

sealskin does not appear likely to endanger the existence of the sporrán. Ideally, this can be achieved without recourse to an 'artificial' sporrán, a term which sounds rather off-putting.

### **We are Famous!**



Nelson, the well-known publisher, requested permission to use one of the pictures from the Bell Island demonstration last summer in a social studies textbook. We gave permission, and the photograph will appear with the caption "Scottish Country Dancers enjoy dances that have been passed down from generation to generation."

We need to focus on that sunny summer day during the freezing and icy days of spring. It may not seem possible, but the time will come again when we can dance outside!



## ***Royal Scottish Country Dance Society St. John's (Newfoundland) Branch***

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**NEWSLETTER**

**April 2010**

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### **Chairman's Message**

It has been a wonderful year; winter never really arrived and spring has come and gone. Perhaps it will come again. We have been able to dance and enjoy each others' company without interruption, learning some new dances and relearning some old favourites, mastering some and leaving some work to be done on others with lots of laughter coming from some sets now and then.

We welcomed Kathy Simonsen as our newest instructor. Kathy spent a few weeks in Scotland the past summer earning her teaching certificate and we have benefited from her teaching talents many times this year in classes on both Monday and Thursday nights. Kathy also devised the program that the demonstration team performed on Bell Island at their Canada Day celebrations last summer and along with Penny Gillies and Martin Mulligan provided the programs for our socials during the past year.

Penny has mastered the art of using an MP3 player (thank-you Stewart) to provide music for our Thursday classes and I am sure has spent many, many hours assembling and indexing the tunes.

Thank-you to all who have instructed and guided us during the year, to the committee members who have worked to keep the group alive, to Corryvreckin for the wonderful music at our socials and to all the dancers who have enjoyed and supported Scottish Country Dancing.

Ken. Galbraith,  
Chairman, RSCDS, St. John's

## Spring Social

Our spring social went ahead as scheduled on Saturday, March 20, 2010, and was very successful although so many people were travelling and couldn't make it. We had enough people for two five-couple sets, and everyone had an opportunity to dance and enjoy themselves.

## Don'ts for Dancers

Don't look worried to death over the dance. Dancing is, and has been from time immemorial, an expression of joy. Even if you are English, don't take your pleasures too sadly.

Don't let some little misadventure spoil your evening. If you have come a cropper, be ready to laugh at yourself.

## Scottish Identity

In 2009, Scotland celebrated the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Robert Burns with 'Homecoming Scotland', and entire year devoted to inviting Scots at home or abroad to reconnect with their Scottish roots at more than 400 events, including of course tartan, shortbread, haggis, whisky...and Scottish Country Dancing.

It is said that for one Scot in his or her native land, there are least five more overseas who can claim Scottish ancestry. Of course, the connection may be somewhat remote, as in the case of the Canadian visitor whose father's biological mother's family, whose surname she didn't know, had emigrated from Scotland, and fondness of some of these distant cousins for the more picturesque aspects of Scottish culture may well cause some bemusement among those living in Scotland now. However, the organizers of 'Homecoming Scotland' included those whose "attachment to Scotland may be emotional rather than simply genetic".

I'm sure our pleasure in Scottish culture, and particularly that part of it represented by Scottish Country Dance, is not diminished if we are not actually Scottish.

## The Case of the Sealskin Sporrans

European opposition to the seal hunt may cause problems for those gentlemen who like the traditional sealskin sporran. BBC reports indicate that not only new sporrans, but even those in the current stock and secondhand ones may be eliminated by the law against seal products passed by the European Parliament in 2009, with British regulations to come into place in August 2010. Anxious fans of the traditional sealskin sporran have been questioning the members of the Scottish Parliament, and were reassured by Jim Mather, MSP, who said that "...the Scottish Government supports the tightening of trade in seal products. However, it also supports measures allowing sporrans manufactured in Scotland to be made from seal skins in a traditional way." This appears to cover all possibilities!



On the other hand, sporrans may be made of many different materials, and 'traditional', in this case, means that the sealskin sporran has been popular for about a hundred years, although some earlier examples may also have existed. Most of the very earlier sporrans were made from deer or calf hides. However, even a cursory examination of the historical record reveals that a great many materials have been used to make sporrans, ranging from the luxurious to the more commonplace and from expensive furs from a wide range of animals – sometime including their heads as well as their pelts – to plain leather and even, in some regions in the very early days, cloth. These were not the only possibilities – the military introduced sporrans with long hair from goats or other animals in the eighteenth century. Given the wide range of materials and styles influencing the sporran over the centuries, any loss of access to

