



THE BLETTHERS



Gary Hay, Chair

Laurie Walter, Editor

Fall Welcome Dance and Open House: A special Fall Welcome Dance and Open House for new, former, and continuing dancers will be held on Saturday, October 25, at 7:00 PM at the St. Josaphat Parish House, corner of Southport and Belden Aves., in Chicago. All are welcome and there will be goodies to follow! Bring friends!!

Frolic on the Fox 2: The Silk and Thistle group decided not to run up against the world of Celtic music when they learned that not only a Tannahill Weavers concert but also Chicago's Celtic Fest were in conflict with their chosen Frolic date. The Frolic on the Fox 2 has therefore been moved to Saturday, Nov. 1, still starting at 7:30, and still held on the fine floor of St. Charles' lovely Baker Community Cen-ter, located at the corner of Walnut St. and Route 31, one block south of Route 64 (North Ave.) on the west side of the Fox River in downtown St. Charles.

Lively music will be provided by a trio which includes St. Charles flutist Susan Conant (who was highly acclaimed after last year's Frolic), in concert with Dave Mullen of Milwaukee on fiddle and Mike Briggs of Madison on piano. The program of 16 dances includes one written by Silk and Thistle regular Jeanette Parrott in honor of Kathy Baker, whose contributions to the Chicago RSCDS scene are now notably missed since she is at seminary. It also includes the dance "Silk and Thistle," written for the group by George Whitehorne, Mary Helen Polensky's father, a Georgia resident who is nevertheless an "honorary" member of the Fermilab-based group.

Refreshments will be provided by the local group, though contributions will be appreciated. The cost is \$7 for each dancer, but non-dancers are welcome to observe and listen from the lounge at the end of the hall for just \$2. For more information, dance descriptions or hospitality, contact Doug or Susan Jensen at (630) 232-9089, Doug at work at (630) 840-8194, or Mady Newfield at (630) 584-0825 (email: djensen@fnal.gov). (Mady Newfield)

Semi-Annual General Meeting: The Semi-Annual General Meeting of the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society, Chicago Branch, will be held on November 9, 1997, at 6:00 PM in the St. Josaphat Parish Hall, corner of Southport and Belden Aves. in Chicago, followed by social dancing. All members of the Chicago Branch are invited to attend. Non-members may also attend but may not vote on Branch busi-ness. The minutes of the Annual General Meeting, held in May of 1997, will be distributed to the mem-ber-ship.

English Country Dancing: ECD continues on second and fourth Wednesdays at 8:00 PM at Saint Mark's Church, Evanston. Upcoming dates are Oct. 22, Nov. 12 & 26, and Dec. 10. St. Jude's Assembly plays on second Weds. and Putting on Aires on fourths. For information, call Tom Senior at (847) 433-8704 or email: seniort@newtrier.k12.il.us or <http://nths.newtrier.k12.il.us/summerwww/seniort/first.html>

Bios from Frolic musicians: The following biographies of the Frolic on the Fox 2 musicians were also provided by Mady Newfield:

Mike Briggs--Mike Briggs has been playing keyboard for longer than he wants to remember. He has been a member of a Dixieland jazz ensemble and has played solo piano and organ for church-related functions. Currently he plays with McDuff's Ceilidh Band in the Madison, Wis., area, for Scottish and English country dancing and for New England contra dancing. He also plays button and piano accordion [and tells jokes that begin, "It seems this Scotsman..."].

Susan Conant--I grew up immersed in dancing and music at Pinewoods Camp, a folk music and dance camp that my grandmother, Lily Conant, operated in Plymouth, Mass. Family vacations were timed around the English dance weeks and from a young age I became fluent in English and American dance and music. I went on to aspire to becoming a professional flutist. I continued to play for English and American folk

dancing, sitting in with folks like Bare Necessities, Yankee Ingenuity, Christmas Revels, and all manner of other dance band groups and musical styles.

The Scots, who arrived for a week in July, were often referred to by my rather Victorian (and very British) grandmother in a somewhat exasperated, but amused, manner. Perhaps that's because when we cleaned out their cabins, the garbage cans were always quite full of empties. Later, as I worked on the camp crew, we learned that we could expect the best parties at Scottish week.

Scottish dancing remained somewhat remote from my experience until a few years ago, when I sat in the band pit during a Scottish class at Camper's Week. I found out that playing the music was a comparable athletic experience to doing the dance, full of exuberance and bravado. Certainly something to be sampled and added to my experience. As opportunities to play for dancing are rare in St. Charles, I look forward to playing for the Frolic on the Fox.

Dave Mullen--A violinist since junior high school, Dave started playing Scottish fiddle music just last summer, following the 1996 Milwaukee Highland Games. After attending the Loch Michigan Fiddle Club's workshop with Barbara McOwen in August, Dave jumped in with both feet as fiddler for the Milwaukee Scottish Country Dancers' weekly meetings and dances. Besides Scottish fiddle, Dave plays a variety of other styles. Also a singer and guitarist, he plays with ensembles ranging from pit orchestras for Broadway-style musicals to the Christian acoustic trio Tres Dias ([http://www.dct.com/kmerrell/tres dias](http://www.dct.com/kmerrell/tresdias)).

Happy Halloween!!! Our modern celebration of Halloween is a descendent of the ancient Celtic fire festival called Samhain. The word is pronounced "sow-in" with "sow" rhyming with "cow." The Irish-English dictionary defines Samhain as All Hallowtide, the feast of the dead in pagan and Christian times, signaling the close of harvest and the initiation of the winter season. From it, the half year is reckoned.

The Celts believed that when people died, they went to a land of eternal youth and happiness called "Tir non Og." They did not have the concept of heaven and hell that the Christian church later brought to the land. The dead were sometimes believed to be dwelling with the Fairy Folk, who lived in the numerous mounds or "sidhe" (pronounced "shee") that dotted the Irish and Scottish countryside. Samhain was the new year to the Celts. Turning points, such as the time between one day and the next, the meeting of sea and shore, or the turning of one year into the next were seen as magical times. The turning of the year was the most potent of these times. This was the time when the veil between the worlds was at its thinnest and the living could communicate with their dead in Tir non Og.

After the coming of the Christians to the Celtic lands, certain of the folk identified the fairies as those angels who had sided neither with God nor with Lucifer in their dispute and thus were condemned to walk the Earth until Judgment Day. In addition to the fairies, many humans were about on this night, causing mischief. Since this night belonged neither to one year or the other, Celtic folk believed that chaos reigned and the people could engage in horseplay and practical jokes.

During the course of these hijinks, many of the people would imitate the fairies and go from house to house begging for treats. Failure to supply the treats would usually result in practical jokes being visited on the owner of the house. Since the fairies were about on this night, an offering of food or milk was frequently left for them on the steps of the house so the homeowner could gain the blessings of the good folk for the coming year. Many of the households would also leave out a dumb supper for the spirits of the departed. The folks who were about in the night imitating the fairies would sometimes carry turnips carved to represent faces. This is the origin of our modern Jack-o'-lantern.

Many divination practices were associated with Samhain. Dunking for apples was a marriage divination: the first person to bite an apple would be the first to marry in the coming year. Apple peeling was a divination to see how long your life would be: the longer the unbroken apple peel, the longer your life was destined to be. (Mel Briscoe, *via* Noel Chavez; thanks to both.)