

RSCDS, Chicago Branch



The Blethers

FEBRUARY 2008

"They Aims to Please": The 2008 Chicago Branch New Year's Ball provided a very pleasurable way to usher in the New Year. Robin Gaston writes, "The highlight of the Ball weekend, January 12 - 13, 2008, was the music of Laura Risk (fiddle) and Nicholas Williams (piano). We were privileged to have them play for the New Year's Ball on Saturday and for the Brunch dance on Sunday. Not only are they superb musicians but their gracious friendliness was a joy as well. Laura provided a music workshop on Saturday afternoon which was much appreciated by all who attended. This resulted in the discovery of a local fiddler, Carol Cook, who plays viola with Lyric Opera's Orchestra and has been playing Scottish fiddle since childhood. She played with Laura and Nicholas at the Brunch dance and created quite a rousing trio. We hope she may be the key to organizing local musicians to play for the Branch classes and events.

There were 62 dancers attending the New Year's Ball, held at the Ukrainian Center, the Ball venue for many years. A new manager at the Ukrainian Center has upgraded the food and building but there was an increase in the hall rental fee and some details did not run as smoothly as in the past. Approximately 30 dancers attended the Brunch dance held at Bethany United Church of Christ near Paulina and Montrose in the city. It is a comfortable venue with a helpful custodian. We appreciate the dancers who traveled from afar to attend the weekend events, as well as the local dancers who attended.

At the previous two New Year's Balls, there were over 80 attendees, so this year marked a significant drop which was not weather-related. Along with higher expenses for the hall and other items, this resulted in the weekend barely breaking even. The raffle and sales of license plate covers and pins from the Branch stock helped keep the numbers out of the red. Even though we bring in excellent musicians, the Ball does not seem to attract the number of attendees, particularly from out of state, that we used to draw. The COM and planners would appreciate any ideas or actions you have for attracting more attendees to this and other Branch activities. Given the drop in attendance and a shrinking pool of local dancers to do the planning which a formal weekend event requires, perhaps the COM should consider alternative options for the New Year's event, such as instead holding an informal afternoon dance with a potluck supper and local musicians or recorded music.

Mady and I appreciate all the helping hands who assisted in various ways. Many thanks to: Clay and Marsha Spurlock for handling the greeting and check-in, Liz Stake for organizing hospitality, Mary Helen Polensky for the programs, Andrea Ewing-Ostergaard for the table decorations, Barbara Cool and Ken Heinemann for being MCs at the Ball and Brunch dance respectively; Noel Chavez for transporting the first aid kit and many other essential items; Barbara Cool and Tom Senior for providing hospitality for the musicians; everyone who brought delicious goodies for the Ball treats table and for the brunch; and to the many folks who provided hospitality, carried, set up, took down and helped whenever needed during the weekend. It's always a pleasure being with the wonderful people who are Scottish country dancers in the Midwest. Their friendliness is matchless."

ClassNotes: The Loch Mich and Silk and Thistle classes continue to offer dancing and socializing each week, so break away for a couple of hours, either Sunday evenings, 6 o'clock, at the Bethany United Church of Christ, Chicago, or Tuesdays, 7:30, at the Fermi Lab barn in west suburban Batavia. There is always a set with a spot for your twinkling toes!

Membership Reminder: As a reminder, membership may still be paid to Dave Neuffer, Branch Treasurer, P. O. Box 174, Warrenville, Illinois, 60555. A regular Branch membership costs \$30; checks should be made out to RSCDS - Chicago Branch. For further information, the membership form is posted on the Branch website: <http://rscds-chicago.org>

Around the World: Well, actually, just north of the Illinois border in Beloit, the Chicago Branch will hold its annual Dance Weekend Workshop, June 6-8, featuring music by the talented Terpsichore, also known as Elke Baker on the fiddle and Liz Donaldson on the piano. Teaching will be presented by the highly enjoyable Rebecca Blackhall-Peters, of Vancouver. Make plans to be entranced by this special event which promises wonderful dancing and lovely music. For more information, please contact Mady Newfield (630-584-0825) or Sue McKinnell (630-961-0101.)

Chicago Branch Momentarily Leads the World: As a way of determining the most popular dances, a dancer in Scotland recently began collecting the programs from dance events worldwide in order to begin a computerized tally of which dances occur most often in those programs. Sue McKinnell was the first person to send in a program to be tallied. Because she got the jump on everyone else, the first tally showed that Chicago Branch dances are the most popular dances in the world!

Gaelic Meets Microsoft: In more technology news, Microsoft launched new software last January which translates the Microsoft Vista operating system into Gaelic. Words such as "computer" which translates into "coimpiutair" and "spam" which is still (what else but) "spam," won't confuse users of the new Gaelic system. But a "cookie" is a "criomag;" an email address is "seoladh puist-d;" and "modhglusaid ned-shioncronach" means "asynchronous transfer mode" (so there!) The new software is being especially welcomed by the Bord na Gaidhlig, the Scottish body set up to promote Scottish Gaelic in everyday language.

Haggis in the News: "Real" haggis has been illegal to import to the U.S. since 1971. Americans wanting a taste of the dish featuring minced sheep lung, heart, liver and oatmeal, have had to make do with alternate versions made in the U.S. But according to a recent USA Today report, "The Scottish government is currently exploring ways to once again allow Americans to enjoy Scots haggis." This report has put heart in American lovers of haggis (sorry.) For now, local fans of Scots haggis have apparently been making do with haggis made with 100% USDA Choice sirloin beef. Recently, a company which produces a popular American canned haggis reportedly sold 2,000 pounds of haggis in the three weeks leading up to Burns Night. The manager of the company was quoted saying, we're, "up to our eyeballs in haggis right now." (ok, sorry for that, too.)

J. B. Milne: Have you ever wondered what the "J. B." stands for in J. B. Milne? According to an article printed at the time of his death, "John Bannerman Milne was one of three sons of the late Mr. Charles Milne, a Dundee coal merchant. When he was nine, John bought his first violin and by the age of 16, he was working in Dura Works from 5:30 am to 6 pm, teaching the violin from 6 pm to 8 pm, then playing in a dance hall until midnight.

Mr. Milne became an apprentice engineer, but his future lay in the entertainment world. His first entertainment job was at the Variety Theatre, later the Palladium, and later the Rex, until it was demolished. He was a 19s a week "musical director and cleaner." His savings were invested in a motor hire business, which he sold for 360 pounds to found his cinema empire.

In 1928 Mr. Milne bought the hall where he once played violin and washed floors. He had the vision to install talkies and never looked back. At the time of his death, he owned 34 cinemas and bingo halls, making him the head of Scotland's largest private cinema chain."

For those who may have speculated that the initials "JB" in JB Milne sounded like a businessman's title, this now appears to have been a good guess!

Marching in Scotland, Dancing in New York: This intriguing phrase is the title of a new book, written by Margaret Dunlop. The novel is set in the years before WW11. The characters are from two families, Scottish and English, who are thrown together in the search for work and a better life. The "Marching" and the "Dancing" in the title are to contrast life experienced in Scotland with the "new" life found in the USA. One aspect of the story that might be of interest to dancers is that the protagonists' "new" lives in the USA include more dancing than they had done in Scotland. Additional information about the author and her book can be found on Margaret's website: www.margaretdunlop.com.

YouTube Film Previews Highlands Visitor Centre: For an interesting armchair traveling experience, the builders of the new Battle of Culloden Visitor Centre in Scotland invite everyone to view a video of their new facility. 30 years in the planning and costing 10 million lbs., the Visitor Centre depicts the Battle of Culloden, which altered life in the Highlands forever after 1746. To view the film, you can either go directly to

www.youtube.com/watch?v=OfbHNh3Xlyg, or enter "Battle of Culloden" in the search feature at the www.youtube.com home page. For information about the Battle of Culloden, go to www.nts.org.uk/Culloden.

Burns Night by Candlelight: Finally, here is a Burns Night story that was sent around recently by a SCD dancer in Zimbabwe:

"Yesterday the Harare Caledonian Society had its Burns night dinner at the Harare Club and just after 5pm I knew there was a chance that this dinner would be different from what we had planned as we had a massive power cut. The dinner was at The Harare Club in the CBD (Central business district) and in general the CBD does not have power cuts UNLESS there is a major fault -guess what - last night there was obviously a major fault as driving to the club there were no traffic lights and the only lights were from those buildings with generators. Harare Club does not have a generator and as such was in darkness to the extent that you could see absolutely nothing in the underground parking and very little light on the stairs leading up to the function on the 2nd floor.

Slowly people arrived and carefully came up the stairs - most brought a small torch to guide their way. The club dug out some candles and cut them in half to put on the tables (candles now cost \$11 million a packet). A member of the club and our contact for having the function there, went into the kitchen to find out how the food was doing as they did not have gas cookers. It turned out :-

The soup was still cold

The haggis was warm and ready to eat

The mince for the cottage pie was hot and so was the gem squash and the potatoes but the other vegetables were cold

The fruit salad was made and the ice-cream was still in the freezer

Coffee was out of the question.

We had a chat and it was agreed we would start the evening as there was some food to eat, I had batteries for the music machine and someone had batteries for the key board so we could have some sort of meal and manage some entertainment.

A couple of us went round the table collecting the money - \$25 million ahead. Have you any idea what it is like to be paid \$50 million in \$10000 bearer cheques? In the dark? A man gave me 2 "bricks" to pay for their dinner. I had to go and get a shopping bag to put the money in. Some nice lady from the United Nations was paying me in \$750000 bearer cheques and we had great trouble working out how many she had to give me, then we had to try and count them by my small torch.

Fortunately the power came on round 8.30 to much applaud!!! By now we were on the pudding but the club heated the soup and it was served at the END of the meal before the coffee!!!!

When I was collecting the money (in the dark) not one person muttered that they were not going to get the full meal and requested a discount. Everyone came (all 65 people) and just "got on" with having an evening out.

The dinner went well and proved that the important part of a good evening is not the food or the venue but the people attending!"

Upcoming Dates of Note: Saturday, March 8, Twin Cities Ball
Saturday, April 19, Madison Ball
Sunday, May 4, AGM
Saturday, May 17, Milwaukee Spring Dance
Friday -Sunday, June 6-8, Weekend Workshop in Beloit

2007-2008 Committee of Management: Noel Chavez, Honorary Secretary; David Neuffer, Honorary Treasurer; Corrine McArdle, Doug Jensen, and Gwen Leyffer, Members at Large.

Website: <http://rscds-chicago.org>

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