

# The Story behind a Robert Burns' Supper

January 25 is the anniversary of the birth of Robert Burns and around that date you will see and hear mention of a Robert Burns Supper.

## **So who is this Robert Burns guy and why are people having supper with him?**

Well, Robert Burns, or Rabbie, as he was called, won't physically be having supper with anyone, since he died in 1776. But he will certainly be there in spirit! He was a Scottish writer, a poet more specifically, and he was loved by the common folk of Scotland for his wittiness, his humor, and his exaltation of the common people.

## **But why should a 21 Century American care about an 18<sup>th</sup> century poet?**

Well, as a Scottish poet, he was so dearly loved by his people that they called him "The Bard of Scotland" and those Scots that immigrated to America, Australia and Canada did so with a copy of Burns' poems in their luggage. They spread their love and admiration for him and his poems throughout the new world. In fact, Burns was so ingrained in the fabric of America that, when Andrew Carnegie donated his millions to build hundreds of libraries across this country, he insisted that they include the complete works of Burns and that a bust of "The Bard" be prominently placed nearby.

Burns believed in the splendor of love and wrote hundreds of romantic poems and songs. He was a true romantic, passionate, courageous, and willing to take risks. He was continually falling in love, many times it ended badly, but he was always ready to try again.

He was a humorist with a poet's eye and wrote many poems that caught a piece of life and left a moral. Many brought quotes into the English language that are still in use today. For example:

*"To A Mouse"* - The best laid schemes of mice and men often go astray.

*“To A Louse”*- O would some power give us the gift to see ourselves as others see us.

Then there were the political pieces. He wrote a poem about William Wallace and the 14<sup>th</sup> century war for Scottish Independence titled “Scots Wha Hae” which almost got him thrown into prison, but is now the unofficial National Anthem of Scotland!

He wrote “A Man’s a Man for A’ That” which was an ode to equality because he believed in the abolition of slavery and in universal suffrage long before those issues became political.

Burns admired the spirit of the American Revolution, which was underway at that time, so much that he wrote a letter to General George Washington encouraging him in his efforts against the English crown.

And finally, he also wrote the words to the most popular song in the world. Yes, in the world. He wrote Auld Lang Syne, a song that virtually the whole world sings every New Year’s Eve.

**So now you know why we celebrate Robert Burns on his birthday, but you haven’t yet heard why you might want to attend one of these suppers.**

The best part of Rabbie’s story is about the Haggis which was a staple for the common folks of Scotland, but was looked down upon by the upper class because it was made from the left over parts of a sheep after slaughter. The farmers would sell the better parts and keep the leftovers. These left over parts were mixed with oats and were stuffed into a sheep’s stomach and cooked to produce a large sausage which they called a Haggis.

As the story goes, Rabbie was invited to speak to a group of wealthy gentlemen at a dinner party. When he arrived, he was asked to wait in the servants quarters while they finished their meal of fine French cuisine.

Well, as you can imagine, this didn’t sit well with him, so while he waited, he wrote a poem entitled “Address to the Haggis” and when he was called to join the diners, he read it to them. Essentially it is an ode to the nourishment and taste of

the humble Haggis over the inferior French food of the rich and how eating Haggis instead of the disgusting French ragout, makes a man strong and sound and superior in battle.

Five years after his death, a group of his friends got together on his birthday to celebrate his life. Included in the evenings activities, was a reading of his poem, "Address to a Haggis". The idea, fueled by the love and pride of the Scottish people, caught on and grew until today 200 years later, it is celebrated in virtually every country in the world and the "Address to the Haggis" has become his most famous poem!

That original agenda is followed to the letter. To be a true Burns' Supper, there will be whisky toasts to the Lassies, to the Laddies, and to the immortal memory of Rabbie Burns, as a minimum. There will be a parade of the Haggis, led by the piper (Scotts need to hear the pipes whenever more than two or three of them are gathered together) followed by the Chef carrying the Haggis on a silver platter (for all to see), it will be guarded by men in kilts carrying Claymores (a large two handed sword), a whisky bearer (this is thirsty work they are about to do), and the Haggis Master who will recite the Poem and who will kill the wily Haggis beast with a dirk ( a long pointed dagger). Following this ceremony, the Haggis will be passed among the guests and eaten along with dinner. Afterwards there will be music and dancing and finally at the end of the evening everyone will join hands to sing Auld Lang Syne.

It is a wonderful evening of History, Drama, Pageantry, Camaraderie, and Fun. If you think you may want to join us, don't hesitate. We fill up quickly. And who knows, it may become your favorite annual event!

In case you were concerned, **you do not have to eat the Haggis**. We understand, it is an acquired taste!

Come join us, The Scottish American Society of The Villages, on Friday, January 18 for a Robert Burns' Supper at Colony Cottage Recreation Center. Go to [scotsrus.weebly.com](http://scotsrus.weebly.com). Reservations are required. Cost is \$45/person.