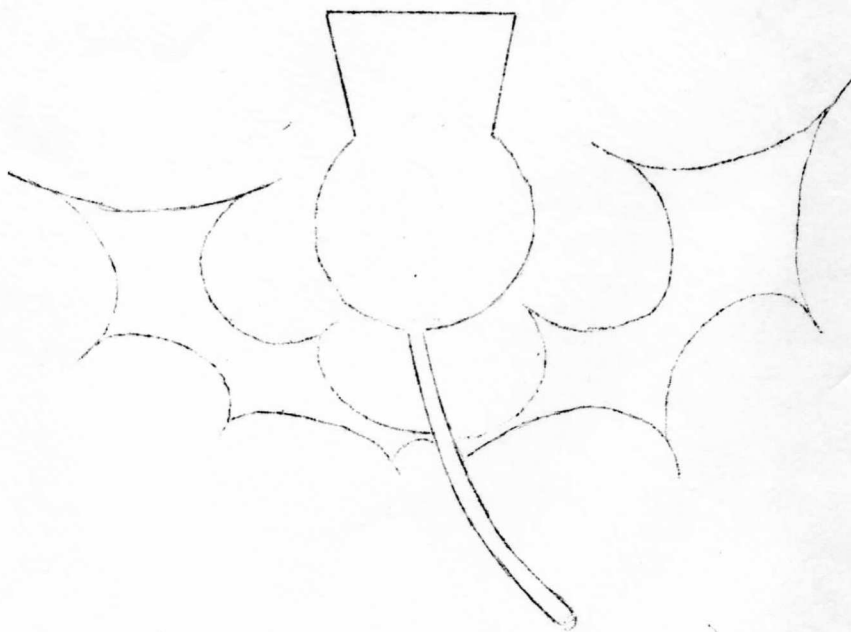


THE
THISTLE



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

The Thistle comes to you this year in a new format. The reason for the change is that the high-quality printing which we used over the first three years is expensive, and the circulation of the magazine, though it has grown, has not grown enough to support this expense. We have reluctantly, therefore, decided to have the magazine mimeographed until our accounts are healthy again. Anyone who is badly disappointed by the change can help us get back to our printed version soon by introducing keen dancers to the Thistle in the hope that they will become subscribers. We shall, of course, maintain the same high quality of contents.

OUR DANCES, No. 19 : Scottish Reform or The Prince of Wales.

During the nineteenth century Scottish country-dances tended to fall into patterns, and one pattern which became very common was as follows. The dance was of the usual length (32 bars) and of two-couple type. The first half consisted of some rather individual figure, characteristic of the particular dance; the second half was the standard sequence down-the-middle-and-up-and-poussette. Such dances were always in the fast tempo - jigs, reels, hornpipes and so on; never strathspeys.

Scottish reform is a typical dance with this pattern, its characteristic figure being the balance-in-line. This figure came originally from the quadrilles (which reached Scotland just before 1820) and is rather rare in country-dances.

The tune is a lively and attractive jig - one of the few jigs used for country-dances (for, although there are plenty of country-dance tunes in the same metre as the jig, that is to say, they are most naturally written with a 6/8 time-signature, many of them are not in fact jigs but other types of tune, such as quicksteps).

Scottish Reform is not one of those dances which, like Petronella for instance, was described over and over again in Ballroom Manuals during the course of the nineteenth century. Indeed, until its description was published by the S.C.D.S. in 1925 it was taught entirely by oral traditional. In this way it resembled certain very local dances, but according to J.F. and T.M. Flett it was in fact common throughout Perthshire and Argyllshire and was preserved at the Perth Hunt Ball and the Argyllshire Gathering. This puts it in rather a

select company, for not many country-dances were performed at highland balls. It also appears to have been danced, at least occasionally, south of the border, for the English Folk-dance and Song Society published a description of it in 1952, under the name "Pins and needles" which they believed to be a corruption of Prince of Wales. They collected their version in Northumberland.

There is a curious resemblance between Scottish Reform and one of the best-known of the American contra-dances : Hull's Victory. This dance opens with a balance-in-line figure (not quite the same as Scottish Reform's) and finishes with down-the-middle-and-up-and-right-and-left, which is as much a standard sequence in nineteenth-century New England as down-the-middle-and-up-and-poussette was in nineteenth-century Scotland.

BOOK REVIEW.

Traditional dancing in Scotland, J.F. and T.M. Flett. (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964, 63/-)

This is quite the best book on Scottish dancing that has yet appeared; indeed, one of the best books on the dancing of any nation. It covers the most interesting and vital period in the history of the dance, during which were formed the traditions which we (those of us, that is, who dance in traditional style) follow. This period starts as far back as living memory goes and closes (perhaps arbitrarily) with the first world war.

Statements are carefully documented : the bibliography starts with a list of names and addresses of some 200 informants (traditional dancers, teachers, their surviving close relatives, and so on) 86 of whom were born before 1880. The authors have spent 12 years in these investigations.

The first chapter describes the repertoires and teaching methods of a number of well-known teachers, and shows how the various types of dance spread through Scotland; and the second chapter describes public dances, harvest homes, hiring fairs, balls and other occasions, public and private, formal and informal, when the dances were performed.

There were four main types of social dance : (i) Reels, (ii) Country dances, (iii) Quadrilles and (iv) dances for couples, like the waltz, the polka, "La Va" and such-like. (There were also a few individual dances. One is the Bumpkin; another is Babbity Bowster which - though most people remember it today as a childrens' dance - had a wide and interesting distribution described in detail in this book). Of the four main types of dance, the Reels are native to Scotland; country dances were introduced from England shortly after 1700, and the others arrived from the continent in the nineteenth century.

Rather naturally, the book pays most attention to Reels, with descriptions of not only the well-known threesome, foursome and Reel of Tulloch, but also such interesting but little-known dances as the Old West Highland Circular Reel, Ruidhleath mòr, the Six reel from Lauder, and many others, including reels from the Orkney and Shetland islands, different enough from those of the mainland to deserve separate chapters.

Only seven country dances are described, chosen to "illustrate the general development of the Country Dance in Scotland". Besides the actual movements of the dances, this chapter covers their histories, their variants in different regions, the teachers in whose repertoires they were included, and other interesting but not-generally-known background.

There is an excellent chapter on steps for Reels and Country dances, again with much background; and a chapter on the *art* of "treepling", a type of stepping that has almost died out.

In an appendix which will be of particular interest to Canadian readers, Frank Rhodes describes Scottish dances surviving in Nova Scotia.

Many of the facts which this book reveals will surprise the modern generation of country dancers, but the authors' careful deductions and strict documentation admit of no argument. Time and effort spent in studying it will be well spent indeed.

LOCAL NEWS.

The main item of news for Vancouver is the formation of a branch of the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society (President, Bob Simpson). The branch will take over the various activities of the old "provincial" (the Scottish Country Dance Society of B.C., which was affiliated to the R.S.C.D.S. but was not a branch). It will also organize country-dance classes at various levels. The details of these have not been fixed at the time of writing.

The open air country-dance in Stanley Park took place weekly as usual, and was clearly enjoyed by the spectators as well as the dancers. Weather was not kind this year, but fortunately the opening night at least was fine, giving us the very welcome chance of seeing the dancers and pipers perform before their visit to Scotland (as described in the item "Mrs. MacNab's tribute").

The 1964 camp provided the usual opportunity for hard work and the rewards that go with it. Technique was polished, new dances were learnt, and gaiety abounded. Although there was a slight lack of intimacy compared with the earlier smaller camps at Crescent Beach, the move to UBC was well worth while in view of the larger numbers now attending. The band (Murray Black's) was a great success at the Saturday-evening dance, for which Brock Hall provided a magnificent setting.

MRS. MAC NAB'S TRIBUTE.

This summer has been a memorable one for Mrs. MacNab and her dancers. A team formed from the dancers in her various classes has visited Scotland, together with the Vancouver Ladies' pipe-band.

The stimulus for the visit was an invitation to perform at the Military Tattoo which forms part of the Edinburgh Festival, and by all accounts it was a great success. Not only is the dancing of the "E.C. highland lassies", as they called themselves, of a very high standard, but they perform a number of spectacular dances quite unfamiliar in Scotland, because although the mother country has, over the past dozen years, been reimporting those of Mrs. MacNab's dances that are suitable for country dancers, Scotland had not until this year seen those which required much highland stepping - dances like The Clansmen, The Cameronian reel, or The eight men of Moidart, all in this year's repertoire.

To celebrate the occasion, the Vancouver ballet society sponsored and organized a "Tribute to Mary Isdale" (this being Mrs. MacNab's maiden and professional name). This consisted of a presentation to her on the stage of Queen Elizabeth theatre following a performance by the "Lassies" and the pipe-band, with, as guest artists a Scottish singer, a ballet-dancer (who had been a pupil of Mrs. MacNab's for highland dancing) and country dancers from the newly-formed Vancouver and district branch of the R.S.C.D.S.

NORTHERN JUNKET.

The square-dance magazine that is different. \$2.50 for 12 issues, from Ralph Page, 117 Washington St., Keene, N.H., U.S.A.

Each issue brings you interesting articles on all phases of dancing : squares, contras, folk-dance, folk-song, folk-lore. Traditional recipes, too, for hungry dancers.