

# HSHC SPORRAN

[www.HighlandSocietyofHarfordCounty.com](http://www.HighlandSocietyofHarfordCounty.com)

January 2026 — Alba Gu Brath — Scotland Forever

*The Highland Society of Harford County was incorporated for the preservation of the spirit, lore, poetry, art, dress, welfare, and history of the Scottish people dedicated to the promotion of these traditions among those of Scottish ancestry within Harford County and its environs.*



## A Tribute Issue to Honor Jim “Ski” Schiaffino

Sporran Editor & Member Extraordinaire

Clans Nelson, McKay, Mackintosh, & MacThomas

Life Member of the Highland Society of Harford County



July 6, 1947 — November 28, 2025  
Bel Air, Maryland



James E. Schiaffino, Jr., age 78, of Bel Air, MD, passed away on Friday, November 28, 2025. He was the son of the late James Edwin Schiaffino, Sr. and Anna (Nitkoski) Schiaffino, and the beloved husband of Angela (Macomber) Schiaffino, with whom he shared 54 years of marriage.

Jim was a devoted member of St. Joan of Arc Catholic Church in Aberdeen, a proud member of the Highland Society of Harford County, and an active member of the Scottish American Military Society. He was a proud graduate of Calvert Hall College Prep High School, attended Towson State University, and graduated from Loyola College of Maryland and dedicated 30 years of his career to teaching social studies in Baltimore City, where he became beloved by students and colleagues as “Mr. Ski”. Jim was also a passionate historian, public speaker, and avid soccer fan. He enjoyed painting, researching and writing articles for several Scottish newsletters, and developing an archive of his family’s genealogy. He also cherished his dogs.

In addition to his loving wife, Angela Schiaffino, Jim is survived by his son, James A. Schiaffino and his wife Laura; his sister, Anna Margaret Donnelly and her husband Michael; and his brother-in-law George Macomber and his wife Patricia. In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made to the Little Sisters of the Poor St. Martin’s Home, 601 Maiden Choice Lane, Catonsville, MD 21228.

Anyone wishing to contribute an article, news, a joke or humorous anecdote or other contributions, news, suggestions for articles send them to:

[sallyjoanderson@hotmail.com](mailto:sallyjoanderson@hotmail.com) or [abowden@bcps.k12.md.us](mailto:abowden@bcps.k12.md.us)

# Fond Remembrances

Jim was a stalwart member of our Highland Society of Harford County for more years than I can count, and made many important contributions, not just with his writing skills and historical perspective, but with his fellowship and good humor. He was the sole writer and editor of our monthly newsletter, The Sporran, for many years. The articles he wrote were always insightful and colorful, clearly a reflection of the gifts he brought to the classroom as a teacher.

He was a special person and we will miss him greatly. A big loss. All our prayers are with him and his family. Beannachd Dhè air d' anam. God's blessings and eternal peace..

-- John Polk

We're so very sorry to hear this. Listening to Ski all these years talk about history, politics, Scots, almost anything makes us wish he had been our teacher. Our thoughts are with Angie and family at this sad time.

-- Ray and Susan Buchanan

Having only been a member for a few years now, I did not know Ski as well as so many of you but truly enjoyed my conversations with him during the time I knew him.

Deepest sympathy to Angie, his family and all of those in the Society that are mourning his passing.

May he rest in peace.

-- Kallie Lyons

Sad news comes today

Ski was a good guy very interesting. Always in motion mentally if not physically. My love and deep condolences to his wife, Angie

-- The GORDON, Todd Holden

I am so sorry ...Jimmy was such a kind person and so smart and talented. My thoughts and prayers are for you.

--Susan Schiaffino

Ski was a fellow Baltimore City teacher. He and Angie brought me into the Highland Society of Harford County. He had an engaging personality. He was a witty writer and a delightful conversationalist. May he rest in peace.

-- Andrea Bowden

Ski was one of my favorites and I always hoped I'd get to sit at his table at our gatherings. His knowledge of history and just about everything else along with his gift of storytelling made him quite a favorite of everyone.

Ski was the Sporran editor and principal writer for so many, many years it was quite a task for Andrea Bowden and I to follow him after he retired from it in March 2021.

Ski & Angie were very generous to the HSHC. I remember, for instance, the bushels of crabs - and much appreciated shucking lessons - that they donated for our summer crab bakes. Additionally they organized and pulled off our formal dinner & dancing galas. Their events were such a treat and great fun.

-- SJ Anderson



I have known Ski for many many years.

He and his wife Angie were always helping our Society in some way, and his presence and joyful nature were always enjoyed by Society members. Their significant doings for the Society helped to keep it alive during some of its leaner years. All of us will miss Ski, but most especially will those who experienced his contributions during his healthier and more active years.

Our hearts go out to his wife Angie, who has been so active for the Society alongside Ski. Both Ski and Angie have been lifetime members, earned by their devotion to our Highland Society. Please, say a prayer for Ski for his peace, and for Angie for strength and for whatever may help her in her time of loss.

-- Jim Wasson

I am greatly saddened at the passing of my dear friend and fellow Son of Scotland.

Jim was a Baltimore City School Teacher at the Old Clifton Clifton High School in Baltimore about the same time I was schlepping to nearby Mervo Tech. He and Angie also lived just blocks from my boyhood along the same stretch of Herring Run Park. Jim and Angie also ran a catering company for several years which was very helpful when various groups held banquets and dinners. Jim was a member and lecturer for many Scottish organizations and wrote articles for many newsletters locally and nationally. He was associated with the Brotherhood of Kilted Veterans, St. Andrews Society of Baltimore, Highland Society of Baltimore, Highland Society of Harford County and the Scottish-American Military Society.

I met Jim when he was introduced to me by a close friend and attorney Ralph Murdy a college friend of Jim's. Jim became a founding member of SAMS Post 1814 in Baltimore then later a founding member of the Brotherhood of Kilted Veterans when we separated from

SAMS. He was editor of the SAMS newsletter for 12 years and the BKV for the last 4. He wrote great articles on Scottish and Military subjects on customs, traditions, culture and history as well as mixed drinks and food recipes, like how to make haggis, blood pudding and Scottish short bread. The only place I saw a bigger storage of wisdom and knowledge was on Google. Who needs acres and acres of server farms when Jim stored it a brain the size of a Cantaloupe.

I will miss Jim immensely as a member of the old guard. I close with a special message to Angie and the rest of Jim's family. It is an excerpt from a letter that Abraham Lincoln wrote to Mrs. Bixby who had just lost her 5 sons during the civil War and says it far greater than I could.

"I feel how weak and fruitless must be any words of mine which should attempt to beguile you from the grief of a loss so overwhelming. But I cannot refrain from tendering to you the consolation that may be found in the thanks of the Republic..." A. Lincoln

-- Bruce Dull, former HSHC member



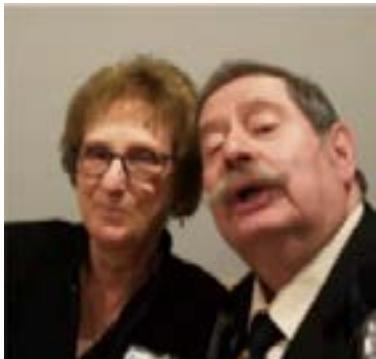
Ski & Angie at one of our  
Kirkin' O' the Tartans



August 2018 with now-deceased member  
Sue Kenyon



December 2023 holiday dinner



January 2023 at Bobby Burns dinner



April 2020 with Angie and friends Connie and  
Randy at lunch

# Favorite Articles He Wrote for the Sporran

Now you can cozy up to a warm fire with some hot chocolate or other beverage,  
relax and read some of Ski's articles

## GroundHog Day

Nestled snuggly in the north west corner of Pennsylvania there lives a shy but sly little critter that goes by many names. To avoid unwanted attention he will use one of these sobriquets: wejack, wuchak, woodshaw, whistlepig, wood-shock, groundpig, whistler, thickwood badger, Canada marmot, monax, moonack, weenusk, red monk, land beaver, and siffleur.

One day a year he overcomes his shyness to greet the world. He crawls out of his cozy, little burrow to tell the world what the weather is going to be for the next six weeks. So now you can add another name to the list: Punxsutawney Phil, the great weather predictor.

It is Phil's big day and he has chosen the small town of Punxsutawney, PA, in the very heart of Pennsylvania Dutch (Pennsylvanisch Deitsche) country to do it. So what is Phil doing in a Scottish journal? Isn't he of German origin? Well, yes and no. You see it was the Celts who originated the idea of predicting the weather. The Celtic culture stretched from The British Isles to China, long before there was an Egyptian or Greek kingdom. It was the Celtic holiday of Imbolc that says that if a hibernating animal casts a shadow on February 2, winter and cold weather will last another six weeks. If he sees no shadow, spring will come early.

Over time the Celtic /Germans celebrated the myth that the hibernating animal was a badger. In The British Isles the Celts used a hedgehog to predict the weather. would cast its shadow, predicting snow all the way into May. With the arrival of Christianity some folks began to call it Candlemas day. When German and Scottish immigrants settled in Pennsylvania, there weren't any hedgehogs or badgers to be found . So they used the GroundHog.

Due to his shy personality he only served the wee town of Punxsutawney in quiet anonymity. Phil gave his first recorded prediction in AD1886 in the local newspaper. Although he had been doing it annually for some time. The following year brought the first official trek to Gobbler's Knob. Each year since then has seen a steady increase in participation.

However, word began to spread about Phil and his predictions. People began to travel to Punxsutawney to get his take on the weather. As his fame spread more and more folks decided to spend February 2nd in Punxsy (as

the locals refer to it). Phil first received his official name in AD1961. The origins of the name are unclear, but speculation suggests that it may have been indirectly named after Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh

The popularity of Groundhog Day now attracts around 30,000 to 40,000 followers who willingly spend the night of February 1st standing on a snow covered hillside of Gobblers Knob waiting for Phil's prognostication. Since approximately AD2018, the event is streamed online each year.

During the night the participants can sip warm hot chocolate and watch the local entertainment. One of the highlights of the night's program occurs when the exchange students at the local high school regale the audience with their experiences in the USA and what their lives were like in their home country. Then just before dawn everyone is treated to a fantastic 30 minute fireworks show. It is during the fireworks that Phil is awakened from his winter slumber to make his prediction.

But the show isn't over. The town opens its arms to all the participants with their version of a winter carnival. There are many 55 gallon drums spouting warm fire where you can simply

Warm your hands or create Smores (thoughtfully provided by the town. There are vendors offering almost everything from hot food to souvenirs. You can even try your hand at SnowSnakes. Rather than describe it here you can look it up. You can visit the library where Phil and his consort Phyllis reside during the offseason. Sometime time around noon the buses begin to run the revelers back to the farms where their cars are parked. It is a lot of fun and I stngly suggest that you try it if only once.

Several other towns hold similar Groundhog Day events but they don't hold a candle to Groundhog Day in Punxsy. Everyone knows the real deal is in a small town in Western PA.

*Here are 10 "facts" to add to your groundhog trivia.*

**Phil's full name is a mouthful.** The groundhog's name is Punxsutawney Phil, Seer of Seers, Sage of Sages, Prognosticator of Prognosticators and Weather Prophet Extraordinary.

**Phil is a really old guy.** Phil is 127 years old, supposed-

ly. The average groundhog lives to be between 6-8 years, but Phil takes a magical elixir every summer to extend his lifespan. The elixir also changes his appearance (much like the Doctor in "Doctor Who"), which explains why Phil may be grey one year and a youthful brown the next. Alas, the elixir does not work on humans.

**Phil has a wife.** Well, make that Phil has had many wives. While Phil has an extended lifespan, his wives do not partake in the elixir so they pass away like normal groundhogs do. Phil always finds love again, though. He does not have kids.

**Phil was not in "Groundhog Day."** Phil had a full schedule and was not able to partake in the filming of the movie. In the Bill Murray movie he is played by a groundhog named Scooter - who bit the actor three times during filming. Phil was Murray's first choice for the role. "He's treated like royalty and is very well-behaved. A true professional," the actor told The Philadelphia Inquirer in 1993. "So when they couldn't get him - a creature who has been hand-raised since birth and is very tame - what did they do? They went out into the woods and caught this Scooter, a groundhog who hated my guts from day one."

**Phil has his own car.** It's called the Philmobile and it's a little bus that houses members of the Inner Circle. Phil has a special seat on the outside, so he can be seen on parades.

**Phil plays dead, occasionally.** Oftentimes during summer parades, crowds will panic as the Philmobile draws through. That's because they will see Phil lying flat on his back, legs in the air looking dead. But he isn't, this is just how groundhogs cool off. One tap on the glass and Phil turns himself the right way round again.

**Phil has met some notable celebrities,** including Oprah Winfrey and former president Ronald Reagan.

**Phil isn't a teetotaler.** During prohibition he threatened to impose 60 weeks of winter on the community if he wasn't allowed a drink.

**Phil doesn't cause the weather.** He just predicts it.



## November in Scotland

November 2021

When one mentions the words November and Scotland several events spring immediately to mind: The Celtic Football Club's founding in 1817 or the Stone of Destiny being returned to Edinburgh Castle in 1997. Okay, just kidding. But, those events really did happen.

Most of us are probably unaware of Guy Fawkes Day, November 5th. It was Guy, who along with others, planned

to assassinate Scottish born King James I and restore a Protestant monarch to the throne. They were going to blow up Parliament and the king with it. The plotters secured the lease to an undercroft (basement) beneath the House of Lords, and Fawkes was placed in charge of the gunpowder they stockpiled there. The plot failed partly because the plotters "passed the bottle" to fill time. They imbibed a wee bit too much and fell asleep and were subsequently caught. There was also a letter blowing the lid off the plot, as it were. Following his arrest when asked by one of the lords what he was doing in possession of so much gunpowder, Fawkes answered that his intention was "to blow you Scotch beggars back to your native mountains."

Guy Fawkes is sometimes toasted as "The last man to enter Parliament with honest intentions". Fawkes became synonymous with the Gunpowder Plot, the failure of which has been commemorated in The UK since 5 November 1605. His effigy is traditionally burned on a bonfire, accompanied by a fireworks display. During the day children would go door to door asking for "A penny for the Guy"

In addition to The Guy, it became the custom to burn an effigy of anyone who raised the ire of the public. After 1673 it was the pope because the heir presumptive to the throne, James, Duke of York, made his conversion to Catholicism public. Effigies of other notable figures who have become targets for the public's ire, such as Paul Kruger and Margaret Thatcher, have also found their way onto the bonfires although most modern effigies are of Fawkes. It is after all Guy Fawkes Day. "The Guy" is normally created by children, from old clothes, newspapers, and a mask.

The bon fires, now used for The Guy, were originally part of the festival of Samhain which we know today as Halloween. On the night of Samhain, people would light fires to protect themselves from the evil spirits and guide the good spirits on their way. The fires were then extinguished at bedtime to make the home and hearth, not to mention their bodies, cold and less inviting to the predatory and wandering evil spirits. It was originally referred to as the Festival of Fire. Over time the festival migrated to November the 5th and became part of the Guy Fawkes festivities



## Was Robin Hood Scottish?

September 2020

We have words like legends, myths, folktales, and lies and they exist for a reason. People in general love to hear stories. As a lifelong student of History, I believe that they all have a basis in fact. Although the 'fact' might actually be far removed from the fiction. Like most tales from this era there is much confusion about whether ole Robin ever existed at all and if he did where did he live? Suffice

it to say that everything you ‘know’ about Robin Hood is probably incorrect. For starters the very first mention of Robin Hood came not from Merry Olde England but from Scotland!

The Scots writer Robert Fordun wrote of Robin Hood in the *Scotichronicon, a history of Scotland and Northern England*. The National Library of Scotland has called it “probably the most important medieval account of early Scottish history”. The text includes a reference to “the famous murderer, Robin Hood, as well as Little John”. It is one of the earliest records of Robin Hood and Little John. The reference is found, in Latin, under year AD1266. *“The foolish common folk eagerly celebrate the deeds of these men with gawping enthusiasm in comedies and tragedies, and take pleasure in hearing jesters and bards singing (of them) more than in other romances.”*

The use of Robin Hood as a nickname has many references in history such as the armed robber William Le Fevere in 1261 who changed his name to William Robehood. In the York Azzizes of 1225 there is reference to an outlaw called Robert Hod who changed his name to Hobbehod. Several other references to similar names show that criminals would change their name to Robin Hood or a version thereof, to hide their true identity. That they did so suggests that originally there was a real person.

So why are the Scots writing about Robin Hood several hundred years before the English? For starters this area of Scotland was referred to as **The Borders** or the “undefined area.” Folks on both sides of the border crossed very frequently, usually to rustle cattle. They were referred to as **Reivers**. It was pretty much a lawless area. So it is highly conceivable that an outlaw from one side would seek shelter across the border. If that outlaw made life difficult for the English (Scotland’s traditional enemy) then he or she would be regarded as somewhat of a hero and celebrated by the Scots.

The characters **Robin Hood, Litill Johanne, Friar Tuck and Maid Matilda** used to be central characters in **May Day** masquerades in Scotland. (Yes, Maid Marian’s name was originally Maid Matilda.) Early ballads and sources suggest that he was based in Barnsdale, South Yorkshire on the borders of Nottinghamshire. In the North York Moors National there is even Robin Hood’s Bay. Another tradition places Robin Hood in Loxley, Sheffield south of Leeds. In later ballads he is located in Nottingham. Then there is the myth of him living in Sherwood Forest near modern day Edwinstowe. These are areas located well south on The English side of The Borders. It would appear that as the years past the legend of Robin Hood moved further and further south far from its place of origin.

About 1437, Fordun’s *Scotichronicon*, was revised by Walter Bower, where the latter states that Robin Hood was ‘that most celebrated robber,’ was one of the dispossessed

and banished followers of Simon de Montfort. (He was the Earl of Leicester who led a rebellion against Henry III of England. Another reason why the Scots would have felt Robin Hood was a hero.) He proceeds, however, to couple with him ‘Litill Johanne’ and their associates, “... of whom the foolish vulgar in comedies and tragedies make lewd entertainment, and are delighted to hear the jesters and minstrels sing them above all other ballads.”

This suggests that the tales of Robin Hood were entertainment for the common man. Forder was referring to the labourers and craftsmen in the towns and villages of Scotland and northern England.

Another written reference to Robin Hood also came from Scotland. So worried were the Scottish authorities of the populace making heroes out of outlaws that the Scottish parliament in 1555 banned any annual celebrations involving Robin Hood and similar characters. *English records don’t even mention Robin Hood.* He is, however, mentioned in ballads but only several hundred years later.

It should be mentioned that Robin Hood was only mentioned in English ballads sung to entertain the “Common folk” The earliest preserved English reference of a Robin Hood is from a fragment of a play entitled Robyn Hod and the Shryff off Notyngham This apparently dates to the late 1470s.

So was Robin Hood real? Yes. Was he Scottish? Maybe, but probably not. However, he was celebrated in Scotland as a hero. More than likely he lived, occasionally, on the Scottish side of the Border at least when he was being hunted, which was frequently. However, the reality is that if it wasn’t for the Scots we would not have heard of him.



## A Wee Boxing Day Tale

December 2019

Hamish walked into the local pub, sat down next to his friend Gordon and ordered a pint of bitter. Gordon looked over at him and noticed that his eye was swollen and bruised and there were some scratches on his face. “Oh aye, Hamish wha’ happen’ tae ya?” he asked.

“Well,” Hamish began, “what wi’ Boxing Day commin’ and the old auto on it’s last days, me wee wife began droppin’ hints about what we should replace it with. I grew weary of her naggin’. So when she said, ‘I want something shiny that goes from 0 to 200 in about 3 seconds.’

I bought her a scale. You can guess the rest.

# The Coat of Arms of Scotland

January 2021



You might notice that when he's featured on heraldic symbols, the Unicorn often has chains wrapped around him. This is a 'nod' to this medieval belief that a free unicorn was a dangerous creature and needed to be subdued.

During the reign of King James III (1466 - 1488), gold coins were introduced that featured a Unicorn. With the ascension of King James VI of Scotland to the throne succeeding Elizabeth I of England, and the resulting effective union of the two countries. NB: The current queen in Scotland is Lizzy I as she is the only first queen to be named Elizabeth. Only in England is she Elizabeth II.

The Scottish Royal Arms featured two unicorns as shield supporters. In a gesture of unity, King James replaced the one on the left with the English lion. The symbolism was potent, for the lion and the unicorn had long been painted as enemies, vying for the crown of king of beasts, with the unicorn ruling through harmony and the lion by might.

Today, the Royal Coat of Arms of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland still has the English lion on the left and the Scottish unicorn on the right, and the Royal Coat of Arms for use in Scotland has them the other way round.



The rivalry between these two countries can be found in literature, symbolised by the lion and the unicorn. Sir Edmund Spens wrote in The Faerie Queene:

*Like as a lion, whose imperiall powre  
A proud rebellious Unicorn defies  
T'avoide the rash assault and wrathful stowre  
Of his fiers foe, him to a tree applies.  
And when him running in full course he spies  
He slips aside; the whiles that furious beast  
His precious horne, sought of his enimyes,  
Strikes in the stroke, ne thence can be released,  
But to the victor yeilds a bounteous feast.*

-- A variety of sources

# UUUMM Hogmanay? Exactly what is it????

December 2024

Craig Ferguson, Glasgow born comedian, can wax eloquently on the subject. He is known, in America, as Nigel Wick, Drew Carey's boss from the show of the same name, but more recently as the host of The Late Late Show with Craig Ferguson. He has upon occasion referred to Hogmanay "As the most important of all Scottish holidays, probably because we celebrate it over two days and it's an easy word to say when you're hammered ( A Scottish word for the condition politely referred to as "overindulgence." The Brits use "pissed") We use other words.



## Microwavable Clootie Dumpling

September 2019

**A Hogmanay or a Burn's Night Dinner would nit be complete without a clootie dumpling.**

### Ingredients:

½ pint cold water  
4 oz sugar  
1 heaped tablespoon Cinnamon  
1 heaped tablespoon Mixed Spice  
8 oz Margarine  
8 oz Sultanas (Currents)  
8 oz Raisins  
1 tablespoon Treacle (Molasses)  
8 oz plain flour  
1 teaspoon Bicarbonate of Soda  
2 eggs

### Method:

Assemble plain flour & Bicarbonate of Soda

Put the top 8 ingredients into a saucepan and bring to the boil, simmer for five minutes.

Add the hot mixture to the flour and bicarbonate of soda, when well mixed add the two beaten eggs and mix well.

Pour the mixture into a cling film lined bowl and cook in the microwave for: 650 Watt for 9 minutes or 500 Watt for 12 minutes

Leave in the bowl to cool and firm up then turn out onto a wire rack or plate.

Finished dumpling can be sliced and served hot with any accompaniment to like custard, brandy butter, scoops of clotted cream, or any sweet sauce and ice cream. A wee dram o' whisky also goes well with it.