

Mary Wattum



Mary Wattum was a pioneer of dancing in western Canada who danced for more than sixty years and became a benefactor and patron of the Vancouver Branch.

Mary was born Mary Elizabeth Bowden in Revelstoke, BC, in 1913. Her early childhood years were spent in PEI, and in 1922 the family came back to Vancouver where Mary attended school. She was a brilliant student, qualifying for university at the age of 15. After earning her MA, she won a scholarship which enabled her to attend the universities of London, Edinburgh, and Oxford. On her return to Vancouver, she completed her doctorate in education. She taught high school for ten years and then served for thirty years as a psychologist for the Vancouver School Board.

As a young girl, Mary joined the first Scottish country dancing class in Vancouver, taught by Mrs. Thomas Bingham and consisting largely of members of St. Andrews-Wesley Church. Mary herself played a significant role in the early development of Scottish country dancing here. When Mrs. Bingham needed a new location for her Vancouver class, Mary arranged through the School Board for Mrs. Bingham to teach under the Vancouver Night Schools. The night school classes continued until the formation of the Vancouver Branch in 1964.

Long afterwards, Mary worked to keep the memory of Mrs. Bingham alive. In the late 1990s, for example, she dedicated a new organ at St. Andrews-Wesley Church to Mrs. Bingham's memory.

For many years, Mary faithfully attended classes and drove to dances everywhere. Her many dancing activities are celebrated in "Mary Wattum's Reel," published in the Vancouver Ruby Anniversary Collection. Right up to the end, she came to events and enjoyed talking with her many friends. Her generous donations made many of our most memorable events possible. She gave air fares and fees to bring the John Ellis band to our Millennium Ball, the David Cunningham band to the Pacific Spirit Ball, and the Marian Anderson band to our first Thistle Ball. She made another donation which will continue in perpetuity when she created a fund to bring live music at our annual Betwixt and Between Dance. Mary died on January 2nd, 2008.



Mary Wattum at the Betwixt and Between party, December 2000

Rosemary Coupe
Archivist, RSCDS Vancouver Branch