



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

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NEWSLETTER

November 2007

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Time seems to be rushing by and the classes are going well. Our basic class varies in numbers but seems to have at least one set each week and sometimes up to twelve dancers. As I'm sure our beginners have realized, it does help to attend regularly. One has a slightly better chance of remembering what you were taught the week before!

The Ceilidh in September was very well attended and, although we were worried it might be too crowded, we seemed to manage. Thanks to Martin for teaching all the dances and to Corryvreckan for great music. We'd like to know what you thought of The Star of the Sea Hall compared to Masonic Hall (which wasn't available this year). I'm delighted that our workshop was so well attended. We had 39 people sign up for the full workshop and, although it's hard to get numbers for the social, we think about 50 were there. I know we had 40 for brunch on the Sunday.



*Doug, Susan, Cheryl and Ainslie Durnin*

Everyone enjoyed Cheryl Durnin as a teacher. She made everyone feel relaxed and it was nice that her husband Doug and daughter Susan were able to come. Of course we already have Ainslie dancing with us. They all enjoyed their visit enormously and, in true Newfoundland fashion, everyone made them feel very welcome.

Our thanks go to Noreen and Martin for teaching the English class and to Penny who did the programme for the social. Corryvreckan were terrific as usual and we love having them play for us.

There are many people to thank for the success of the weekend and Penny did a good job of this at the social. However, I want to particularly thank Karen Oakley who washes and irons the cloths and banners we have decorating the hall, and brings in flowers, containers and numerous bits and pieces to make the gym look so good. Pat Rivers also brought in large containers of foliage which looked lovely.

On a personal note I want to thank Ingrid Pardoe and Phil Hanley for doing the cooking at the brunch.

Brenda Burness  
Chairperson

## *Between the Jigs and the Reels,*

November 3, 2007.

Photos courtesy of Pat Rivers.

### **Visitors Welcomed!**

We were very happy to welcome visitors from away to our workshop and social in early November. Andrew and Helen Lindsay are from Pictou, Nova Scotia, and were hosted by Brenda Burgess. Andrew was on a job here a few summers ago and attended our dance sessions at St. David's.



*A Wee Nothin'*

It was a great surprise when George de Mille and his wife Allison, from Fredericton New Brunswick, walked through the door on Saturday evening. They were attending a conference in St. John's, and had found out about our event on the internet. George attended our 1989 summer workshop and danced in the demonstration when we performed in the Bannerman Park Folk Festival that weekend. He returned as a guest teacher for our 1991 summer workshop. Also he submitted a dance, "Bakeapple", for our collection of Newfoundland Dances (All around the Circle, 2002).

And of course we were very glad to have our guest teacher, Cheryl Durnin, make her trip from Winnipeg a family affair, with husband Doug and daughter Susan, to join daughter Ainslie already here with us.



*Louise Beaton and Shirley Brown*



*Mary Bridson and Karen Oakley*



*George de Mille with Penny Gillies*

## **50 Years of Memories – RSCDS in Toronto**

by Noreen MacLennan

On September 15, 2007, I attended the 50th Anniversary celebration of the Toronto Branch of the RSCDS, which was formed in 1957. The day began with an afternoon reception followed by an evening dance with music provided by Bobby Brown's band. Both events were held in the Rameses Shrine Temple in north west Toronto. Three hundred people had gathered for the afternoon reception and as I entered the densely packed hall, my first thought was how would I find friends from that era. Magic, magnetism, or maybe just gray hair drew us together as we embraced and laughed before the memories began flowing. We recalled the first formal ball, weekend workshops, and demonstrations we had participated in to spread the word of Scottish Country Dancing. Around the perimeter of the room groups had set up displays of photos and memorabilia which showcased the amazing growth of the Toronto Branch.

In the fifties, most members of dance groups were recently arrived Scottish immigrants, or Canadians with a Scottish heritage. Advertising, word of mouth and demonstrations attracted large numbers. Soon from one small group that I originally belonged to, there were several groups in various parts of Toronto. A meeting was held and plans were set in motion to apply for Branch status. In the fall of 1957 Miss Milligan arrived to examine candidates for Preliminary Teaching Certificates. From then on, many more groups were formed, including classes for children.

As I recall, we always had live music for classes, either piano or violin. One of the first bands was Ed Brydie's "Scottish Ramblers". Fred Collins, the drummer, now plays with Bobby Brown's band. Glen Young, the pianist, attended the celebration. The following names, also in attendance, will be familiar to some of our local members as they taught workshops in St. John's. Sandra Binns Johnstone (1987), Sandy Bain (1989), and Georgina Finlay (1996).

As a grand finale, our group of "old timers " gathered in the bar to toast each other and friends who are no longer with us, finishing with a photo session as a memento.

### **Green Mugs and Money!**

A reminder that the cost of a drink and cookie at break time on Monday nights is 30 cents. And please bring your own mug, as our dwindling supply of styrofoam cups will **not** be available after November 12. Think green!

### **Burns Night Supper**

Burns Night Supper, hosted by the St. Andrew's Society, will be on Saturday, January 26, 2008, at the Legion Hall in Pleasantville.

## SCD - A Beginner's Point of View

by David Jeffrey

(Reprinted with permission from R.S.C.D.S. Kingston Ontario Branch Newsletter, April 2007.)

Katherine and I like to dance and, from time to time, we would talk about taking up some form of formal dancing. Over the course of several years we looked at our options and often we would find out about lessons long after the registrations date, or it was on the wrong day of the week for us, etc., etc.. Finally, in September of 2006 we found the match. It was to be *Scottish Country Dancing*.

It seemed to be a natural fit. Our ancestors were from Scotland and Celtic music always got our toes tapping or body swaying, be it a jig, reel, strathspey, march or lament. We had seen some Scottish Country Dancing performances in the past and felt we knew what we were getting ourselves into. We felt we were fairly well informed. But, were we *prepared*? The first lesson soon drove home that we were not.

After the opening warm up exercises we were casting quick glances over our shoulders at the wall clock. Only 15 minutes had gone by and we were breathing hard, our shirts were a little damp and we thought we'd never make it to the end of the two hour lesson. Surely, there would be some rest along the way! There was - just 5 miserable minutes around 8:00 p.m. and then it was back to the dance floor. The truth is, we don't remember a lot about the first night other than that there were others who appeared to be in similar distress and that we would not be dancing together as partners.

The next few lessons were a humbling experience and we learned that watching and doing were two entirely different things, that our memories weren't as good as we thought they were, and that from time to time we weren't sure which was our left or right hand or foot.

We were also learning a whole new language - skip change of step, slip step, strathspey travelling step, pas de basque, allemande, advance/retire, cast off, figures of eight, four hands across, ladies chain and so on. Old words took on new meanings. "Geography", for example, has nothing to do with earth sciences in Scottish Country Dancing but has everything to do with your position in the set. Gentle but *firm* nudges and whispers from those who knew the way were our guides through this tortured topography.

One fateful day in October our patient and philosophical instructor decided it was time for a change in my wardrobe. At the end of the lesson she looked down at my feet and said it was time for "proper foot wear". My comfortable Arnold Palmer loafers would have to go. It was time for dancing slippers. There was some resistance on my part to wearing the wispy little things because of the lack of support they provided. Once again, kind members of the society came to our aid and let us in on the secret of their soles.

As the weeks slipped by we noticed there was an attrition of the beginner students such as ourselves and, consequently, it was harder to hide in the crowd. Frequently the instructors would cruise up beside us and take us in tow for a practice run across the gym floor, trying to get us up to speed and on the beat to one of the travelling steps.

Slowly, ever so slowly, as the lessons slipped by we made some headway, like finally getting our eyes off our feet and keeping an eye on our partner, or like actually being in step and on the beat with our partner and the rest of the set for more than two or three steps. Also, there were times when our minds were a muddle and we wondered what this was all about. However, there were moments of clarity when the picture and the story of the dance unfolded as it should.

What has been so important to us as we navigated through this geography of Scottish Country Dancing has been the people we have met along the way; the kind words of encouragement, understanding, helpful hints, stage whispers and gentle nudges have been our signposts and trail markers as we journey along through the new landscape. Our philosophical instructor is so right when she says, "It's the journey and not the destination that really counts". . . .

So soon, *very* soon, we hope to see you at one of the socials.

Cheers from Katherine and Dave.

### **Quote**

“There is nothing more notable in Socrates than that he found time, when he was an old man, to learn music and dancing, and thought it time well spent.”

Michel de Montaigne, French essayist (1533 - 1592)

### **Outreach Activities**

We don't have a regular demonstration team at the moment, but we have had various members perform publicly this fall. Cambridge Estates seniors home invited us back in September, along with Catherine and Len, who sang and played for them. (Benjamin was very good, sleeping in his Snuggli while Catherine sang.)

On November 1 we helped St. David's welcome their new minister with a display of Scottish dancing, along with the Judy Knee School of Dancing and performances from the children's choir and a church parents' string ensemble called Spectacles. We enjoyed a lovely buffet supper with the congregation as a reward for our efforts. St. David's hosts our Thursday night technique class.

Later in November we will also be performing at the Seniors Resource Centre event "Just Try It!" at the Holiday Inn, and hope to attract new dancers.

Thanks to Kathy Simonsen, Catherine Wright, Bill Scott, Penny Gillies, and all our volunteers for making these activities possible.

## Dancing on Gravestones!

by Mary Bridson

On my recent trip back to Britain I spent a few days in Kirkcaldy, just across the Forth estuary from Edinburgh. Not an obvious holiday destination (though Bruce Shawyer, a native son, might dispute that!), but Fife is where most of my forbears came from, and where I spent many childhood summers. I had great fun looking up old houses, farms and parish records, with some assistance from Bruce's sister, Elma.

I made contact with an RSCDS group there, and was very happy to join them for an evening's dancing. There were only a dozen people, a friendly group, and we had some laughs when mistakes were made, just like home! What prompted my ghoulish title, though, is the fact that we were dancing in the parish hall of Abbotshall Church, where I had just found the gravestone of my great great grandparents!



*Mary with the Kirkcaldy group. Barbara MacAndie, the teacher, is behind my right shoulder.*

## May Ash – Scottish War Bride

by Noreen MacLennan

Marion (May) Ash, a Scottish war bride, celebrated her 90th Birthday on Sunday, October 21. An afternoon reception, arranged by her daughter Rosemary, was held at her residence on Savage Creek Road. Many relatives and friends gathered, with good wishes for her on this special day. May has been an active member of the Kirk since arriving in St. John's over sixty years ago. She is a co-founder, and continued active member, of the British War Brides Association.

Last year, her portrait, in the collection painted on wood panels by Bev Tosh, was on display in The Rooms. This exhibition immortalized war brides who left their homelands to live in Canada. May is well known as an active member of the St. Andrews Society, forming the Ladies Auxiliary which helped under-privileged families. She is one of three Newfoundlanders to receive the Caring Canadians Award, to be presented by Michelle Jean.

## Quote!

And finally, a quotation of encouragement for all those of us afflicted with various injuries, operations, diseases and weaknesses of hips, knees, ankles, feet etc.!

“You can go a long way with bad legs and a good head.”

Gavin McDonald, *Scottish Bicyclist*, (2006)