

MARY ISDALE MACNAB

SCOTLAND
1889

CANADA
1966

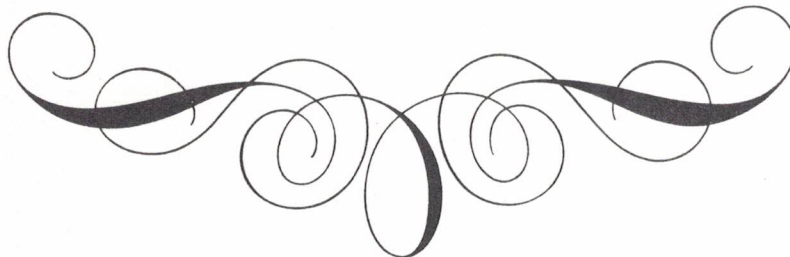
Mary Isdale MacNab, born in Glasgow, Scotland, came to Vancouver, B.C. Canada in 1907 with her family. She began teaching Highland dancing in 1910 and was still actively teaching within two months of her death in November, 1966. She trained hundreds of dancers during her career, among them many, many champions. She will be best remembered for her more recent accomplishments.

A number of dances from her collection of Ancient Highland Dances were presented by her group of dancers, the B.C. Highland Lassies of Vancouver, Canada, at the Edinburgh Tattoo at Edinburgh Castle in 1964. The girls then appeared as featured dancers with the Columbia Festival Royal Marines on their tour of the United States and Canada in 1966, and performed in Ottawa, Canada, in 1967 during the visit of H. M. Queen Elizabeth. These performances of the dances from this collection led to further acclaim and recognition for the dances, the collector and the Lassies.

Mrs. MacNab's dances were collected over fifty years of research. She explored historical records and challenged the memories of friends and acquaintances in Scotland. She continued her search as she probed into recollections of descendants of the Scottish Highlanders who had emigrated to the United States and Canada. In this way she was able to bring these dances back. Without her diligent search over the years, these dances would have been lost to us.

It had been only in this decade that Mrs. MacNab was persuaded to compile her notes for publication. We are indebted to Dr. Hugh Thurston, of the University of British Columbia, an authority on the dances of Scotland, for his help. His untiring efforts, as he worked directly with Mrs. MacNab and carried on after her death, have made the reproduction of these dances possible. We are grateful too, to Miss Joan Frazer, the present spokesman for the B.C. Highland Lassies, for her help and theirs in the preparation of these dances for print.

Mrs. MacNab left all records, rights and title to her collection of dances to her niece, Mrs. Elizabeth Sutorius, of San Diego, California, who intends to make the dances from this famed collection available to teachers of Highland dancing throughout the world, thus establishing a living memorial to this wonderful lady.



The Missing MacNaberries

**Typed descriptions from
Tom Flett/ Elizabeth Sutorius/ Hugh Thurston and others**

***T11 The Portree Lassies
For Four Couples***

Intro+32+6x16+24b Reel

TF McN9 Let7 1954-11-11 MIM to TF re Portree Lassies

Airmail letter written by Mary MacNab from Vancouver, Canada on 11 November 1954 to Dr Tom Flett in Wallasey, Cheshire

Dear Tom,

The *Portree Lassies* I mailed to you yesterday I hope you will be able to understand. As I told you my notes on some of my dances are blurred and need a bit of study and that is the snag I have not had time to study. My school is larger than ever, about 150 students and although I have help I have to be responsible for all the dances. However I will give you a brief account of the history of the dance. The Portree lassies were the young women who waited for their men-folk coming from their fishing. The dance was originated about early 18th century. The figures were supposed to be the mending of the nets and baskets of the fishermen. As you will notice the women do most of the dancing and men enter later.

I found that most of these dances seem to belong to the actual work of the characters taking part and must be authentic. The dance was given to me by Lachlan Campbell who came from Nova Scotia. He was a piper and said the tune was 'Three Girls from Portree'. He told me his Grandparents knew the dance and all his relatives could dance it. His seven aunts and a cousin took part. It can be danced by four couples as we danced it years ago.

Originated in Portree, Skye.

Sincerely, in haste.

M. MacNab

E501

THE PORTREE LASSIES

A dance for four couples.

Music: "Three girls of Portree" (reel)

Step: Use whatever travelling-step you are used to : e.g. the progressive reel movement for highland dancers, the hop-one-two-three for country-dancers.

Introduction

The women enter with a skipping step and form a line as in diagram 1.

Figure 1

- 8 bars Women 1 and 2 set to each other (with the pas-de-basque-and-balance) and turn once-and-a-half (with the propelled pivot step) so that they change places. Meanwhile women 3 and 4 do the same.
- 8 bars Women 4 and 1 repeat these movements
- 8 bars Women 1 and 3 repeat these movements, so do women 2 and 4
- 8 bars Women 2 and 3 repeat these movements.

Figure 2

- 8 bars The women join hands to form a line (the first woman's left in the second woman's right, and so on) and the first woman leads the line to the left through three-quarters of a circle. They finish in a line at right angles to their original position. (See diagram 2).
- 8 bars They dance a reel of four. At the end, they turn to face front.

Figure 3

- 2 bars Women 1 and 3 move to their right with galop-steps, while women 2 and 4 galop to their left.
- 2 bars All dance two pas-de-basques.
- 4 bars All galop back to place and then dance two pas-de-basques.
- 8 bars They repeat these movements

Figure 4

- 4 bars Woman 4 dances as shown in diagram 3.
- 4 bars Woman 3 dances as shown in diagram 4.
- 4 bars Woman 2 dances as shown in diagram 5.
- 4 bars All dance four pas-de-basque.

Figure 5

- 8 bars Raising their right hands to their eyes the women look for the men, turning clockwise with pas-de-basque, one complete revolution in the eight steps. On the last two steps they catch sight of the men, who have appeared at the entrance, and wave to them. The men enter smartly and take their places in front of the women to form a four-couple country-dance set.
- 8 bars With a slight bow each man takes his partner's right hand in his right. They dance as shown in diagram 6.

Figure 6

- 16 bars All cut the diamond (as in "Petronella").

Figure 7

- 8 bars The men dance as shown in diagram 7.
- 8 bars The women dance as shown in diagram 8.

Figure 8

- 4 bars The men dance forward with four pas-de-basque,
 - 4 bars dance half a reel of four (ending as in diagram 9),
 - 4 bars set with pas-de-basque-and-balance, and
 - 4 bars swing as in the Reel of Tulloch, but without changing places.
 - 4 bars The men dance half a reel of four,
 - 2 bars set to partners, with pas-de-basque, and
 - 2 bars turn partners once round with both hands.
- Bow to partners.



FRONT



Diagram 1

Diagram 2

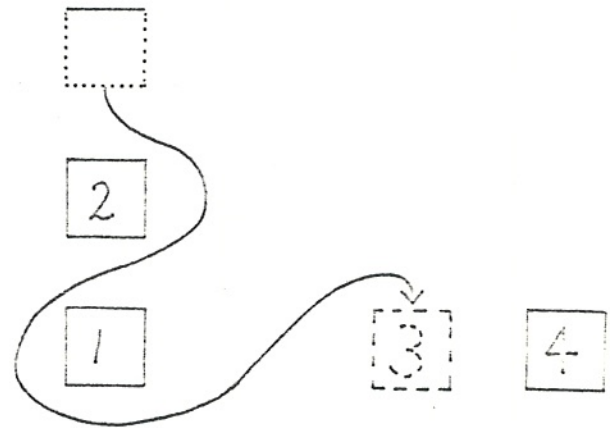
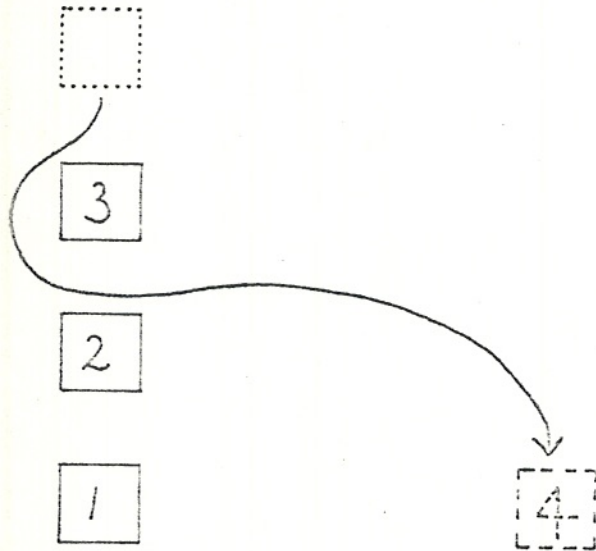


Diagram 3

Diagram 4

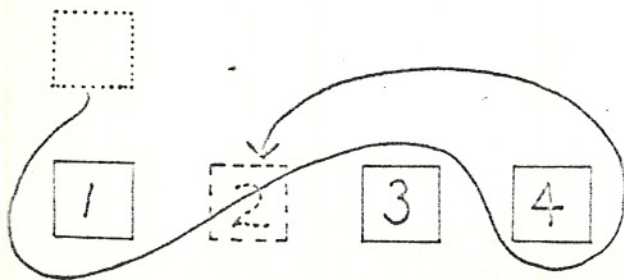


Diagram 5

PORTREE LASSIES

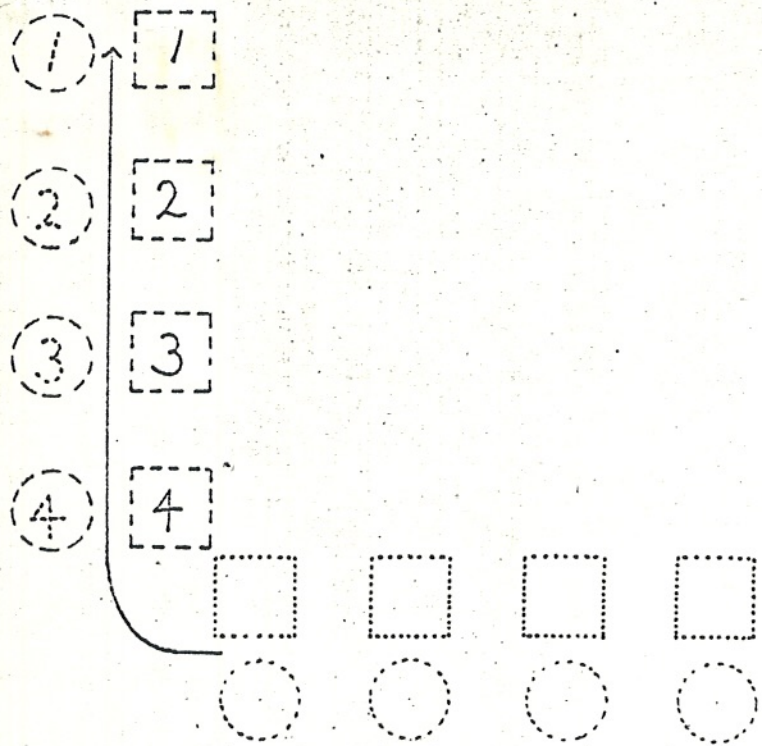


Diagram 6

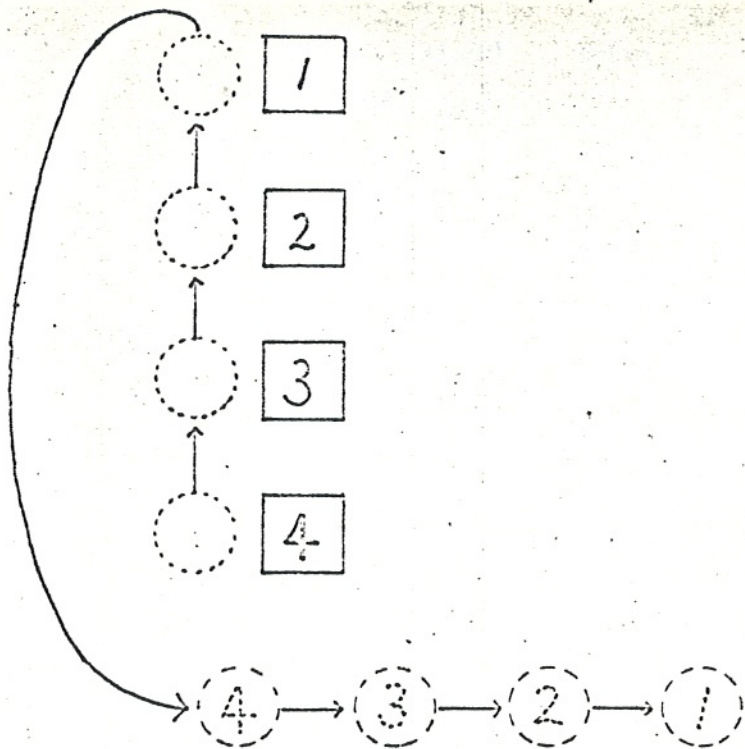


Diagram 7

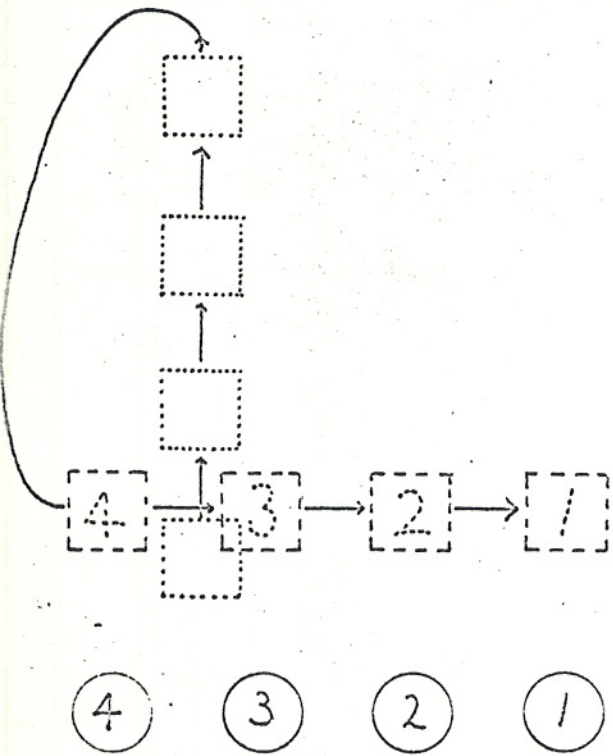


Diagram 8

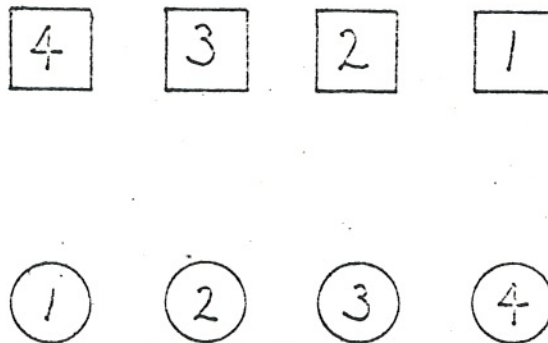


Diagram 9

PORTREE LASSIES