

Scottish Country Dancing in Vancouver

A History

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Cover illustrations

Upper left: Dancing at the Highland Games, 2003

Upper right: Lady Aberdeen Tea Dance, 2015

Photo courtesy of Kerry McDevitt

Middle left: Gleneagles Ball, 2014

Photo courtesy of Kerry McDevitt

Middle right: Vancouver Branch Golden Jubilee Ball, 2015

Photo courtesy of Kerry McDevitt

Lower left: Dancing in Stanley Park, 2014

Photo courtesy of Kerry McDevitt

Lower right: Dancing in Queen Elizabeth Park, 2009

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Preface

Scottish country dancing in Vancouver had a very early start, a mere seven years after the formation of the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society itself. It was in fact the first organized SCD in Canada. We owe our knowledge of the earliest years to a minute book with disintegrating black binding and yellowing sheets, some closely typewritten and some handwritten. This book records the foundation and early history of the “Vancouver Branch” of the “Scottish Country Dance Society of BC,” precursor of the present Vancouver Branch of the RSCDS. It was preserved thanks to Jean Brakenridge, sister of Pearl Brakenridge who had served as the Secretary of the early “Vancouver Branch” during the 1950s. In 1981, Jean found the minute book among her sister’s effects and gave it to the Vancouver Branch Archives.

The minute book, together with other early records, was transferred to the Vancouver City Archives in 2011 to ensure its preservation. The present account is an attempt to make the story of Scottish country dancing in Vancouver more widely available. The story begins in the 1930s when Scots were a dominant group in Vancouver, continues through the middle years of the twentieth century when Scottish immigrants continued to come in large numbers, and ends (for now) in the early twenty-first century, when Canadians from many origins learned to love this high-spirited form of dancing for its own sake.

Thanks go to a number of my fellow dancers and others:

The Vancouver City Archives staff gave me access to archival materials.

Kerry and Mary Ann McDevitt (photographer and archivist for the Branch respectively) patiently searched out high-resolution versions of many photos.

A number of teachers and dancers kindly wrote accounts of their own groups: Gerda Barwieck, Derek Bisset, Cathrine Conings, Marion Dutcher, Dorothy Hargreaves, Wendy Hutcheon, Ruth and Alex Jappy, Laurie Lang, Nan McKay, Margaret Moore, Margaret Nichols, Elizabeth Peerless, Ann Thrasher Rogers, and Simon Scott.

Kristin Shoolbraid of Salt Spring Island sent additional Mrs. Bingham materials.

Members of long standing shared their memories through interviews: Fran and Sandy Caruth, Brian Corbould, Dorothy Hargreaves, Ruth and Alex Jappy, Liz Johnston, Duncan MacKenzie, Mary Murray, Simon Scott, Kay Sutherland, and Ed and Jean Wagstaff.

Fran Hillier collaborated with me in the interview process.

Dougie Gibson of *Its All Good* in Scotland kindly designed the cover page.

In earlier years, I was given access to original and photocopied manuscript material on the general history of Scottish country dancing by the staff at the Atholl Collection of the A.K. Bell Library, Perth; the Bodleian Library; Drummond Castle; the National Library of Scotland; and the RSCDS Archive.

I have attempted to set the early part of the story against the broader background of Vancouver in the 1930s.

A short general history of Scottish country dancing is given in the Introduction to suggest the origins of some traditions as they developed in Vancouver.

Photographs which are not attributed are either my own or anonymous photos in the Branch archives.