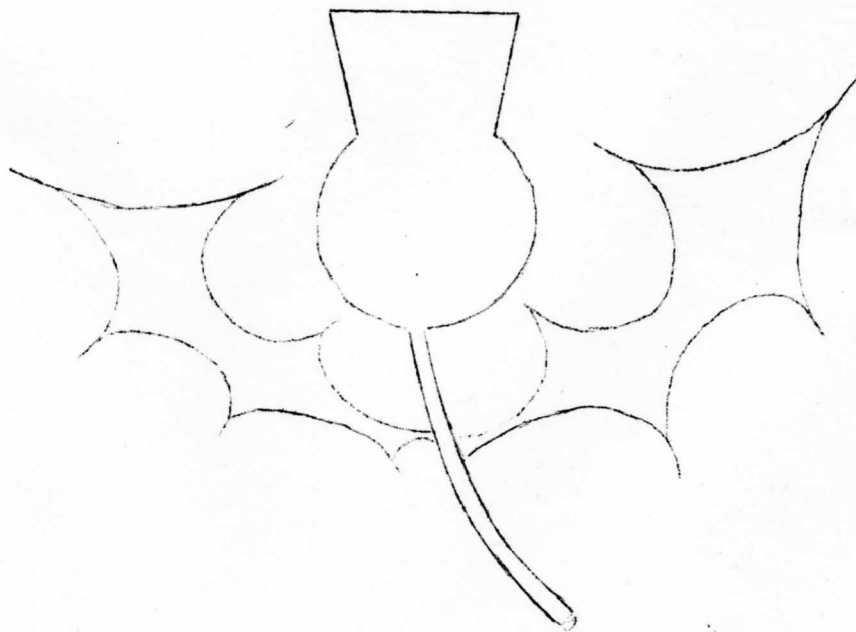


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THE THISTLE



Issued by the West Point Grey Scottish Country Dance Club of B.C.
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EDITORIAL.

In this issue we break slightly with established custom. So far our regular features - Our dances, Hints for better dancing, Your questions answered, and so on - have been written by us. As a matter of fact, rather too much of the magazine has been written by us this year - contributions from outside the editorial committee have fallen off, and we would welcome more. However, to return to our opening statement: we are very pleased to be able to announce that this time the regular feature "Our dance" is written by Bob Campbell of Ontario. We are equally pleased to have received contributions to this series by Hugh Foss, which we shall publish in future issues.

OUR DANCES, No. 22: Riggs of Corn.

Previous issues of The Thistle have contained articles about old dances and new ones except for that in Issue 20 which dealt with a new dance inspired by an old one. But now we have something a little different, an old dance with a new twist. And yet the new twist leaves the old dance intact. As will be seen, the new fits the old like hand and glove. As the full story of how individual dances originated is known in very few instances let us see how this one came into being, just for the record.

Most readers will have seen the article on Barley riggs in Issue No. 20. Now, my reaction to this dance was one of unusual interest and surprise. The interest is easily explained - a dance based on Corn Riggs had also occurred to me. But there should really have been no surprise because Hugh Foss's "double figure-of-eight" is so striking that it was bound to be used in more than one new dance. As many Thistle readers probably know it appears in "Glendarroch Gathering", a 48 bar jig devised by Iain Boyd of Wanganui, New Zealand. It was after enjoying this dance that "Riggs of Corn" popped into my mind, rather like a light being turned on. The birth took place on the evening commuter as it rattled its slow way from Toronto to Oakville. As closely as can be recalled the train of thought, in abbreviated form, went as follows:

"Very enjoyable dance, Glendarroch Gathering, - I wonder if others will use the double figure-of-eight? - Great possibilities." - Pause - "Hmm" - Another pause - "Very ingenious figure - Hmm - Clever lad this Foss" - (Dozed for a few moments at this point but on 'coming to' the reverie continued) - "And just imagine, simply a variation of the figure-of-eight - it would likely be equally as nice in other dances" - Pause, mental fag, then time out to do a bit of a crossword puzzle followed by further meditation. - "Like a figure-of-eight through bifocals or twin lenses, times two as it were" - A very long pause then CLICK - "Well for goodness sake! Of course! Corn Riggs doubled, two couples on the go all the time! Why in the world didn't I think of it before? It's worth giving a try even if only as an exercise in dancing". So the dance was put to the only test that counts - on the floor. And it worked! Perhaps others would like to have a 'bash' at it.

- Bars 1 - 8 First couple, followed by second couple, cast off and dance down behind own lines, turn (inwards, of course!) and dance up to places with second couple leading.
- Note. Second couple dance up to top place to begin then cast off to follow first couple. On the return trip second couple dance up to top place then curve round into their own place, the man to his right, the woman to her left. They finish facing out.
- 9 - 16 Double figure-of-eight, second couple to finish facing out.
- 17 - 24 First couple, followed by second couple, lead down the middle and up again with first couple still leading. They finish ready for poussette.
- Note. Second couple curve round through first place to follow first couple. At the end of bar 20, when first couple are turning, second couple divide, dance round behind first couple (man round man, woman round woman), rejoin hands and follow first couple up to place.
- 25 - 32 First and second couples poussette.

Simple? Yes, but not quite ^{so} simple as Corn Riggs. It will be found that care is required with the phrasing and repetition needed to develop good teamwork. Because of this the dance will be found useful as a practice piece. The trickiest part is on the second repetition in a four couple set when there are no markers.

So, dancers, put yourselves to the test and when it is over see if you can give positive answers to the following questions:

- (1) In the first figure did we keep the same distance behind the dancer ahead as there was between dancers in the sidelines when the set was formed?
- (2) Did we refrain from sailing off into orbit in the double figure-of-eight?
- (3) When my partner and I were in second position did we divide and sweep neatly round behind first couple at the end of the lead-down in the third figure?
- (4) Did we finish each figure where we should and flow smoothly into the next without hesitation or spurting?
- (5) When the final chord sounded was our set at the same place on the floor as when we started the dance?!!

LOCAL NEWS.

The Great Snow extinguished all Scottish dancing over the holidays, including the party between Christmas and the New Year which Mrs. Bingham had arranged so painstakingly and so well. At the moment of writing Vancouver is on the point of recovering - we hear that the first branch class in January was reduced to seven participants; our own dance two days later was down to 17, just enough for a good evening's dancing.

COMING EVENTS.

Jean Redpath will be singing at The Ark during the week which contains the 22nd of January, on which night we plan to go down in force and listen to her.

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED.

Q. What precisely is a country-dance?

A. This simple five-word question has no simple answer. The trouble is that the word "country-dance" has meant different things at different times, which is not surprising for a word which has remained current for so long (over 400 years). Let us take the various developments in order.

The earliest known use of the word "country-dance" is dated 1577 and it is used frequently from that date on. The dance was primarily rural until about 1600 (which of course accounts for the prefix "country") and all references are to dancing in England until 1654 when we read of it being danced at the Swedish court. In 1651 John Playford published "The English dancing-master" which contained instructions for country-dances: by studying them we can say fairly precisely what the word "country-dance" meant at this date. Country-dances were figure-dances in definite formations (e.g. square-for-four or round-for-as-many-as-will), the steps were simple: the figures could be reasonably complicated.

Unfortunately, as soon as we can give a definite description of the country-dance, it begins to change: between 1650 and about 1700 it underwent a rapid development. All formations except the longways-for-as-many-as-will died out. This formation is the one familiar to us today, though some Scottish dancers are tending to lose the as-many-as-will aspect by making sets always four couples long (the English, Irish and Americans show no such tendency).

This formation remained the only one for over a century, and the dance itself changed comparatively little, but at last, about 1820, another rapid development took place. The first sign of this was a new type of progression, the first couple going right to the bottom - the first dance it occurred in was "Sir Roger de Coverley". Then a whole host of new formations sprang up, each with a name of its own. One, the *écossoise*, differed from the country-dance in only one particular: the first woman and man were at the head of each other's lines at the start. This type of dance became very common in New England, though these dances were always called contra-dances - the word "*écossoise*" was not used.

Other formations which arose at the same time were "Swedish dance" (three-facing-three, like our "Dashing white sergent" but arranged up and down the room, not in a big circle), "Mescolanze" or "Spanish country-dance" (four-facing-four, like "La Tempête"), "Circassian circle" (which was then the name of the formation, not a specific dance) and "Spanish waltz" (like *écossoise*, but to waltz music). It is scarcely necessary to point out that the "Swedish dance" has nothing to do with Sweden nor the "Circassian circle" with Circassia; it is almost as obvious that neither the "Spanish country-dance" nor the "Spanish waltz" came from Spain; and careful research finds no connection between the *écossoise* and Scotland.

The question which concerns us is "are these dances to be classed as country-dances?" Here the historical approach shows us the right answer. If the word "country-dance" meant essentially a type of formation then Circassian circles etc. should not be called country-dances, though they are clearly very closely related, all having the idea of "progression" implicit in them; moreover they were and are danced by the same people with the same technique on the

same occasions. But in fact the word "country-dance" became attached to one particular formation simply by the accident that the other formations died out: therefore when new formations arose it was reasonable to reverse the process and class them as country-dances. And indeed the terms "écossoise" and "mescolanze" died out fairly soon (they never even seemed to reach Scotland, Ireland or America), and therefore if we exclude dances in these formations from the category "country-dance" there is no category for them except "miscellaneous". (Not all writers take this view, however: J.F. and T.M. Flett, in "Traditional dancing in Scotland", class écossoises as country-dances, but exclude the Circassian circle).

Let us finish by approaching the definition from the other direction and list some dances which are familiar to most country-dancers, but are not country-dances. The threesome reel, foursome reel, fivesome reel, sixsome reel, crossed foursome reel, Axum reel, Shetland reel and Reel of Tulloch are reels, in the strict sense of this word. In a slightly wider sense, reels include the eightsome reel, sixteensome reel, thirty-twosome reel, the Bumpkin, the Oxton reel, the "longways" eightsome reel, and the Buchan eightsome reel. La Russe is a quadrille figure.

SCOTTISH REFORM. (Rondeau)

Give me your hand. 'Tis thus we start.
Our meeting's brief. Too soon we part.
Ere I some subtle speech have planned
About the Ball, the floor, the Band,
You're off with someone else more smart,
A Viscount or, at least, a Bart.
Has this upset my applecort?
No. Back you come towards me. Grand!
Give me your hand.

Madam I plunge. I'll use no art.
I'm fevered. Is this Cupid's dart
Or some affection of the gland?
You smile as though you understand.
Since you have robbed me of my heart
Give me your hand.

Hugh R. Foss.

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