

THE THISTLE

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EDITORIAL.

Our next issue will be a memorial issue to Mrs. MacNab. The main item will be an appreciation of her work, and the dances described will be from her collection. Many people know one or more facets of her work: highland dance teacher, collector of dances, arranger of festivals, dance-director of tattoos, and even (in a small way) collector of oriental dances. We hope to give some insight into the whole range of her interests, with special attention to her magnificent collection of Scottish dances.

A fund has been set up to provide a memorial scholarship in her name to the University of B.C. We are sure that many of our readers would like to contribute; donations may be sent to The Mary Isdale Memorial Fund, c/o Mrs. T.G. Fridge, 5560 Columbia, Vancouver 15, B.C.

OUR DANCES, NO. 39: MEG MERRILEES.

This dance seems to have come into being at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and it has appeared in a number of different forms. The first printed description of it appeared in 1827 in "The Ballroom" (where, the reader will remember, the first printed description of Petronella is to be found). The description is as follows:-

1. The first lady turns the second gentleman round with right hand and afterwards with the left; at the same time the first gentleman does the same with second lady. 8
2. Down the middle and up again 8
3. Three and three, in a line, dance out and back again 8
4. Turn to proper sides and four hands round 8

This sequence of figures has a slightly old-fashioned look about it, because the "three and three, in a line, dance out and back again" followed by "turn to proper sides" is in fact a figure which had been common in the previous century under the name "lead out sides and turn", but did not last. (About the only other surviving dance in which traces of it can be found is "Rachel Rae").

The next occurrence of "Meg Merrilees" is in Joseph Lowe's Selection of popular country dances, dated about 1840. This description starts with the same two figures, and makes it quite clear that both couples dance down the middle and up; but the last two figures have been replaced by a poussette, thus cutting the length of the dance to 24 bars. This version occurs in several sources (sometimes with small differences such as "swing" instead of "turn") including Kerr's collection of reels and strathspeys which appeared about 1900; and seems to

have been the commonest. Some of these sources give one additional detail: the down-the-middle-and-up is danced arm-in-arm.

The version in R.S.C.D.S. book 1 differs from earlier versions mainly in having the first man and second woman turn for the first four bars, and the other pair for the second four, instead of both pairs turning for all eight. An interesting and practical detail is that the second pair finish the turn by joining left hands so that the turn starts as a right-hand turn but ends as a crossed-hand turn. This is just what is needed to make the turn practicable and comfortable, and is the kind of detail that can be found when a dance is collected alive, but is rarely or never given in the older printed instructions.

David Anderson's version is Lowe's with a hands-round inserted before the pousette, and so more or less combines both the above versions.

The most unusual version occurs in Smythe's "Pocket Companion" 1830. It goes:-

The two first couple figure partner first by the right and then by the left, all four down the middle arm in arm and up again and right and left.

The usual form of this dance, then is of the "down-the-middle-and-up-and-pousette" type which was so common in the last century. Its tune is rather unusual; the rhythm is that of a reel, but the melody is most unlike that of any reel. The dance is classed as English in "The Ballroom" but as "Scottish" in the "Pocket companion". (Later books do not mention the nationality of the dance, as English country dances had died out of polite society and it was taken for granted that the dances described were Scottish).

The name is that of a gipsy woman in Sir Walter Scott's novel Guy Mannering.

The dance is not as popular today as it was ten or fifteen years ago, and this is a pity because it is great fun when danced by the right kind of dancers - those who can enjoy a good vigorous crossed hand turn, and who finish up with a well-danced pousette.

OUR DANCES, NO. 40: CIRCASSIAN MIXER. By Glover Whittaker.

Formation: Circassian circle.

Music: Sixteen bars of strathspey followed by sixteen bars of reel.

The dance:

Strathspey

- Bars 1 - 4 Each man dances a highland schottische step with the opposite woman, starting to the man's left;  
5 - 8 and promenades once round counter-clockwise with his own partner.  
9 - 16 Reel of four.

## Reel

- Bars 1 - 4 Each woman, advancing towards the opposite man, sets twice,  
5 - 8 and turns him with right arms (elbow-cup hold). They finish with the woman on the right and facing the other two, so that there is a change of partners.  
9 - 16 With new partners, the couples dance a rondel to progress around the circle.

## CORRESPONDENCE.

Dear Sir,

You would find few people in Ontario who would agree with the review of the "Clansmen's" records reprinted from the 'Reel' in the last issue of the 'Thistle'.

To say that the strathspeys are a "trifle leaden-footed" suggests to me that the reviewer has little understanding of and feeling for either the music or the vigorous quality of a strathspey.

It is true that a great many dancers like a strathspey to be played faster than Mr. Hamilton records them, but then it requires less skill and control to dance a faster strathspey.

Mr. Hamilton comes from a family of Scottish musicians and is an accomplished musician himself with an extensive knowledge of Scottish and Irish music. He is also a beautiful dancer. He and his wife were, for several years, members of the winning team at the Hamilton Scottish Country Dance Festival.

Stan. Hamilton and the Clansmen is the only band I know whose strathspeys can exhilarate and whose reels and jigs can lift you up so that you literally float. Anyone who has not danced to the Clansmen has an experience awaiting them.

I can only conclude that the "Reel's" reviewer had a very slow gramophone.

Yours sincerely,  
Velyien Henderson,  
Ottawa, January 9th.

## COMING EVENTS.

Kelowna. Scottish country dance party on April 22nd in the Royal Anne Hotel, 7.30 p.m. Tickets at the door \$1.00.

Vancouver. The annual Scottish dance week-end will be even more interesting and valuable than usual. Those of you who have enjoyed the Fletts' articles will be able to meet Tom and Joan and learn some of the traditional dances from them. Besides the classes there will be the usual Ball on Saturday evening (music by The Teuchters) and ceilidh on Sunday evening. Application forms and more details from Mrs. S. McPhail, 5691 Eagle Harbor Road, West Vancouver.

DAVID ANDERSON OF DUNDEE AND HIS BALLROOM GUIDES. IV.

by J.F. and T.M. FLETT.

In our first article under this title we mentioned the Threesome Reel and Scotch Reel for Six which were used by David Anderson's exhibition group in performances at Highland Games. We mentioned also the Reel of Nine which is described in Anderson's ballroom guides. Since the details of these dances are either unpublished or not easily available, we give their description in this concluding article.

**THREESOME REEL.** As for the Foursome Reel, the music for this consists of one or more strathspey tunes followed by one or more reel tunes; the dancers clap to indicate when the tempo should be changed.

The dance was performed by a man and two ladies, or by three ladies, and we give the description for the mixed case. The dancers form a row facing the audience, with the man in the centre. On the last bar of the introduction the man turns to his right and the two ladies face inwards, and all point right toe in 4th position.

Bars 1-8. They dance a reel of three, the man giving right shoulder to the lady whom he is facing. All end in original place facing the audience.

Bars 9-16. All dance setting steps on the spot, facing the audience.

Bars 17- Repeat bars 1-16 ad lib.

This version of the Threesome Reel is closely similar to the version used for social dancing, as described by J. Grahamsley Atkinson in his Scottish National Dances, Edinburgh, 1900 (see our Traditional Dancing in Scotland, p.140).

**SCOTCH REEL FOR SIX.** The music for this is similar to that for the Threesome Reel above.

The dance was performed by three men and three ladies, or by six ladies, and we give the description for the mixed case. The dancers take partners and form a row facing the audience, first couple being on the left-hand end of the row (as viewed by the dancers), then second couple, then third couple, each man having his partner on his left. On the last bar of the introduction they turn to face partners as above.

Bars 1-8. They dance a reel of six. The figure here is similar to that of the Foursome Reel, but with two additional loops (i.e. it consists of five loops). The dancers begin by passing partners with right shoulders, and each dancer performs exactly half the track, so that at the end of the figure the dancers have reversed their order in the row. All finish facing the audience.

Bars 9-16. All dance setting steps on the spot, facing the audience.

Bars 17-24. They dance a reel of six, again beginning by passing partners with right shoulders and ending in original places, facing the audience.

Bars 25-32. As bars 9-16.

Bars 33- Repeat bars 1-32 ad lib.

This Scotch Reel for Six is distinct from any of the other Six-some Reels known to us.

REEL OF NINE. The description of this dance given by Anderson in his ballroom guides (all editions) is as follows:

"Reel Time.

This dance is done with either a majority of ladies or gentlemen, but ladies are more suitable.

Stand in three lines of three, each gentleman facing down the hall between two ladies; Reel of three across, (i.e. each gentleman with his two partners) finishing in places - This occupies 8 bars.

All set and turn both partners, one after the other - other 8 bars.

Reel of three at corners, at same time the other three at the corners go hands round to left and back to right - other 8 bars.

All set and turn both partners - other 8 bars.

These movements are repeated round the whole square, occupying 96 bars. All join hands and go round to left, with the exception of the gentleman between the middle three (or where the gentlemen form a majority, the lady between the middle three) who sets to the others as they go round to the left".

This Reel of Nine has obvious similarities to the Bumpkin (Scottish Country Dance Book 2), but has neither the repeated 'dance up the room and back' nor the interchange of the trios which we find in the Bumpkin. It differs also in the 'hands round' performed by the corner trios when the centre person reels diagonally.

At first sight Anderson's Reel of Nine seems merely a corrupt and abbreviated version of the Bumpkin, but this is hardly fair. Anderson seems to have based his description on one in H.D. Willock's Manual of dancing, Glasgow, 1865, which is as follows (we have inserted brackets round the numbers of bars of music required, but have left the wording unaltered).

"Reel of Nine.

This reel is suitable for a majority of either sex, who stand in three lines of three each: if for a majority of gentlemen, the ladies take the centre, and the gentlemen each side: if for a majority of ladies, the gentlemen take the centre, and the ladies each side.

1. Reel of three across the set (8).
2. All set (8).
3. Reel of three at corners, at same time the remaining three at each corner do hands round to left, and back to right (8).
4. All set (8).
5. These movements are repeated round the whole square (96).
6. All join hands in a circle, with the exception of the lady or gentleman in the centre, who sets to the others, while they pass round to left, and back to right (8).

For this dance a majority of ladies is preferable, each gentleman setting - 4 bars to the one lady, and 4 to the other".

It can be seen that Willock's and Anderson's descriptions have closely similar wording. However, there is an essential difference, in that Willock has an 8-bar period of setting where Anderson (as also in the Bumpkin) has 'set and turn'. In fact except for its last 8 bars Willock's Reel of Nine consists of alternate 8-bar periods of reeling and setting, and is thus in the style of a true Reel. The dance described by Willock therefore looks like a conscious attempt (not necessarily by Willock himself) to create a Reel of Nine in the Reel style, although it is probably still based on memories of the Bumpkin.

By replacing the 8-bar periods of setting by 'set and turn', Anderson has destroyed the 'Reel' character of Willock's dance, and has made it more akin to the Bumpkin. It should be noted here that the Bumpkin was itself originally regarded as quite distinct from Reels, and that the alternative name 'Ninesome Reel' given in Scottish Country Dance Book 2 is comparatively recent (for the early history of the Bumpkin, see J.F. and T.M. Flett, "The Bumpkin", Scottish Studies, 9 (1965), 85-90).

In 1958 we collected a Reel similar to Willock's Reel of Nine from Mr. William Lawson of Lanark. This was called the Rob Roy Reel, and was an exhibition dance for children; Mr. Lawson learnt it in Lanark about 1890 from a lady, Mrs. Yuill, then in her forties. It differs from Willock's version in that the dancers face the top of the room throughout each 8-bar setting period. The reels too were taken in a different order, those in the Rob Roy Reel being across twice (each time alternated with setting), then twice up and down, then twice diagonally from top right-hand corner to bottom left-hand corner\* (with the trios at the other corners dancing hands round and back) and then twice on the other diagonal. It finished with hands round as in Willock's Reel of Nine.

\* As viewed by the dancers when facing the top.

#### NEWS FROM SCOTLAND.

The 51st (Highland) division is being disbanded and replaced by a Territorial Reserve unit, the 51st Highland Volunteers. Companies will be stationed in Dundee (Black Watch), Wick (Seaforths), Aberdeen (Gordon Highlanders), Inverness (Queen's own Cameron Highlanders), Stirling (Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders), Liverpool (Liverpool Scottish) and London (London Scottish).

#### RECORD LIST.

Addendum: Jimmy Blair, Fontana TE 17460: The laird of Milton's daughter, Come ashore jolly tar, From Scotia's Shore. Bob Campbell remarks that the tune used for "Scotia" is not the correct one.

Has anyone seen or heard TE 17459?

## JACK McCONACHIE.

We regret to announce the death of Jack McConachie. He will be well known to most of our readers as the composer of "Rest and be thankful". He was a very fine highland dancer, and about twenty years ago set up a highland dancing school in London. Later he took up country-dancing. He investigated the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society's system closely, but decided not to follow it completely. His country-dance teaching was in collaboration with the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing, who published his books: two collections of his own dances, and one set of reconstructions of dances (from a manuscript by James Young) entitled "Scottish country dances of the Eighteenth century". He also engaged in field work, and collected some step-dances from the Hebrides.

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF HIGHLAND PIPES AND DRUMS AT SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

Throughout Canada, and particularly in British Columbia, there are organizations which provide instruction for young people in piping and drumming. Once young persons enter university, however, their talents in piping and drumming are often not developed further, partly because Students' Councils are reluctant to provide the extensive funds necessary for band uniforms, pipes and drums, partly through lack of any overall programme which might interrelate a person's studies at the university with his particular talents and interests in Piping and Drumming.

Simon Fraser University is now developing such a programme. Pipe Major Edmund Esson, M.B.E. has now completed two semesters as a senior instructor in piping for the early beginnings of the programme.

No beginning piping instruction is provided because the time which a student spends at the university is too short.

Students who qualify in piping and who are maintaining a good standard in academic studies are eligible for University Awards. These awards normally are equal to the semester's tuition fee. An award is for one semester and is renewable. Students who maintain a high proficiency in piping and drumming and who are also in receipt of a University Award are designated as University Pipers. They take part in various activities at the University, particularly in the university ceremonies. Permission was obtained last year from Lord Lovat for them to wear the Hunting Fraser tartan. A selection of three marches has now been arranged which are unique to the university.

The programme is advancing only as far as funds allow; donations are very much appreciated. Courses will it is hoped, be developed in general Highland Folk Culture. It is also expected that strong Highland Dance and Scottish Country Dance groups will emerge soon.



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THE THISTLE.

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Leaflets available: Schiehallion, Inverness reel - 10¢ each.

Rosslyn Castle, Far up the glen, Lylestone House, Black Ness, Flying Scotsman, Last of the lairds, Suilean gorma, Suilean donn', The ceilidh, Castle Campbell, The Old sporan, The provost, Stirling Castle, Kilspindie, McLaine's hogmanay, Riverside, Cariboo country dance, Inverness gathering. - 5¢ each.

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