



THE THISTLE







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EDITORIAL.

This issue is devoted to the late Mrs. MacNab. We take this opportunity to remind readers that a memorial fund has been set up with the object of providing a university scholarship in her name. Donations may be sent to The Mary Isdale Memorial Fund, c/o Mrs. T.G. Fridge, 5560 Columbia, Vancouver 15, B.C. We are sure that many of our readers would like to contribute.

OUR DANCES NO. 41: McLAINE OF LOCHBUIE or McLAINE'S HOGMANAY

Formation: Three-couple longwise set.

Opening reeling and setting

- 1 8 The three men dance a reel of three, the first two men passing right-shoulder to start. Meanwhile the women do the same, but left-shoulder.
- 9 16 Set to partner. (Men high-cut if they can).

Verse and chorus

- 17 24 The first man dances a figure-of-eight round the other two men, and the first woman round the other two women. Both start by dancing in.
- 25 40 Chorus: 1- 4 Set to partner
 - 5--8 Change places with partner, passing right-shoulder

9-16 Repeat

- 41 48 The second man dances a figure-of-eight round the other two men, starting anti-clockwise round the first man.

 Meanwhile the second woman dances a figure-of-eight round the other two women, starting anti-clockwise round the third woman.
- 49 64 Chorus
- 65 72 The third man dances a figure-of-eight round the other two men, and the third woman round the other two women. Both start by dancing in.
- 73 88 Chorus

All change places

- 89 92 The first woman and third man turn with both hands and return to places
- 93 96 The first man and third woman do the same

97 - 100 The second couple do the same

101 -- 104 Change places with partner, passing right-shoulder

105 - 108 The first man and third man, spinning clockwise with pas-de-basque steps, change places (the first man passing in front of the second man, the third man behind).

109 - 112 The first and third women do the same (the first woman passing behind the second).

The hogmanay (At this point the music perceptibly speeds up).

113 - 116 The third couple turn with both hands, ending in the first woman's <u>original</u> place, facing directly away from the first man's original place, using the pasde-basque. At the very end, they change to crossed-hands hold (right hands on top) and take up allemande position.

117 - 120 The second couple do the same, ending behind the third couple.

121 - 124 The first couple do the same, ending behind the second couple.

125 - 126 Each couple turns halfway round clockwise on the spot.

127 - 128 The man releases his right hand and twirls his partner once-and-a-half round under their raised left hands. During this he himself turns halfway round clockwise (so they end facing as in bar 124, with the woman on the left of her partner) and lowers the left hands so that he finishes with his left arm round her waist, her left hand in his at her left hip. He takes her right hand in his.

129 - 132 Balance twice. See below

133 - 136 All couples turn clockwise once round, with the pasde-basque. The front man releases his partner
halfway through the turn and she dances to the rear.
The other two men release their partners at the end
of the turn and the women dance one place forward.
The men take their new partners in the same hold as
in bar 129.

137 - 144 Repeat the instructions of bars 129-136.

145 - 152 Repeat once more, but finish by taking partners with two-hand hold.

153 - 160 Couples turn with pas-de-basque steps to original places. Release hands and join right hands for the final bow and courtesy.

This dance was collected by Mrs. MacNab from Murdo McLaine of Nova Scotia. She taught it at various places, including the annual Vancouver Scottish Dance week-end, for which this written description was first made, and it was a great favorite with the Braemar group. It should be danced in a gay and informal style. In the reels and figure-eights (1-8, 17-24, and 65-72) partners nearly but not quite touch shoulders.

Music: There is no fixed tune for this dance: any gay lively duple-rhythm Scottish dance tune will do. "Isle of Skye" is one possibility. Mrs. MacNab herself used the recording labelled "Ellwyn's fairy glen" played by Andrew Rankine's band on Parlophone R4298. The tunes are "Farewell to whiskey", "Dawning of the day", and "The barren rocks of Aden".

Balance Step

- Bar 1 Beat 1 Leap forward about 18" onto the right foot
 - 2 Close the left foot to 3rd position rear and lift the right foot a couple of inches
 - 3 Replace the right foot on the floor, taking the weight on it
 - 4 Pause
- Bar Beat 1 Leap back about 18" onto the left foot
 - 2 Close the right foot to 3rd position (front) and lift the left foot a couple of inches
 - 3 Replace the left foot on the floor, taking the weight on it
 - 4 Pause

OUR DANCES NO. 42: BROADSWORDS OF LOCHIEL

Formation: Four swords are placed in a cross on the ground, points to the centre, as in the diagram. A man stands at each hilt facing the centre. For this description the men are numbered clockwise. So are the spaces between the swords, using Roman numbers and starting with the space to the first man's right front. The first man is the one facing the audience.

Music: Strathspey (72 bars) and reel (32 bars)

Step 1

- Bar 1 Set with pas-de-basque right and left (hands on hips for all pas-de-basque)
 - 2 and travel to the next sword-hilt to the right with four outward brushes with the right foot (left arm up).
 - 3 Set with pas-de-basque, facing the centre,
 - 4 and high-cuts. (Arms up for all high-cuts).
 - 5-16 Repeat three more times to places.

Step 2

- Bars 1- 2 Pas-de-basque over your own sword (e.g. the first man dances a right foot pas-de-basque in I, left in II, right in I, and left in II).
 - Join hands in a circle and dance high-cuts over your own sword.
 - 4 Release hands and turn 3/4 round clockwise (e.g. the first man in I) with pas-de-basque.
 - 5-16 Repeat three more times over successive swords, but on bar 16 the second and fourth men dance back to their original places, while the first and third men make a complete turn.

Step 3 (Described for the first man; the third man dances similarly meanwhile).

Bar 1 With left foot in II, dance two toe-heels with the right foot over sword 1. (Left arm up).

2 Change feet (and arms) and dance one toe-heel. Then jump over sword 1 into I, turning anti-clockwise to face III with a left-footed pas-de-basque.

3- 4 Pas-de-basque and high-cuts.

5 With left foot in I dance two toe-heels over sword 1. (Left arm up).

6 Change feet (and arms) and repeat.

7 Jump into II and turn clockwise to face IV with one toe-heel on the right foot and prepare to high-cut.

8 High-cut.

9-10 Turn to your original place with pas-de-basque 11-12 and high-cut there.

13-24 The second and fourth men as much.

When the first and third men begin to dance, the second and fourth men march round the swords to the first man's original place. During bars 11-12 they march to the positions in which they start dancing. As they start to dance, the third man marches to the first man's place; during bars 23-24 he marches to his own place. While the third man is marching the first man marches completely round the swords. All marching is clockwise.

Bars 1- 2 Join left hands in the centre (as in hands-across)
and dance two toe-heels with the right foot over
your own sword (e.g. the first man has his left
foot in II) and then with the left.

Jump across your sword to face the next one with toe-heels right and left.

Beat your right heel four times over this sword (e.g. the first man's right heel beats in IV: his left foot is in I). Do not hop on the left foot. Hooch.

5-16 Repeat three more times over successive swords, but on the last two bars release hands, pas-de-basque to your original places, and high-cut there.

HERE THE MUSIC CHANGES

Step 5

Step 4

Bars 1- 6 Balance-and-pas-de-basque right, left, and right

7-8 and high-cuts.

9-16 With pas-de-basque the first man dances to hilts 4, 3, 2 and 1, turning clockwise the while: two bars and a three-quarter turn to each hilt. Meanwhile the others as much.

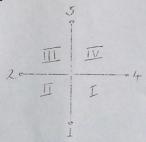
Step 6

Bars 1-8 High-cut, turning right-about during bars 7-8.

9-15 High-cut (facing away from the centre).

16 Assemble with right foot in front and change.

This dance was collected by Mrs. MacNab from a pipe-major in the Seaforth Highlanders, London, 1935. She taught it in several places, including the Scottish week-end at Long Pond, Massachusetts, and to the Braemar group. She often selected it for exhibitions and tattoos.



MARY ISDALE MACNAB

The death of Mrs. MacNab last November brought to an end a long, valuable and colourful career in the world of Scottish dancing. Her pupils lost not only a teacher but a friend.

Mary Isdale (for this was her maiden name) was born in Govan and was taught highland dancing as a child by E.E. Henderson. She and her family emigrated to Canada in 1907. In 1920 she married Allan MacNab, from Lochgoilhead. She is survived by one son, Gordon.

She started to teach highland dancing in Vancouver about 1910, and at the present time nearly all the leading teachers here are former pupils of hers. What distinguishes her from other teachers of highland dancing is that instead of confining herself to the standard repertoire for highland dancing competitions she also collected, and eventually taught, other, less common, dances. collecting started, so she once told me, when she was encouraged by some old highland ladies in Vancouver to learn some of the dances they knew as children. She found that other people were willing to teach dances to her, and her mother encouraged her to write down what she learned. Most of her collecting was done about forty years ago, but she would learn dances whenever the chance presented itself, and she acquired the Weaving Lilt as late as 1946. collecting was not like the field-work of a folklorist: it was mostly from other teachers. Vancouver, a busy port, with many highland Scots in its population, was an ideal centre for this.

The dances which Mrs. MacNab collected were very varied. Many were step-dances; she had a magnificent collection of sword-dances and a fine version of the dirk-dance; she had figure-dances for various numbers of dancers, some with plenty of stepping; and she had several quadrilles and two country-dances. Many of her dances were clearly of the sort that a highland teacher would display at his end-of-season concert. These concerts seem to have

been fairly common in Scotland during the late nineteenth century, but fell out of fashion. However, after Mrs. MacNab's dancing school had become established she began to use the dances in her collection in this very way: in an annual concert which developed into the famous "Gathering of the Clans". Besides being a first-class teacher of dancing, Mrs. MacNab had a flair for costuming and for compiling a satisfying and balanced programme. We print later the contents of the last of these concerts, her Centennial Revue of 1966.

For these concerts Mrs. MacNab reconstructed dances from her notes - or, rather, not entirely from her notes (which were very brief) but from a combination of the notes, her memory, and her experience of, and feel for, the kind of movement that is a valid part of Scottish dance-tradition. (I do not believe that anyone could reconstruct the dances completely from the notes alone). In a letter which she wrote to me in 1955 she said

" My latest is 'Lamont of Inveryne', a very complicated dance. As I had my notes for a very long time it was hard to follow, but I have worked on it with my senior class, and have it finished. "

The most striking things about Mrs. MacNab's dances are their variety and flexibility. Nearly all figure-dances are performed in a definite formation: square, column, line, circle, and so on. Not only did Mrs. MacNab's dances have a greater variety of starting-formations than usual (including three-sides-of-a-square in 'MacKenzie of Seaforth' and 'McLeod of Lewis', half a square in "Bonnie Prince Charlie', and a most interesting formation in 'McNeil of Barra', to be described later) but they tended to melt from one formation to another, not always regaining the original formation at the end of the dance.

Here is a list of some of these dances.

Solo step-dances for men.

Dirk Dance
The first of August

MacNab's salute (sword-dance)
Earl of Ross (sword-dance)

Solo step-dances for women

Highland laddie Over the water An cailin cuairt
Island herd-maid Yellow-haired laddie Lady Louisa MacDonald
Bonnie breast-knot (or My lady's breast-knot, or The lovers'
knot).

Duets

Jacobite sword-dance Reel of the black-cocks
The braes of Tulliemet Mairi Ban's bridal

Trios

The shepherd's crook Bronach The fiery cross Sword-dances (other than solo and duet)

Culloden The Clansmen

Argyle sword-dance Broadswords of Lochiel

Set-dances for men (other than sword-dances)

MacKenzie of Seaforth The whirlygig Friockheim
The house of Fraser The sailors' knot

Miming or acting dances Flower of Benbecula (one woman) Reel of the black-cocks (two dancers in costume)

Village maid (one woman) The fiery cross (two men and a bov)

Special dances Hebridean weaving-lilt Sheena's dance A courting-dance

The men of Moussa McNeil of Barra Eight men of Moidart Muilean dubh The brooch of Lorne

Country-dances

Jeannie o' the witchin' e'e (longways) St. Andrew's night (circle)

Set-dances

The Duke of Gordon's welcome to Aberdeen Braes of Balquhidder Glengarry waltz Orcadian wedding-dance Bonnie Anne MacLaine of Lochbuie MacLeod of Lewis Laird of Dochart's reel Lerwick reel Portree lassies

McLeod of Harris Kelvingrove Vallag MacDonald of Sleat Over the Dee and over the Don Earl of Errol's reel Lamont of Inveryne Dunvegan castle Lewis Bridal dance The Lovat star Madeod of Promingon.

St. Andrew's night The Cameronians Waltz cotillion Rouken Glen Brig o' Doon Because he was a bonnie lad Huntly reel Bonnie Prince Charlie

One highlight of this collection is the fine series of sword-Outside this collection only two Scottish sword-dances seem to be known: the solo sword-dance performed at highland games, and the Argyll broadswords danced in several highland regiments (not the same dance as Mrs. MacNab's Argyle Broadswords). Mrs. MacNab's sword-dances are of the same general type as these two, but 'The Clansmen' is an unusually spectacular one that requires eleven dancers and ten swords.

The backbone of the collection are the set-dances. are figure-dances for various numbers of couples, mostly in square or longways formation. They vary from 'The Cameronians', which has plenty of highland stepping, through 'The braes of Balquhidder', which has a sporadic highland schottische, and 'The Earl of Errol's reel', which has only polka, balance, and pas-de-basque steps, to the stately Kelvingrove, which is a waltz quadrille. Perhaps the most attractive of these dances is 'MacLaine of Lochbuie' or 'Mac-Laine's hogmanay', for three couples in longways formation. first part consists of such usual figures as setting, reeling, crossing and turning. The second part is the "hogmanay": the music quickens and each man in succession gathers up his partner, finishing in file, each man with his left arm round his partner's waist; they balance forward and back twice and spin round, each man passing his partner on to the next man. After three such passes everyone has his own partner back and the couples turn to their original places. An interesting little detail is that the dancers do not fall back into their original lines and bow and courtesy to each other from a distance, but retain right hands for this final salutation. Another interesting set-dance is 'MacLeod of Dunvegan'

or 'Dunvegan castle', danced by six couples who start in a solid rectangle. Some of the figures depict the castle itself: for example in the figure called "battlements" four dancers stand shoulder-to-shoulder to form a wall, which slowly rotates. (The other eight dancers form two more walls).

The dances I have called 'acting or miming dances' were prominent in Mrs. MacNab's concerts: she always seemed to have pupils who could act well enough to carry them off. The Reel of the black-cocks is perhaps a stage version of the traditional west highland dance 'Ruidhleath nan coileachan dubh'; if so, it has developed a long way from a simple social dance to a representation of the strutting and fighting of two black-cocks, ending with the victory of one; it is danced with tremendous verve and energy.

"The Flower of Benbecula" tells a story: a young girl is taking a dancing-lesson on her mother's orders but she does not really like the slow elegant ballet-like movements and would rather be dancing in highland style. After a while the quick angular movements of the highland dance begin to show through, and as soon as she is sure that her mother is not looking she persuades the musician to change his tune and breaks into a highland fling. Unfortunately a corrupt version of this dance (consisting only of the elegant first part) was put about in Scotland a few years ago under the name "Rose of Benbecula".

A few of the "special dances" deserve comment. 'The Brooch of Lorne' is a spectacular dance that was often the main theme in Mrs. MacNab's annual concerts. The formation consists of concentric rings of dancers; in the very centre a male dancer in a yellow shirt represents the cairngorm in the brooch.

'The eight men of Moidart' is based on the well-known legend of the '45 Rising. There are several dances of this name, all quite different: this one starts as a minuet, then changes to a strathspey and finally to a reel.

Concerning three more of these dances Mrs. MacNab wrote (in a letter):-

A Scottish fantasy, 'The bride of Iona' was based on a story given to me by a Canadian-born Norwegian, Lief Hansen, whose great-grandmother came from Iona. The scene was taken from the arrival of a bridal party at the house of the bridegroom. The dances he gave me were very Scandinavian with a highland flavour, and the bridal song I found later was part of an old Norwegian dance. The Hebridean Weaving Lilt was collected from Bellshare presumably Baleshare, North Uist. Another Hebridean dance used in 'The bride of Iona' was 'The courting dance'. It is almost like Daldans. Another, 'Sheena's dance', has a Swedish tune.

A particularly interesting dance is 'McNeil of Barra'. Mrs. MacNab got it from L. McNeil of Castlebay, which is on Barra. Six girls stand in two lines; a man in the centre of the rectangle so formed dances a Fling while the girls dance various figures round him. Then the music speeds up to reel tempo and he dances with

the girls, two at a time, rather as in 'The Bumpkin'. Now it is well known that many dances once common in the Hebrides have faded away: of some, brief descriptions are known; of others, only the name. Only the name survived of 'An long' ('The ship' in Gaelic): it was mentioned, in a list of such forgotten dances, by D.G. Mac-Lennan in his book 'Highland and traditional Scottish dances' (1950) with the remarks that it was Hebridean. Joan and Tom Flett have described in their book 'Traditional dancing in Scotland' how they went in search of these dances in 1953 and managed to find on Barra an 88-year-old piper, Neil McNeil, who remembered some details of the dance. Its full name was 'An long Bharrach' ('The Barra ship'); six dancers formed the outline of the ship and the seventh, who represented the mast, danced with them in turn. It was taught, about 1881 by Ronald Morrison at Castlebay. There can be no doubt that 'An long Bharrach' and 'McNeil of Barra' are one and the same dance.

Much more could be written about these dances if space permitted. Since it does not, let us turn to a description of how Mrs. MacNab collected them.

The first dances she collected were from D.C. Mather, who had emigrated to Canada in 1899, and from whom Mrs. MacNab and her sister took dancing lessons soon after they settled in Vancouver (they were his only pupils at the time). He taught them the standard highland dances and, in addition the Dirk Dance, 'Culloden', and 'The fiery cross'. Although Mrs. MacNab took these dances down, she had no idea then of collecting dances in earnest: this only started when she met some old highland ladies who were eager to teach their dances to her. One of these ladies was Mrs. Fassiefern Bain (daughter of the Rev. Alexander Stewart, better known as 'Nether Lochaber'), who taught her 'MacDonald of Sleat', 'Jeannie o' the witchin' e'e', 'Highland laddie' and 'Over the water'. We have already mentioned Lief Hansen. Other sources were:-

Lochlann Campbell (Nova Scotia): Lamont of Inveryne, Portree
lassies

Mrs. Gilbert Fontaine (Quebec): The Earl of Errol's reel Graham Forbes (Ontario), who got the dance from his grandfather: The Duke of Gordon's welcome to Aberdeen

Allan MacDonald (Truro, Nova Scotia): MacKenzie of Seaforth,
Dunvegan Castle

Murdo MacLaine (Nova Scotia): McLaine of Lochbuie Finlay McLennan (Nova Scotia): Jacobite sword-dance Archie MacNab (Toronto): The laird of Dochart's reel L. McNeil (Castlebay, Barra): McNeil of Barra Neil McNeil, aged 89 (Craigston, Barra): The reel of the black-

Hector MacPherson (Lochboisdale): The first of August, The Harris sailors, Whirlygig

Torquil MacPherson (Lochboisdale): The flower of Benbecula Mrs. Nimmo (Glasgow): Rouken glen
An elderly lady from Argyllshire: Bonnie Anne
An engineer on a Pacific liner: The sailors' knot
A pipe-major in the Seaforths (London, 1935): The broadswords
of Lochiel

In addition, Mrs. MacNab taught two dances collected by her brother in North Carolina: Because he was a bonnie lad, and Bonnie Prince Charlie.

Besides using her more spectacular dances for her concerts and at such gatherings as the monthly concerts of the local Gaelic societies, or the annual Vancouver Folk Festival, Mrs. MacNab produced a team of dancers to perform at tattoos, at first local, but eventually in 1964 at the most famous of all Scottish tattoos: the tattoo on Edinburgh castle esplanade on the occasion of Edinburgh Festival. (They are so far the only team of Scottish dancers from abroad that have been invited to perform there). The next year these dancers toured the U.S.A. as part of the Royal Marine tattoo.

Although Mrs. MacNab concentrated on the highland style of dancing, she by no means neglected the social dance. She organized the Prince Charles club, where country-dances, quadrilles and the eightsome reel were danced weekly during the winter season; and she obtained a teacher's certificate from the R.S.C.D.S. 1948 she visited the summer school at St. Andrews, and taught four of the dances from her collection: MacDonald of Sleat, The Hebridean weaving lilt, Rouken glen, and The shepherd's crook. dances were a resounding success, adding some much-appreciated variety to the repertoire of country-dance enthusiasts. They were printed for her by the R.S.C.D.S. in pamphlet form under the title "Scottish country dance book of four set dances as collected by Mrs. Mary Isdal [e] MacNab of Vancouver and given to the Society at their 17th Summer School at St. Andrews". This was the first of a series of such pamphlets and Mrs. MacNab's pleasure at its success was only slightly marred by the fact that the Society printed for the Weaving lilt a tune which she considered most unsuitable: instead of the tune she used, a variant of "Charistiona Chaimbeul", they printed "Orange and blue" (under the title "Broachan laoimh" There are some blemishes in the descriptions of other dances, but the only other one that I have heard her speak strongly about is the changing of "Kelvingrove" from a waltz to a strathspey.

Somewhere between the Prince Charles club and her young professional pupils comes the 'Braemar' group, consisting of eight adult couples, all personal friends of hers, and many of them parents of her pupils. To this group she taught over the years many of the less strenuous dances from her collection. These dances were only relatively less strenuous - the Braemar group's repertoire did not include dances like The clansmen or The sailors of Harris, but the men of the group could and did dance eight bars of highcuts when required. It was probably teaching this group that gave

Mrs. MacNab the experience and confidence necessary for her teaching at St. Andrews, for she always regarded herself as a teacher of children and was rarely at ease when teaching adults except for this one group of personal friends.

Mrs. MacNab showed a keen interest in the dances of other nations besides Scotland. She arranged for Swedish, Ukrainian, Irish and other teachers to give instruction in their own dances to her pupils, and she even collected a few exotic dances herself. One of these was a stick-dance from Ceylon in which two dancers, kneeling, clash two wooden beams together in time to the music, while half a dozen others dance round, over and between the beams with athletic leaps and crouches, being careful, of course, to land between the beams only when they are apart and to leap away before the next beat, when they clash together.

Mrs. MacNab was, in herself, a very friendly, motherly per-This statement may surprise anyone who met her only briefly. because she had a certain reserve that had to be broken through before her true character became apparent. But many is the pot of home-made jam or soup that bachelor members of her dance-groups have taken home with them after an evening's dancing in her basement, and many is the party that she has enlivened with her rather dry sense of humour: she was one of those rare people who can tell a joke against themselves. There is no doubt that her girl pupils, from the youngest to those who are now adult, were extraordinarily fond of her. She was a mainstay in the Scottish life of Vancouver. She was active in the St. Andrews and Caledonian Society, the Glasgow and district association, the Gaelic Society, the B.C. Highland dancing association, and the Vancouver branch of the Canadian Folk Society. She also took a great interest in the highland dancing in San Diego (where her sister and niece live). She was a founder of the Vancouver ladies' pipe band (who wear MacNab tartan in her honour) and was its president for 25 years. She also took a great interest in the Vancouver police pipe band and the pipe band of the local Seaforth Highlanders battalion. She was, finally, one of the founders (in 1960) of the annual Scottish dance week-end, which attracts dancers each May from as far as Southern California and Northern B.C., and once even from Alaska. She was, moreover, no mere figure-head: before the first week-end she made several awkward trips by car and ferry in search of a suitable site.

Mrs. MacNab's passing leaves many gaps which will not be filled; but her dances at least will remain a fitting memorial to her.

Programme of the Mary Isdale School's "Centennial Revue", June 3rd, 1966.

From the highlands of Scotland

Sword dance Reel of Tulloch
Strathspey and reel The Argyle broadswords
Highland Fling "Over the Dee and over the Don"
Jacobite sword-dance Perth assembly
The shepherd's crook Seann Triubhas McKenzie of Kintail
Cross of St. Andrew MacKenzie of Seaforth

Scandinavian dances (Four)

From the land of the Shamrock (Three Irish dances)

From the isle of Skye
Portree lassies

From the Pacific Islands to British Columbia (Maori and Hawaiian dances)

Sailors' hornpipe

Polish mazurka

Dancing through the years

(Various dances from the minuet via the Charleston to go-go girls; including "Highland dancing as in 1910").

The Orcadian Bridal
Bridal dance
Dances by guests

Scottish medley Braes of Tulliemet

Centennial salute to Vancouver

The village maidens Lady Louisa MacDonald
The Flowers of Edinburgh A Scottish lilt
To Jenny Flora MacDonald's fancy

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House, McLaine's hogmanay, Riverside, Rosslyn Castle,
Stirling castle, Suilean donp', Suilean gorma, The
ceilidh, The Old sporran, The provost - 5¢ each
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