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Descendants of Robert Burns

A presentation to The Calgary Burns Club by William R. MacLachlan

My source for this presentation, and the earlier one on Burns' ancestors, was the Burns Country website. It's address is:

<http://www.robertburns.org/family/descendants.shtml>

This website names 250 direct descendants of Robert Burns spanning seven generations. I have printed the thirty pages that contains their names, and often their date and place of birth and death, spouse and children. I will give it to the Club Archivist after it circulates at the end of my talk.

It is interesting to note that most of the recent descendants have opted not to share this information. Thus, private is beside their names. This will make the task of tracking the Bard's descendants more difficult for future generations.

I see little merit in a recitation of 250 names as I'm sure you'll agree. Rather, I propose to spend a little time on Generation One, the children of Robert Burns and add some random observations. **Text of Generation One from Burns Country**

Nine children were born to Robert Burns and Jean Armour between 1786 and 1796. Now, we all know that the infant mortality rate at that time was very high. But to see how many of his children died so young is very sad indeed.

Jean and Robert seemed to have a propensity for twins. Their first set, **Robert and Jean Burns**, were born 3 September 1786 in Mauchline. Jean died on October 20, 1787, living little more than a year. Robert married Anne Sherwood at age 23 and lived a long life for those times, dying at the age of 70 in Dumfries. He was educated at Dumfries Academy and Glasgow University. In 1804 he obtained a clerkship in the Stamp Office in London, but was not successful and got into trouble for gambling debts. In 1832, at age 46, he was given early retirement and a pension due to his father's fame.

He retired to Dumfries with his common-law wife Emma Bland where he taught mathematics and classics while Emma kept a lodging house. Robert had one child by Anne Sherwood, Elizabeth Burns, who was born 16 May 1812. He had four children by Emma Bland. Robert (Emma was 19 and he was 35), Jane, Jessie, and Francis were all born between 1821 and 1829.

Jean bore twins on March 9, 1788, also in Mauchline. **Unnamed**, they died on March 10 and March 22 of the same year. A month later Robert married Jean in the private ceremony, mentioned earlier.

Francis was born 18 August 1789 in Ellisland. He died at age thirteen.

William was born 9 April 1791 in Ellisland. He married Catherine Adelaide Crone on 8 September in Bangalore, India. He died at the age of 80. William was educated at Dumfries Academy and Christ's Hospital, London. He entered the service of the Honourable East India Company and eventually rose to the rank of Colonel. He had no children.

Elizabeth was born on 21 November 1792 in Dumfries and died at age 2.

James was born 12 August 1794 in Dumfries and married Sarah Robinson in April 1818. He married Mary Beckett in June 1828. He died at the age of 71. Like his older brother William, James was educated at Dumfries Academy and Christ's Hospital, London, before entering the service of the Honourable East India Company where he rose to the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel. James had three children by his first wife. They were Jean, Robert, and Sarah. All were born in India and Jean and Robert both died there. Robert died at 1. Interestingly, Jean is recorded as dying at sea. She was four. James had one child by Mary Beckett, Annie Burns Burns. She was born 21 September 1830 and lived to the age of 94. She died on 10 May 1925 in Cheltenham. Imagine, a granddaughter of Robert Burns still alive in 1925!

Maxwell Burns was born 25 July 1796 in Dumfries, four days after his father died. He died at age two.

Of the nine children Robert and Jean had, only three lived to adulthood and only two had children of their own. All three of his illegitimate children reached adulthood and all had children.

Jean also raised **Elizabeth (Betty)**, Robert's child by Ann Park. Betty was born 31 March 1791. Ann was a barmaid at the Globe Inn in Dumfries. Betty married John Thomson and they had eight children between 1809 and 1833.

As well, Robert had a daughter by Elizabeth Paton. **Elizabeth Burns** was born 22 May 1785 in Tarbolton. She married John Bishop and had five children between 1807 and 1815. Elizabeth (Betsey) Paton was employed as a female servant on the Burnes farm at Lochlie in the winter of 1783-84, but returned to her own home when they moved. However, Robert apparently returned to visit her since their daughter Elizabeth (Bess) was born 22 May 1785.

Robert also had a child by Janet Clow. Janet (Jenny) Clow was a maid to Nancy McElhose, a friend of Robert Burns, who lived in Edinburgh. Their son, **Robert Burns**, was born November 1788 in Edinburgh. He married an unknown person and became a successful merchant in London. There is mention of only one child here. Robert Burns was born around 1820 and died 12 September 1851 in Borneo.

The **third generation** saw the Burns descendants becoming a little more scattered. Sarah Elizabeth Maitland Tombs Burns, daughter of Burns' son James Glencairn married Berkley Westropp Hutchinson and moved to Australia with her family in 1852. Tragically, all three of her children died on the sea voyage in an 11-day span - ages 4,3, and 1. She had six more in Australia.

It is not until the **fourth** generation that Canada is mentioned. Robert Burns Hutchinson was a son of Sarah Elizabeth mentioned above. Born on 10 November 1855 he died in August 1944 in Vancouver, B.C. at the age of 88. His daughter, Dorothea married Clarence Sabourin on 6 May 1916 in Vancouver. He died on 15 June 1961. There is no mention of her death. The Sabourin name continues to the current generation.

In his descendants, there are teachers, merchants, soldiers, adventurers, ne'er do wells and the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Viscounts Weir. There are stories of tragedy and courage. All of this sprung from the seed of Robbie Burns. Thank you.