguished themselves, tartan became a symbol of national pride. George IV cemented this when he visited Scotland in 1822 sporting tartan dress,. From then on, the use and variety of tartans exploded.



### **Spokane Scottish Country Dancers**

In January of each year the Spokane Public Library holds a Library Learning Week, with dozens of events for all ages. This year, Scottish country dance teacher Kelly Milne led an “Introduction to Scottish Country Dance” workshop at the South Hill Library on January 31. It was an outstanding success, with more than 50 people showing up to learn about Scottish country dancing. Kelly did a great job leading a larger-than-expected crowd through several dances, with the support of a few other members of the dance group, and everyone seemed to enjoy the experience. We understand it was one of the best-attended sessions of Library Learning Week.

As a result we have some new members joining us for our Thursday dance nights; I would like to invite St Andrews Society members to come and try it too. Verbal descriptions can only go so far in describing the the joy of Scottish country dancing; you really have to experience it for yourselves!

The next event on the dancers’ calendar is participation in the local celebration of National Tartan Day on Saturday, 11 April, at Shadle Park Library; their performance is scheduled for 12:30 pm. Information about this event can be found in another article in this newsletter. Later this year the dancers will perform at the Spokane Highland Games, on 1 August, at the Spokane County Fair and Expo Center, accompanied by the San Francisco Scottish Fiddlers. Dancing to live music is always a treat for dancers! Be sure to mark your calendars for these two events.

### **Scottish Genealogy Group**



Congratulations to the Genealogy Group which just celebrated its one year anniversary and is still going strong under the leadership of Saree Gregory.

The meetings have covered lots of interesting topics over the past year. In March, the topic was using AI in genealogy research and Saree shared her experience to date with this type of research, which was followed by a great discussion. The topic of AI will continue for the April 1 meeting, when Saree will share more of her experience with ChatGPT and members will be given the opportunity to try ChatGPT live with some of their own research questions.

The May 5 will feature Saree and Tabitha sharing ideas for planning a family history trip to “meet” your ancestors.

Meetings will continue through the summer on the first Wednesday of the month from 6:00-7:00 pm, at the Spokane Valley Library, Conference Room B, 22 N Herald Rd, Spokane Valley. Topics are currently being developed.



### **St Patrick's Day**

The Scottish community was well-represented in the St Patrick's Day parade on March 14th. As usual, the Angus Scott Pipe Band were in the forefront of the Spokane parade: they actually got a credit in the Spokesman-Review, though the accompanying picture showed a member of the Spokane County Firefighters Pipes and Drums who were marching with them. Representatives from the Highland Games and SAMS also marched in the Spokane parade, and Lilac City Highland Dancers were in the Coeur d'Alene parade, so hopefully the publicity will be helpful to the Scottish community.

If you missed the parade (it was, after all a rather chilly day) and love the pipes and drums, check out the video of Angus Scott Pipe Band's appearance at "Pour Before the Parade" on the band's website: [aspband.com](http://aspband.com) .

