



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

NEWSLETTER

February 2008

This newsletter is a little later than usual and we have a very good excuse. Mary and John Bridson are now the grandparents of twins, Arthur and Eleanor, and Mary was away doing grandmother duties.

Penny and Stewart Gillies are now first-time grandparents of a baby girl, Sarah. Our congratulations go to everyone.

Dancing is now well underway and we have been lucky in that, in spite of the weather, we have not had to cancel a class. I think I'm not alone in being glad to see the back of January. Dancing is great exercise and also lifts people's spirits.

An update on Vanier School. The new gym floor is underway and Billy (the janitor) feels it will probably be finished in time for our 1st March social. The stage is being renovated at the same time. We'll know more in a couple of weeks. This social has an Irish theme and we encourage people to wear something Irish or green.

In the next little while the Nominating Committee will be looking for people to serve on the Executive. When approached would you please consider one of the positions. They are not onerous jobs and if we want to continue dancing, we need an Executive.



Brenda Burness
Chairperson

Twelfth Night Social, January 5, 2008

Despite conspiring circumstances, our Twelfth Night Social was a success!

First we had the awful news of a sewage leak at Vanier School over Christmas, which destroyed the gym floor, and meant a frantic last minute search for a new location. Fortunately St. David's was available, and although our feet don't like the hard composite floor, it is a friendly familiar place, and Karen and co. had it beautifully decorated as always. The weather, which has been so rotten through the last two months, also co-operated on the night.

Our numbers were a bit sparse, but we had dancers old and new, enough for two sets, and an interesting transformation of Corryvreckan into Corryquartet! Bruce at piano was joined by Alasdair and Alison Black on violin, and Frank Fusari on accordion. (It's great that these professional NSO musicians enjoy a night off to play Scottish dance music!)

Our MC, Bill Scott, arrived for the last half hour, having been held up at the ferry on his drive back to St. John's from Ontario! Again we had the good fortune of his wife Sue being available to take over the introductions, and all went smoothly. Too bad that Bill wasn't there in time to dance Sugar Candie with Sue, their favourite dance.

Here's hoping that our March Social, with Irish theme, has the proverbial luck of the Irish, and everything goes to plan!

Stories behind the dances

(distilled from articles in Scotland through her Country Dances, by George S. Emmerson, 2nd edition ©1981.)

I thought you might be interested in the derivation of the names of two of our Twelfth Night dances, and of one in March. Thanks to Martin for the loan of his book.

Lennox Love to Blantyre

A country dance published by RSCDS, taken from Holmain MS ca 1740. The tune for which it is named dates back to 1702. The strange title comes from an involved story of love, marriage, death and wills. Frances Therese Stuart, eldest daughter of the third son of the First Lord Blantyre, was a celebrated beauty, the model for Britannia on the old British penny, and an accomplished dancer at the court of Charles II. She refused all offers at court and secretly wed the Duke of Lennox, who was estranged from the king at the time. When the Duke died in 1672, his Lennox estates in Dumbarton were left to his widow with a pension, and she managed them with great financial success. On her death in 1702 she willed a large portion of her fortune to her nephew, the Fifth Lord Blantyre, stipulating that it be invested in purchase of lands in the kingdom of Scotland, and was to be named Lennoxlove in her memory. The estate chosen to bear this name was Lethington in East Lothian, the ancient seat of the Maitland family, one of whom served as Secretary of State to Mary Queen of Scots.

Cadgers in the Canongate

A 'cadger' was a hired carrier of goods, which he strapped on his pack-horse, an easier mode of transport between the towns and countryside, where he plied his trade, than carriages or carts in the days before Macadam improved late 18th C roads. The Canongate is the most celebrated historic street in Edinburgh, and now comprises the final stretch of The Royal Mile leading from the Castle to Holyrood Palace. 'Gate' in Scottish dialect means road or way, and it was the main route from the walled town around the castle to the Augustinian abbey (with its clergy or canons) of the Holyrood {Holy Cross} established in 1128.

[An interesting discussion of language used in official RSCDS publications, can be found at <http://www.rscdsvancouver.org/language.html>. I discovered this while trying to figure out how to describe the initial reels of this dance. Ed.]

The Wild Geese

This was a nickname for the Irish Jacobites who went over to the Continent with the exiled King James VII (II of England). It also connotes a foolish or uncertain undertaking, as in the term ‘wild goose chase’.



MacKay Family

Many of our longer-term members know Kathy and Don MacKay, who were active dancers with our branch. Their son, Cameron, was awarded the Margaret Williams Scholarship, valued at \$2000, in November, 2007. [The Margaret Williams Trust Fund award was established in 1982 in memory of the former University Librarian, to encourage the pursuit of professional librarian/archival qualifications.] Cameron is in his final year of a master’s degree in library and information studies at McGill University. Congratulations!

Workshop Thank you

We received a nice note of thanks from our November workshop instructor, Cheryl Durnin.

“To One and All,

Thank you for the opportunity to share some classes with you at your workshop.

Thank you all for the wonderful hospitality shown to us during our stay.

Sincere and best wishes for a wonderful dance season.

Cheryl and Doug Durnin”

Assemblies in the 18th/19th centuries

[Reprinted from *The Tartan Times*, vol.LV, no.3, Jan/Feb, 2007]

Assemblies were very popular, and Scotland built Assembly Rooms for the purpose of dancing in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen, and several Lowland towns. Usually held once a week, these were popular events for all. New collections of dances appeared every year, and people flocked to the Assemblies to learn them. So at the Aberdeen Assembly, “country dances were kept up with great spirit to the lively Scotch tunes, and formed a most agreeable amusement, free from ceremony, everyone on terms of intimacy.” Examples include *Maxwell’s Rant* and *Machine without Horses*, dances which are still popular today.

Your Passport to Scotland

“The bagpipes are calling you to kick up your heels with the St. John’s Branch of the Royal Scottish Country Dancing Society. They’ll show you how to do some lively jigs and reels.”

The Newfoundland Museum at The Rooms had a special celebration of things Scottish on Sunday, February 3, called *Your Passport to Scotland*. This was the first of a cultural sampling from around the world for children in February.

“It was a great success: the children were very enthusiastic and didn’t have to be persuaded to come on to the floor. In fact one little girl was asking Bill to be her partner as soon as she had finished the dance. She must have been about 6! A number of the parents were quite happy to get up as well and we hope maybe we attracted some new members.

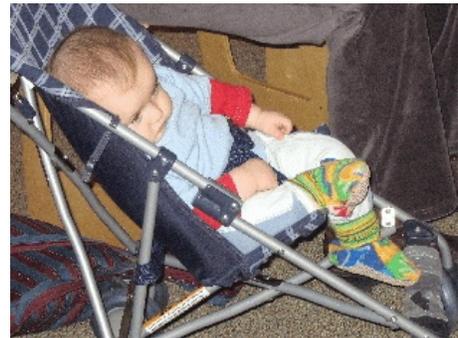
A special thanks should be made to Noreen who is so good with children and did a great job. Also to all those who participated, encouraging the children to dance and generally giving them a lot of fun.”



The long and the short of it . . .



Report by Brenda Burness
Photos by Bruce Shawyer.



Benjamin Armstrong Wright, our youngest dancer



A “Take” on Scottish Country Dancing

by Angela Yeo-West, Feb. 2007

[Reprinted from the *Montreal Scottish Dancer*, November 2007]

[This poem contains the names of eleven Scottish dances – can you spot them?
Answers at end of newsletter. Ed.]

I wandered peaceful as a cloud, my thoughts all full of Bon Accord,
When all at once I spied a crowd by Loch Nagar, a mighty horde;
I stared, for what a sight to see, large men in skirts with hairy knee,
Wi’ wicked knives about their frame, as if to hunt some unseen game.
They stabbed a sausage which was dead – I thought this strange but never said.
They blew a bag with long lank arms, that wheezed and shrieked like fire alarms.
A lass called Jessie Hornpipe winked, asked me to dance, and “Yes” I blinked.
I gave my hand all innocent. “Round Reel of Eight” she trilled, eyes bent.
It made no sense, what did I know? But from that instant – like a blow –
My body was no longer mine; some unseen power I can’t define
Snatched and whirled me, about! around!! Up in the Air, far from the ground,
I soundless screamed in nameless dread, my legs had gone and turned to lead.
My kneecaps creaked with stretch and strain, my frenzied toes scabbled in vain
To find a floor that was not there, just miles and miles of empty air.
Pain Jubilee Jigged bone to bone, I had not even breath to groan;
I was a cork tossed on a sea by heartless Knaves who leapt with glee,
Yelled bloody threats and curdled cries, and rushed like rockets through the skies.
I felt all bruises black and blue, for where I’d been, I had no clue,
How I’d travelled from here to there I did not know, I did not care.
Then stopped the screeching pipe and drum, I stood brain dead and mighty numb
As Jessie propped me at a wall, to Rest and be Thankful, and not fall.
She left with Sugar Candie smile, said she’d be back in a wee while.
I heard the threat, I rushed to hide, but hope was doomed and sadly died
As teacher strode up, smacked my back, and brightly sang out “Well done Jack!
“I liked the way you danced and flew, your pas de basque was something new.
“Your reel no doubt I’ll have to cure, your rights and lefts were vague, unsure;
“Tarry Awhile and don’t you fret, I’ll make a dancer of you yet.”
She paused with Gentle Shepherd face, her smile was wise and full of Grace:
“Remember this your whole life through – The Music Tells You What To Do.”

Dance Scholarship

Our St. John's Branch offers a \$500 scholarship towards the cost of attending TAC in Canada, or St. Andrew's Summer School, particularly those wishing to participate in teacher candidacy classes. Contact Brenda for more information.

Summer Dance Schools

TAC Summer School August 10-17, 2008.

TAC – Teachers Association of Canada – offers classes each summer for aspiring teachers. This year it is at Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Ontario. For more information see <http://www.tac-rscds.org/>

RSCDS Summer School July 20 - August 17, 2008

Application date has just passed for this year, but if you want more information for future reference (they run every summer), see <http://www.rscds.org/>

Pinewoods Scottish Dance Sessions, July 11-14, July 14-19, 2008

RSCDS Boston Branch run these dance and music camps at Pinewoods Camp in Myles Standish State Forest near Plymouth, Mass. USA. There is multiple choice of instruction and a friendly camp atmosphere in a great setting. Contact Gregor Williamson 781-944-5252 for more information, or see <http://www.rscdsboston.org/events-pinewoods.html>

Inventory

We are trying to track down all the materials owned by the branch, and are requesting your help. If you have anything that belongs to the group, or know someone who does but doesn't come dancing very often, please get in touch with a member of the executive. They don't want to be inundated with "stuff" to store, but would like to know what and where it is for the record!

Note to dancers, particularly of the Reel of the Royal Scots (editor included!)

“Snapping the fingers, in Country Dancing and Reels, and the sudden howl or yell (introduced in some Scottish parties as partly national with them) ought particularly to be avoided, as partaking too much of the customs of barbarous nations.”

(From a book on etiquette published in London 1817.)

Answers to poem puzzle.

Bon Accord, Loch Nagar, Jessie Hornpipe, Round Reel of Eight, Up in the Air, Jubilee Jig, Rest and be Thankful, Sugar Candie, Tarry Awhile, Gentle Shepherd, The Music Tells You What To Do.