



THE BLETTHERS



Gary Hay, Chair

Laurie Walter, Editor

Great Workshop!! Once again, all possible superlatives apply to the June, 1997, RSCDS-Chicago Branch Weekend Workshop. Don't forget to plan for 1998: May 29-31 at Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, Illinois. Mary Helen Polensky is next year's chair and I'm sure she'd appreciate early volunteers. For 1997, our heartfelt thanks to Noel Chavez and her hardworking committee.

Fall dancing: The regular dance year is not far away! Loch Michigan begins its regular schedule on September 7, 6:00-8:30 PM, at St. Josaphat Parish Hall, corner of Southport and Belden Aves. in Chicago. Open House September 14: bring a friend!

ScotReel will meet on the following Thursdays, 7:00-9:00: September 18 and 25; October 2, 9, 16, 23, and 30; November 6, 13, and 20; end-of-year dance on Saturday, November 22, at 7:30. The 10-week Fall session is \$20 for Homewood-Flossmoor Park District residents and \$30 for non-residents, payable to the Park District. ScotReel meets at the Irwin Center, corner of Highland Ave. and Ridge Rd. in Homewood. For information call Ingrid Kendall at (708) 957-4494; to register call (708) 957-PARK.

Silk and Thistle dancers will continue to party away on Tuesday nights, without fail. Call Doug or Susan Jensen at (630) 232-9089, Mady Newfield at (630) 584-0825, or Mary Helen Polensky at (815) 756-7182 for information. Also see the following entry....

"Frolic on the Fox 2": An informal Scottish Ball, presented by the Silk and Thistle Scottish Dancers of the Chicago Branch of the RSCDS, Saturday, September 20, 1997. The dance will start at 7:30 PM at the Baker Center in St. Charles IL ("a lovely hall"), one block south of Rte. 64 on the corner of Walnut and Rte. 31. Only \$7 at the door. Music by Mike Briggs, Susan Conant, and Dave Mullen. Refreshments. Call for more information: Doug or Susan Jensen (630) 232-9089, djensen@fnal.gov (Susan also for hospitality); Mary Helen Polensky (815) 756-7182; Mady Newfield (630) 584-0825, madynewfld@aol.com For dance descriptions, contact Doug Jensen.

New Year's Ball: Mark your calendar! RSCDS-Chicago Branch New Year's Ball, Saturday, January 4, 1998. If you'd like to receive more information later in the year please send your request with a stamped, self-addressed envelope to Ingrid Kendall, 17633 Dundee Ave., Homewood IL 60430; telephone (708) 957-4494, 5:00-9:00 PM.

Chicago Fall Dance: Saturday, October 25, 7:00 PM, at St. Josaphat. See you there!

Milwaukee Fall Dance: The Milwaukee Scottish Country Dancers have put together the program for their October 18, 1997, dance. The dance will be held in the afternoon. A flyer containing the dance descriptions and other pertinent information will be sent to the secretaries of the local groups within a month.

Kingston, Ontario, 31st Annual Weekend Workshop & Ball: November 7-9 at Queen's University, Ontario. Instructors: Sheila Keller, Catherine Shaw, and David Tague; music by Bobby Brown and his band. Registrar: Ruth Taylor, 23 Massey Place, Brockville, On K6V 3L1, Canada; (613) 342-2421.

Message from Gary D. Hay, incoming Chair: My greetings to you all, to those who know themselves as dancers and to those who haven't yet learned that they are. I thank the membership of the Chicago Branch for electing me Chair, affording me the opportunity to be of service to a community which has been the source of many wonderful gifts in my life.

My experience of Scottish Country Dancing began nearly five years ago at one of our September Open Houses. At the time, I was convinced that there were people who could dance and people who could not, and that I could not. Through the gentle encouragement and support of people who have since become

dear friends, I had a moment of eureka!--one can learn to dance, a little at a time. Now, this seems obvious to me, and it may seem obvious to you, but then, it came as a bolt of lightning to my brain. I could consider my experience unique, but one of the pleasures I've had again and again through my participation in Scottish Country Dancing is to see newcomers "get it" and open themselves to the joy we can all experience on a regular basis.

There are a number of duties involved in being Chair, but the one I would like to talk about now is communication. I want to let you know that I am available to hear your gripes, your concerns, your suggestions, about situations that you consider to be problems, and about what you perceive as our successes. I am also available to answer questions. I may not always know the answer, but I will know who I can call to get an answer.

Another aspect of communication which concerns us all is getting the word out. There are many people who may experience similar joy in learning to dance, and who just don't know about the opportunities available. There are those who would love to learn, yet fear of "making mistakes" keeps them from taking the first step. I see our job as letting people know and offering support and encouragement to help folks move through any shame or embarrassment they may feel about difficult yet necessary parts of learning.

It is important for me to let you know that there are many tasks involved in keeping our Branch running smoothly, and that we have a strong need of volunteers to help with those tasks. Often, a small group of people ends up being burdened with too much work. I'm asking you for your help. Please feel free to approach me or any other member of our Committee of Management. They are Mary Lou Woods, Honorary Secretary; Sue McKinnell, Honorary Treasurer; Doug Taber, Mike Fitak, and Dawn Arnold, Members-at-Large.

I caution you all that, as your Chair, I am learning to do the job as I do it. I will make mistakes, and I am counting on you to let me know when you see it happen. I do have the benefit of having served on our Committee of Management under the able stewardship of Bryan Luce, and I thank him for all the lessons I've learned from him during the past year. I also thank the current members of the Committee of Management, upon whose help I'll be relying. Thanks, too, to our teachers, for all their hard work and careful planning. And thank you for helping to make it possible for all of us to learn and to have fun and to get to know people--to me, that's why we're here.

Blessings to you all, and keep dancing!

Talkers solicited: Would you like to have a go at doing talk-throughs? It's a challenge the more experienced dancers might enjoy. If nothing else, it gives a perspective of how better to LISTEN to talk-throughs! The teachers will be glad to provide guidance and help. Some of you may be thinking of becoming teachers in the future. Ask Gary for the guidelines for becoming familiar with talking dances through or beginning the road to teacher training.

Then if you are interested in doing talk-throughs just for experience or want to assist with class with the thought of taking formal teacher training in the future, give Gary a call so you can be considered for inclusion in class planning.

[thanks to Ingrid Kendall and others]

Some points of Scottish Country Dance etiquette (or some things your mother may have forgotten to mention): [There will be a quiz afterwards on which of these are more honored in the breach.]

Choosing partners: -Dance with as many different partners as possible. -Ask a partner to dance after the dance is announced, not before. -It is acceptable for less experienced to ask an "expert" to dance and for a lady to ask a man. -At social dances and balls, don't book dances ahead, with occasional exceptions for a very favorite dance or a very favorite partner. Booking ahead makes it difficult for everyone to find partners and enjoy the dance. -At Chicago social dances and balls, be a good host: dance with out-of-town guests, strangers and newcomers and help them feel welcome.

Forming sets: -Form sets after the dance is announced, not before. -Long-wise sets are formed from the top (nearest the music). Each couple joins at the bottom of the set. The top couple of the line counts the sets. When reaching the bottom, they indicate to the person directing the dance how many couples are needed and when the sets are complete. If one person of a couple is temporarily alone in a long-wise set (partner fixing a shoe, getting a drink [during our frequent open bars?], briefing the dance, etc.), the person waiting in the set stands on the men's side of the dance until the sets are counted. Join a square, round-the-room, or triangular set in any position. -If you are not comfortable with your place in the set, ask another

couple in the same set if they are willing to exchange places. -Try not to leave a set after the lines are counted or during a dance.

Dance reminders: -"Cheat sheets" are brief notes of the essentials of how to do a dance. Refer to these notes before the talk-through and not on the dance floor or during the dance. [It is far, far better to make a mistake.] -A talk-through is a brief, spoken instruction before the dance begins. Instructions are usually given in 8-bar phrases. Listen and try to imagine the pattern of each phrase [waving the hands to learn the patterns kinesthetically is acceptable, if not overdone]. Do not talk [!]. Clarifying questions should be directed to the person briefing the dance, not to your fellow dancers. That allows others to benefit from the question.

During the dance: -Begin with a smile to your partner during the bow and curtsy. -Keep lines of the sets straight to help "anchor" the set. Be alert and anticipate what comes next. -Be sociable: give eye contact to other dancers [and keep smiling, too!]. Help others with gestures and quiet instructions. Try not to shout to others in the set. -Mistakes are okay: everyone makes them. Just try to keep dancing and sort yourselves out to be ready for the next phrase or repeat of the dance. -At the end of the dance, thank your partner and others in the set [and musicians, if relevant]. Escort your partner off the dance floor. [My apologies to whoever gave me this list of useful hints and whose identity I have forgotten.]

Scot whips off his kilt to save a man's life: A Scotsman saved the life of a stranded hillwalker on a remote mountainside by taking off his kilt and wrapping it round the shivering man. Bare-bottomed Andy Young, 43, braved the elements as he stripped down and used his kilt and thick cotton shirt to keep the hypothermic man warm. Mr. Young cuddled close to Tom Mitchell, 41, and sang him traditional Scottish songs while they waited two hours on the chilly Sron Ghorm, near the Aultguish Inn, Wester Ross, for a helicopter. Mr. Mitchell, of Collynie, Methlick, near Aberdeen, went for a lone hill walk on Monday but did not return to the inn. Friends were particularly concerned because he has epilepsy.

Mr. Young said, "It was all I could think of because he was shivering so much. I cuddled in close beside him and I think our body heat kept us alive. I sang songs to him to keep his spirits up. I sang 'MacPherson's Rant,' 'The Skye Boat Song,' and 'Pittenweem Joe' over and over again. When the helicopter arrived, I took my kilt and shirt back and looked on as he was winched into the helicopter. I did not want to have to walk into the inn naked." [from Nancy McClements, *via* Noel Chavez; also Ree Grisham]

(Offered without comment): A Scottish dancer [probably Mike] walks into a bar and orders a beer. The bartender gives him a beer and a bowl of peanuts. The guy starts drinking his beer and munches on a few peanuts when suddenly he hears a soft voice, "Hey, that's a nice kilt." The dancer looks around and sees no one except the bartender at the other end of the bar.

The guy takes another sip of his beer and munches a few more peanuts when again he hears the soft voice, "Man, that glengarry looks good on you." The dancer looks around, dazed and confused, and only sees the bartender down at the other end of the bar. He has another sip of his beer, a few more peanuts, and the same thing happens again, the soft voice, "I hear you have a great pas-de-basque."

The dancer calls down to the bartender: "Do you hear voices?" "Voices, sir?" the bartender asks, thinking he's got a looney sitting at the bar. "Yeah, watch this," says the dancer. He sips his beer and munches a handful of peanuts. Sure enough, there's the soft voice, "Man, people must enjoy dancing with you." "Oh, that," says the bartender. "It's the peanuts." "The peanuts?" asks the dancer. "Yes," says the bartender, "they're complimentary." [with thanks to both Ree Grisham and Ken Schoon]

News of friends: Those of you who've been around the Branch for a while are acquainted with Myrtle Herman (who is very good-natured about being told she's the world's most vertically-challenged dancer). Myrtle has been having some health problems recently and is not currently able to live at home. Her spir-its are good and she enjoyed the gigantic card we signed for her at the June Workshop but she would probably be further cheered by hearing from some of her dancing friends. Her number is (708) 335-2243. Her daughter asks me to point out that Myrtle may not instantly remember you but will generally catch on if you keep reminding her of things you've done together. If you're going to be down in the south 'burbs, give her a call beforehand and try to arrange a visit. She'd appreciate the attention. [Thanks to Ingrid for the good idea.]

CALENDAR:

Loch Mich--

Sept. 7 First class
14 Open House
*****20
21, 28 Class

Oct. 5, 12, 19 Class
*****25
26 No class

Nov. 2, 9, 16, 23 Class
*****9
*****22
30 Possible class (future vote)

Dec. 7, 14 Class
????????????????????21

1998!!! HAPPY NEW YEAR!!!!

Jan.
*****4
11, 18, 25 Class

Feb. 1, 15, 22 Class
8 Open House

Mar. 1, 8, 22, 29 Class
*****14
15 No class

Apr. 5, 12?, 19, 26 Class

May
*****3
3, 10, 17 Class

ScotReel--

18 First class
25 Class

2, 9, 16, 23, 30 Class
Fall Dance*****

6, 13, 20 Class
4, 11, 18, 25 Class
Semi-Annual General Meeting*****
ScotReel End-of-Year Dance*****

2, 9, 16, 23, 30 Class
Holiday Party??

New Year's Ball*****
6, 13, 20, 27 Class

(ScotReel's Spring schedule forthcoming at a later date)
3, 10, 17, 24 Class

3, 10, 17, 24 Class
Spring Dance*****

7, 14, 21, 28 Class

Annual General Meeting*****
5, 12, 19, 26 Class

Silk & Thistle--

2, 9, 16, 23, 30 Class

"Frolic on the Fox 2"*****

7, 14, 21, 28 Class

A brief history of Scotland from earliest times: In the beginning Scotland's only inhabitants were a small group of people living underground on Orkney. This was the Stone Age and life was generally uncomfortable until the arrival of the Beaker Folk.

The Dark Ages continued for many centuries with few chinks of light at the end of the tunnel. However, there was plenty of new land to be had as the ice-sheets retreated, property was cheap and Scotland succumbed to hordes of monosyllabic invaders, like Celts and Picts and Gaels. Little is known about these early folk, who built large Brooches and the Ring of Brodgar.

One for the Woad--

When the Romans came along, they were defeated by the Scottish landscape in their attempts to build straight roads, so they put a wall across the A1 and M6, which shut off Scotland for several centuries. Around this time, pious Antoninus speaks of Picts who painted themselves blue, but they may just have been feeling the cold.

Skipping on ahead past Macbeth, Macduff and all the Witches, we come to a better-known chapter in Scottish affairs, featuring Wallace 'Wha' Hae', the Scots Wham, Bruce and the Spider.

On to the glorious reign of Mary, Queen of Scots, whose husband Darnley came to blows with Rizzio, the Italian secretary. They murdered each other over supper and Mary married Boswell instead. This set her off on a life of tragic wandering, in which she spent one dismal night in every castle in Britain, until she got to Fotheringay, where she nobly submitted to the executioner's axe, with Cally engraved on her heart.

At this point Scottish History enters a distinctly gloomy patch, unrelieved till the appearance of Rob Roy. Against a dark background of clan-feuding and cattle-theft, Bonnie Prince Charlie landed on Skye to rally the clans round the monument at Glenfinnan. The rest is history.

Athens of the North: On a happier note, Scotland had a brief burst of glory in the 18th century, when the sun came out in Edinburgh and much was achieved in architecture, philosophy and copying bits of the Parthenon. These developments came to a tragic halt with the Tay Bridge Disaster in 1879.

Efforts were made to cheer up the people, but life in Scotland continued to be grim, particularly in the cities where mounting unemployment gave rise to cholera, clapshot and frequent nasty injuries in the gorbals. However, all this was changed in recent times by the creation of the Glasgow Garden Festival and the discovery of oil in the North Sea. (from Scotland for Beginners: Bannockburn an' a' that, by Rupert Besley)