



# 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. 6

April, 1962

## EDITORIAL

### A year of the Thistle

Starting a magazine can be exciting; you can't tell how it will go until it is well under way. Will we get anything interesting to print? Will anybody subscribe? Will we make any blunders? Will it be full of misprints? Will the typography look good?

We can now answer some of these questions for the Thistle. People like the typography. We have plenty of historical material, background material, dance-descriptions, and light verse; no fiction. (Do we want fiction? It depends what it's like!). We have pleasingly many subscribers outside Vancouver, but not nearly as many in Vancouver as we had hoped. Our main need, in fact, is for subscribers. If we had enough, we could afford to produce a six-page issue: we certainly have enough material for it. The moral is clear.

## OUR DANCES, NO. 6

### The White Rose of Scotland. (Strathspey.) by Elma Taylor

Bars

- 1 - 2 First couple set and
- 3 - 4 cast into second place (second couple move up),
- 5 - 8 they cross, giving right hands, and the man casts round third woman and the woman round second man. They finish back to back facing first corners.
- 9 - 12 They dance a half reel of four with the first corners, at the end of which corners have changed places and first couples are back to back facing second corners (first couple do not pass each other in these half reels, but meet and turn away by the right.)
- 13 - 16 Half reel of four with second corners, at the end of which corners have changed places and first couple are back to back facing first corners (who are still in opposite corners.)
- 17 - 20 Half reel of four with first corners, and
- 21 - 24 Half reel of four with second corners, first couple finishing back to back in the centre, woman facing up, man facing down.
- 25 - 28 They dance three hands round to the left, woman with second couple and man with third couple, second and third couples dancing to places while first couple pass by the right for
- 29 - 32 three hands round to the right, woman with third couple and man with second couple. First couple finish in second place.

The "half reels of four" figure is popular in a number of modern dances, including "Inverness Reel" and "Mairi's Wedding". This dance is, as far as we know, the one in which it first occurred.

## LOCAL NEWS

Members of Clan MacNeil from as far away as Nova Scotia and the southeastern U.S.A. gathered at the Oakridge auditorium in Vancouver on the occasion of the recent visit of their chief and his wife. The concert included performances of "Bride of Barra" and "MacNeil of Barra" by pupils of Mrs. MacNab; songs; piping; a musical comedy; and original Gaelic poems by John MacNeil.

The evening classes finished their winter season with their usual grand dance and exhibitions at the King Edward High School. "Honour the piper", "Hamilton rant" and "The port of Vancouver" were exhibited; and Mr. Grant Vincent, after a display of ballroom dancing, taught everyone a samba. An unusual feature of the evening's dancing was the simultaneous performance of two different dances: while some sets danced the Eightsome reel, others danced the Buchan eightsome. This raised the problem of what the Buchan dancers should do while waiting for the others to finish; no-one seemed to have a very satisfactory solution.

## COUNTRY-DANCE STEPS, UP TO 1752

By J. P. Cunningham

(Reprinted, by permission, from *The Reel*.)

Although the earliest printed references to country dances appeared in the 1560's we find no precise details until the first edition of Playford's 'Dancing master', published in 1651. Neither this nor subsequent editions makes any reference to the steps to be used, despite the fact that the sub-title was "Plaine and easie Rules for the Dancing of Country Dances". It does admittedly use the term "slip" or "slippe", for instance in "First Cu: slippe down between the 2 they slipping up — then they slippe down" in 'Bobbing Joe', but this may be a reference to the movement or figure rather than to the step. The same disregard of direction as to steps was shown in subsequent collections of country dances, save that instructions seem to be given where a special step is to be used; the following are examples:—

### The Dancing Master. The Third Volume (? 1726)

"Trumpet Minuet                      Note: This Dance must be done with the Minuet Step"  
Beautiful Clarinda                "The first man Minuet to the 2nd Woman, and turn her with his Right hand"

### The Dancing Master. Vol. the second — 4th Edition (1728)

"New Minuet                      Note: This Dance must be done with the Minuet Step"  
"Lady Marys Courant              This Dance should be done with Courant Step if the Company can do it"  
Kelways Maggot                    "The first Man and 2d Wo. makes the first New Rigadoon Steps"  
Mademoiselle Dupingle            "The two first Cu. Hands all four round the Minuet Step, and turn single"

This absence of directions as to steps except in special cases could be the result of one of two causes. Either, everybody at the time knew which step or steps to use without being told. Or, the choice of step was left to the individual dancer.

Fortunately, towards the end of the 17th century R. A. Feuillet, a Paris dancing-master, developed a system of symbols and diagrams making it possible to record in print the figures, steps, hand-movements, etc., used in dancing. In 1706 he published his "Recueil de Contredances mises en Choregraphie", in which he explained that "the English are the first inventors" of country dances, and added diagrams showing how 32 country dances should be danced. He also made some interesting remarks about steps — for convenience I will take these from the English translation published by John Essex in London in 1710:—

### "A Treatis of Chorography or Ye Art of Dancing Country Dances" by John Essex 1710.

On page 7:— "Of ye Feet, steps, Hands and Armes. Tho' my designe is not to mark any steps in Country Dances, being willing to leave the Dancers ye liberty of composing the same as they please, there are notwithstanding some motions of ye Feet, Hands and Armes which I can't omitt incerting here".

On page 15:— "Advice concerning ye steps that best sute with Country Dances.

The most ordinary steps in Country Dances (those excepted that are upon Minuet Aires) are steps of Gavot, drive sideways Bouree step and some small Jumps forward of either Foot in a hopping manner, or little hopps. In all round Figures as the preceeding and following are, one may make little hopps or Bouree steps but little hopps are more in fashion". (An illustration of a turn by the right hand is then interposed).

"As it is ordinary that every figure of a Dance ends at every cadence or end of the Aire, it will be proper to make a small Jump upon both Feet".

*Scotland's Leading Musicsellers*

**RAE, MACINTOSH & CO. LTD.**

SCOTTISH COUNTRY DANCE MUSIC AND RECORDS  
MAILED TO ALL PARTS OF THE WORLD

39 George Street, Edinburgh

**"NORWELL'S FLING SANDAL"**, the traditional hand sewn Scottish Country Dance Shoe, worn wherever there is a Scot. Stocked in black only. Any basic colour can be made up at extra charge. Girls' 11-2 35 Shilling (\$5.19), Boys' 3-5 - 42/6 Shilling (\$6.31), Ladies 6-8 - 45 Shilling (\$6.68), Mens' 6-11 - 47/6 Shilling (\$7.04). Postage extra.

**NORWELL'S OF PERTH, P.O. Box 12, Perth, Scotland.**

On page 16:- "In all figures that goe forwards and backward, or backwards and forwards, you must always make gavotte steps". "In all figures that goe sideways you must always drive sideways". "When it will be requisite to make other steps than them wee have mention'd, as Rigadoon steps, balances & c, they shall be mark'd upon ye figures."

In his translation Essex gave diagrams illustrating 10 country dances, some exactly the same as in Feuillet (e.g. "The Female Saylor" - Essex, "La Matelote" - Feuillet) but most different.

A study of the 32 country dances in Feuillet and the 10 in Essex shows that both generally leave the dancers to choose the steps - Feuillet makes no reference to steps in 23 out of his 32 dances, and in the other 9 he indicates steps only in particular figures and not for the whole of the dance, while the corresponding figures for Essex are 3 dances with no reference to steps, and 7 dances where steps are indicated for particular figures. This omission of instruction as to steps cannot be mere oversight, because the diagrams are most precise as to such details as taking and releasing hands etc. Where Feuillet and Essex do indicate the steps to be used, the steps are:- Rigadoon steps; balance on right foot, then on left foot; and jump on both feet.

This freedom of choice is confirmed in a poem published in 1729:-

**"The Art of Dancing. A Poem in Three Canto's" by Soame Jenyns, 1729.**

Of country dancing he says:-

"But see! the spritely Dance is now begun"

"The Dancer here no more requires a Guide.

To no strict Steps his nimble Feet are ty'd:

The Muse's Precepts here wou'd useless be,

Where all is fancy'd, unconfin'd, and free".

It will not escape notice that Jenyns calls country dancing 'the spritely Dance'. Is this mere poetic licence, or does it imply lively, vivacious, steps?

In 1752 we have a further contribution:-

**"A Concise & Easy Method of Learning the Figuring Part of Country Dances"**  
**Nicholas Dukes 1752.**

"..... according to the present method of dancing they keep continually footing, as in casting off, crossing over, or any other part of figuring; you may foot it forwards or backwards or Sideways as the Case requires"

To sum up - tentatively. It would seem that in the 17th and early 18th centuries the dancers had liberty of choice as to the steps they would use, except in country dances "upon Minuet airs" and in those figures where a special step was indicated. The range of steps from which their choice would be made was probably:- gavot steps, drive sideways, bouree steps, rigadoon steps, balance, jump on both feet together, and "little hoppers". I doubt if anybody would want to keep slavishly to the original steps (even if we could find out all the details) but there is some intellectual interest in knowing how the dances were originally performed.

## **NORTHERN JUNKET**

The square-dance magazine that is different. \$2.50 for 12 issues, from Ralph Page, 182 Pearl 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.

## BOOKSTALL

Twelve Scottish country dances 50¢  
Schiehallion 10¢  
Inverness reel 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, though the next issue will not appear until October.

## THE OTHER HALF DANCES - FROM THE REEL, 1954

Reprinted by courtesy of the editor.

A visit to Britain recently of Mr. and Mrs. Tom Henderson of Washington, D.C., gave an opportunity of studying some unusual, but effective, teaching methods. They are the mainspring of a large body of dancers in Washington and have in a very few years developed their own training methods, which they find particularly suitable for their large classes with a high rate of turnover. This high turnover implies a continual stream of beginners, though a nucleus remains with them. It is used to encourage and help the beginners; it is then rewarded by being given a dance or two up to its own standard.

Training methods of a military type seem to find great effect with beginners; large charts are prepared with such figures as rights and lefts drawn on them, and these are displayed to illustrate the teacher's remarks. Probably most useful, and enterprising of all, is the production of a training Manual, which at the modest price of 25 cents gives beginners a good grounding in basic principles. Its direct style ("during a dance, you are either actually dancing yourself or waiting your turn to dance") is characteristic, but it is not intended to supersede more comprehensive books on the subject, such as Anderson and Duthie or Milligan. Its value is that it speaks to beginners.

Music is a great difficulty in the U.S.A., because no local bands can play Scottish music properly. All teaching is done to records. A novel idea is to teach a dance in quick time first as a strathspey, to a strathspey record. Having learnt the figures, the dancers can increase their speed and dance it in correct tempo. This is in line with the Hendersons' method of teaching beginners strathspeys, before reels and jigs. This is the opposite of most teachers' methods, but it works, and they think it works better.

A useful concept, defined in the little manual, is that of the Active Couple. This is what is usually called the First Couple, but avoids confusion, since the first couple in a set is not necessarily the one at the top of the set; in fact, there may be more than one first couple in a set. Other couples are defined as Helping Couples, numbered 2nd, 3rd, etc., according to their starting position in relation to the Active Couple.

This refreshing approach helps solve some of the difficulties which appear in the R.S.C.D.S. books. An example is "Eight Men of Moidart," which is described in the books as a 16-bar dance. There is nothing to tell dancers who are learning from the book that there are in fact 32 steps danced two to a bar instead of the usual one to a bar. The Hendersons cannot be alone in finding these books less suitable for such groups as theirs where there is no qualified teacher to hand. All the more reason for hoping that future publications, and reprints of older editions, will strive for as high a standard of clarity as possible.

### HIGHLAND PUMPS

Infants to Adults

\* THREE QUALITIES STOCKED \* SPECIAL COLOURS TO ORDER

ALSO

LADIES COUNTRY DANCE PUMPS

Price List on Request - Trade Enquiries Invited - School Contracts Undertaken

**E. GANDOLFI LTD.**

Theatrical, Ballet & Highland Pump Makers

Dorset House, 150 Marylebone Road - London, N.W. 1, England