

Traditional Celebrations

It is a well-known fact that the Scots have always appreciated the "*enjoyment of innocent festivity*" in celebrating the anniversary of St. Andrew, as did those who attended Montreal's first recorded St. Andrew's Ball at the Mansion Hotel near the north end of St. Paul Street on December 2nd, 1816. The event was described in the Herald, as follows: "*On Monday evening, the principal Tradesmen of this city and vicinity, had a Ball and Supper at Dyde & Co.'s Mansion House Hotel, in celebration of the Anniversary of the Tutelar Saint of Scotland. The dancing commenced about 7 o'clock and continued with great spirit till after midnight, when the Company to the number of about 130 sat down to a sumptuous and elegant supper, which reflected great credit on Mrs. Dyde's taste. The supper room was handsomely decorated for the occasion, having at the upper end a transparency representing St. Andrew at full length. After supper the dancing was resumed and continued with much vivacity till after five, when the party retired to their respective homes highly pleased with their entertainment.*"

Eighteen years later, the same Scottish exuberance was displayed at another St. Andrew's Day celebration on December 1st, 1834 amidst nationalistic speeches, toasts and dedicated commitment to the proposed founding of the St. Andrew's Society of Montreal and its charitable endeavours. The 120 gentlemen present all appreciated the good-humoured ambiance of the gathering where "*the utmost good feeling and hilarity prevailed*", to such an extent that while "*the company thinned-out fast at 2 a.m.*" the Chairman, the Hon. Adam Ferrie along with the few "*who saw it out*" danced a "*Highland Fling*" before departing at 5 a.m., after imbibing a few hot toddies made with "*fine Highland whisky*".

In the early years, the November 30th anniversary dinners were attended by the gentlemen members and invited guests. The first one organized by the Society being in 1835 at Rasco's Hotel with 150 "*at table*" and where the toasts were plentiful (sixteen or more) accompanied, presumably, with just as many tastings of "*Mountain Dew*" - all interspersed with Scottish songs and music. The first change to this format was the proposal for a Caledonian Assembly, which took place at Donegana's Hotel in 1848 attended by the Governor General, The Earl of Elgin. A contemporary report describing the brilliancy of the event stated that: "*we hope we shall prove no false prophet in predicting its annual recurrence whenever the revolving year brings round the festival of St. Andrew*". This prediction, however, would not materialise until 1871. The dinners continued but in 1854 the Constitution was altered making it possible to celebrate the day either by a dinner "*or in any other way deemed advisable*". Subsequently, from 1855, most of the social events took the form of a concert or a soirée. The concerts always seemed to be well attended; one, for example, was a Promenade Concert held at City Hall on March 23rd, 1858 with an audience of over 2,000 people, which greatly increased the net proceeds for the Society's charitable endeavours.

The first St. Andrew's Ball to be held under the auspices of the Society took place on November 30th, 1871 at the St. Lawrence Hall. It was described by the Montreal Herald as being one of the most enjoyable of the season and was also referred to in the Society's report as having been "*numerously attended and the festivities passed off with great spirit and success*". From then on, the St. Andrew's Society Balls were established as notable annual events. On a few occasions, however, they were replaced by a dinner or banquet, and cancelled in times of adversity.



St. Andrew's Society Ball, Windsor Hotel, Montreal, QC, composite, 1878
II-51688 (Detail), McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal

The most famous Ball of all, attended by the Governor General, the Marquis of Lorne and H.R.H. Princess Louise was held at the newly opened Windsor Hotel in 1878. The splendid event was recorded for posterity by Notman's well-known composite photograph. Unfortunately, the Jubilee Ball planned for 1885 was cancelled, as were all social activities, because of floods and a serious smallpox epidemic. However, at the closing of the Jubilee year, a magnificent Ball was held at the Windsor Hotel. It was matched only by the pageantry and decor of the 1893 Ball at which the Governor General, the Earl of Aberdeen, and the Countess of Aberdeen, were the Guests of Honour. The Earl arrived wearing the full dress uniform of the Royal Body Guard of Scotland, accompanied by the Countess handsomely attired in grey brocade, wearing a woven sash of Gordon tartan and a tiara of diamond stars. While she "*scintillated with diamonds*" the tartan bow on her shoulder was fastened by an appropriate "*enamelled maple leaf*" brooch. It would appear that the impressive Lady Aberdeen, who founded the Victorian Order of Nurses and other good causes in Canada, was the first lady to

be recorded as wearing a tartan sash at a St. Andrew's Ball in Montreal. The Grand March to the Ballroom was led by the Pipe Major of The Royal Scots, followed by nine pipers, each of the ten carrying a different coat of arms on the pipes.

In 1900, at the first Ball of the 20th century, honouring Their Excellencies the Earl and Countess of Minto, the guests were entertained by the full pipe band of The Royal Scots, their pipers also officiating at the "*solemn function of the marching-in of the Haggis into the Banquet Hall, the savoury dish being borne in state upon the shoulders of four sturdy men of the Royal Scots in full uniform*".

Throughout the period when those magnificent and opulent balls of the Victorian era were held in the splendour of the Windsor Hotel, they were indeed the annual highlight of the Montreal social season. The successful and prosperous Montreal Scots took great pride in their ability to honour their patron saint in splendid Scottish fashion and to entertain the Society's illustrious patrons. Underlying

the social pleasure and gaiety, however, was the satisfaction that the proceeds from the evening's celebrations would greatly assist their less fortunate compatriots. In the earlier days, it was the proceeds from the concerts that helped to provide the necessary funds for the Society's benevolent endeavours. Now, it is the Ball that has become the largest single source of revenue for the Society's charitable efforts.

During the First World War, as in other times of war and adversity, the Society discontinued all social activities; also, at the time of the Depression, the 1931 and 1932 Balls were cancelled. The usual practice was reinstated, however, in time for the 1935 Centennial Ball where among the Head Table guests were "*His Worship, Mayor Camilien Houde and Mme. Houde; representatives of the National Societies; prominent Montreal citizens and Past Presidents of the Society*".

The outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 resulted in the cancellation of the 1942, 1943 and 1944 balls. However, before sailing to assume his duties in the United Kingdom, Lieutenant-General A. G. McNaughton, Officer Commanding Canadian Army Overseas, and Mrs. McNaughton were able to attend the Ball of 1939 as Guests of Honour. Because of "*the presence of the many officers in the uniform of their regiments*" the event later became known as the "*Khaki Ball*".

Although there had been a Victory Ball at the cessation of hostilities in 1945, the Ball of 1946 was more spectacular, due no doubt to the remarkable efforts of the Ball Chairman, Mrs. Keith Hutchison, O.B.E. who proudly carried the Scottish Saltire (the Society's colours) along Peacock Alley and into the Ballroom of the Windsor Hotel where to the sound of the regimental pipes of The Black Watch (Royal Highland



Windsor Hotel on Dominion Square, Montreal, QC, ca. 1878,
MP-0000.1542.22, McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal

Regiment) of Canada, eighty radiant debutantes were led into the Ballroom, amidst 2,000 guests, for their presentation to the distinguished Guests of Honour, His Excellency, the Rt. Hon. Viscount Alexander of Tunis, Governor General of Canada and Her Excellency Viscountess Alexander. *“The traditional note was everywhere, the same Scottish rites and dances giving historical emphasis to the scene”.*

With few exceptions, it had been customary at all the Balls to invite the Governor General of Canada as the Guest of Honour, the last such honoured guest being the Rt. Hon. Vincent Massey in 1955. However, since 1952, when Lord and Lady Lovat were the invited guests and with the exception of the year 1955, forty-five representatives of Scotland’s peerage have attended the Ball as Guests of Honour; the ancestors of many of them having been Governor Generals of Canada, who had also been the invited guests at the earlier Balls.



Mrs. Keith Hutchison, Ball Chairman, with Lord and Lady Lovat, St. Andrew’s Ball, 1952

The Black Watch (RHR) of Canada which had *“co-operated closely with the Society and in no small way contributed to the success of the Ball”* each year since at least 1930 was honoured at the Ball in 1962 for both the regiment’s 100th anniversary and the tenth anniversary of its Cadet Corps.

During the FLQ crisis, the St. Andrew’s Ball of 1970 *“although held under trying conditions”* was the only major gala function to be held in the city of Montreal at that time.

The St. Andrew’s Ball held on November 28th, 1980 was the Society’s last one to be held at the Windsor Hotel due to the imminent closure of the hotel in 1981, thus ending a unique relationship that had lasted for almost a century. For a period of eight years the Ball venue was at both the Sheraton Mount Royal Hotel and the Sheraton Le Centre, changing to the Château Champlain in 1989, where it remained for six years. The present location is at the Queen Elizabeth Hotel where the Ball has been held since 1995.

In 1985, the Sesquicentennial Ball was held at the Sheraton Le Centre during the tenure of the Society’s first lady President, Mrs. Eileen Clark, culminating one year of several well-coordinated events in celebration of the Society’s 150th year. The most important of these events was the exhibition *“A Celebration: St. Andrew’s Society of Montreal, 1835-1985”* held at the McCord Museum where it continued to be shown for one year. As an expression of gratitude, the proceeds in the amount of \$2,500 from a reception held at the museum to mark the opening of the exhibition were donated by the Society to the McCord Museum.

The St. Andrew’s Society’s long-time association with the national societies, St. George’s (until their demise), St. Patrick’s and the German, dating back to their similar founding dates, has been constant, their representatives regularly attending each other’s anniversary celebration. Later in the 19th century, the representatives of the Caledonian Society, the Irish Protestant Benevolent Society, the St. David’s Society and the St. Jean Baptiste Society were also invited to attend as the Society’s guests, as

was the Royal Commonwealth Society in the 20th century.

“There never has been a Ball given by the St. Andrew’s Society that did not live long in the memories of those who had the good fortune to be present” and “the gowns worn were extremely handsome and upheld the reputation that Montreal women have of always appearing well dressed”.

These remarks made in 1899, at the closing Ball of the 19th century, could have applied equally to the last Ball of the 20th century, held at the Queen Elizabeth Hotel on November 26th, 1999. The historical

traditions carried forward from the Society’s earlier years were still as constant at the closing of the 20th century as they had been at the end of the 19th. The debutantes in their white formal gowns were just as charming and the reels and strathspeys were danced with the same exuberance as in former years. The Haggis ceremony and the Toast to the Pipers were carried out, as they had been at so many of the Society’s functions since the Society’s first official dinner in 1835. The traditions continue and the St. Andrew’s Ball also continues as the Society’s primary fundraising and social event.



St. Andrew’s Society of Montreal Centennial Ball, Windsor Hotel, Montreal, QC, 1935
MP-1985.43, McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal

*“Tradition is a meteor which,
once it falls,
cannot be rekindled”*

Anon