



THE BLETTHERS



Ree Grisham, Chair

Laurie Walter, Editor

Celebrating the life of Kenneth Parrott: All of us in the RSCDS, Chicago Branch, were saddened to learn of the death of Ken Parrott on September 4, 1998. Throughout his life, Ken sought out Scottish Country Dancing, whatever continent he was on. Locally, he had danced with Dick King's SCD group in Hinsdale and was a founding member of the Loch Michigan Scottish Country Dancers, lending his support when his wife Jeanette taught the first class in mid-February of 1980. And he's been with us ever since, a faithful member through the years.

Ken was a man of strong convictions and strong loyalties: he had his favorite dances, which he referred to as "old chestnuts." He loved nothing better than to share them with a new dancer and show him or her how special they were. Ken upheld the name of SCD at all times and was particularly partial to Miss Milligan's idea of "controlled abandon," helping us understand how crucial it is to the joy of dancing. Another area in which Ken excelled was the social interaction aspect of SCD: nobody was readier to welcome new dancers to the group or to twinkle blue eyes at his partner and the other dancers in a set!

It is hard to close a tribute like this, to someone we have known so well and for so long. Ken was an inspiration to all of us and we hope to have half as much spirit and energy in our ninth decade. He was a wonderful contributor to SCD and he will be missed wherever and whenever Chicago dancers gather. But we have delightful memories.

Our sympathy goes out to Jeanette and the rest of the family. We'll aye remember you, Ken. [My thanks to Ree Grisham, Ingrid Kendall, and Peg and Ken Schoon for their help with thoughts and reminiscences.]

Semi-Annual General Meeting: The Semi-Annual General Meeting has been moved back a week to November 15 (still at 6:00 in St. Josaphat parish hall, corner of Southport and Belden Aves., Chicago). All are welcome to attend but only members may vote on Branch business. Send in your membership now! (Form enclosed.) There will be social dancing afterwards. [Ree Grisham]

Desperately seeking space: We are looking for a hall for the December 5th, Fall Dance. If you know of a hall with a wooden floor and reasonable ambience (at a reasonable price!), contact a member of the Committee of Management. [Ree Grisham]

St. Josaphat security: At St. Josaphat, the parish has asked us to please follow our usual security measures: keep the outside doors closed, don't admit strangers unless they're coming to dance (in which case, welcome them warmly), and don't linger too long outside when you leave. For the next several weeks, the choir will be practicing for *The Messiah* while we're arriving, so come ready to start at 6:00 PM but please enter softly. [Ree Grisham]

Dance class hiatus: Paul King's sessions of dancing using his father's legacy of Scottish Country Dancing books and notes have gone on hiatus. Call Paul at (708) 442-3351 if you are interested in future meetings. [Ree Grisham]

New Year's Ball notes: Don't forget that our next big event is the New Year's Ball, January 9, 1999! Here are a couple of requests: Reminder!!! Need goodies!!! Before you know it, the 1999 New Year's Ball will be upon us. It's not too early to plan some delicious goodies to bring for our special dessert table. The many wonderful treats are always one of the highlights of the evening and much appreciated after a vigorous night of dancing. Please call Robin Gaston to sign up your goodies. Her number is (847) 475-4589. [Robin Gaston]

Not too early to start thinking about hospitality for our out-of-town guests for the New Year's Ball. Please make an effort to find space and be ready when someone from the Ball Committee calls. [Ree Grisham] [And our thanks to Robin, Ree, and the rest of the Committee for the hard work and planning that's already gone on!]

English Country Dancing: English Country Dancing, taught by a familiar person, meets at St. Mark's Episcopal Church, 1509 Ridge Ave., Evanston IL, on second and fourth Wednesdays (except December), 8:00-10:00 PM, "only \$4." Live music by St. Jude's Assembly (second Weds.) and Putting on Airs (fourth Weds.). Upcoming dates are November 11 and 23, December 9, January 13 and 27, February 10 and 24, March 10 and 24, April 14 and 28, May 12 and 26, and June 9. (Whew! Tom really plans ahead.) The site is at the corner of Grove and Ridge in Cunningham Hall, second floor of the parish house; park behind the church, on Grove St., or at the Methodist Pension Association off Davis, and enter from Ridge just south of the church. For information call Tom Senior at (847) 433-8704 or seniort@NTTC.ORG

Scots cash in on kilts": As every Scot knows, the tartan and the kilt lie at the very heart of his [sic] national pride and identity. Are they not centuries-old symbols of the ancient clans? Well, not exactly. The short kilt was invented in the 1730's by an English Quaker industrialist, Thomas Rawlinson, of Lancashire, who found that his Scots workers kept getting their long, clumsy garments in his furnace. So, he invented a short skirt that kept them decent and out of trouble. He called his invention the kilt.

Then in the middle of the last century, a Bannockburn textile firm, hoping to increase sales, sent their pattern book to the Highland Society in London and asked them to pick one cloth as an emblem for each clan. The Highland Society patron, Prince Albert, duly obliged.

And the canny Scots kilt-makers have been coining it ever since.

[from the RSCDS Kingston, Ontario Branch *Newsletter*, which reprinted it from the *Ghillies Gazette*]

Throwing sticks and stones": What does a Scotsman wear under his kilt? Well, if he's a participant in the 23rd Annual New Hampshire Highland Games and Scottish Heritage Week athletics competition, he wears spandex bike shorts--much to the chagrin of my friend Liz, who had been hoping for more, or should I say less?

I, for one, understand the men's modesty. If the thousands of people attending the 23rd annual festival were watching my skirt fly up, I'd be sure to have something on underneath, too. The NHHG, held from Sept. 18-20, is the largest Scottish festival in the Eastern U.S. This year it broke attendance records, with more than 40,000 guests enjoying the beautiful fall weekend. Most of the folks who gathered here from all over the country didn't just come for the bonny view of the White Mountains. Many came to celebrate or learn about Scottish culture and history or to participate in dance or music competitions. Some came to listen to the bagpipes and drums or as representatives of clans dressed in full tartan regalia. I came to watch gargantuan men throw telephone poles and big rocks.

The big guys were competitor in the Heavy Events--athletic competitions with deep, thousand-year-old roots in Scotland's Highlands. It is generally believed that Scottish kings used the games as employment tryouts, subjecting bodyguard wannabes to tests of strength and skill. While the seven professional and five master's athletes at the NHHG weren't vying for steady work, they were after something equally important--a little money, some Braveheartesque glory and a hefty amount of hernia-inducing fun.

To bring home the green, a less than gargantuan first-place prize of \$100 per contest, they competed in seven events: the 18-lb stone throw, in which an oblong stone is hurled much like a shot-put; the 56-lb and 28-lb throws for distance, in which the lead projectile looks like a mace without the spikes; the sheaf toss, during which the competitors use a pitchfork to propel a 20-lb sack of hay up and over a bar, with the bar raised after every round; the 56-lb throw for height, tossing the same lead projectile from the distance event over the same bar used in the sheaf toss; the stone carry, where athletes lug two stones (total weight: 510 lb), one in each hand, as far as they can (in this event, the NHHG record is 99', but as far as I'm concerned, just picking them up is a mighty accomplishment); and, my personal favorite, the caber toss, in which the men lift, run with and throw, end-over-end, a 22'10", 110-lb wooden pole.

While being Scottish is no advantage in the festival's exercises in lifting, straining, grunting, and heaving, size--as well as a strong cardiovascular system--really does matter. Steve Pulcinella, 6'2" tall and 290 lb, was this year's first-place overall winner in the open (professional) meet. Pulcinella, 35, said he

participates in about 20 of the more than 100 annual festivals around the country. The athletes who compete on the professional circuit have become good friends, Pulcinella said. "We really enjoy each other's company. We come from similar backgrounds, almost all of us share a track-and-field history, and we are always rooting each other on."

From what I saw, it was indeed a friendly competition. The athletes hurling their sticks and stones managed to avoid breaking any bones. True, one of the competitors nearly decapitated Judge Alan Sim with his caber, but it was an accident, a case of Mr. Sim, vice-president of the Scottish Games Association and former heavyweight athlete, being too close behind the competitor when the athlete lost his grip. Mr. Sim acted not only as judge for the events but also as a master of ceremonies, giving the spectators a real dose of Caledonian authenticity by explaining all the events in his thick Fettercairn-bred burr.

Most of the events evolved slowly into their modern form, their origins lost in the Highland mists. But Mr. Sim tossed around a few competing hypotheses. "One theory of how the caber toss began is that it was instigated by woodcutters who would throw the logs down hills to move them," he told the crowd. "Another theory is that they were used for crossing streams, putting one caber next to another to walk across. Another theory is that they were used to climb into [English-]occupied castles, but if you ask me that's a very romantic theory."

Romantic or no, Mr. Sim has been spreading his theories all over the world trying to get more people interested in the Heavy Events and Scottish culture. He recently returned from a trip to Russia, where he ran the second annual Moscow Highland Games. The odds are good that these two cultures filled with tradition mix better than whiskey and vodka. [by Kate Flatley, from the *Wall Street Journal*, thanks to Mel Whitson and Ken Heinemann]

CALENDAR:

<i>Loch Mich--</i>	<i>ScotReel--</i>	<i>Silk and Thistle--</i>
Nov		
1, 8 Class	5, 12 Class	3, 10 Class
15*****Semi-Annual General Meeting, 6:00, St. Josaphat*****		
22, 29 Class	19 Class	17, 24 Class
Dec		
	3 Class	1 Class
5?*****Fall Dance, location to be determined*****		
6 No class		8, 15 Class
13 Class		
20*****Holiday Party, 6:00, St. Josaphat*****		
		22, 29 Class

1999!!! (almost the millenium)

Jan		
3*****Ball walk-through, 6:00, St. Josaphat*****		
		5 Class
9*****New Year's Ball*****		
10 No class		12 Class
17*****Open House, 6:00, St. Josaphat*****		
24, 31 Class		19, 26 Class