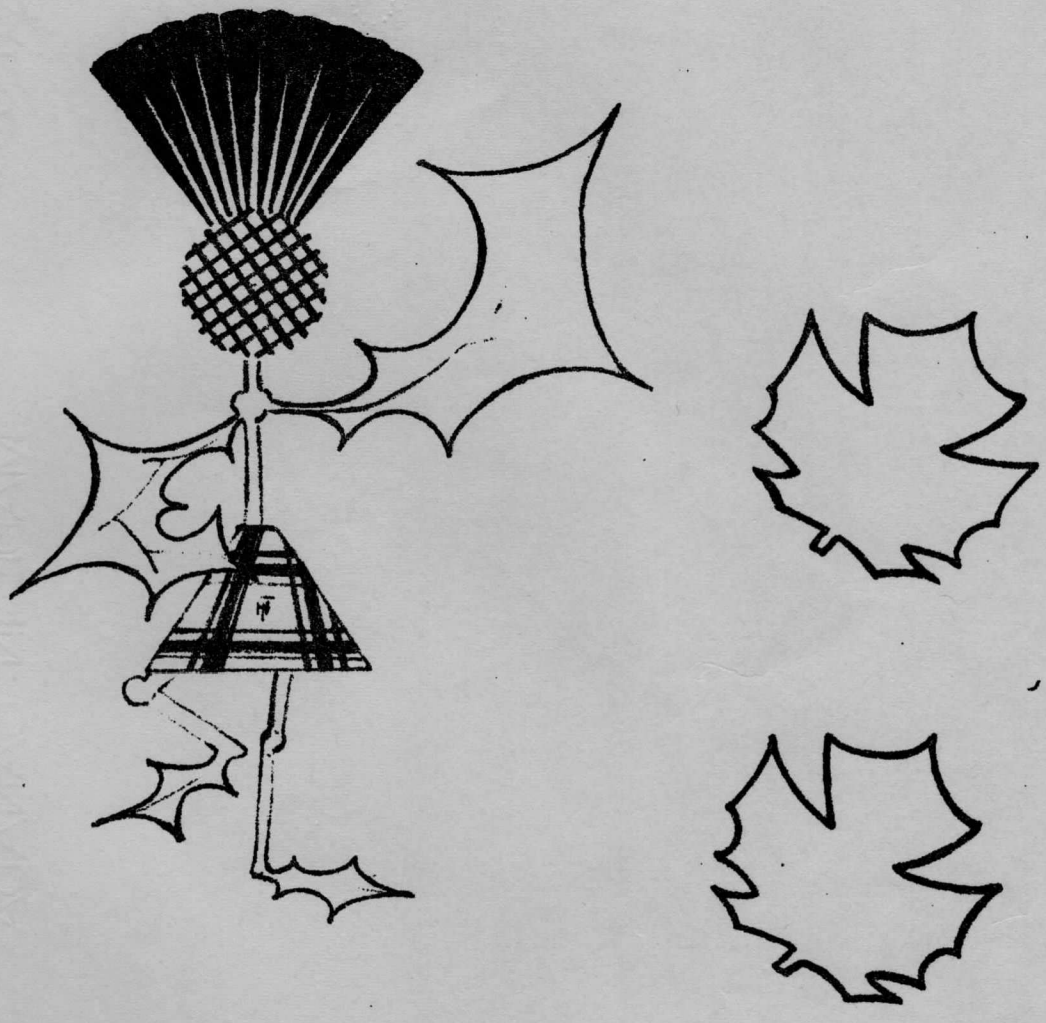

THE

THISTLE

Issued by the Thistle Club
President: Dr. Norman MacKenzie, C.M.G., M.M. & Bar, Q.C., LL.D.

No. 39 February, 1969

EDITORIAL

Vancouver, and perhaps the whole of Canada, is now in the middle of its Burns season. Readers in Scotland might be surprised to know that over here Burns suppers do not all take place on the 25th of January, and the Bard is celebrated over a period -- some of the earlier Burns suppers being as much as two or three weeks before the event. The suppers themselves, too, are less strictly Burnsian and more generally Scottish than is usual in Scotland itself. However, the traditional toasts -- the Immortal Memory, the Lassies, and so on -- are always included, and it is surprising how many people, so far from the old country, can be found who are knowledgeable enough and willing to do justice to the memory of Scotland's foremost poet.

-- OBITUARY --

It is with great regret that we announce the death of Mrs. Stewart of Fasnacloich, one of the co-founders of the Scottish Country Dance Society. The Oban Times says

> She was of gentle disposition, a woman of great kindness, charm and dignity. Throughout her long life, until prevented by old age, she was a staunch worker for the causes she had at heart. She will always be remembered for having originated in Glasgow in 1923 the idea of the Scottish Country Dance Society, which she developed with Miss Milligan.

She will also be remembered, by all those interested in Scottish Country Dancing, as the owner of the only surviving copy of one of the most important sources of information on traditional Scottish dancing: "The ballroom or the Juvenile Pupil's assistant" published in Glasgow in 1827, which she was very willing to lend to research workers; indeed she was always very pleasantly willing to help the cause of Scottish Country Dancing in any way she could.

THE THISTLE

Editorial address: 3515 Fraser Street, Vancouver 10, B.C.
Editors: Douglas and Sybil Duncan, Hugh and Nina Thurston.
Subscription: $1.25 per year (four issues). Six or more copies to the same address: 95¢ each per year.
Back numbers: 2-18 25¢; 26,27,29,30,32,34,36, 35¢. The rest out-of-print, but Xerox copies available on request at 15¢ per exposure.
Other publications: Schiehallion 10¢, Inverness reel 10¢, Inverness gathering 5¢, Argyll broadswords 20¢. Sixteen Scottish Country Dances (1945-1967) by Hugh Thurston: $1.00

OUR DANCES NO. 53: La tempête.

You might guess that a dance with this name would be French. You would be wrong. The dance is found in quite a number of countries, but France is not one of them. Then why does it have a French name? Almost certainly because it is an early nineteenth-century dance. In those days French was (a) fashionable and (b) the usual technical language of the dance (with terms like entrechat, pas-de-basque, ballon, for which there are still no English equivalents). It is not only in Scotland that dances with French names were found, and in fact the country where they were commonest (other than French-speaking countries, of course) was the U.S.A.: early nineteenth-century American collections abounded with names like "La Belle Catherine", "Allemande suisse", and so on.

From before 1700 to just after 1800, the longwise country-dance had been the most fashionable dance in England (and the American colonies) and toward the end of that period also held sway in the cities of Scotland and Ireland. But about 1820 new formations arose in England, and quickly spread. Their earliest description was in 1822 by the dancing-master GMS Chivers, who himself invented some of them. One of his formations, called "mescolanze" was precisely the formation in which La Tempête is danced (the four-facing-four version, not the alternative version for two-facing-two). La Tempête seems to be by far the commonest and most widespread of the mescolanzes; besides England it has been found in Scotland, Ireland, New England, and Germany; in fact it has been collected in several locations in Germany, one as far east as Pomerania.

All the old books called the dance "La tempête", which is French for "the tempest". The German dance-historian Bohme makes the point that the dance is not at all tempestuous but "lieblich und munter". Later, the Germans usually called it "Tampet". Some English village dancers called it "Tom Pate". Sometimes the name was translated into "the tempest", but I think it is writers about the dance, rather than dancers of the dance, who did this. The more conservative Scots never deviated from the original name. Most Americans kept to it, too, (though one book gives "Tom Pate") and in fact chaos would arise if they tried to call the dance "tempest" because there is in Vermont a very well-known double-contra called "Tempest", which is <u>just</u> similar enough to La Tempête to be confused with it. The Irish lost the name completely, and call the dance "The siege of Ennis".

La Tempête has its own very individual tune, which is found with at least half the versions. It has been printed many times: in particular, in Scottish Country Dance Book no. 2.

There are no early English descriptions of the dance -- in fact, the English seemed to stop printing country dances just about the time La Tempête was invented, and the earliest descriptions are Scottish. They are found in a collection by Joseph Lowe, about 1840. We say "descriptions" because he gave two. The first one he calls the "Edinburgh version"; the second one he invented himself. The "Edinburgh version" goes as follows:-

1- 8	All advance and retire
9-24	Each couple chassés past the couple beside them and back twice
25-32	The centre four hands-round and back; the outside pairs, two-handed turns
33-40	Same as above except hands-across and one-handed turns.
41-48	All advanced and retire and pass through the opposite line.

This is a common and widespread version. It is, for example, the version found fifty years later in David Anderson's well-known collection, and the English, German, Irish and American versions are similar : the American versions in fact, are almost identical.

Lowe's other version is the one that will be familiar to most readers, as it is the one collected by the R.S.C.D.S. and printed in book 2. It does not seem to have travelled well, as no trace of it has been found outside Scotland.

OUR DANCES, NO. 54: Bonnie wee Glen. By John Geddes.

Record: Flying Scotsmen LP - PC1041 Band 1, Side 1, Jimmy Shand Special.

Formation: Two-couple sets, couple 1 facing couple 2, lady to right of man in a large circle around the hall.

Part One:

1- 4 Join nearest hands with partner and set twice to opposite couple.

5- 8 Turn opposite person with right hand once around, with four travelling steps.

Part Two:

9-12 Join hands in a circle of four and travel left with eight slip steps.

13-16 Return to place with left hands joined in centre (star) taking four travelling steps.

17-20 Two ladies change places with two travelling steps, join right hands in passing. Men repeat crossing with right hands joined.

21-24 Join right hands in centre (star) and with four travelling steps, turn once around.

25-28 Join hands in a circle of four and with eight slip steps, turn once around in opposite direction (remember to return to new places, position you crossed to).

29-32 Join right hand with partner, turn once and half around, turn your back on the couple you have just danced with to face a new couple, and repeat dance from beginning.

Arranged in 1964; dedicated to Glen John Geddes, then a few months old.

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-- Hints on Better Dancing --

Our hint this month is directed to those teachers, leaders, comperes and M.C.s who say to their dancers "Smile". Our advice to them is "don't". I mean, our advice to teachers etc. is "don't instruct people to smile"; I don't mean that our advice to dancers is "don't smile". Any dancer who finds it natural to smile while dancing should of course do so; it is the dancers who are deliberately smiling because they have been told to who are so excruciating to look at.

The reason why teachers tell dancers to smile, is usually not because the dancers are merely failing to smile, but because

they are looking grim, strained and/or unhappy. The correct cure is not to tell them to smile, but to find out what it is about your teaching that is making them grim, strained and/or unhappy and put it right.

As a matter of fact, the whole idea is based on a misconception. A smile is not a sign of enjoyment : it is a sign of tension. You will not find a human being smiling when he is really enjoying himself, whether he is eating a superb meal, listening to a symphony, or watching Celtic beat the Rangers (or the Rangers beat Celtic as the case may be) : think of something that gives you real pleasure and ask yourself honestly whether you smile while you are doing it. The typical occasion for a smile is when two people meet who know each other slightly, and the ice has to be broken; or when someone gets up before an audience and feels a little nervous.

News from the U.S.A.

-- Jeannie Carmichael Memorial --

On November 9-10, 1968, the New York Branch inaugurated the Jeannie R.B. Carmichael Memorial Program as a tribute to Miss Carmichael who had contributed so much to the growth of Scottish Country dancing in our part of the world. Miss Jean C. Milligan of Glasgow came to New York expressly to conduct the first of these Memorial workshops. Before we knew it, Miss Milligan, with her usual warmth and enthusiasm had us all dancing "The Campbells are Coming", and "The Wild Geese". Many other dances from Book 24 as well as from "Introducing Scottish Country Dancing" were taught.

On Saturday evening, a grand ball was held, with Bob Gruskin as M.C. Stan Hamilton and the Clansmen played so delightfully that there were many requests for encores, and dancing continued until 1 a.m.

On Sunday afternoon, a final class was held. During the tea that followed, Miss Milligan spoke of the growth and development of the R.S.C.D.S. and of the pioneering work Miss Carmichael had done in introducing Scottish Country Dancing to the United States.

Nothing would have given Miss Carmichael greater joy than the knowledge that people were gathering from all parts of the U.S. and Canada for the enjoyment of Scottish Country dancing. Therefore, it is the purpose of the Memorial to invite an outstanding teacher of Scottish Country dancing to come from Scotland, in alternate years, to conduct these weekends. We hope that many more people will join us for the next Memorial Workshop to be held in 1970.

INDEX TO THE THISTLE

For some while now we have thought of making an index to the Thistle. It seems likely that many readers would find it useful (it is surprising how many new subscribers ask for as complete a set of back numbers as possible) but it would be a substantial undertaking. In a recent letter Mr. John Dickson suggested producing the index in parts : one part indexing the dances, another part indexing the hints for better

dancing, and so on. As a matter of fact, it so happens that quite by chance, we have produced one part of such an index : in the Thistle no. 34 we indexed all the even-numbered dances in the series "Our dances" up to that date (these include all the newly-composed dances of the series).

Here, as the second part of the index, are the odd-numbered dances.

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HISTORIAL QUOTATIONS

The quadrilles reach Scotland (1817)

"It was the first season of the quadrilles, against the introduction of which there had been a great stand made by the old-fashioned respectables. Many resisted the new French figures altogether and it was a pity to give up the merry country dance".

(From Elizabeth Grant's "Memoires of a highland lady").

Dancing at funerals (1771)

The late-wake is a ceremony used at funerals. The evening after the death of any person, the relations and friends of the deceased met at the house, attended by bagpipe or fiddle. The nearest of kin, be it wife, son, or daughter, opens a melancholy ball, dancing and greeting, and this continues till daylight; but with such gambols and frolicks among the young and pert of the company, that the loss which occasioned them is more than supplied by the consequences of that night.

(From Thomas Pennant's "A tour in Scotland").

Enthusiasm for the dance

Both sexes were passionately fond of dancing which consists chiefly in reels and other figures. The style was more remarkable for the spirit and agility of the performers than for its elegance and grace.

(From Ramsay of Ochtertyre's "Scotland in the 18th century").

The reel

It is to the highlanders of North Britain that we are indebted, I am told, for a dance in the comic vein, called the Scotch reel, executed generally, and I believe always in trio, or by three. Nothing can be imagined more lively and brilliant than the steps in many of the Scotch dances.

(From Sir John Gallini's "A treatise on the art of dancing", 1765).

The reel (1775)
The general dance here is a reel, which requires that particular sort of step to dance properly, of which none but the people of the country can have any idea.
(From Edward Topham's "Letters from Edinburgh").

Enthusiasm for the reel (1775)
The perseverance which the Scotch ladies [display] in these reels is not less surprising than their attachment to them in preference to all others. They will sit totally unmoved at the mostly sprightly airs of an English country dance, but the moment one of these tunes is played, which is liquid laudanum to my spirits, up they start, animated by new life, and you would imagine they had been bit by a tarantula.
(From Edward Topham's "Letters from Edinburgh").

Scottish attitude to dancing (1775)
A Scotchman comes into an assembly-room as he would into a field of exercise, dances until he is literally tired, possibly without ever looking at his partner, or almost knowing who he dances with. In most countries the men have a partiality for dancing with a woman; but here I have frequently seen four gentlemen perform one of these reels seemingly with the same pleasure and perseverance as they would have done, had they had the most sprightly girl for a partner. They give you the idea that they could with equal glee cast off round a joint stool or set to a corner cupboard.
(From Edward Topham's "Letters from Edinburgh").

The strathspey (1775)
Another of the national dances is a kind of quick minuet, or what the Scotch call a straspae. We in England are said to walk a minuet, this is galloping a minuet. Nothing of the minuet is preserved except the figure; the step and time most resemble an hornpipe -- and I leave you to dwell upon the picture of a gentleman full-dressed and a lady in a hoop dancing an hornpipe before a large assembly.
(From Edward Topham's "Letters from Edinburgh").

Scottish conservatism (1775)
It is no civility to attempt to show [the Scotch] anything new : they hold their dances sacred and will hear no innovation on that point. Cotillons and other French dances have not travelled so far north.
(From Edward Topham's "Letters from Edinburgh").

A ladies' threesome (1775)
One reel in the highlands, where the party consisted of three maiden ladies the youngest of whom was above fifty, was conducted with gestures so uncouth and a vivacity so hideous that you would have thought they were enchanting the moon.
(From Edward Topham's "Letters from Edinburgh").

-- THE BACKGROUND --

As a contrast to the usual Thistle material we are reprinting a series of articles written in 1956 for The Tartan Times, published in Boston, U.S.A. Naturally, a phrase like "over here" in the articles means "in the U.S.A." or "in Boston"; and in 1956 very few modern dances were danced, people kept fairly strictly to the S.C.D.S. books and the Border Book.

The articles will repeat a few of the points we have covered in The Thistle, and anticipate some that we are going to cover later, but we feel that there is no great harm in this.

Let us, to begin with, have a broad general look at Scottish dances, and see just how they fit in the picture of dancing as a whole.

First, we have the highland step dances -- vigorous, precise, lovely to watch, and (though you might not suspect it) great fun to dance too. They are mostly solos, though there are occasionally group dances like the "Argyll Broadswords" and the "Reel of Tulloch". They are famous at Highland Games and regimental exhibitions. There are also some lesser-known ones, not favorites with any regiments and not on the highland syllabus, but quite good dances for all that. Among them are some women's dances including "Flora Macdonald's Fancy" and "The Scottish Lilt," and quite a number of solos from the Hebrides: "Highland Laddie" is about the best known of these.

Second, we have the reels: the foursome, threesome, sixsome, fivesome, double foursome -- there are quite a lot when you gather them together. They are essentially social dances, and were danced by all from the highest to the lowest. Their technique, though, is that of highland dancing -- they are full of highland steps. And, to be quite frank, without the steps they would be rather dull. A later family of reels (born about 1880) are the eightsome and its two descendents, the sixteensome and the thirtytwosome. They have more figures and fewer steps, and the eightsome reel is deservedly the most popular single dance in the repertoire -- at least among those who don't aspire to foursome steps. The ninesome is an odd man out. Its closest relatives are English, Swedish, and German.

The old time dances with a Scottish flavor -- "Gay Gordons", "The Roberts", "Road to the Isles", "Rye Waltz", etc., are much less well known in Scotland than in America, for in Britain, old time dances are not mixed in with folk dancing as over here. The "Gay Gordons" is the only one of these which is at all common.

Finally, we come to the dances which concern us most: the country dances. Our term "country dance" is not quite as narrow as the American "contra" (for which the Scottish equivalent is "longwise country dance"). It includes dances in a "Circassian Circle" formation, of which we have three or four. One rather important thing to bear in mind if you are going to think about the background to our dances is this: the dances we have in our books come to us in two quite distinct ways, and are in fact of two quite distinct types. You can tell which is which in most

cases from the footnotes in the books. On the one hand, we have the traditional dances, handed down from one dancer to another; and collected, written down, and printed by the society. These are described as "collected in so-and-so". Some of the universal favorites are simply "collected locally". On the other hand, we have what might be called "historical" dances. These have been reconstructed from old documents.

You don't have this distinction in American dances: at present American contras are all of the handed-down type (except for a handful of newly invented ones which haven't had time yet to be handed down, and the solitary "Bonnie Kate of Aberdeen", reconstructed by Ralph Page and Ted Sannella). The English have the same distinction, but they keep the two types quite separate: The Playford dances (the historical ones) in volumes 2, 3, 4 and 6 of their Country Dance Book and the traditional type in other volumes and other books. They dance them in different styles too.

With them the distinction is much sharper, of course. For one thing, they have kept to the seventeenth century for their historical dances, except for a few in their Apted book. The Scottish books, however, contain some Playford Dances (e.g. "Red House", 1695) going through Walsh (about 1720), Johnson (about 1750), Bremner (about 1770), Bowle (about 1790), and so on until we reach "The Ballroom" (1827) which contains many of our modern dances, including "Petronella" and the "Duke of Perth".

[to be continued]

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Your Questions Answered

Q. In Thistle number 37, Bob Campbell asks "what is a tushker". That is my question : what is a tushker?

A. We have had the answer from Bob Campbell, via John Dickson of Lachine. According to Jamieson's dictionary a Tuskar or Tushkar is an instrument made of iron with a wooden handle, for casting peats. It is an Orkney and Shetland word and is derived from the Icelandic.

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