

ROBERT BURNS

Scottish people in any part of the world celebrate the birthday of Scotland's most revered poet in January of each year. Robert Burns was born Robert Burness in a clay cottage near the bridge of Doon in Ayrshire on January 25, 1759. His father, William Burness, came from the north of Scotland to become a gardener and nurseryman at Doonside. Robert's parents later moved to a farm called Mount Oliphant and Robert helped with the farm until he was nineteen, when the family settled on another farm at Lochlea in the Parish of Tarbolton. Robert spent some time learning the elements of surveying and mensuration.

His work on the farm made him conscious of nature and the changing seasons and this is reflected in some of his poems such as "Ode to a Mouse" and "Ode to a Mountain Daisy". His enjoyment of the companionship of friends and his ability to quickly produce a verse made him a welcome guest.

He joined the Lodge of St. David at Tarbolton on July 4, 1781, and he became a Master Mason in October, 1781. His father died in 1784 in poverty and with a pending law suit regarding the terms of his lease of a farm at Mossgiel in the Parish of Mauchline. At this time Robert was involved in liaisons with several young ladies one of whom he married and later divorced.

His first book of poems was published in 1786 due to the kindness of many masons who donated the necessary funds to pay the printing costs. As a result of this hook his fame as a poet spread far and wide. He enriched the Craft by his poems and many of his later works bear references to masonry. He remained a working man and never assumed to be more. It is remarkable that from the extreme poverty of his life as a farmer he produced some of Scotland's finest verse. He lived in Edinburgh for some years, and in April, 1788, Burns acknowledged Jean Armour as his wife and took her to live with him in Dumfries, where he had obtained employment as an Excise Officer. Burns died at Dumfries on July 21, 1796 and was buried in St. Michael's Churchyard. In 1815, however, he was re-interred in the Mausoleum in Dumfries.

The Editor