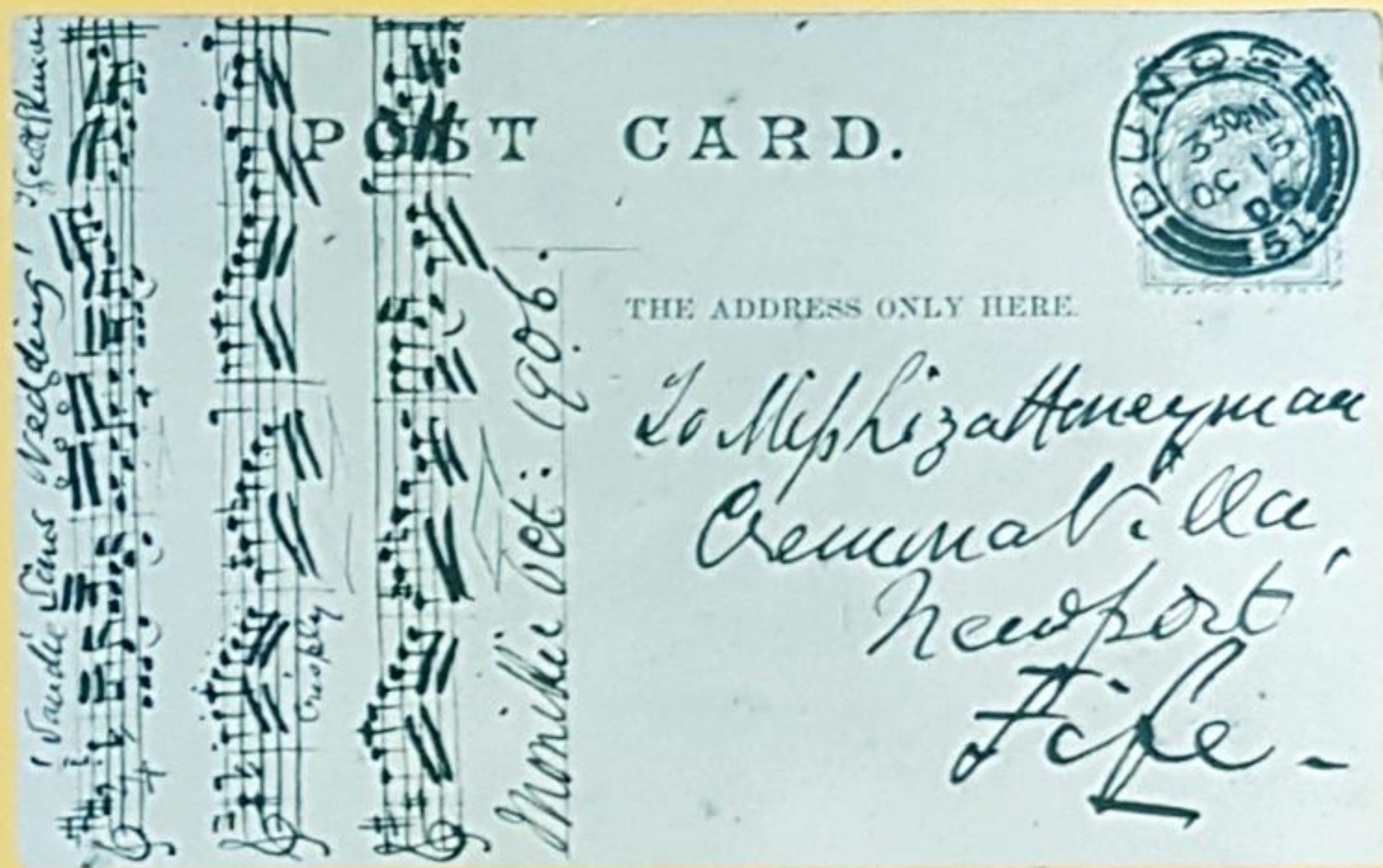
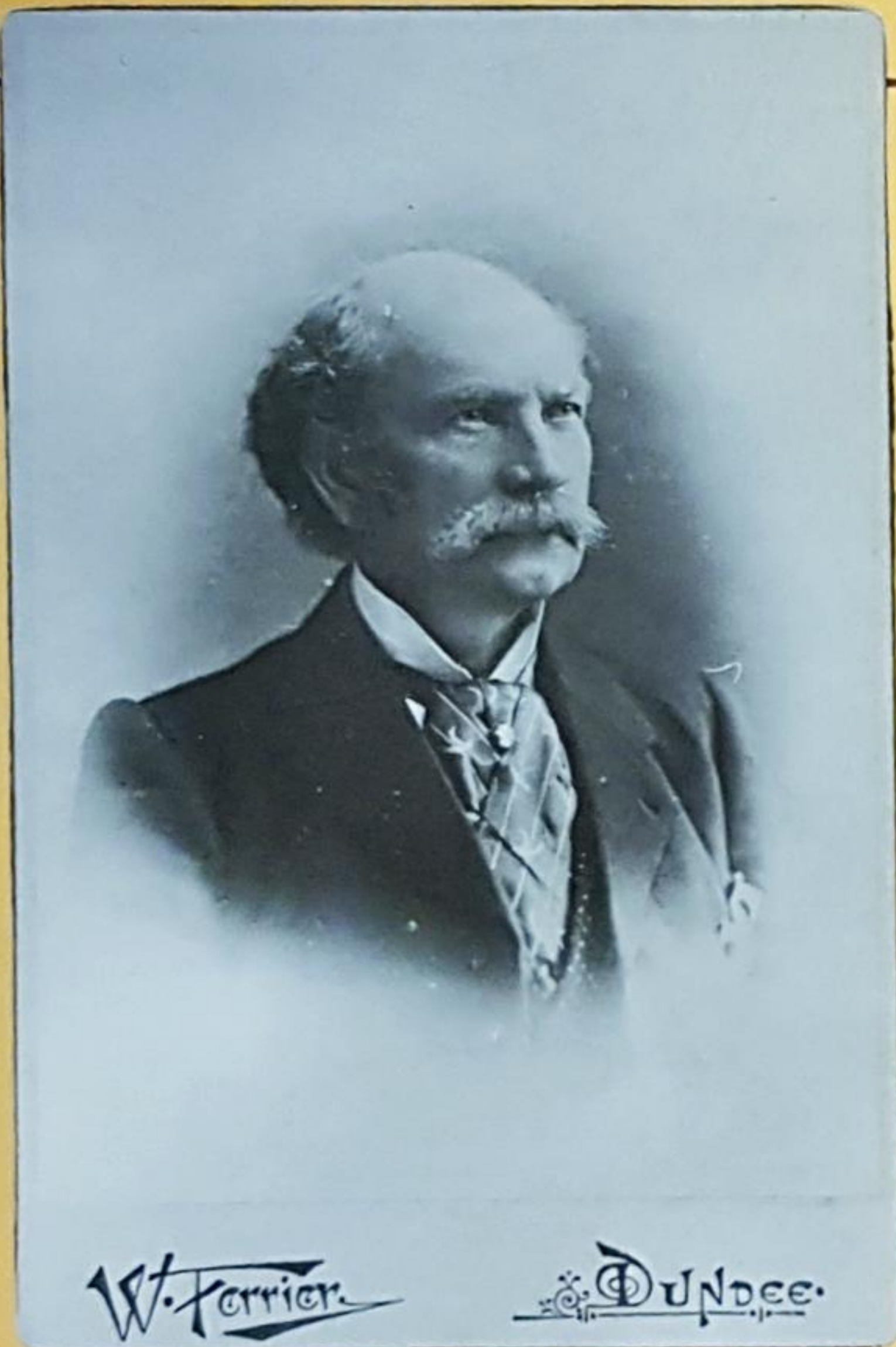


J. SCOTT SKINNER ❀ THE STRATHSPEY KING



CLASSICS OF SCOTS FIDDLING



THE STRATHSPEY KING IN GRAND FORM.—In pursuance of his present tour through Scotland, Mr Scott Skinner and his concert party favoured Cupar with a visit on Tuesday evening. The Corn Exchange, in which the entertainment took place, was occupied by a large audience. It goes without saying that, capable as was every member of the concert party, Mr Scott Skinner was himself the star of the evening. Arrayed in the garb of Old Gaul, and wearing in brooch and sporran a wealth of precious stones that dazzled the eye, he brought with him the Andrea Guarnerius violin (1690) that was presented to him 40 years ago by Mr W. Grant of Carron and Eleclues. Its tone is superb in every string, and in the hands of such a master as the Strathspey King, it completely carried the audience away. The pieces played were either Mr Skinner's own composition or arrangement, and among the charming selections given were his famous "Bon-Accord" air, the "East Neuk o' Fife," and "Auld Robin Gray." His playing generally was characterised by the expression and Celtic fire peculiar to Highland music, and was in such demand that he had difficulty in getting down from the platform. The concert party have to be congratulated on the good taste that marked the selection of their songs, many of which, such as "Cam ye by Athole," by Miss Rene Bishop (soprano); "Doon the Burn, Davie Lad" by Miss Gladys Cooper (contralto);

and "Macgregor's Gathering" by J. Elliot Tulloch (baritone), are too seldom heard nowadays on our concert platforms. The trio "Ye Banks and Braes" was beautifully rendered as a part song by these artists, and the "Il Travatore" duet, "Home to our Mountains," received admirable treatment from Miss Cooper and Mr Tulloch. Delightful variety was lent to the entertainment by the smart and dainty step dancing of Miss Cathie Macdonald, who was loudly applauded. Miss Hamilton had a heavy task as pianist, but was equal to every demand made upon her, and at the close, Mr Rose Wood, manager, expressed on Mr Scott Skinner's behalf his thanks for the large patronage bestowed, and on the artists' behalf their thanks for the attention given them—the audience, he said, having been the most appreciative they had had in their tour. At the close several members of the audience went to the ante-room, and congratulated Mr Scott Skinner on his playing. One of these was a lady who with her family had motored in from the country, and she informed the Strathspey King that she knew no difference in his personal appearance since she had been one of his pupils in Aberdeenshire, notwithstanding that the "King" is now within a month or two of being eighty years old.

REPRINT FROM *Fife Herald and Journal*,
27TH SEPTEMBER, 1922.



T. Johnstone

MELVILLE DRIVE
MOTHERWELL

Scott Skinner's American Journey, 1926



From The People's Journal, March 13, 1926:

SCOTT SKINNER ON HIS VISIT TO AMERICA To Compete for World's Championship in Fiddling (Special to "People's Journal")

Mr. J. Scott Skinner, at the advanced age of 82 years, is on the point of leaving for the United States to uphold the prestige of "Fair Auld Scotland" in the realm of fiddling.

The international contest at Lewiston, Portland Bay, Maine, to decide the violin championship of the world in strathspeys, reels and jigs, for wielders of the bow over sixty years of age, is to take place on April 5th, and extend over the following five days; and the Campbell Clan Society, charged with selecting a representative of this country, has chosen "the Strathspey King", known all over the British Isles and further afield as a unique exponent of the national music.

1000 Dollars and Cup Prize

The promoters of the contest, one of whom is Mr. Henry Ford, of motor car fame, are the members of the Scottish Clan of America, and the prize attaching to the championship is 1000 dollars (£400) and a silver cup of the value of £100. The latter becomes the absolute property of the winner.

Entries have been received from Ireland, Canada, New Brunswick Island, Prince Rupert Island, and from all parts of the great Republic. Mr. Scott Skinner is the only one put forward on behalf of Scotland, and, as I have said, he is the nominee of the Campbell Clan Society.

In the octogenarian's native Banchoory, and the North Country generally, the news of the engagement has caused quite a thrill. Old friends and admirers are especially jubilant. They recall the veteran's age, speak of the enterprise as the most daring in a life which has been full of adventure, and the joys of fare, and, extending to him their full-voiced laudation of his pluck, wish him success in an event which, if pulled off, will, indeed, put the crown on a long, and, in many respects, remarkable career.

Wishing to see "the King" (as his friends call him) myself, and to get from him a first-hand indication of how he regards the trip across the Atlantic, I called on Wednesday afternoon at his lodgings at 25 Victoria Street, Aberdeen.

What Doctor Told Him

The old man was still abed. "Just taking a long lie," he whimsically apologized, "so make sure that I'll be as fit as my own fiddle when we start out for Uncle Sam's and God's own country tomorrow (Thursday) morning. I'm feeling fine."

"Do you mean, then, in answer to me, 'don't my doctor tell me to get up at the other end and still be I was good for another couple of days? Rightly you, but he's never going to get up at the other end!'"

"What else was he saying to me?" I asked.
"Oh, it's a long story," he replied. "The Scottish Clan Society is at the back of it, but behind it again is Henry Ford and a million. Ford's like me. He's tired of that everlasting jazz and tango music, and wants to get back and take in with him in the national and classical tradition. That's the stuff. Ford is on the spot again."

"Then what are your arrangements for the journey?" I asked.

"My housekeeper would tell you all about the friends and buses we are taking," he remarked with a laugh, "but you wouldn't be interested in that. Well, we are on our way and will be in Glasgow, the 15th, from Liverpool by bus. There are to be great meetings on my arrival. I understand Representative of all the Scottish Clan Societies are to assemble to move me. Henry Ford is committed and, backed by a powerful paper, I'm to be made a 'show up' in a procession round the principal parts of the high-rise town."

From America I hear further that the cinematographers are to be on the job, and very likely before you see me back in Aberdeen you'll get me in the picture houses."

Engagements Pouring In

"How long will you be away, Mr. Skinner?" I asked.
"Oh! I wish I could say. My passport is for a three months' stay, but there have been so many inquiries wanting to fix up engagements with me - all sorts of 'trumps', you know - that really - oh, well, I can't say. At the same time, I am not to let our American friends overwork me."

"Man," he added, throwing up his arms, "I think I'm going to enjoy myself. My friends will be glad to know that, while I'm a wee bit excited at the prospect, I'm in good fettle; and my housekeeper, who is accompanying me, will see to it that I don't overtax my strength while I'm on the other side."

Congratulatory Messages

Before bidding Mr. Skinner good-bye, I learned that he had been deluged with letters and telegrams from friends in all parts of the country congratulating him on the honour that has come his way, and wishing him all success. One admirer in Banchoory hopes he will be able to give the Americans a Deeside "dichin", and a parish kirk minister, a lifelong intimate, sent the following communication:-

My Dear and Gaele Old Friend,

Well this is news indeed! - and among the men over to assembled in Lewiston, Portland, Maine, U.S.A., "Old-Time Fiddlers," I predict you'll easily bear the brunt, and be a mile above them all! -

By the Eye of Imagination I see a vast concourse of Uncle Sams and Yanky-Doodles, and "Henry Ford" seated on thrones, heavily embroidered velvet and gold, made out of the frame of the first Ford car he designed and made - then, the doors having been thrown open by his lackeys in uniforms bespattered with the star-spangled symbols - I see the figure of the venerable composer of "Tulchan Lodge" and innumerable other airs advancing and making a low bow, and Henry Ford standing up, with the steering rod of his Ford for a mace in his right hand, and in good English with heavily nasal accented tones saying: "Mr. Scott Skinner, before proceeding to action, open your mouth until my dentist-in-chief examines your teeth to see if, before God and this dentist, you are over 60 years of age" - and on hearing that the kilted Aberdonian is over 80 I see Henry Ford falling backwards and having to be assisted to his seat. Well, well, it is all most exciting, and will be the star turn of the whole musical season... I wish you God speed and bon voyage and a safe return, with at least £100 in your splanchna, and a bag full of stories of all the funny people you'll meet and the queer places you'll see.

It only needs to be added that the whole expenses of the trip will be borne by the Scottish Clan Society of America.

Scott Skinner on Record

The playing of Scott Skinner was quite concisely documented during the last quarter-century or so of the preceding era, and it is probable that more than a hundred of his performances were committed to cylinders and discs. The earliest are believed to have been a group recorded in Glasgow in September 1899 for PARLOPHONE. Within the next few years Skinner recorded numerous cylinders for VICTROLA and PATHE, many of the latter being later transferred to vertical-cut discs.

On January 30, 1910, Skinner journeyed to London to record for the ALHAMBRA & TYMPHONY company (then known as HMV), probably at the studio at 31 City Road. From that studio comes the Columbia String group (matrix 15194, Serial 70) from Guarphonic Company record G.C. 7700 (like in track 30 that a name which has been recorded - but you will not find it anywhere).

The other two of the group are the original 78s, recorded on the 10th of March 1910, and the 78s, recorded on the 10th of March 1910, and the 78s, recorded on the 10th of March 1910. The other two of the group are the original 78s, recorded on the 10th of March 1910, and the 78s, recorded on the 10th of March 1910. The other two of the group are the original 78s, recorded on the 10th of March 1910, and the 78s, recorded on the 10th of March 1910.

In January 1910 Skinner went to London for the Columbia company, recording some 20-odd titles, probably at their Oxford Street studio, for issue on the Rena label. These performances, made at his prime, have provided the majority of the selections on this LP and *The Music of Scott Skinner* (12TS058). Included here are the Celebrated Hornpipes (18744, Regal Zonophone G6616) (1/6), Highland Schottische No. 2 (18747, Regal Zonophone G6618) (1/4), Lucania Polka (18749, Regal G6622) (1/4), Highland Reels (18751, Regal Zonophone G6616) (1/7), Triumph Country Dance (18753, Regal G6622) (1/3), Bagpipe Marches (18755, Regal G6622) (1/3), Medley No. 2 (18756, Regal G6622) (1/3) and The President (18758, Columbia Rena 1291) (1/1). As will be seen, the original Rena issues were eventually replaced by Regals, some of which remained in catalogue well beyond Skinner's death, to be transferred in the '30s to the Regal Zonophone label.

Also during 1910 appeared a series of seven cylinders, two of 2-minute and three of 4-minute duration. It is possible that they were recorded about the time Skinner was in London for Columbia; at any rate, they almost certainly belong to this period.

Skinner's final session came a dozen years later, in the latter part of November 1922, at the Columbia studios at 108 Clerkenwell Road, London. Again, some 30 performances may have been recorded; all that were issued were on the RENAISSANCE label. Reproduced here are the Home Sweet Home group (73053, Regal G7312) (1/4), the Mrs. Scott Skinner group (73075, Regal G6622) (1/7) and the Glenora group (73076, Regal G6622) (1/6). The piano accompanist was Ethel Stuart (later Ethel Key), Skinner's niece.

The instruments with which Skinner made probably all his recordings was a Strath violin. This is an instrument lacking the conventional violin's wooden body, the acoustic role of which is assumed by a metal diaphragm, connected to the bridge, and a metal horn, which amplifies and directs the sound. Strath violins were better suited than conventional models to the acoustic recording process, and most of the early recorded violinists used them.

Tony Russell



The front and back sleeve photographs are of Scott Skinner, the former dating from 1910. The MS of *Cradle Song* is in Skinner's own hand; on the reverse the composer has written "Simplicity of form does not necessarily mean dearth of genius." Nature is the thing... A sadder air I have never penned."

An EMI Records recording. Produced for TOPIC by Tony Eagle. Sleeve notes by Alastair Hardie. Additional notes by Tony Russell. Sleeve design by Tony Russell. Illustrative material from the collection of John Junner (except *Cradle Song* MS from James Duncan); location photography by Tony Russell.

TOPIC thanks Mr. John Junner of Banchoory, Kincardineshire, for his kind loan of the original records retained here and for all his assistance in the production of this LP. Thanks also to Brian Rust for discographical assistance.

Other TOPIC records of Scott Skinner music include *The Music of Scott Skinner* (12TS058) by Bill Hardie & J. Scott Skinner, and *James F. Dickie's Delight* (12T079) by James F. Dickie.

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Sister 1

- 1 The President - Air and Variations
- 2 Lucania Polka
- 3 The Freebooter
Tullochgorum
The East Nesh o' Fife
- 4 Allegory
The Miller o' Hirn
Mackenzie Fraser
The Auld Wheel
- 5 Bagpipe Marches
Athole Highlanders' Farewell to Loch Katrine
Cameron Highlanders
The Inverness Gathering
- 6 Colbrand Hornpipes
Arthur Seat
Eugene Stratton
The Banks
- 7 Highland Reels
Laird o' Thorns
Gavin M'Millan
Laird o' Drumblair
Gladstone's Reel

Side 3

- 1 Medley No. 2
Bonnie Lass o' Bon Accord
Marquis of Huntly's Farewell
The Ten Pound Fiddle
- 2 Highland Schottische No. 2
Sandy Cameron
Miller o' Hira
The Glenlivet
- 3 Triumph Country Dance
Triumph
Timour the Tartar
The Left Handed Fiddler
Speed the Plough
De'il Among the Tailors
- 4 Home Sweet Home
The Iron Man Strathspey
The Bungalow Reel
- 5 Cradle Song
Cradle Song
The Braes of Auchtertyre
The Athole Highlanders' Farewell to Loch Katrine
- 6 Glen Grant
Tulchan Lodge
The Parent - Humorous Pizzicato
- 7 Mrs. Scott Skinner
Mackenzie Hay
The Devil's Elbow

Devotees of the art of James Skinner have, up to now, had their appreciations restricted to those old yips they were fortunate enough to own or could pick up in some antique shop. Now, with the issue of this disc and its accompanying volume *The Music of Scott Skinner* (12TS068), we have the chance to hear a wide selection

of this unique artist's records - some of them very rare indeed. This has been achieved with the cooperation of Mr John W. R. Junner, to whose extensive record collection we are indebted for all the tracks on this LP.

Skinner was born in the Dreside town of Banchoory in 1843. His musical education was initially in the hands of his brother Sandy, who taught him the violin and the art of vamping accompaniments on the 'cello. Skinner's abilities in this latter respect brought him into contact with the 'Tadland Minster' Peter Milne (1824-1901) and it was to this musician that he owed his early training in strathpey playing. In 1855 a six-year apprenticeship followed with an orchestra of young players, 'De Mark's Little Men'; it was during this period that Skinner consolidated his violinistic and theoretical skills under the guidance of Charles Bourcier.

On returning to the northeast of Scotland, Skinner trained and practised as a dancing-master, and it was as a tribute to his teacher, 'Professor' William Scott, that he henceforth adopted the name James 'Scott' Skinner. His prowess on the violin, however, had been developing apace, a fact borne out by his notable success in an open violin competition held in Inverness in 1894.

Skinner's first publication, a polka, dates from 1860. He went on to produce a remarkable total of over 60 pieces published either in sheet music form – the *Minnie* and *Corngorn* series – or in his many collections, the most important of which are the *Miller & Hore* Collection (1881), the *Elpis* Collection (1884), the *Laps* Collection (1888), *The Scottish Violin* (1900) and the *Harp and Chymney* Collection (1904).

Concert tours took Skinner to America on two occasions, in 1893 and 1906, and his stocky figure was a familiar part of musical life in his native land for over sixty years. Proof of the esteem in which he was held by his fellow countrymen is afforded by the fact that it was an Aberdeen newspaper editor who dubbed him the 'Strathpey King', a title he bore undisputed till his death in 1927. He was buried in Aberdeen's Allendale Cemetery and his grave is distinguished by a fine bronze bust which was unveiled in his memory in 1931.



Skinner originally intended *The President* to be named after the German Kaiser but was eventually persuaded to rename it in favour of the American head of state. Arranged by the celebrated northeastern folklorist Gavin Greig (editor of the *Harp and Claymore Collection*), it is in the form of a polka and trio with variations; use is made of a whole battery of violinistic effects – harmonics, left-hand pizzicati, thrown bow, etc. – not commonly found in the composer's more traditional output. A even rarer Skinner polka, the *Lascala* was titled after the ship of that name, and dedicated to its master, Capt. Mackay. (It was probably on this vessel that Skinner made his first voyage to America.)

The *Freebooter*, *Tullochgorum* and *The East Neuk o' Fife* introduce the essence of Skinner's art. James MacPherson, the freebooter in question, is said to have penned this heroic air on the eve of his death - his illegal activities having resulted in his sentence to the gallows at Banff in 1700. *Tullochgorum* was first pub-

lished in Bremser's 1757 collection and the *quintessential* Scandinavian has inspired poetic praise from the national muse of both John Skinner and Robert Ferguson. Skinner adds some brilliant variations of his own as he does in *The East Neuk o' Fife*, yet another tune of considerable antiquity, coming from James Oswald's 1762 collection.

The following group of four Skinner tunes opens with the pastoral *Our Highland Queen*, written in 1881 and dedicated to Queen Victoria, but for some reason titled *Allegory* on the original record label. One of the composer's most popular strathspeys, *The Miller o' Hira* comes from the collection of that name, as does *The Auld Wheel*. Mackenzie Fraser was published for the first time in Henderson's *Scottish Music Maker* of 1925.

Saunders's masterly variation-playing is well demonstrated in the three bagpipe marches. He regarded the Athole Highlanders' Farewell to Loch Katrine, a pipe quickstep composed by William Ross, 'as the king of pipe marches'. His own Cameron Highlanders pays tribute to a regiment in which the composer's brother served for eleven years. Of older vintage, The Inverness Gathering (or Culloden Day) makes more use of dotted rhythms, giving opportunities for some effective cross-tuning.

Arthur Seat and Eugene Stratton are generally considered to be the finest of the Strathpey King's many hornpipes. Stratton was a celebrated 'coon' singer in Skinner's day; the tune will be found in the *Flowers of Scotch Melody*, having been transcribed from this recording by J. Murdoch Henderson. Banks Hornpipe - attributed to Pizzotti - is believed to have been a Scottish export to America under the title *Kinloch's Grand Hornpipe*; its ultimate return, however, has found it changed in form and name.

Four of Skinner's friends are the dedictees of the following group. The Laid o' Thruma (written for J. M. Barrie) gives unusual prominence to triplet rhythmic figuration - even the opening phrase features triplets rather than the customary dotted patterns. Gavin M'Millen was a Glaswegian who acted as the composer's agent in that area of Scotland. Without doubt the 'King's' most celebrated strachey, The Laid o' Drumblair pays tribute to his friend as patron William McHardy; Gladstone's Reel, distinguished by its unusual four-strain structure, refers not to the famous politician but to an Edinburgh music lover.

Arguably Skinner's best-known composition, *The Bonnie Lass o' Bon Accord* was the tune chosen as his musical memorial - the opening bars being inscribed on the gravestone in All Saints Cemetery. His reel *The Ten Pound Fiddle* is preceded by the *March of the Marquis of Huntly's Farewell*, one of the finest strathspeys of William Marshall (1728-1833). Always a cornerstone of Skinner's repertoire, the Marshall strathspey gained him the laurels in the 1863 Inverness violin competition mentioned above.

A further reminder of *The Miller n' Hien* provides a rare opportunity to ascertain how the lapse of four years has affected the performer's interpretation. This



tune is flanked by a further two strathpeys, Sandy Cameron and The Glenlivet. Note how a smooth transition into Glenlivet is facilitated by concluding on the first strain of *The Miller o' Hae*.

Opening and concluding with the tune *Triumph*, the *Triumph Country Dance* track also features *Timber the Tarter* and the *De'il Among the Tailors*, both of which come from the 1884 *Atholl Collection*. Skinner adds some fine variations to the *De'il*, whose



rhythm is a familiar fingerprint in Scottish music. According to J. Murdoch Henderson, Skinner's real The Left Handed Fiddler was dedicated to George Taylor Sex, although his son - also George Taylor - probably achieved even greater fame as a left-handed player. The second strain of this reel introduces a pastoral note with the violin imitating the call of the cuckoo. Speed the Plough was composed by John Murdoch.

Home Sweet Home, played with all the appropriate grandeur, serves as the rather incongruous introduction to Skinner's own Iron Man and The Bangalore. The aforementioned William McHardy was the 'iron man' in question, and the reel refers to a cottage which he made available to the 'Kong', rent free, for several years. An interesting resemblance exists between the openings of these two tunes.

The Cradle Song is subtitled *Buraville* in *The Scottish Violinist* but the fact that this tune is in simple as opposed to compound time makes it a rather loose description. Composed by Coochett, *The Braes of Aachtertyre* was first published in Stewart's collection but turns up in Mackenzie's *Dance Music of Scotland* (Book 5) in the guise of a reel in C. As arranged here the tune is characterised by some generous double stopping. Skinner concludes this group with his beloved Athole Highlanders' Farewell to Loch Katrine.

Skinner dedicated *Glengraat* to his "dearest friend James Goss of Glengraat", whereas Taitchen Lodge recalls the place where the composer, as a young man, had taught dancing to Lady Cherwode of Oakley. The Parrot, the only unaccompanied item on the disc, is a piece of trick fiddling probably picked up during the student years with Rouger. The pizzicati are of the kind executed by the left hand.

Writing in his *Miller & Hires Collection* Skinner states that solo strathspeys, such as Mrs Scott Skinner, are 'not dancing tunes'. Dedicated to the composer's first wife, he cites this one as his 'favorite for concerts'. The remaining two tunes (also by Skinner) are the strathspey *Mackenzie Hay* - written to the president of the London Caledonian Society - and the reel *The Devil's Elbow*.

Alastair J. Hardie
September 1977