

INTRODUCTION to Haliburton School of the Arts SCD book #1

This book contains an assortment of dances suitable for beginning, intermediate, and advanced dancers. For rank beginners, the three dances on page 4 use only the skip change of step, with an optional walking step for the advance and retire figures if retiring with skip change of step is too challenging. Pages 5 and 6 of this book include dances with other basic steps, as well as interesting and enjoyable sequences of basic formations.

The two dances on page 7 are not difficult, but they do make use of an ancient style *poussette*, in which the dances give a lot of weight as they turn their partners while simultaneously circling around the other couple one and a half times to change places. When the RSCDS revived traditional dancing in the 1920's, recording the various forms of *poussette* presented a special challenge. The choice to standardize these *poussette* figures in a precise manner introduced a measure of artifice somewhat at odds with the traditional flavour of these figures. For example, in describing the common RSCDS version of the 8-bar *poussette* progression in quick tempo, J.F. and T.N. Flett comment in their book **Traditional Dancing in Scotland (1964, p. 237)** that it "is apparently a modification of a *poussette* *invented* about 1925 by Mr. John Duthie". We have made use of the Fletts extensive description of the traditional *poussette* (see pages 234-7) in promoting our version of the "ancient *poussette*". In the process we have rediscovered the fun of swinging around another couple. Following an effective teaching strategy, which emerged over the years at Haliburton, we introduce the new figure in *strathspey* tempo before attempting it at a quicker pace.

Hugh Foss, another renowned researcher into the "old ways" of Scottish dancing, has also found that traditional forms of the dance were significantly more varied than the modern RSCDS repertoire would suggest. For example, in his booklet "Sundry Writings anent Scottish Dancing" (1978, p. 59), Foss describes a 4-bar rights and lefts done without giving hands, and simply passing shoulders in the familiar right-left sequence, "taking as short a route as you can to the opposite corner" rather than dancing through each corner of the square. This description, together with the fact that an identical figure is still danced in some traditional dances in Cape Breton Island, inspired us to incorporate what we called "Old Style Rights and Lefts" into some of our dances. We enjoy "Dancing roon the Green", described on page 8, as both a *strathspey* and a reel, in order to experience the fun of this 4-bar maneuver in both tempos.

The second dance on page 8, a 16-bar *strathspey* for two couples, introduces another new figure called "an unraveling ½ reel of 4". This motif lends itself to a variety of contexts, and we have made extensive use of it in a number of dances, some of which are yet to be published. This particular dance "Blythe and Cheerie" has the further distinction of being a wonderful demonstration dance, since it includes a surprising variety of figures in just a few bars. Each year at Haliburton, a number of dancers have been enthusiastic about putting on a short demonstration at the Haliburton Highland Games following the week of classes, making an effective demonstration dance useful.

Both the Old Style Rights and Lefts and the Unraveling ½ Reel of 4 appear in the next dance making it a bit more challenging. However, if the dancers are familiar with each figure in separate dances first, there is not likely to be any real difficulty. Preparing for more challenging dances in this way inspired us to choreograph the "Irish Drover" as a stepping stone to learning the Irish Rover: an earlier dance of ours, the "Gypsy Rover", published in Gaelic College SCD Book #2, can also contribute to this.

The dances on pages 10 and 11 provide opportunities to enjoy some variations of old traditional steps described by the Fletts. The "Drumlin" is a new figure devised to incorporate them into a progression. Finally, "Proud and Saucy" offers a moderate challenge for intermediate and advanced dancers by including a Men's Chain and Set and Link, both of which, although recognized, are relatively uncommon in RSCDS publications. With such a variety of steps, figures, and combinations of figures included here, we hope there is something of interest!!

INTRODUCTION to Haliburton School of the Arts SCD book #3

Many of today's common formations appear to have had, in the past, other ways of performing them. This is not surprising given the fact that old notes were generally in short hand and difficult to decipher. Oral sources were used extensively by J.F. and T.N. Flett in their book **Traditional Dancing in Scotland (1964)**, however their informants were generally old and not necessarily reliable, and such sources were generally not used by the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society (RSCDS). As a consequence, there was a certain amount of intuition and guesswork involved in working out how the figures were done.

CORNERS

One of these formations is corners. Today, when one is standing on your own side of the set in 2nd place, one's 1st corner is the person of the opposite sex on the right, and one's 2nd corner is the person of the opposite sex on the left (Fig. 1).

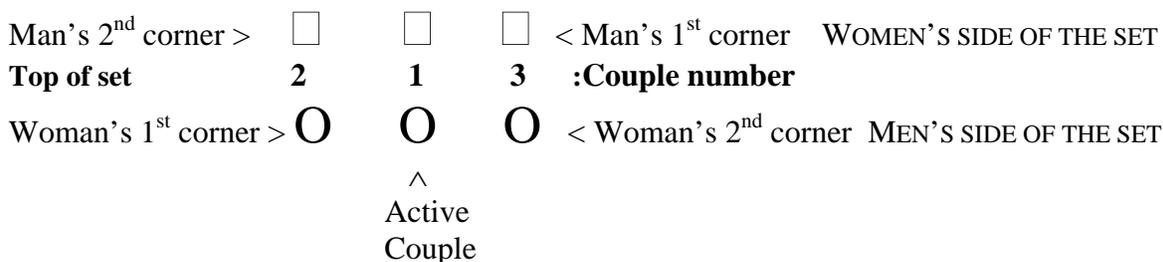


Figure 1. Today's location of corners.

However, **corners** is a formation that evolved from one of the most traditional of Scottish dance figures, namely the Reel of 3, generally with a man between two women. The Threesome Reel (RSCDS Book #6 is an example). These Reels of 3 involved an alternation of setting and traveling (either [a] in a reel of 3 starting with the right-hand partner, [b] turning right-hand partner then left-hand partner, [c] set and turn right-hand partner then left-hand partner, or [d] with the women dancing around the man and under the arches). It is important to note that the 1st partner to be passed in the reel or turned is on the man's right. Later the Reel of 3 evolved into corners by placing two lines of three (or Reels of 3) facing one another with the men stepping into the middle to stand back-to-back facing their partners, their original right-hand partner is now on their left, i.e. in 2nd corner's position. Herein lies a potential source of misunderstanding when "turn your 1st partner" evolved into "turn your 1st corner" – is it your original right-hand partner or the person now on your right? The RSCDS interpreted it as the person now on your right, i.e. in the modern 1st corner position, however, given the evolution from the Reel of 3, I believe it referred to one's original 1st partner (right-hand partner), i.e. using modern terminology, the person in 2nd corner position. Unfortunately, the corner's formation is rarely shown as a diagram in old manuscripts. One dance that does is "Loch Erichside" in the Border Book of Scottish Country Dances (Fig. 2), and here 1st corner is shown to be 2nd corner (in modern terminology). Support for such an interpretation may also come from the feel of dancing the common formation "turn corner right, partner left, corner right, partner left". In the modern version, the second turn in the middle with partner is 1+ 1/2 turn and is generally too far to go in two bars, especially in quick tempo. This may have led to the loss of popularity in modern times of dances with this formation. On the other hand, if one turns 2nd corner

(modern terminology) first, the formation flows remarkably well. Of course, it is now impossible to go back and revise the terminology for corners and change all the published dances with corners to reverse the order of the corners. A possible solution is to devise some dances that call for “turn 2nd corner right, partner left, 1st corner right, partner left”. To this end we include several dances in this book with such a formation.

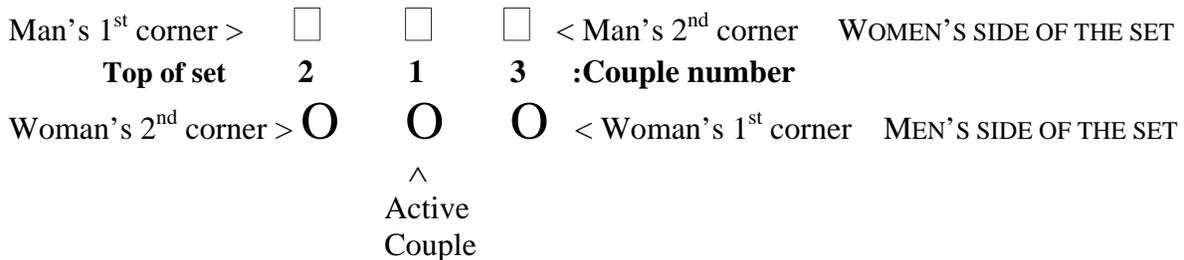


Figure 2. Locations of corners shown in Loch Erichside, Border Book of Scottish Country dances.

Another potential interpretation of the corners figure occurs in Ron Wallace's dance "Fair Jenny's Jig": turn 1st corner left on the first 2 bars of the phrase, then partner right, 2nd corner left, partner right. This pattern occurs in some Contra dances (called contra-corners) and English country dances, and gives a similar smooth flow to the figure. A variant of this method starts by turning partner right on the first two bars of the phrase, then 1st corner left, partner right, 2nd corner left. Several dances using these variants of the formation are included in this book.

POUSSETTE

Another common figure that has been interpreted in many different ways is the 8-bar **Poussette** in quick tempo. J.F. and T.N. Flett comment in their book **Traditional Dancing in Scotland (1964, p. 237)** that the standard RSCDS version "is apparently a modification of a poussette *invented* about 1925 by Mr. John Duthie". Furthermore, the RSCDS inferred that it was danced using the Pas De Basque, with the men starting on their left feet. On the other hand, the Scottish poussette appears have been introduced from England, where the formation involves two couple rotating anticlockwise 1+ ½ times around each other as each couple rotates clockwise. As the movement is generally sideways, it requires that the man and woman's steps be mirror-image, and thus one of the pair starts with the left foot, but the sideways movement is incompatible with the Pas de Basque. Using this information, and Fletts' extensive description of the traditional poussette (see pages 234-7), we introduce another interpretation of the poussette that may be closer to the original version that uses either the Strathspey setting step or a sideways Skip Change of Step or Polka Step: we call it the "Ancient Poussette". This version reintroduces the fun of swinging around another couple, in stark contrast to the rather stilted modern version. In fact, the relative rarity of the 8-bar poussette on dance programs may be partly due to its contrived feel. It is worth noting that the "Ancient Poussette" has the same feel as the 4-bar Poussette in quick tempo recorded in two RSCDS dances: St. Patrick's Day (RSCDS Books 3) and the Seagull (Miss Milligan's Miscellany II). Furthermore, the "Ancient Poussette" can also be done in strathspey tempo using the

strathspey setting step, and may have been closer to the original version of the “Diamond Poussette” (All Round Poussette in the RSCDS dances). Other version of the poussette published by the RSCDS are rather contrived and have not found popularity, e.g. All Round Poussette in 8-bars of quick tempo (RSCDS Book #18: Longwise Eightsome Reel); and (ii) the Polka Poussette (RSCDS Book #31: Polka Country Dance).

Following an effective teaching strategy, which emerged over the years at Haliburton, we introduce the “Ancient Poussette” in strathspey tempo before attempting it at a quicker pace. We have found that the “Ancient Poussette” is much easier for beginners to learn than any of the other versions. Once again, one cannot revise the modern published dances that use the 8-bar poussettes in slow or quick tempos. So we have devised some dances to include the “Ancient Poussette”.

8-BAR ANCIENT POUSSETTE in a longways set: couples start in the middle both hands joined with partner and angled slightly. 1st & 2nd couples dance 1+ ½ anticlockwise around each other & out to progressed places:

Bar 1: dance out to side with ¼ clockwise turn at end with 1st couple going to men’s side, 2nd couple towards women’s side,

Bar 2: dance into center with ¼ turn,

Bar 3: dance out to opposite side with ¼ turn,

Bar 4: dance into center with ¼ turn,

Bar 5: dance out to side with ¼ turn,

Bar 6: dance into center with ¼ turn,

Bar 7: continue turning ¾ around, and

Bar 8: retire to own side having progressed on place.

N.B. strathspey setting step is used throughout this poussette & 1st woman and 2nd man start with their left foot. In quick tempo, a sideways skip change of step is used throughout this poussette & 1st woman and 2nd man start with their left foot.

RIGHTS AND LEFTS

Rights and Lefts is another formation that has other ways of dancing it. For example, in his booklet “Sundry Writings anent Scottish Dancing” (1978, p. 59), Foss describes a 4-bar Rights and Lefts done without giving hands, and simply passing shoulders in the familiar right-left sequence, “taking as short a route as you can to the opposite corner” rather than dancing through each corner of the square”. This way of doing the Rights and Lefts avoids the tendency in beginners of dancing a loop on one or more of the corners, and the difficulty of dancing scalloped half turns, especially in a crowded ballroom. A 4-bar Rights and Lefts, but with hands, may be found in the dance “Within a Mile of Edinburgh Toon” (RSCDS Book #21). Foss’ description, together with the fact that an identical figure is still danced in some traditional dances in Cape Breton Island, inspired us to incorporate what we called “Old Style Rights and Lefts” into some of our dances.

OLD STYLE RIGHTS & LEFTS in a longways set: dance the pattern of Rights & Lefts but with no hands & with one step to each side of the square, i.e. pass partner by the right shoulder, pass neighbour by the left shoulder, pass partner by the right shoulder, & pass neighbour by the left shoulder.