

Burns Scholar Ross Roy Celebrates 80th Birthday

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August 20, 2004 was a special day for Burns scholars around the world - America's beloved G. Ross Roy celebrated his 80th birthday. Participants gathered at the University of South Carolina in Columbia to join the festivities honoring Professor Roy and his lovely wife, Lucie. The program speakers paid personal tribute to Dr. & Mrs. Roy at a dinner the night before the symposium at a local hotel.

The birthday celebration was held in conjunction with another festive occasion, the 15th anniversary of the *G. Ross Roy Collection of Robert Burns, Burnsiana & Scottish Poetry* at the University of South Carolina's Thomas Cooper Library. The University's Department of Rare Books & Special Collections, headed by Dr. Patrick Scott, also presented an exhibit entitled "*Robert Burns in His Time and After*" displaying many books, poems, songs and other items about and by Burns.

The G. Ross Roy Collection consists of approximately 15,000 volumes of which nearly 5,000 are on Burns. The Roy Collection is considered the best Burns collection in North America and, in this writer's opinion, rivals those in Glasgow and London. The University acquired most of the vast collection from Professor and Mrs. Roy in 1989.

Not satisfied with just donating their magnificent collection, the Roys established a fellowship in honor of Professor Roy's grandfather, Ormiston Roy, who taught his young grandson of his love for Burns and other Scottish writers. The fellowship provides opportunity for scholars to spend five weeks during the summer studying Burns or other Scottish authors. Fellowship recipients this past summer were Thomas Keith of New York City and Dr. Carol McGuirk of Florida Atlantic University, both noted Burns scholars.

A surprise for those in attendance at the symposium was the unveiling of three copies of the 1786 Kilmarnock edition of *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* that were displayed side by side in an enclosed case. Dr. Patrick Scott indicated this was an historic occasion in that it was the first time in over a hundred years that three Kilmarnocks had been displayed together. One of the three copies is owned by the University through the largesse of Dr. & Mrs. Roy, and the other two are owned by K.D. Kennedy (Raleigh, NC), and Susan and Frank Shaw (Atlanta, GA). Many of the Burnsians in attendance had never seen one Kilmarnock in their lifetime, and here they were able to view three of them in one setting.

The symposium also featured two films on Burns, *The Romance of Robert Burns*, produced in 1937, and the 1959 film *Robbie and His Mary*. Featured speakers included Kenneth Simpson, Gerard Carruthers and James Mackay from Scotland. Others on the program were Thomas Keith from New York, Jonathan Pons of Missouri, Carol McGuirk of Florida, Esther Hovey from California, Thorne Compton of South Carolina, and Frank Shaw from Georgia.

A unique commemorative Burns keepsake was given to all symposium attendees. It featured a numbered title page of the Kilmarnock Burns from Professor

Roy's collection and was printed by English Professor Scott Gwara at the University's Maxey Press.

According to University records, Dr. Roy started teaching at the University of South Carolina in 1966. He founded *Studies in Scottish Literature*, a scholarly journal, in July 1968. He was told at the time that he would be lucky to find enough information for one volume. Interestingly, I just received my 2004 hardback copy consisting of volumes XXXIII and XXXIV.

Dr. Roy was awarded an honorary degree from Edinburgh University in 2002 for his work regarding Robert Burns. He is also an honorary president of the Burns World Federation and is a member of the Atlanta Burns Club.

Hearty congratulations are due to Professor Scott and his talented staff for the excellent job they did in planning and executing the symposium, the exhibit, and the birthday celebration.

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