

Royal Scottish Country Dance Society - St. John's (Newfoundland) Branch  
Winter Newsletter 2012



### Chair's Message

Greetings Dancers: It will soon be spring and it's hard to believe but so far we have come through winter without losing any Thursday nights to the weather.

We've had a good turnout since Christmas and our 12th Night Social. The latter went extremely well and proved to be a good start to the New Year. Since then our Thursday nights have been busy. Kathy has instigated a techniques class which has been well attended and brought back two of our beginners from last fall as well as a brand new beginner. We hope they are enjoying dancing with us.

We sent along a 4 couple demo set to dance at the Burns Supper for the St. Andrews Society. As Kathy had only just emerged from surgery and was unable to dance, various members of the team found themselves shuffled into new positions and still managed to acquit themselves very well. Congratulations everyone.

Noreen McLennan has been our unofficial archivist for a very long time and has accumulated a vast array of photos, letters, and notes from workshops and socials etc.etc. for the last 20 years. These have left Noreen's basement finally and have found a new home in the MUN Archives and may be seen by anyone with an interest in the history of our group. Some of the photos and documents are quite fascinating and we are very grateful to Noreen for creating and taking care of this collection.

See you on Thursday night.

Denise

### Celebrating 20 years: the St John's (Newfoundland) Branch of the RSCDS

2011 marked a special anniversary for the St John's (Newfoundland) Branch of the RSCDS. In 1991, formal application was made to the RSCDS and Branch status was granted to our group. This 20 year milestone was marked during our 2011 Christmas social, with many reminiscences shared.

## **Who We Were:**

### **A Short History of Scottish Country Dancing in Newfoundland**

by Noreen MacLennan

(Abridged from an article originally published in  
all around the circle, Scottish Country Dances from Newfoundland, Vol.1.)

A large contingent of Scottish war brides arrived in St. John's in 1946 and soon formed a club to maintain friendships and share memories of Scotland. They enjoyed Scottish dances such as The Dashing White Sergeant, Eightsome Reel, Gay Gordons and others, which they shared with relatives and a widening circle of friends as they settled in their new home. As these became familiar and enjoyed by many, they were included on the programme of the annual St. Andrew's Ball.

When I arrived in the mid sixties, I joined the group which had formed, comprising war brides and spouses, professionals who had come to the province to work and teach, and friends of theirs who were interested in the social activity. We met at St. Andrew's Church (the Kirk), where Mrs. Stobie, the minister's wife, taught classes every week in the church hall. This class disbanded in 1967 for various reasons, and there is no record of classes being held in St. John's for the next few years.

In 1970, Cathy and Lloyd Leland arrived from Montreal, where Cathy had been a keen dancer. Finding that there was no active dance group at that time, Cathy took steps to form one. She approached the St. Andrew's Society and asked if members would be interested in attending a class in Scottish Country Dancing. This led to the formation of The St. Andrew's Dancers with initial classes being held in dancers' homes. As numbers increased, the St. Andrew's Society took on the financial responsibility of renting a venue for classes until the group became self-sufficient. Dr. Bruce Miller was a strong supporter, while fellow expatriate Scot, Jim McAndrew, taught the dances. In 1975 James Orr and Edward Moore shared the teaching. In 1976, Edward Moore attended candidate classes at St. Andrews Summer School and on his return to Newfoundland became the regular teacher for several years.

I rejoined the group in 1980, which at that time consisted of about two sets per evening. Classes were held in the Cafeteria of the Engineering Building of Memorial University. Edward Moore had continued as the teacher but as he had other commitments he asked me to take over the teaching of the class. Because I had a full certificate, we applied to Scotland in 1983 to become an affiliated group of the R.S.C.D.S.

Since the group was small in number, we embarked on a programme to increase our visibility and thereby increase membership. I activated a demonstration group, and we took part in multicultural functions, outdoor folk festivals, and the annual Burns Supper, benefiting from the media coverage of these events.

In 1985, we travelled to the west coast of Newfoundland with the City of St. John's Pipe Band to participate in a two day Scottish Festival in the Codroy Valley. This is an area of Newfoundland settled during the years 1840-1865 by large numbers of Scots from Cape Breton.

We were invited in 1986 to go to the French territory of St. Pierre et Miquelon off the south coast of Newfoundland to take part in their Bastille Day Celebrations. Led by two pipers from the City of St.

John's Pipe Band, we paraded through the streets with the local dance group Orok Bat, making stops in several areas to give performances of dances.

In August 1987, we held our first weekend workshop. Our guest teachers were Sandra Binns Johnston and Jim MacLellan. The event would not have been possible without the help of the TAC Outreach Programme. In addition to our local members we welcomed many out of province guests from Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia, Maine, Massachusetts, and Connecticut.

In the summer of 1988, three fully certificated teachers, Martin Mulligan, William and Susan Scott, took up residence in St. John's. At this time we expanded the class schedule to three levels – beginner, social and technique. As we now met the requirement for Branch status, formal application was made to Scotland. Martin Mulligan and Bruce Shawyer drafted a constitution and Branch status was granted in 1991.

In the late 1980's, two of our musically talented members, Bruce Shawyer (piano) and Stewart Gillies (violin), began playing for some demonstrations and social programmes. Over the next few years, the musical group expanded and developed into an ensemble of seven musicians now known as Corryvreckan. The band plays for our socials and many of our public performances. Since becoming a Branch in 1991, we have continued to organize both one-day and weekend workshops with guest teachers from other parts of Canada and the United States. In 1997, we sponsored a small Preliminary Test class, one of whom, Penny Gillies, has since obtained her full certificate.

We have made a contribution to the community by providing entertainment for several years at various venues, including Hogmanay Blood Donor Clinics, Glenbrook Lodge and other seniors' homes, Macdonald Drive School, and the Commissariat House provincial historic site. With an eye to the future, we have also offered programmes and children's classes which provide encouragement for younger dancers. We hope to continue attracting new members through demonstrations, audience participation and continued advertising.

The following are quotes from a Branch survey that was completed in 2006. These dancers' comments nicely celebrate Scottish Country Dancing and our fellow dancers and teachers.

*"The dancing is interesting, vigorous, sometimes challenging, but most of all it is always fun."*

*"Our St. John's Branch is the friendliest social group I have ever belonged to."*

*"SCD seems to attract folks from many different backgrounds, different generations and socio-economic groups. . . It's a total entertainment/exercise package. . . fabulous music, aerobic exercise and is mentally challenging. What's not to like??!!"*



*H.M. Queen Elizabeth II dancing at the Ghillies' Ball at Balmoral Castle (1972).*

2012 marks the Diamond Jubilee (60 years reign) of Queen Elizabeth II. In 1947, HRH Princess Elizabeth became the Patron of the Scottish Country Dance Society and graciously remained the Patron of the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society (the title "Royal" having been bestowed by King George VI in 1951) on her succession to the throne. One of her lesser known interests is Scottish country dancing. Each year during her stay at Balmoral Castle, The Queen gives dances known as Ghillies' Balls, for neighbours, estate and Castle staff and members of the local community.

Can you unscramble the “royal” dances below?

- |                                       |       |
|---------------------------------------|-------|
| 1. buleeji igj                        | _____ |
| 2. llbomaar tselac                    | _____ |
| 3. hre ytsjmae si wlcmeoe             | _____ |
| 4. ijg ofr zil                        | _____ |
| 5. teh inddamo ioncelearb igj         | _____ |
| 6. rlayo tchay nnitaairb              | _____ |
| 7. ooolrdhy euosh                     | _____ |
| 8. ueseq'n iisvt                      | _____ |
| 9. srncepis oalyr                     | _____ |
| 10. oblarmla tahpyestr                | _____ |
| 11. eht imndaod uiejble               | _____ |
| 12. eth yalro isvti                   | _____ |
| 13. het eduk dna hsedscu fo gbuehrnid | _____ |
| 14. nogl evil eht eenuq               | _____ |

## **Ball or Social Etiquette**

This piece was included in a previous newsletter, but all dancers – new and old – can benefit from reading it for the first or second time! Many thanks to the original author.

There are many different opinions on etiquette but the following is a list of do's and don't's taken from various publications.

1. Feel free to ask anyone to dance. It does not matter if they are a different level or the same or opposite sex, or someone you do not know. Ladies, be aggressive - think of every dance as a ladies' choice.
2. Do try to dance with a variety of different partners. If you're an advanced dancer, invite a beginner for a dance you know is within his or her capacity. Dancing with you may make the beginner's evening!
3. Do give a friendly hand to your partner as you walk to the set. The dancer who asks a partner to dance should find space on the floor.
4. Do always join the set at the bottom. Don't barge in above. If you wish to start as 4th couple, ask another couple to switch with you after the set has been formed. If you are joining a square set, make sure the existing sets are full before you start a new one.
5. The first man in each line, or the first couple together, should count off the sets in their line and then signal the MC as to how many more couples are needed.
6. Do stay in your lines while sets are forming. Miscounts hold things up.
7. Listen quietly to the talk-throughs. When you explain to your partner exactly what the briefer meant, the other people in your set cease to be able to hear. If your partner has a question, explain after the briefing or preferably before. If you are unsure of a dance, look for a strong partner for it.
8. Help. Be aware that most dancers who are lost are on sensory overload. Having 5 other dancers scream directions (whose terminology they probably do not understand anyway) does not necessarily help them get through the dance, much less enjoy it. Non-verbal communication works best (giving them the correct hand, waving, or a gentle tug - beware of the grab, though). If more direction is needed, the simpler the better - "here" rather than "turn your first corner by the right" and if possible, let their partner direct - that is whom they are dancing with and hence tuned in to. Your shouting may just be adding to their confusion.
9. Relax. No one has yet been shot for giving the wrong shoulder in a dance. While one should be careful about getting into a dance that is over one's head, do not worry about ordinary mistakes; everyone makes them, so simply smile and continue on.
10. When the dance is over, do thank the set as well as your partner - everyone has contributed to your enjoyment. Make sure you clear the floor between sets and don't form sets until the MC announces the next dance.

## Calendar of Events

**Last class** – April 19

**AGM and social** – April 26.

Something new for 2012! Meeting to commence at 7:00 pm with a social to follow. Please bring some nibbles to share with your fellow dancers at the end of this evening, which will take place at St. David's.

**Summer dancing** – starting dates soon to be announced! Please join us for dancing through the summer months. It is a great way to keep on your toes for the fall term of dancing.

## Scottish Country Dancing Seen and Heard in the news

Check out the new “RSCDS Dance Scottish” facebook page for some interesting comments on “calling the dances” at socials and balls among other topics.

Attention all knitters! Alice Starmore, a Scottish knitwear designer, has created sweater patterns based on Scottish country dances. The patterns include the *Strathspey*, the *petronella* and the *cairn gorm brooch*. Her description of the *Strathspey* is as follows: “The pace of the dance is stately and the steps are easy, making it a popular choice at all good Highland ceilidhs. I designed *Strathspey* with a relaxing pace and light, easy steps in mind “. Have a look!

RSCDS Summer School 2012 will run from 15 July to 12 August. Guarantee your place and choice of dates at Summer School 2012 by registering early, when online booking will be up and running - make sure you catch the "early bird" discount, which will be available up to the end of March!

## The Minister on the Loch

Just in case you were wondering who was the subject of the dance “the Minister of the Loch” which we danced in last week’s class. The cleric in question is the Rev. Robert Walker (of Canongate Kirk, Edinburgh), who was depicted as an ice-skater on Duddingston Loch by Sir Henry Raeburn, the famous portrait painter. Duddingston Loch is near Edinburgh.



**Word scramble answer key:** 1. Jubilee Jig 2. Balmoral Castle 3. Her Majesty is Welcome 4. Jig for Liz 5. The Diamond Celebration Jig 6. Royal Yacht Britannia 7. Holyrood House 8. Queen’s Visit 9. Princess Royal 10. Balmoral Strathspey 11. The Diamond Jubilee 12. The Royal Visit 13. The Duke and Duchess of Edinburgh 14. Long Live the Queen