



The THISTLE

A MAGAZINE OF SCOTTISH COUNTRY DANCING AND ALLIED SUBJECTS.

Issued by the West Point Grey Scottish Country Dance Club of B.C.
President: Dr. Norman MacKenzie, C.M.G., M.M. & BAR, Q.C., LL.D.
Editorial address: 3515 Fraser, Vancouver 10, B.C., Canada.

No. 8

November, 1962

EDITORIAL

The annual ball is the main event in the coming month, and we are looking forward to dancing with old and new friends on the 29th.

OUR DANCES, NUMBER 8

Grey Daylight. (Strathspey).

Sometimes a dance is composed for no particular purpose; in response to inspiration, let us say. Sometimes a dance is composed to fill a lack. This one is for dancers who want an easy two-couple strathspey of standard length (32 bars).

Bars 1 - 4 The first woman casts off one and dances across to the second man's place. Meanwhile, her partner follows her, i.e. he crosses over to her place and casts off one. The second couple move up to top place on bars 3 - 4.

5 - 8 The first two couples dance hands-round

9 - 12 and back.

13 - 16 The first man casts up one and crosses back to his place, his partner following him and finishing in her place. (The second couple move down on bars 15 - 16).

17 - 24 The first couple dances down the middle and up.

25 - 32 The first two couples dance an allemande.

"Grey Daylight" is an alternative name for "Stirling Castle", and is the recommended tune for this dance.

THE HISTORY OF COUNTRY DANCING IN VANCOUVER

In November, 1928, the Vancouver Scottish Society were planning their annual ball. The programme contained only one Scottish dance — the Highland Scottische — and Mrs. Thomas Bingham, then a newcomer from Scotland, found this slightly shocking. "Where is the eight-some reel?" she asked. "Nobody knows it" she was told. So she decided to arrange some practices. At this point Scottish Country Dancing in Vancouver, as an organized activity, began.

Miss Helen Crawford, also newly arrived from Scotland, had her S.C.D.S. lessons fresh in her mind. She was asked to direct the practices. They did not go entirely smoothly. Many Vancouver Scots had been dancing the eight-some reel over the years (in 1928 this dance was forty or fifty years old), but had been dancing it for fun, without taking it really seriously. They had never heard of the S.C.D.S. version. One great difference occurred at the point where the eight-some reel should have a hands-across: the older Vancouver Scots occupied all the time between the hands-round and the chain in setting and swinging. Finally, however, the only sensible decision was taken: Miss Crawford had been asked to teach, so her version would be danced. And six sets performed her version at the ball, to the accompaniment of Pipe-major Gillies of the Seaforth's.

The Vancouver Scottish Society's main concerns were literature and folk-lore, but the dancing aroused enough interest for them to ask Mrs. Bingham to give a lecture/demonstration one evening. Again, not everything went smoothly. The secretary's attempt to cut the dancing short nearly caused Mrs. Bingham to resign, but in the end the demonstration was given. Here country dances first appeared on the scene (for, as readers no doubt know, the eight-some reel is not, strictly speaking, a country dance).

Next Mrs. Bingham was persuaded to give the lecture to the Overseas League, but only on the understanding that her own friends formed the team. The sixteensome reel had just been published, and though it seemed impossibly ambitious, they learnt and danced it. The music was played by Nettie Wilson, who, as Mrs. Eric Stuart, still plays most of the Scottish dance-music to be heard in Vancouver.

Another well-known person came on the scene at the same lecture. Mrs. MacNab even in those days was recognized as the leading teacher of highland dancing here. She was invited to the lecture, and so began a long and fruitful association between highland and country dancers. This was at a time when, in Scotland, there was very little contact between the two types of dance. Mrs. MacNab's connection with country dancing bore fruit about twenty years later when she put back into circulation, through the R.S.C.D.S., many dances which she had collected earlier. We owe the publication of such dances as the Hebridean weaving-lilt, Bonnie Anne, and The Earl of Errol's reel to this meeting.

Let us return, though, to 1929. The Scottish Society had a branch in West Vancouver. When they, too, asked for Mrs. Bingham's lecture, it was clear that now was the time to get a permanent group started. Thus the **Scottish country dance society of British Columbia** was formed in November, 1930. Mrs. Bingham was the first president and the instructor; and the group was to follow the rules and regulations of the S.C.D.S.

Soon another group was formed in West Vancouver. Then the dancers in the Vancouver Scottish society (the main interests of which were still literary) became an independent group whose primary interest was dancing. In 1938, the National Council of Women made Scottish Country dancing their year's project. When it was over some of the dancers formed the "Lady Aberdeen" group — the only all-female group in Vancouver (at least, the only one intentionally so, though the night-school classes, later, were often without men) and the only group to meet in the morning. In 1938, too, Mrs. Bingham added authority to experience by qualifying for the S.C.D.S. teachers' certificate.

One evening, while the Vancouver group were dancing in their regular hall, the hall committee were dining downstairs; and the noise of the dancing so alarmed them that they cancelled the dancers' lease. Someone suggested a school gymnasium. To use this, however, the dancers had to form an official class under the School Board. Not everyone liked this. Those who didn't managed after a while to find a hall and re-form their group. Those who did formed the nucleus of the "night-school classes" which now meet three times a week, with Mrs. Bingham teaching. They provide most of the formal teaching in Vancouver, and are the only group to be divided into three levels: beginners, intermediate, and advanced.

Other groups formed over the years: the North Vancouver group, the New Westminster group, the Prince Charles club (which affiliated to the S.C.D.S.), the White Rock group, our own West Point Grey group at the University and, newest of all, the Gleneagles group (last year). In 1932 the society formed a 'Provincial executive' to do those things which individual clubs cannot do. It runs the annual ball, and in early days standardized the repertoire.

Vancouver had an early start in R.S.C.D.S.-style country dancing. We were amused to read, in last year's New Zealand magazine, that this type of dancing was about ten years old in Canada. The Canadian writer evidently was not aware of what was going on west of the Rockies. The S.C.D.S. started in 1923, and there must have been many attempts, from then on, all over the Empire and perhaps also outside, to start S.C.D.S. groups. The reader will have noticed that the beginnings in Vancouver were not easy going. To start such a group needs not only organizing ability, but resolution and persistence. Vancouver was fortunate: Mrs. Bingham had these qualities, and any Scottish dancer in Vancouver today will confirm that she still displays resolution and persistence in full measure. After such a good start, however, Vancouver seemed to rest on its laurels. In 1958, when the present writer arrived, it seemed to have fewer skilled teachers, a lower general standard of dancing, and a less impressive annual ball, than any other town of its size. It did not have a summer school or dance-camp where teachers and dancers could be concentrated; it had not even a small mimeographed news-sheet. These troubles have been, or are being, remedied. When, in 1959 three Vancouverites (Mrs. MacNab, Andrew Shawyer and Hugh Thurston) met at the Boston camp, they decided to start one in Vancouver, and this is now a flourishing annual affair. We have more teachers now (even though we lost our best technique teacher to New Zealand), and Mrs. Bingham continues to do the work of three or four ordinary persons. The standard of dancing is slowly rising, and, as for the news-sheet: you are reading it.

Apart from country dancing in the strict sense, Vancouver is the place for Mrs. MacNab's dances. The published ones are, naturally, those most like country dances. The complete collection ranges from these to dances which are almost pure highland dances. We hope to tell the story of this other aspect of Scottish dancing in a later issue.

LOCAL NEWS

Vancouver Branch S.C.D.S. of B.C.

Those who found difficulty in joining in the regular programme of the fortnightly dances, will be glad to hear that it has been decided to hold a beginners' class in an adjoining room at the Dunbar Community Centre.

SCOTTISH DANCE GROUPS

Lady Aberdeen Branch S.C.D.S. of B.C.

Mrs. Lillian Lindsay, Secretary, 2891 Alma Road, Vancouver 8, B.C., CA 4-0601.

NEWS FROM SAINT ANDREWS

(from a letter from Hugh Foss)

In her talk on the first Tuesday Miss Milligan said her 'thing' this year was the importance of listening to the music and dancing with one's soul, not merely counting the drum-beats and dancing with one's feet. She has told one of her classes that all they needed was a drum.

Strathspey music was not for children under 16. Not only did they not have the poise to dance slow steps, the music was unintelligible to them.

At various times she made remarks about complicated set dances. She taught complicated dances to her classes to quicken their responses and train their minds, but she did not like to see such dances used for demonstrations under the name of Scottish Country Dances. True S.C.D.'s were longwise and simple enough for a couple who did not know them to join a set as fourth couple and pick them up as they went on. She had suffered a really terrible experience in Toronto. Her partner persuaded her to join him in a quadrille-type dance which she did not know. He assured her that she would find it easy to pick up. But he was the only one in the set who knew it and the result was something she still finds it horrifying to remember. At Leeds Festival almost all the teams had chosen complicated set dances. The one team that stood out above all the rest was the one that had chosen to dance the Village Reel.

At step practice in her class Miss Milligan again this year emphasized the importance of not lifting the front foot more than an inch or two above the ground on beat 4 of the skip-change in quick time. If one lifted it any higher one lost the forward urge as one slapped it down on the floor on beat 1.

In strathspey travelling one should not try to get high on the toes, as this also interfered with the urge forward on beat 1. The step on beat 3 should be long enough to extend the back leg before the foot was brought through, smoothly with the toe hardly off the ground.

When teaching the pas de basque one should emphasize the three beats by exaggerating the lifting of the feet and by moving from side to side.

COMPARISON CORNER

Nine is a rather unusual number of participants in a dance, and the Bumpkin is quite unlike any other Scottish dance. There are, however, a few similar dances to be found elsewhere. A brief description of one of these, the Swedish Trekarlspolska, has been given in an earlier number of the Thistle. These two are very like each other in structure. Other dances, such as the German Kegelkönig are somewhat less like them; and at the other extreme "Ninepins" seems to resemble the Bumpkin only in requiring nine dancers, and even this resemblance is not particularly striking, for "Ninepins" is danced by four couples and an extra man, not by trios. (If you do not know the "Ninepins" you will find the description in the English Folk Dance and Song Society's "Community Square Dance Manual No. 3". Older descriptions can be found in nineteenth-century Scottish and American text-books.) Closer investigation will show, however, that these dances do in fact form a reasonably coherent genus, of which "Ninepins" and the Trekarlspolska are two extreme species.

First, we note that these dances are all found in the same area-north-western Europe. There is in fact an area which consists of Norway, Denmark, Sweden, the Swedish-speaking part of Finland, North Germany, and the British Isles, whose dances are seen to have much in common. To this might be added North America as represented by its squares and contras (but not of course by Amerindian dances). In particular dances of this region are in the main abstract figure - or step-dances. Mimetic movements are the exception and not, as in some other regions, the rule.

The Trekarlspolska and the Bumpkin have a good deal in common; each has also a number of its own national characteristics. The common characteristics include the formation - three trios, each consisting of a man between two women, in a square - and the fact that the centre man plays a fundamental part in the movements, dancing a certain figure first on one diagonal, secondly on the other, thirdly with his partners, and fourthly with the other two men. The particular tunes used are "national": the Bumpkin has a typically Scottish tune (a variant of "Babbity Bowster") and the Trekarlspolska has an equally typical Swedish tune. The steps are "national" too: the Bumpkin is danced with the same steps as the "eightsome", and the Swedish dance uses two steps very common in Swedish dancing - the walking step with the emphasized first beat and the östgöta step. It also, however, uses an untypical step reminiscent of a slowed-down Scottish "triple-spring" (see the previous article).

The particular figure danced is also "national": set and turn and reel of three was an especially common figure in early nineteenth-century Scottish dances, and the Trekarlspolska figure (the turn with östgöta-steps) is to be found in other Swedish dances. The fact that while the centre man is dancing his figure the other two groups of three dance a similar figure is peculiar to the Bumpkin. In the Trekarlspolska (and in Kegelkönig) the other six dancers stand still. The repetition of the figures of the Bumpkin after two have changed places, is "national"; it is the same form of progression as in one form of the threesome Scotch Reel, and if continued, would be the same as progression in a two-couple country dance. One point about the Bumpkin which is more important than it seems at first sight is that the centre dancer is singled out as "king" with a cocked hat. In the finale of the dance, with the "king" dancing a solo while the rest dance hands-round, this is particularly striking. In other words, whereas the formation of the Swedish dance is pure "three threes", the Scottish one has a touch of "eight plus one". This characteristic can by no means be called "national".

Now let us turn to Kegelkönig. Kegel means "skittle" or ninepin and könig means "king". This dance is performed by five men and four women, and the arrangement is of interest: the nine dancers are drawn up in a square, the centre one is a man — the Kegelkönig — and the others are alternately men and women. Starting at a corner and going anti-clockwise, they are: first man, first woman, second man, second woman, third man, third woman, fourth man, fourth woman. Thus the square is formed of three lines of three, but is also made up of four couples plus an extra man. In fact the starting formation of this dance resembles both that of the "Ninepins" on the one hand and that of the Trekarlspolska and the Bumpkin on the other. The figures, too, have resemblances to both types of the nine-hand dance. At one point the dancers form three lines of three (in which formation they dance a setting step); at another the eight outer dancers form a ring with the Kegelkönig in the centre, and he chooses a girl for his partner, her former partner becoming the new Kegelkönig. Then the dance begins again. The particular figures I have just described come from a version from Friedenau; but all versions are fairly similar. There are also a number of nine-hand dances in the Swedish-speaking part of Finland, which resemble either the Trekarlspolska or Kegelkönig.

COMING EVENTS

The 18th Annual Ball of The Scottish Country Dance Society will be held on Saturday, November 24th in the York Ball Room, Georgia Hotel. Dancing 8 to Midnight.

Lady Aberdeen Christmas Party, Friday, December 14th, Scottish Auditorium, 12th and Fir. Dancing 8 to 12 P.M.

BOOKSTALL

Twelve Scottish country dances	50¢	Inverness Reel	10¢
Schiehallion	10¢	Scottish country dances in diagrams	60¢

Obtainable from the Editorial Committee. Prices include postage.

The annual subscription to the Thistle is \$1.25 (six issues).

Subscriptions for 1962/3 can be accepted at any time now.

HINTS ON BETTER DANCING

Your invitation ('The Thistle', October issue) is accepted with an amateur's usual misgivings. Two 'Hints' follow:

1. Will the lady graciously take her partner's lead, and
2. Use your biceps — both men and women (with acknowledgements to Miss Jean Milligan).

'Student'

THE PIPES

At the tenth Festival International des Cornemuses, held in Brest, Brittany, last August, Scotland was represented by the City of Edinburgh Police Pipe Band. This festival is (according to a report in The Oban Times) considered to be the greatest bagpipe festival in Europe, and perhaps in the world.

Although the Biniou (the native Breton bagpipe) is to be seen in museums, Bretons themselves today more often play on imported Scottish pipes. Another reed instrument (without a bag) called the Bombarde, and drums complete the Breton pipe band (called Bagadon).

There is also an annual festival at Quimper, when records are broadcast throughout the town. To quote the Oban Times again "It is an unforgettable experience to have heard a sweetly sung Scots Gaelic song being relayed throughout a town far removed from the isle of its origin and to hear the familiar and exciting three pace drum rolls preceding a Scottish pipe band's march, strathspey and reel".