



## Royal Scottish Country Dance Society -Chicago Branch The Blethers May, 2008

Edited by: Carlyn Bromann

Committee of Management: Noel Chavez, Secretary; David Neuffer, Treasurer; Corinne McArdle, Doug Jensen, and Gwen Leyffer

**A Word on Classes:** Loch Mich will hold its last class of the spring on Sunday, June 1. For questions about Loch Mich, please contact Noel Chavez, [nchavez@uic.edu](mailto:nchavez@uic.edu). Silk and Thistle will continue to meet on Tuesday nights, 7:30, throughout the summer, with classes moving to the high-rise at Fermi mid-June. For questions about Silk and Thistle, please contact Doug Jensen or Mady Newfield, at [folkdance@fnal.gov](mailto:folkdance@fnal.gov).

**Weekend Workshop 2008:** If you haven't already made your plans to attend this year's Weekend Workshop, you still have time. A wonderful treat is in store for us, June 6-8, in the form of music by Elke Baker and Liz Donaldson and teaching by Rebecca Blackhall-Peters. Add to this the familiar location of Beloit College and the ease of registration (forms are available at <http://rscds-chicago.org>), and the package is complete! For additional information about the weekend, contact Mady Newfield or Sue McKinnell at [chicagoscd@gmail.com](mailto:chicagoscd@gmail.com).

**2008 Highland Games:** The Branch is again hosting a tent at this year's Highland Games, June 20-21, at the Oakbrook Polo Grounds. This year we will be sharing the tent with the Evanston Scottish Country Dancers. Volunteers for helping at the tent are welcome. Contact Greg Canfield ([gcanfield@worldnet.att.net](mailto:gcanfield@worldnet.att.net)) for more information.

**News From the AGM:** At the recent AGM, the membership elected the following individuals to serve on next year's Committee of Management: Dave Neuffer -Honorary Chairman, Mady Newfield -Honorary Secretary, Marsha Spurlock -Honorary Treasurer, and Gwen Leyffer, Noel Chavez and Corinne McArdle -Members At Large. The outgoing and incoming C.O.M.'s will be meeting together over the summer -(correction: they are meeting in May.) Thank you to everyone serving on these committees.

**Reel of the 51<sup>st</sup>,** or how a dance first performed in a German prison camp became a Scottish Country Dancing favorite:

This information, kindly submitted by Ingrid Kendall, comes from the *Scots Magazine*, 2007. As the story goes, while serving with the 7<sup>th</sup> Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders in World War II, Lt. "Jimmy" Atkinson was captured by Rommel's forces. "We never knew what we'd let ourselves in for," Jimmy said. "My helmet had a couple of dents and my watch had been shot off." On the long march after capture, Atkinson's mind focused on dancing as a diversion, and he came up with the concept for a new reel, but then ran into a couple of problems. First, there wasn't any music; the Germans had captured and destroyed all of the bagpipes that they had found. Secondly, Jimmy wasn't an accomplished dancer or dance devisor. But fortunately for him, soon after the Highlanders reached the prison camp where they were to spend the next five years, they organized the Laufen Reel Club. Meeting three times a week on the top floor of the prison hospital block, the dancers whistled the tunes and made suggestions about the dance, which gave the reel the form that we know today. Eventually the dance was written down to be sent to Scotland, but the censors were wary of letters containing phrases such as "cast three places" and "lead up to the top corners," so a demonstration was required to convince the Germans that it wasn't a secret code! Finally, however, the dance was allowed through, and the Red Cross sent it out as a fundraiser, only to be swamped by orders. The 51<sup>st</sup> Highland Division was a source of great pride to the Scots. They had felt its loss keenly, and everyone wanted to know the reel that was devised behind prison doors. By the end of the war, the dance's popularity was well-established. The then Queen, later the Queen Mother, requested that the RSCDS put the dance in a Society book, and the rest is SCD history. In a 2008 survey of most dances done on SC programs, the Reel of the 51<sup>st</sup> topped the list.

And, on the topic of shoes, according to Martin Martin's "Western Isles," 1703, "The shoes anciently wore [*sic*], were a piece of the hide of a deer, cow or horse, with the hair on, being tied behind and before with a point (lace) of leather. The generality now wear shoes, having one thin sole only, and shaped after the right and left foot; so that what is for one foot will not serve the other." So, historically ghillies had a single-layer sole, or about the same amount of padding as in some newsletters...

