

The Halifax Guitar Society Newsletter

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Halifax Classic Guitar Society

A Short History

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Chair

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Treasurer

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Eugene Cormier

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My wife, Ellie and I moved to Bedford, NS from Ottawa in July of 1971. I had recently begun to study the classical guitar, and was anxious to get involved with other aficionados in the Halifax area. I had been a member of the Ottawa Guitar Society, so I searched for a similar club in Halifax, but to no avail. In desperation I read the classified ads for musical instruments until I saw an advertisement of somebody wanting to sell a classical guitar. I called the number and introduced myself to Dr. Lauri McNeil. We became friends instantly, and he told me that there had once been a society in Halifax, but to his knowledge it no longer existed. However, he remembered that a gentleman by the name of Walter Purcell had been a member.

I tracked down Walter in Musquodoboit Harbour. He gave me another name - Margaret Holgate. One thing led to another, and we soon re-established the Halifax Classical Guitar Society with members Ellie and Roly Burton, Walter and Ena Purcell, Lauri and Gill McNeil, Margaret Holgate, John Harwood and one other whose name I cannot remember.

Our membership rules were simply that anyone who had an interest in classical guitar was welcome to become a member. If they played another instrument, they were encouraged to work up duets with Classical Guitar and play at our meetings. If they simply joined to listen, that was fine too. Membership (I think) was \$5.00 per year.

Our first meetings were at Ellie's and my home. Walter wanted to have it in a different member's home each time, as was done with the original society, but I felt that we had to get a place on neutral ground. I wanted to see the Society expand beyond a handful of members, and even put on public concerts.

We approached St Mary's University Art Gallery, as it was a beautiful setting and seemed ideal for what we were looking for. We were welcomed with open arms by the Curator Robert Dietz. We had no trouble in agreeing that this was exactly what we wanted. The atmosphere was perfect; the welcome was warm and the price (nothing) was right. Bob Dietz became our close friend and first honorary member. He was also, at our encouragement, our unofficial mentor and advisor on our programs, music and concerts (and almost anything else we wished to talk about)

Our objectives were to encourage the enjoyment of Classical Guitar in Halifax; have regular meetings at which members would play; persuade Dalhousie to get a professor of Classical Guitar on staff; and put on public performances with established guest guitarists. We accomplished all our objectives. We also put out a newsletter (with neat bits of technical advice) called "Finger Tips"

We met once a month at St Mary's University Art Gallery and the Executive met separately once a month to plan ahead. I was elected as the first President and the Executive Meetings were held at my home. The first Executive body was composed of me, Roly Burton (President), Walter Purcell (Treasurer), Margaret Holgate (Secretary), Lauri McNeil (member at large), John Harwood (member at large), and one other (who's name escapes me).

In a very short time the Society stabilized at a membership of about 50 people of all ages and walks of life - young and old, musicians and non-musicians, students and members from the general public. We put on several public concerts with outside performers such as the well known classical guitarist from New York, Alice Artzt; and from Ottawa, Ed Honeywell and his Flamenco partner Leo Marti. Ed and Leo did a recording for CBC while they were here, as well. The concerts were held in the SMU Art Gallery, and were open to the public. They were well advertised in Halifax/Dartmouth and had an attendance of about 250 each time. Funding for our endeavors came, in part, from a Provincial grant, and in part from our membership and small concert profits.

I was President until May of 1975, when I moved with my family to Montreal. Carl von Feggelin (spelling?) replaced me and stayed for a year, after which an unexpected turn of events brought me back to Halifax with my family and I was reelected President. I filled the office until 1978 when I was called back to sea and was unable to devote any more time to the Society. I'm not sure what happened after that, but I suspect the HCGS just sort of faded away after Bob Dietz left St Mary's and the Art Gallery was no longer available

Sadly, both Walter Purcell and Bob Dietz passed away not long ago. They were founding members without whose invaluable contribution we would not have existed. They should be remembered.

.(by Roly Burton - Past President)

The Halifax Guitar Society

Membership registration form

Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Phone: _____

Would you like to receive the semi-monthly newsletter via e-mail? Yes ☐ No ☐

E-mail Address: _____

You can contact the Halifax Guitar Society at: 6199 Chebucto Rd., Halifax, NS B3L-1K7
1.902.423.6995 or online at: www.geocities.com/halifaxguitarsociety and
halifaxguitarsociety@hotmail.com