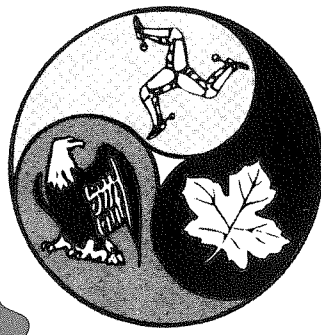


# N A M A



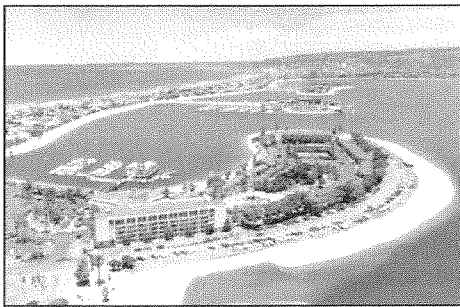
## NORTH AMERICAN MANX ASSOCIATION

Vol. 76, No. 4

To Preserve "Whate'er is left to us of ancient heritage." T.E. Brown

Fall 2005

### Make Your Plans Now For the 2006 Convention



The handsome Bahia Resort Hotel in sunny San Diego, California will be the site of the 48<sup>th</sup> Biennial NAMA convention scheduled for August 27 – 30, 2006. A full schedule of events is being planned by Convention Chair Laurence Skelly, NAMA's first vice president.

The NAMA convention provides an opportunity to renew old friendships, make new ones and, importantly, renew ties to the ancient isle.

With white sandy beaches, the 320-room hotel is secluded on its own 14-acre peninsula in the heart of Mission Bay, San Diego's largest aquatic park. Less than five minutes from Sea World, the Bahia is handy to all of the city's major attractions, including the famous San Diego Zoo and Wild Animal Park, Belmont Park and historic Old Town. And Mexico is just 30 minutes to the south.

Chairman Skelly and his committee are proposing a harbour cruise, a private NAMA function on the famous "Star of India" the Manx-built sailing ship and other NAMA events. An invitation will be extended to the President of Tynwald to speak to convention delegates.

Information about the Bahia Resort Hotel is available on-line at [www.bahiaresort.com](http://www.bahiaresort.com).

### North American Manx Museum Proposed at Wisconsin University

In a development significant to both all Manx descendents in North America and to the North American Manx Association in particular, the University of Wisconsin – Platteville (UWP) has proposed establishment of the North American Manx Museum as a section of a new exhibit center devoted to artifacts, manuscripts and other materials related to the history of southwest Wisconsin and adjoining areas of Illinois and Iowa.

The university's interest in Manx matter reflects the close proximity of Platteville to the Laxey Cemetery that evidences the early settlement of Manx immigrants in the area. Manx people were first attracted to southwest Wisconsin and nearby territory in the mid 1800s because of the familiar topography, the availability of land and the opportunities for employment in farming, mining and other trades.

The university plans permanent exhibit space for Manx items and would permanently house and preserve many of the treasures now held by trustees of NAMA. Our members would have access to these items as required for NAMA conventions and other events. The establishment of a central location for NAMA documents and artifacts would benefit both the organization and the UWP.

The new relationship between NAMA and UWP will be considered by the NAMA board and is subject to a final agreement with the university.

Additional details of this exciting new program will be reported in the next bulletin issue.



*A lively troop of young West Virginia dancers calling themselves "The Clan of Man" are demonstrating Manx culture in action, with the help of folks in Douglas, IOM. Read about them on Page 5.*

## Maintaining Our Manx Heritage Is An Important NAMA Goal

*A Message from President Brad Prendergast*

As I look back on my past year as NAMA president and begin to anticipate the 2006 NAMA Convention in San Diego, I realize again the importance of these biennial gathering to renewing old friendships, making new ones and, most importantly, strengthening our ties to our ancient isle. Our Manx heritage is both a treasure and an obligation. We treasure our roots and the distinct parts of our heritage that make us Manx. Our obligation is not just to preserve these for ourselves but also to preserve them for following generations.

We should teach the next generations how and why their Manx heritage is an important part of their lives. Our direct ancestors were Manx, and before that they were Vikings or Celts. That Viking/Celtic heritage is what made our Manx ancestors distinctive. As our families brought our heritage to the new world, they brought with them those habits, sayings, language, food and other attributes that made us both Manx, Celtic and Viking in our roots.

The Chicago Manx Society recently participated in the Chicago Celtic Fest and had the opportunity to do outreach for new members. Many people, even those of with typical Manx names, do not know of their heritage. I met a man whose name is Gawne. I told him that likely was Manx with that spelling. He told me that he was Irish, because that is what he had been told by his father. After some discussion, he realized that his name is Manx and that he had been wrong about his roots all this time. That kind of one on one recruiting is the only thing that will keep NAMA strong. If you know or meet someone who is Manx, even if by half or quarter blood, spreading the word about our heritage will get that person and family to look into their roots.

At a charity picnic last month I met a young women wearing a tee shirt with the three legs symbol on it. I told her that I was probably the only one present among 10,000 others who knew what her symbol meant. I got her name and asked that she and her family consider joining. That is the kind of recruiting that we need. As powerful as the Internet may be, our recruiting efforts are best when done personally

The challenge is recruiting those closest to us – our children, grandchildren, siblings, nieces and nephews. Give a membership to those recruits. Tell them about the convention next year. If they get a taste of what it means to be Manx, they will be hooked and our job of preserving our ancient heritage will be closer to realization.

### Manx Christmas Songs

Featured on New CD



Lovers of Manx choral music can look forward to a treat with the Manx Choir Cararjyn Cooidjagh's latest CD "Carval Chreneash" (a Cragneash Carol). The CD features 19 tracks of Christmas music in both Manx and English and includes familiar as well as relatively unknown material, all connected to the Isle of Man.

The music performed ranges from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the present day and includes solos, duets and instrumental pieces.

Caarjyn Cooidjagh has been performing together for over 10 years and has been involved in the production of three other CDs, all produced by the Manx Heritage Foundation.

The CD is stocked by the Lexicon Book Shop which is reachable at – [sales@lexiconbookshop.co.im](mailto:sales@lexiconbookshop.co.im). It can be obtained directly from the choir at – [enquiries@caarjyn.com](mailto:enquiries@caarjyn.com).

**NAMA MEMBERSHIP FORM ON PAGE 4**

### NAMA Officers and Directors 2004-2006

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Rockford, IL

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## ***Nominations Are Open for NAMA Youth Award***

The Manx North American Award for 2006 will be made to a young person under the age of 18, who is nominated by a local Manx organization and who demonstrates awareness of the Isle of Man and its culture. First presented in 2002, the award is intended to encourage young people with Manx family links to recognize and celebrate their roots and keep Manx culture alive in their family and community.

The young recipient of this award from the Isle of Man Department of Education must have actively demonstrated an interest in the Isle of Man and its culture in North America through performance of music, poetry, drama, and dance or in the form of written works of poetry, research or short essay. They may also have produced visual art works, in any medium, that serve as evidence of their understanding of Manx culture.

Nominations for the 2006 award should be sent to Mary Kelly, P.O.Box 425, Platteville, WI 53818 by June 15, 2006 in the form of a single letter describing the young person by name, address, age and the activities for which they are to be considered. Photographs are welcome and additional reference may be requested. The NAMA Awards Committee will announce the name of the award winner at the 2006 Convention in San Diego, CA

## **New Lieutenant Governor Takes Office**

The new Isle of Man Lieutenant Governor, representative of the Crown, Vice Admiral Sir Pal Haddacks took office in October. He succeeded Air Marshall Ian Macfadyen who retired earlier this year. The Lieutenant Governor represents the queen on the isle.

## **Financial Times Article Salutes Isle Economy**

(The prestigious Financial Times in a special section in October 2005 reviewed the growth of the Isle of Man economy, analyzing touring, film, e-business, taxation, industry and other areas. Its summary article quoted is below)

The Isle of Man, a 227-square mile island in the Irish Sea halfway between Dublin and Liverpool, is a conundrum. It is one of the world's most successful small economies, yet it has still not yet shrugged off its old image as a shady offshore tax haven with the occasional whiff of political scandal.

In the early 1980s it was a fading, windswept seaside resort best known for its annual TT motorcycle races, tailless cats and kippers. It had 12 percent unemployment, a per capita gross domestic product (GDP) 55 percent of the UK average and an infant financial service struggling to recover from the collapse of the infamous Savings and Investment Bank.

Since then the island's population has grown by nearly one-fifth, unemployment has been below 1.5% for the last seven years and GDP per capita is now 10 percent above the UK average, driven by 21 years of unbroken economic growth and an explosion in financial services.

The Isle of Man, a self-governed British Crown dependency, is not as well known as some offshore centers but it is bigger and faster growing than most. In terms of its 76,315 population it is considerably larger than Bermuda, the Cayman Islands, the British Virgin Islands, Gibraltar and Liechtenstein.

Over the last five years the Manx economy has expanded nearly two and a half times as fast as the UK's and is planning to grow in real terms by 5 to 6 percent a year over the next decade, according to Economy 2014, a recent think-tank report

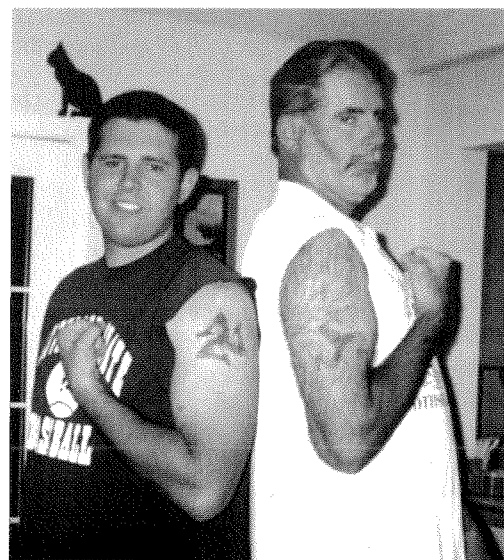
"We are the greatest economic success story that the world has never heard of," says Chris Corlett, a former management consultant whom now heads the island's Department of Trade and Industry.

"It just so happens that the world thinks of us as a backward and dubious financial services center, with a faded Victorian seaside resort, a few cats and motor bikers."

Manx officials believe that one of the island's biggest problems is a perception gap. The island is pinning its hopes on a 500,000-pound national rebranding project due to be unveiled next April.

## **Showing the Manx Symbol**

The photo of a Manx tattoo in a recent NAMA Bulletin prompted Mrs. Edith McWilliams of Clearwater, FL to send this photo and write: "Several years ago my nephew, Tom Greggor of Cleveland, Ohio had one tattooed on his arm and years later his son, Ben, had one put on his arm. Tom is the son of the late Don Greggor, the son of Emily (Clucas) and Ben Greggor, both originally from Peel. They would have been so proud of them displaying their heritage. They were both members of the NAMA and the Cleveland Mans society, and I still am."



## Early Manx Women Worked As Hard as Men

*(NAMA Secretary Joan Gill often tells tales of how women lived on the Isle of Man. This is part of a talk presented recently to a Wisconsin group.)*

In the past centuries when most Manx lived on crofts, the husband and wife worked as partners. Pictures of early farm scenes show the Manx women working along side the men.

As well as helping with farm choirs, the women also did typical female jobs of cooking, tending the children and making the family's clothing. One of the unique skills these women developed was the ability to make a war, thick, warm quilt of the log cabin pattern without the use of scissors, pins or ruler. The individual pieces were torn to measurements of the hand: the center square using the length between the first and second finger, the background pieces the width of your handspan from the tip of the thumb to the tip of the little finger and the strips of light and dark lengths to form the log were measured from the thumb's first to second joint.

The Manx, like all Celtic people, were superstitious. When sweeping the house Manx women would always sweep from door to hearth, thereby keeping good luck inside. When cleaning the floor, you should never brush the sweepings out the door for fear of brushing good luck out with the dust.

On St. Bridget's Day, February 1, housewife would carry a bundle of rushes to the front door of their cottages and invite St. Bridget in to stay the night. They would then spread the rushes upon the floor as a bed for the Saint and loom forward to a prosperous and lucky year.

Manx women were very intuitive. Many a family history records incidence of women awaking in the night realize that there had been a disaster at sea involving members of their family. Or, as in my family, stories of women whose hair turned white overnight, the same night they later learned that a father, son, husband or brother had been lost at sea.

Women were employed in another early industry – kipper smoking. When the herring fleet brought in its catch the fish were off loaded at Peel onto long tables on shore where young women would split and gut the fish in preparation for the smoking process. They were known as Herring Girls.

### NAMA Membership Enrollment Form

Promote and Protect Our Manx Heritage

Please Print

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Spouse \_\_\_\_\_

Street \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State/Prov \_\_\_\_\_ Zip/PC \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ e-mail \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Individual Membership</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Annual.....	\$15 _____
Life	
Under age 50.....	\$ 250 _____
Age 50 – 59.....	\$175 _____
Age 60 and over.....	\$125 _____
Junior (age 1-18 years – no bulletin).....	\$ 2 _____
<b>Family Membership</b>	
Annual.....	\$ 20 _____
Life (2 adults based on age of youngest)	
Under age 50.....	\$325 _____
Age 50 to 59.....	\$235 _____
Age 60 and over.....	\$200 _____
<b>Postage Supplement</b> for international mailing costs .....	\$ 20 _____
(fee paid by non US residents)	
<b>Total Remittance</b> in US dollars or equivalent amount.....	\$ _____

To become a NAMA member, please send this form and your check or money order to:

**John Prendergast, NAMA Treasurer 10251 South Bell, Chicago, IL 50543**

## Viking Re-enactment Society Formed

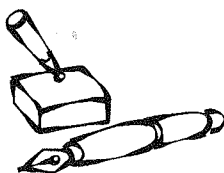
A group of Manxmen eager to reenact the struggles of their ancestors has formed the Vikings of Mann reenactment society to do battle in future festivals on the island and abroad showing how fighting used to be. The group held its first meeting in Peel in September. The members hope to fill a role formerly taken by "Vikings" imported from England, Ireland and Scotland. The group expects to acquire authentic weapons from specialist suppliers, which a news account observed, "could prove expensive. A good battle sword can cost more than 100 pounds, while chain mail costs 75 pounds just for the links."

### LET US HEAR FROM YOU!!

This bulletin is your publication for news about NAMA matters, local Manx society activities and happenings on the Isle of Man. It is also a place to share recollections about the island and other Manx matters.

We welcome items via e-mail to [pnbcue@aol.com](mailto:pnbcue@aol.com) or through the post to:  
NAMA Bulletin,  
3005 Ridgevale Road,  
Wilmington, DE 19808.

Please forward copy for the Winter Newsletter by the end of February, 2006



## An Urge to Dance Makes New "Manx"

It sounds like a Manx fairy tale. A large family in rural West Virginia is looking for a way for their many children to take part in a Celtic festival. They consider singing, but that presents problems. Irish step dancing is a possibility, but the mix of ages and kids is against that idea. Then because this family of 17 natural and adopted children has dubbed itself The Clan of Man, the mother is inspired to contact that Manx Folk Dance Society in Douglas for information on Manx dances. The idea so appealed to the Douglas society that they decided to underwrite the entire effort and provide a video, tapes, sheet music and instructions. Now the group is in its second year of performing Manx dances and at the recent Chesapeake Celtic festival in Snow Hill, Maryland even taught audience members some Manx steps.

Kelly Crenshaw of Shenandoah Junction, West Virginia, mother of the group, filled in the details of the Clan of Man dancers' history in a note to Kelly McCarthy of the Washington Area Manx Society:

I am a Celtic singer and have given lectures and have performed at the Chesapeake Celtic Festival over the years, singing English, Scots, Gaelic and Welsh. Three years ago the producers of that festival approached me about finding a way to involve my children. We have 17 children in all. 15 still live at home.

We thought about having the children sing Celtic music, but one of my boys has a brain disorder that prevents him from singing. We wanted all of the children to be involved, so we decided to dance. The festival producers suggested Irish step dancing, but these are untrained dancers, on a good day. Then for a name the producer suggested we call the group "The Clan on Man". And gave me an idea.

I contacted Joan Cowell of the Manx Folks dance society in Douglas and asked if she could direct me in finding instructions for Manx Dancing. Since we claimed the name, we might as well claim the dance. The Society met and discussed our request and decided to underwrite the entire project. They sent videos, a dozen accompaniment tapes, written instructions and sheet music.

We started working on the Manx dances and soon found that the kids enjoyed doing them. So, even though we are not of Manx heritage - at least as far as we know - we enjoy claiming the Isle of Man as our own. We have committed ourselves to spreading the awareness of Manx culture, particularly through dance.

So committed is the group that 17 members of "The Clan of Man" are now members of the Washington Society, a perfect ending to a fairy tale.

## Statute Honors Manxman at Trafalgar

As part of the observance this year of the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Trafalgar a statue of Manxman Captain John Quilliam has been placed in the Speaker's garden in Castletown. Captain Quilliam steered the Victory, the flagship of Admiral Horatio Nelson. On October 21, 1805 27 vessels under Lord Nelson's command defeated a combined Spanish and French force of 33 vessels off Cape Trafalgar in one of the most important naval battles in British history.

## Centenary of TT Races Observed

A series of special events in September marked the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Tourist Trophy races on the Isle of Man. More than 100 drivers reenacted the first motorcar race that predated the motorbike TT, and the Royal Automobile Club loaned the Manx National Heritage the first Tourist Trophy statue for the occasion. The first race was preceded by a 1904 vote in Tynwald that made road racing legal on the island. The TT race is the oldest regularly run motor competition in the world.

# Society News

## CHICAGO MANX SOCIETY

The society met on July 24<sup>th</sup> at the home of Bob and Laurie Anderson in Wheeling, IL for a delicious potluck meal followed by the meeting with 15 in attendance. We were glad to welcome four new members. The weather was hot at 100 degrees, but we had an enjoyable time (thank goodness for air conditioning). Those of us on the July homecoming told of the various activities we participated in, showing pictures and passing around travel folders, etc.

The Chicago Manx had eight people attending the homecoming between June 29 and July 9. Every one attending had a great time and we were able to do a lot of sight seeing on the planned activities and on our own. We also visited relatives we had not seen in a while.

We again participated in the Chicago Celtic Fest held in Grant Park, Chicago on Sept 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> on Chicago's lakefront. The city provides a tent, signs, tables, chairs and electricity for us to display what we wish of our Manx Celtic Heritage.

Our next meeting will be a Christmas gathering on Sunday, December 4<sup>th</sup> at the home of our secretary, Florence Abbinanti in Evergreen Park, IL, a south suburb of Chicago. We will begin at 1 PM with a potluck dinner. Anyone is welcome to attend.

– Robert Kelly, President.

## CLEVELAND MANX SOCIETY

The Cleveland Manx Society has been on the go. We met on October 2 at the North Royalton Library to hear one of our members, Mrs. Florence Roseman (Kelly) talk about her adventure aboard the SS Athenia. The ship was torpedoed and sank during World War II.

Mrs. Margaret (Maggie) Keegan gave the group an update on her MS fundraiser. Maggie was the first woman to cross the finish line in Sandusky and placed 12<sup>th</sup> out of 1,900 for fundraising during the event. Maggie raised over \$2,600 for MS research. She told us how she had to bike through heat and a terrible thunderstorm on her way to Cedar Point in

Sandusky, and then after she was safely home she was out biking for recreation last week and was hit by a car. Maggie came through with some bumps and bruises and, as she put it, "road rash".

Mr. Ron Teare recently donated \$400,000 to Kent State Fashion Design Department so that they can bring in professionals to critique work on the students enrolled there.

The Cleveland Manx Society is giving cash donations to both the Red Cross and the Salvation Army to aid in the Katrina relief work. We are keeping the families affected by this tragedy in our prayers and thoughts.

We will be meeting in November in the Lone Star Restaurant in Mentor, Ohio and in December we will have our annual Christmas party. – C.J. Burhenne

## ROCKY MOUNTAIN MANX SOCIETY

The Society met October 16 for a potluck supper at the Arvada United Methodist Church. Mrs. Sheila Kelly told about her recent visit to Tynwald. One of our couples is living part time of the year in Port St. Mary's on the isle. Slides were shown of scenes on the isle photographed by Worham and Killey. The program closed with the singing of Flanagan, Holiday Island and Ellan Vannin – Albert Scarffe

## VANCOUVER MANX SOCIETY

Our annual picnic was held July 16 in the back yard of Vice President Angus and Judith Gillon's home. The weather was sunny and there was a good turnout of members. The menu was beef and chicken burgers, donated by our hosts and barbecued by their daughter, Leslie McGee. All the snacks, salads and desserts were provided by other attending members.

Kevin Gillon directed the games amid lots of laughter and all the participants received awards of silver coin. Kevin always comes up with new ideas for the games. The last game was a giant piñata and it took a lot of swats with a bat to break it open. When it did break, out came all this candy. Great fun was had by all, scooping up candy using hands, pockets, and anything that would hold it! We went home well fed, with

sore sides from laughing at the games. It was a wonderful day. A big "Thank You" to Angus, Judith, Leslie and Kevin, for helping to make it so.

Next was July 24, the day our long time member, Mildred Costain, celebrated her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. There were lots of balloons, decorations, food and a large cake. "Costains" came from all over British Columbia to attend as well as members from the Vancouver Manx. A table was set up for memorabilia from the past 100 years. I found an old Manx picnic photo and a lot of my relatives, Condons and Kellys, were in it. Also a copy of the same photo that had all the Costains marked with names. Found a 1924 copy of the World Manx Association publication which contains an article about our Vancouver Manx Society. Mildred's nieces graciously gave me these copies to put in our archives.

Two of our members and past presidents, Flo and Peter Tregellis, celebrated their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary on September 24<sup>th</sup>, in the company of family and friends. They received an early anniversary present when their great-granddaughter, Emma, was born in August.

Our next get-together is our Annual Pot-Luck Dinner, "The Back End Do," on November 5<sup>th</sup> – a good way to celebrate the fall season. – Barbara Condon

## WASHINGTON AREA MANX SOCIETY

On September 13 the WAMA entertained Quintin Gill, MHK from Rushen at a Washington restaurant. Mr. Gill was returning from a Commonwealth Parliamentary meeting in Fiji and stopped over in Washington. The society also entertained Susan McCauley who lives on the Isle of Man and is studying politics at Leeds University. She is currently interning with Congresswoman Thelma Drake's office as a part of her degree course. Fred Blonder, a local Viking longshipman, was also present as he, like Mr. Gill, is a keen folk dancer. Mr. Gill spoke on the commercial and political events on the island.

WAMA President Kelly McCarthy has announced another "Celtic Mingle", for October 29<sup>th</sup> which is close to Halloween – or "Hop tu naa" in Manx – traditionally the Celtic New Year. This gathering in Fairfax, VA will follow up the previous successful Celtic mingle last July.

#### WISCONSIN MANX SOCIETY

The Wisconsin Manx Society held its bi-annual meeting Sunday, October 23 at the Midvale Community Lutheran Church. Joan Gill, who is a member of both the Minnesota and Wisconsin society and secretary of NAMA, presented a program about "Women on the Isle of Man". Ms. Gill is well known for her presentations on Manx folklore.

The Wisconsin Manx Society was organized in 1981 and strives to educate members and the community about the Manx culture of the past and present. Membership consists of persons of Manx birth or connected to the Isle of Man by ties of descent or marriage. Because the Isle of Man has Celtic heritage, members participate in Celtic Cultural activities throughout the state and nation. Wisconsin Manx Society members attended the Conference of Celtic Women in Milwaukee on October 20-22. WMS present Georgene Voutila carried the Manx flag in the opening ceremony.  
– Doris Alff

#### COUNTRY CHILD

*Country child – so long ago.  
My joy, my world – the quiet glen.  
Outside's bustle – to and 'fro,  
Hardly seemed to reach me then.*

*Wandering free 'oer field and farm;  
Barefoot in the gentle stream.  
Free of care and free of harm.  
Time to play and time to dream.*

*But time grinds on – and spares no one  
And new feet thread the paths I knew.  
Young friends grew old – and most are gone.  
That chapter's closed, there's no re – view.*

*An empty stage remains – that's all.  
I will not see a curtain call.  
Better that I let things be  
And keep as cherished memory.*

*Terry Mc Caffrey*

(Mr. McCaffrey is president of the Vancouver Manx Society and remembers a happy Manx childhood.)

#### NAMA Bulletin Copies

A NAMA member and loyal bulletin reader reports that he has most copies of the publication from 1976 through December 2003 and is willing to send them to anyone interested who is willing to pay the postage.

Contact Dan Teare, 724 Adams Street, East Tawas, MI 48730-9306.

#### New CD and Stamps Issued To Celebrate Island Life

A celebration of Island life in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century is the theme for Isle of Man Post's latest stamp issue. Produced in collaboration with Manx Radio and the Manx Heritage Foundation, 'Time to Remember' was inspired by a series of interviews recorded by David Callister over the last five years. David spoke to people such as farmers, teachers, a butcher, baker and a landgirl. Twenty of the most evocative accounts - vivid memories of aspects of life in the Isle of Man long since past ranging from 'guttin' herrin' to donkey rides on Douglas beach - have been selected by Isle of Man Post. 10 feature on the stamps and a commemorative CD, while an additional 10 will be included in the 2005 year book.

Philatelic bureau manager Dot Tilbury said: 'Earlier this year the 20 contributors whose memories shaped our Time to Remember collection were invited to a tea party at the Braaid Young Men's Club and we had a marvelous afternoon. They brought with them all kinds of treasured memorabilia of a bygone era in the Island, which has made this issue especially poignant and highly personal.

The CD 'Time to Remember' contains extracts from the original recordings along with two booklets of stamps, (26p and 29p) and is priced at £14.99. The 'Time to Remember' year book is priced £35, includes the CD plus all stamp issues from 2005 and will be on sale from November 05. Items can be ordered from the Philatelic Bureau, PO Box 10M, Douglas Isle of Man, GB, IM99 1PB or by e-mail to [www@iompost.com](mailto:www@iompost.com)



# How to Celebrate Christmas As Our Manx Ancestors Did

By Lucy Q. Peterson

How did our Manx ancestors celebrate Christmas? With the holidays coming up, I decided to find out. Maybe some of these should be revived – and others probably should not! Here is the condensed version.

They used to celebrate the “foolish fortnight” beginning on December 21<sup>st</sup> (the shortest day of the year) and extending until January 6<sup>th</sup> (“Old Christmas Day”). During this time only essential work was done and all kinds of merriment enjoyed.

On Christmas Eve all would attend church services. When these were concluded, the pastor would leave, but the rest would stay and start singing “carvels” (carols written by the parishioners in the Manx language). These often went way into the night and soon left the religious aspect far behind. The young female attendees sometimes took along peas to fling at their bachelor friends when the singing became too riotous. I read some ecclesiastical minutes where this practice was condemned, but they couldn’t seem to put a stop to it. Apparently at a later date these “carvels” were more standardized (and more acceptable) and often sung by choirs as well as the congregation. They also went caroling to homes the week prior to Christmas.

The young people enjoyed a fiddler paid for by each parish for many nights of dancing. Barns were used for this purpose and it was said that no barn was unoccupied for 12 days.

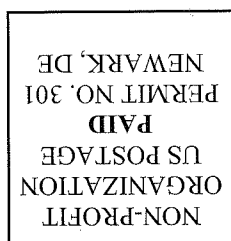
Mummers or “white boys” enacted a play, usually the legend of St. George and the dragon. This used to be performed on the 21<sup>st</sup> – the shortest day – as they symbolized death and resurrection and this short day would become renewed, growing steadily in length.

Another tradition associated with the 26<sup>th</sup> (St. Stephen’s Day) is the hunting of the wren. I also found reference to this being done on Christmas Day. Perhaps this is because of mixing two different celebrations into one. It seems that a wren is hunted and stoned to death, representing Stephen, the first Christian martyr. The reason for its being a wren goes back to a pagan legend. An uncommonly beautiful fairy enchanted young men to follow her and eventually led them to the sea where they would drown. A knight errant sprung up and plotted to destroy her, but she escaped at the last minute, taking the form of a wren. It is in hopes of destroying her that they hunt the wren. They parade, sing and bury her with great aplomb. Feathers from the destroyed bird are considered lucky, especially so for those who go to sea as a preservation from shipwreck for one year.

Well, that is a sampling of the major traditions I found. I wonder what they would think of our celebrations!

*Nollick vannit as Blein Noa feer vie.*

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