

FOR SALE - Steinway full-size upright piano. Fully reconditioned (insides and outsides) by A.L. Collis 10 years ago. If you are interested, please call Sue Scott at 738-3355.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Nov. 28th 1998	St. Andrew's Social - Vanier School, 8 p.m.
Dec. 14th 1998	Last day of classes
Jan. 4th 1999	Start of classes
Jan. 9th 1999	Twelfth Night Social - Vanier School, 8 p.m.
March 20th 1999	Beginners' Social - Vanier School, 8 p.m.
May 3rd 1999	Annual General Meeting - 7.30 p.m.
May 7th 1999	Last day of classes
June 12th 1999	Workshop

The date for the family social has not yet been finalized. Details will be given later.



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

NEWSLETTER

November 1998

As you will have realized, we are not holding a workshop this fall. Instead, it will be held the weekend of 12th June, 1999. One of the reasons for the change is that maybe by this time more of our new members will be inclined to attend. Information is being sent to many branches and we hope that we get dancers from outside the Province. In June our visitors should be able to see icebergs and possibly whales. Mary Murray from Vancouver will be the teacher. She is much in demand and we are delighted she can come. Complete details will be posted later.

A reminder of our **St. Andrew's Social** on Saturday, Nov. 28th, starting at 8 p.m. at Vanier School. Dance booklets are on the notice board. The cost is \$5, payable in advance or at the door. Please bring a small plate of goodies.

The St. Andrew's Society of St. John's will be holding their **Burns' Supper** on Jan. 23rd at the Legion, Pleasantville. The price will probably be the same as last year (\$30) and tickets will be available shortly from Noreen, Robert or Ian.

Copies of the RSCDS October Bulletin are on hand for all our members. Please pick one up if you haven't already done so. There are interesting articles in it and **details of scholarships** which are available for members wishing to attend Summer School in Scotland.

Details are on the notice board about Farland's McTravel trips. Ken McFarland has organized Scottish country dance trips for a number of years to quite exotic places and the latest is to Turkey in October 1999. Also there is "Dancing in Scottish Castles" in June 1999. Check out the information. You may be interested.

We have been asked by the Ardbrae Dancers of Ottawa to advertise the Ardbrae Ball Weekend in Ottawa, Jan. 22-24, 1999. Sheila Virgo has the details if anyone is interested in attending.

The Toronto Branch's Tartan Ball will be held on Feb. 13th, 1999, at the Royal York Hotel. See either Sue Scott or Michael for details.

There is a catalogue of TACBOOKS on the notice board. The list of books is quite extensive and is worth looking at if you're thinking of buying any.

Michael Heald attended the TAC Summer School at UBC, Vancouver in August and gives us his opinion of it. It is always good to let people know what goes on at these events and may encourage other dancers to attend.

The first application forms I prepared for TAC, I shredded after three days - "all that way, too late for points travel, just for a week!" However, I relented and had a terrific week.

It began with an early morning departure from St. John's, a long flight via Halifax to Calgary and a hop over the Rockies to Vancouver, arriving just before noon.

Imagine my surprise, and relief, to see a big TAC sign and a welcoming party. I was whisked away to Gage residence at UBC by one of the Vancouver dancers. That set the tone for the week - they were organized and, like RSCDS types everywhere, very friendly. The residence was better than anything I saw as a student, the food in the Students Union some described as institutional - I didn't think it was that bad.

Sunday night, and each night, there was dancing, with live music which I thoroughly enjoyed. Many of the dances I now recognise but there were "walk throughs" each afternoon which I found greatly added to the evenings' fun.

Overall there must have been more than three hundred people attending the school but with the friendliness it didn't seem that many at meals, classes and dances. Each day we had a different instructor and musician; it seemed each one strove to outshine those of the day before. Now I recognise names such as Bruce Frazer, Robert McOwen, Mary Murray, Simon Scott, Marjorie McLaughlin and, of course, the Jappys who I remembered from the Newfie Encounter in St. John's.

Although I did learn a great deal, it must be admitted many of the points raised were just those brought to our attention here in St. John's by our own great teachers, but it was a most enjoyable week being reminded again, and who knows..... maybe I did absorb a few more. The week sped by to a Saturday night Banquet and Ball. All the dances had been done on previous nights so they were familiar, and the Vancouver Fiddle Orchestra, twenty-plus strong, were led by Ian Price with his accordion, like a jovial Santa leading a crew of elves.

Next year TAC Summer School is in Waterloo. I'm already planning to attend. Even my U.K. trip will be arranged around that. Come on everybody, let's make a Newfoundland contingent!

Thank you, Michael. You obviously had a terrific time.

Overheard (not by Michael) in the Basic Class at the Summer School - "How many Scottish Country Dancers does it take to change a light bulb?" "Eight - but they'll need a walk through first!"

New Year celebrations will be taking place before the next newsletter, so

"A guid new year tae ane an' a'
An' mony may ye see"

This is a traditional New Year's greeting exchanged among friends. But it would not be given until the last stroke of midnight on Hogmanay as it was considered bad luck to give this greeting ahead of time.

I have fond childhood memories of Hogmanay celebrations in Scotland in the small town of Stonehaven where I grew up. On this night, a unique ceremony called "the fireballs" takes place in the old part of the town. At one time similar ceremonies were carried out in many parts of Scotland but only in Stonehaven has this continued from pagan times to the present day.

Fire has played an important part in religious rituals of Druids and Celts, being used in cleansing rites and also to drive away evil spirits. These fireballs of Stonehaven were used to prevent evil spirits entering the new year. Balls of fire, suspended on lengths of wire were swung by stalwart men, and sometimes women, while walking up and down the street with onlookers keeping a wary eye out for stray sparks. These balls, constructed of wire mesh, were packed with old rags and bits of rope steeped in oil, pitch or whatever would burn for a long time.

As a small child it was most exciting to be allowed to stay up so late and be among the crowds of people who lined the main street of the "auld toon." The town clock presided at one end awaiting its important role of signalling the arrival of the new year and the start of the fireballs. At midnight, as the watchers counted the strokes of the clock, the balls were lit and the march began. All watched fascinated as the darkness was lit up and the balls of fire appeared to be swirling independent of human control.

But finally fires began to die down and arms became tired. Onlookers were embracing, exchanging good wishes and creeping away to prepare for "first footing." Homeowners hurried home to put on the kettle and put out plates of bannocks, shortbread, black bun and clottie dumpling. Meanwhile, groups formed to go first footing. Tall dark handsome men were in much demand as the "first foot" over the threshold had to have those characteristics. Often groups would be seen outside a house awaiting entry until a tall dark handsome one appeared.

Such was the impact of this experience, that although I have not seen the fireballs for over forty years, I can vividly see the scene as I write about it. This custom, continued by the locals for the locals, has now become a major tourist attraction with people coming from far away to see this unique ceremony.

Thank you Noreen for letting us share your childhood experience.

If anyone else has memories of past or present traditions, I'd be happy to include them in the newsletter.