



THE BLETTHERS



Ree Grisham, Chair *Pro Tem*

Laurie Walter, Editor

Workshop almost here!!! The 1998 Weekend Workshop of the Chicago Branch, RSCDS, is less than a month away! There is still time (barely) to reserve your place. Run, do not walk, to your phone and contact Mary Helen Polensky at (815) 756-7182 or Noel Chavez at (708) 848-9218 to get on the list. To paraphrase the Fitaks' T-shirts, our workshop is the second most fun you can have not wearing pants!!

Summer dancing: As soon as the workshop is over, get into the spirit of summer dancing! Loch Mich will have dancing on approximately six **Friday** nights at Fox Center in Oak Park; flier with dates forth-coming. Silk and Thistle (Fermilab) continues unabated (not to mention unabashed) on Tuesday nights, though the start time will switch to 7:30 starting the first Tuesday in June. At some yet-to-be-determined point, the venue will also change from the Barn to the Auditorium; call Doug or Susan Jensen (630-232-9089), Mady Newfield (630-584-0825), or Mary Helen (as above) for the latest. ScotReel is taking a well-deserved break and will resume in September (date to be determined).

Also, the Highland Games will be held on June 27 at Gaelic Park in Oak Forest. The Branch will have a tent with participatory dancing from 11:00-12:00, 1:15-1:45, and 3:30-4:30. The Demo Team will perform at 2:30. Call Greg Canfield at (773) 764-2891 to sign up to help at the tent or just show up to join in the dancing. We need to recruit new dancers and how better than by letting them participate in the fun.

Resumption of regular dancing: BUT it isn't too soon to be planning for the Fall. Loch Mich will resume its regular Sunday night schedule on September 13; Sept. 20 will be an informal session; and Sept. 27 will see the most exciting, dynamic, well-attended Open House ever! Additional fall events: Celtic Fest in Grant Park, Sept. 19-20; Silk and Thistle Fall Frolic, October 17; Fall Dance, December 5. Mark your calendars now!

Report of Honorary Secretary: As of May 3, 1998 (for the 1997-98 session), the Chicago Branch of the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society has 42 regular members, 13 long-term members, 8 mailing members, and 2 honorary members. Taking advantage of the class subscriptions offer was 1 Basic Class subscriber for the Fall semester, with 11 Intermediate/Advanced subscribers for the Fall semester and 4 for the Spring semester. The Committee of Management has met 10 times since July, 1997.

Branch activities since the 1997 Annual General Meeting included the following: The annual Weekend Workshop on May 30, 31, and June 1 in DeKalb, IL, with teachers Ellie Briscoe, Marjorie McLaughlin, and Geoffrey Selling. Summer dancing was held at Fox Center in Oak Park from June through August, except on the July 4th and Labor Day weekends. Fall classes resumed at St. Josaphat's on September 7th and an Open House was held on September 14th. The Fall Dance was held on October 25th. The Semi-Annual General Meeting convened on November 9th. The holiday potluck dinner/dance on December 14th concluded the 1997 activities. We welcomed in 1997 at the New Year's Ball weekend, January 3rd and 4th, which included the Sunday Tea Dance in Hinsdale. The Spring semester officially began on February 1st with the Open House on February 8th. The Spring Dance was held on March 14th and our next major event is the June weekend on May 29-31 with teachers Kent Smith, Mary Murray, and Dale Birdsall.

I am concluding my term as Honorary Secretary this year and wish to express my thanks to the members of the COM for their help and support, especially Ree Grisham. I have enjoyed working with them. Now I can retire to being just the "tea lady." [Our thanks also to Mary Lou Woods for her hard work. This also seems as convenient a spot as any to insert thanks to our other outgoing and ongoing COM members: we couldn't do it without you!]

Results of survey: Doug Taber has conscientiously collated and summarized the results of the survey sent to dancers this Spring. Most respondents dance primarily at St. Joe's and many attend quite frequently.

People are about evenly split between those who find the location convenient and inconvenient; some find Sunday nights a difficult time. Generally, the level of satisfaction with the teaching is quite high and most are also pleased with the time distribution (step practice, dancing, etc.). "Social behavior" (usually a perception that some dancers are overzealous in their criticism or reluctant to ask certain dancers to dance) was cited by some as a reason for poor attendance. Overall satisfaction with the length of sessions was expressed by a majority, though a large minority suggested a shorter session. Again, though the majority did not want more evenings devoted to social dancing, a significant minority asked to have them once a month. Most would like to see dances repeated more often but feel that the number of walk-throughs and the mix of difficult and easy dances is "about right." The current policy of offering tea once a month is popular. Some respondents thought the Friday night class might be affecting attendance at Sunday classes.
[Thanks again to Doug; please see him for complete data.]

Edinburgh requests input: As is their wont, RSCDS Headquarters in Edinburgh has sent out a survey to which they want answers instantaneously; never mind that mail takes a bit longer to get back and forth across oceans than within Scotland. This is in aid of their five-year "Strategic Plan." Ree read the multiple-choice questions to the AGM but would welcome input to answer the following essay questions: What are the three major strengths of the RSCDS? What are its three major weaknesses? What are the three major challenges the RSCDS will face in the next five years? If you have insights to contribute, please phone Ree immediately at (773) 528-7824, as they want to know by May 11.

Have you heard? As reported in *The Reel News*, SCD teacher Simon Scott performed a bungee jump at the Teachers' Association of Canada Annual General Meeting in Long Beach, CA, in highland dress [the mind boggles!]. Word of his feat spread, though not necessarily in the manner intended. On the day of the Great Leap, another dancer met a couple in the elevator on the Queen Mary, who asked him where the bungee jump was. He told them its location and added that a member of the group had done it at midday "in his kilt." There was a silence, until finally the woman spoke in a hushed voice: "And he was killed?" Our informant reports that he is careful to enunciate clearly when relating the story of Simon's jump to non-dancers. [from *The Reel News*, newsletter of the London, Ontario, Branch]

19 signs you may be obsessed with Scottish Country Dancing: 1) You spend your entire lunch break compiling this list instead of going down to the local pub with your workmates. 2) When sorting your laundry, you have a separate pile for Tartan! 3) Your morning vitamin supplement now includes a shot of single malt scotch. 4) You argue with your spouse over which TV commercials are in Strathspey time, and which are Jigs or Reels. 5) When you reach the front of any line-up, you immediately grab the front person in the adjacent line-up and go down the middle for four. 6) You have an overwhelming urge to skip-step down the aisles at your local supermarket whenever anything remotely Scottish is played over the Muzak. 7) You force your kindergarten class to learn 'Round reel of eight' instead of 'Ring around the rosie.' 8) You think the Macarena is really boring now, because there's no progression. 9) You think the accordion [or fiddle, says Noel] is "one fine instrument." 10) Seeing a young couple with their arms draped over each other's shoulders at the Mall, you step in behind them and try to change places with an Allemande. 11) Haggis starts to look edible. 12) You meet your spouse coming out of the bathroom: rather than squeezing by each other, you turn 1 1/2 times with the right hand, finishing on opposite sides. 13) You believe January 25th should be a national holiday wherever you live! 14) Another couple, hold-ing hands, tries to pass between you and your spouse in a busy shop and you form an arch for them! 15) You desperately search your family tree: despite your obvious Italian-Kuwaiti background, you KNOW deep down you are really Scottish. 16) Waiting for the bathroom to be free, instead of crossing your legs and/or wriggling, you practice your pas-de-basque. 17) No matter where you are, if you hear accordion music start to play, you bow to the person opposite you, set and cast off two places. 18) Your Christmas list has a pair of cardboard templates of your feet attached, along with the address of a ghillies manufacturer in Edinburgh. 19) When shaking hands with the boss and his wife at the firm's Christmas party, you and your spouse automatically break into rights and lefts. [Tom Miller, Oakville, Ontario, Canada eh?, contributed by Noel Chavez.]

Trip to Nova Scotia, cont'd. We had a very brief stay in St. John. We did learn that this was a royalist city during our Revolutionary War, with many people coming up from the east coast because they did not

want to be separated from Britain. We stopped at the place where the Bay meets the St. John River to see the reversing falls; however, it was the wrong time of day so we saw very little action in the water.

I took a stroll before settling in and found a beach volleyball tournament going on with some very athletic young women. All the time, the fog and mist hung on around the city, which is more usual than not, I was told. An interesting sidelight: there must have been a dog show in town, as many guests seemed to have pedigreed dogs with them. One tiny breed, on the elevator with a bunch of us, was really lost down there on the floor.

Next morning, we departed for a drive through New Brunswick and Fundy National Park. An important stop for us was to view the "Hopewell Rocks," described as "nature's flowerpots." These rocks were formed by accumulated sediments hardening into solid rock, then being split into "pillars" by the earth's tilting. After that, rain streams, waves, and ice sculpted the rocks into "flowerpot" formations. They can be seen towering up from the beach on the Bay of Fundy. The Bay has a difference between high and low tide equal to the height of a four-story building. When the tide is high, the rocks look like tree-topped islands. At low tide, they rise up like pillars from the beach. It is estimated that these rocks will continue forming for another 100,000 years!

A box lunch had been packed for us and we stopped at a lovely picnic-camping area in the park to enjoy it. Fortunately, the water-activated toilet was functioning so we weren't forced to use the "two-holer." There had been a summer-long drought in N.S., so having this facility open was not a sure thing.

We continued through New Brunswick to cross the new Confederation Bridge onto Prince Edward Island. This 12.9 km bridge has just been completed, being opened on July 1, 1997. Prior to that time, a ferry was used. I have a love affair with long bridges and it was a thrill to ride across this one and view the lovely scenery on both shores.

Prince Edward Island is one of the loveliest places I have visited. The cliffs are very red; combined against the green hills and blue water and white beaches, the effect was very pleasant. I had the feeling that this would be a great place to come and kick back for a week. We drove along the National Park, sandwiched between the road and the water. Plow horses along the beach were harvesting seaweed to use in medicines. We stopped at one promontory point to view the wonderful PEI colors.

This island is not only beautiful for its beaches; there are some very prosperous-looking farms and I learned that they also raise beef cattle! Somehow, the idea of producing meat here seemed contra-dictory, considering the plentiful lobster and sea food. However, I had occasion to enjoy some very good beef more than once in Nova Scotia.

On to the capital, Charlottetown, where we were due to spend the next two nights. PEI was made famous by Lucy Maud Montgomery and her book, *Anne of Green Gables* [and sequels!]. There are "Anne" symbols everywhere, even on the cars' license plates. There is a performing arts center and complex which is a wonderful plus for this small island city, thanks to the book. There has been a production of the musical, *Anne of Green Gables*, for thirty years. However, the center is used for other productions as well. So, not only can one come and relax on this beautiful island, there is some very nice cultural entertainment. The Charlottetown waterfront has been developed into interesting shops and restaurants and I enjoyed a pleasant walk there before turning in on the first evening.

Charlottetown is also the place where the Confederation of Canada was formed. I visited the rooms where the provinces sat together and signed the articles making them into a country. The long table and period furniture of the time are still on display.

The next day, we left PEI for Cape Breton Island, a short ferry ride away. We were scheduled for two nights at the Inverary Inn Resort at Baddeck, a pleasant resort town near the tip of the island. One of the pleasures offered by the resort was a short boat ride to observe nesting eagles. Also in Baddeck is the Alexander Graham Bell Museum. Bell settled in Baddeck and left quite a legacy to display at this museum. His home in the hills of the island is still occupied by one of his descendants.

The following day, we spent the whole day driving along the Cabot Trail in the Cape Breton Highlands, which reminded me of the Highlands of Scotland. The views were breathtaking and I took some wonderful scenic photos. Cape Breton is also known for its wonderful folk fiddlers and our guide played a tape of well-known musicians and singers from the area. Many of the tunes were much like the music for Scottish Country Dancing and my feet were jumping.

We were treated to a farewell banquet that evening back at the resort and all of us were made honorary members of the Order of the Good Time, such as Champlain established at his Habitation. We all received a certificate verifying the membership and signed by officials of Nova Scotia.

One of the best was saved for last as we visited the reconstructed Fortress of Louisbourg on our way back to Halifax. This fort has been rebuilt by about 1/4, using original foundations and plans found back in the libraries of Europe. Many young people dressed in costumes of the time stroll the streets of this wonderful site and play the trades of the time. One young lady carried a basket on her back selling bread made in the local bakery. I enjoyed this visit very much and found it much in preference to Willi-amsburg, the latter being much more commercial and crowded.

We were dropped off at the Citadel Inn hotel in Halifax and I spent an additional two days exploring the city. There was an interesting “progressive” film history of the Citadel site, moving one through three theaters to watch the progressive history of the area. The costumed young soldiers acting as hosts to the public were most informative and pleasant. Since the place is on the heights above the city, I had fun watching a parade from above the streets, celebrating Canada Day. Had the fun of hearing the noon cannon from the fort. I also found a wonderful stall selling fudge and traded in the rest of my Canadian coins for a fox.

Early next morning, I left for my flight home. There was an open counter selling fresh salmon which they packed in ice for me to carry home. The fish was for my nephew and his wife, Shirley and Jack. She had requested smoked salmon but has been enjoying the fresh kind very much, which is a good thing, since I had to carry the fish through customs, two planes, and three airports. I could swear I smelled it all the way home but it was well packed and nary a leak.

The trip was a great pleasure and I felt quite a bargain with our favorable rate of exchange, American \$ to Canadian \$. I hope the Nova Scotia Branch of the RSCDS has another workshop and that I will be able to go again; it was a wonderful experience. [Liz Stake]

Trip to London: A bonnie and smashing good time was had at the RSCDS 75th Anniversary Jubilee in Watford, England (just outside London). A host of branches were represented, although I appeared to be the only Yank in attendance. Music was provided by the renowned Craigellachie Band.

Many of the dances were familiar favorites; others were very much of first impression to me. Naturally, dances were not briefed, which in at least a couple of instances made the dancing all the more exciting. Special thanks to all in the Branch who helped me prepare, particularly Doug and Melissa.

Unfortunately, I had to abruptly depart the ball at the stroke of midnight. No, I was not in fear of my coach turning into a mice-drawn pumpkin, but rather of missing the last train back to central London! I took with me, however, some very special memories, and perhaps some day a British princess will appear at my door with the ghillie I left behind. [Bryan Luce]

“A word on midges: The much-loved midge has had something of a bad press lately, notwithstanding the key role it played in the origins of the Highland Fling. The midge is basically a shy creature, rarely encountered, indeed something of a delight to behold on the wing in the still air of a summer’s evening. Midge-bites can of course be most tiresome, but it may be as well to remember that these occur at only one time of year (the holiday season). Furthermore, midges themselves will be found only in parts of Scotland where there is water. Finally, it is only the female midge that bites. Needless irritation can therefore be avoided by the simple expedient of approaching only the male of the species.” [from *Scotland for Beginners: Bannockburn an’ a’ that*, by Rupert Besley]

SEE YOU AT THE WORKSHOP!!!