

***The Tartan Times***  
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# ***Editors' Introduction - Kilts, Bairns, and Succession***

Though not by design, the writers in this issue all emphasize (sometimes surprising) childhood experiences, the importance of family traditions, and “lines of succession” in their respective engagements with Scottish country dancing and music.

Brenda Janssen, founder of the Mount Washington Valley Scottish Dancers in Berlin, NH, recalls the inspirational influence of Jack McKelvie. Jack taught a children’s class in Bedford, NH, from 1955 to his untimely death in 1964. He challenged and supported the “Bedford Bairns,” inspiring more than one of them to become SCD teachers themselves. Brenda’s account ensures Jack will be remembered by new generations of dancers.

Bill Tobin, who was one of Brenda’s students, revived and leads the Lancaster, NH, class, which his parents, Bob and Gerry, began in 1980. Our publication of Bill’s account of his desire to wear the kilt and his discovery of the community spirit and joy of SCD coincides with the 26th Annual Lancaster Spring Frolic. The evolution of this tradition—and the role of live music—will be continued in a future issue.

Finally, we share Barbara McOwen’s account of how she became a premier player, collector, and teacher of the Scottish fiddle. Barbara is well known to the SCD community, not only in Boston, but across the US and beyond. She has taught generations of fiddlers and dancers, led Scottish dance bands, including Tullochgorum, recorded numerous CDs, and served the Branch in many ways.

When asked to write something about her journey, Barbara traced her path to a childhood fascination with an unlikely ditty and early experiences with Balkan dancing. Her path also led to her first Scottish-born fiddle teacher, who had himself been taught by one of the last “Dancies,” or traveling dancing masters, thus linking her to a deeply rooted line of fiddlers and teachers.

We hope you enjoy these stories of generational and generative relationships. Let us know what’s on your mind—and what topics you would like to see in future issues.

Hope to see you at upcoming class parties and at Pinewoods.  
Happy Summer!

The Editors

P.S. - Check out this *Times' Tartan*, which celebrates Pride Month and the LGBTQIA2+ community.



# ***Remembering the Bedford Bairns***

## ***Brenda Janssen***

From 1955 to 1964 in Bedford, NH, a group of children, of which I was a member at 6 years old, was taught Scottish country dancing by Jack McKelvie. Jack was sometimes assisted by John Wilson and other teachers from Scotland and Canada, including Bobby Watson, Colin Green, and Jenny McLaughlan. The group also hosted Miss Jean Milligan, co-founder of the RSCDS, when she came to the US to do exams. The children's class came about in an unusual way. Jack initially offered a class to the parents, but when they said they didn't have time for such an activity, he invited their children instead! At the time, the Presbyterian Church was the center of the Bedford community, but there were not many activities for children outside of school. So Jack's class meant a lot to the kids.



*Jack McKelvie*

Jack saw potential in all of us. This led to a junior demo team whose dancing ability he proudly took every opportunity to show off. The team performed at town events, Crawford House (NH) and Middlebury Inn (VT) and other places around New England. They held annual parties at the Manchester Country Club and the Bedford Town Hall. In May, 1964, they attended the Boston Highland Ball at a Boston hotel, which resulted in an article and photo in the society page of the *Boston Globe*.

Jack held us to a high standard and was confident that we could reach it. Once, while doing the Eightsome Reel, we all went blank, and the dance ground to a halt. Jack went into the middle of the room and apologized to the audience. We were determined that he would never have to do that again.



In November, 1964, Jack McKelvie was killed in an automobile accident, and the Bedford Bairns were disbanded. That same month, a school was dedicated in his name, as he had been a school board member and contributed to the interior decoration of the school. The McKelvie School in Bedford, NH, still remembers him with an assembly each year.

Inspired by Jack's example, two of the "Bairns," myself and Tina Van Loan, became country dance teachers. Tina splits her time between teaching in Florida and in Waterville Valley, NH. I received my certificate in 1983, under Evelyn Murray's coaching. I taught adults and children in Berlin, NH (the Mt. Washington Scottish Country Dancers) and in Lancaster, NH. Bill Tobin and his mom, Gerry, have kept the group active for 27 years.

Tony Moretti from the Boston Branch helped me learn how to fit the music to the dance, which led to my inviting Sylvia Miskoe of Concord, NH, to play for my class in Concord, NH, the Merrimack Valley Scottish Country Dancers. Two members of The Merrimack group also became teachers. Anna Dorsch teaches highland dance, and Susan Haines teaches country dancing. All three groups participated at the NH Highland Games from 1980 to 1982.

This time of my life will always be remembered as wonderful and magical. The Bedford Bairns live on through the generations of students and teachers and, of course, Scottish Magic.

*--Some details in this account were conveyed in a phone call to the editors.  
--Eds.*



**Brenda Janssen** is an SCD teacher who lives in Concord, NH. After completing her training as a Certified Lab Technician at Concord Hospital in 1968 and as Certified Registered Histologist in 1969, she worked at several New England hospitals including the Deaconess Medical Center in Boston, Elliott Hospital in Manchester, and the Concord Hospital. Since her retirement in 1988, in addition to Scottish country dancing, she enjoys curating and preserving family photographs to pass on the family's history to her two sons.



# ***The Power of the Kilt***

## ***Bill Tobin***

1980, Groveton, New Hampshire, Billy Tobin, ten-year-old great grandson of a kiltmaker, eagerly awaited the completion of his first kilt as his mother, Gerry, carefully stitched each pleat. When the kilt was finally ready, Billy wanted to wear it to school for his classmates to see. His parents were apprehensive. Schools were not the kindest places. Was he opening himself up to a taunting? Even bullying? Billy had no such worries. The very next day he walked to school to show off his kilt. To the surprise of his parents and his teachers, by the end of the day, everyone in third grade wanted to wear a kilt.

### **Early Years**

This memory captures an important moment in my life in Scottish country dancing. I did not wear the kilt just because my mother was from Scotland. I wore it because every Tuesday night I joined my parents, Bob and Gerry, and my brothers, Bobby and Andrew, for Scottish country dancing at the Lancaster Town Hall. Our teacher, Brenda Janssen, founder of the Mount Washington Valley Scottish Country Dancers, came over each week from Berlin. (See her “origin story” elsewhere in this issue.) It took a while to learn the patterns and stay on the beat, but I loved that it was something I did with my family every week.

When Brenda moved to Penacook, Gerry tried to keep the class going, but it didn't last, so I couldn't dance during high school. As a student at the University of NH, however, I found the Seacoast Scottish Country Dancers. I arrived at the Grange Hall in Durham wearing a kilt that my great grandmother had made.



*Bill Tobin, Andrew Tobin, and Bobby Tobin all dressed up in their Montgomery kilts.*



I was greeted by the teacher, Doug Schneider, and several women including Sandy Cross, Flossie Wiggin, Ibby Lourie, Jean McDougal, and Moira Batchelder. They watched wide-eyed as a young UNH student showed up in a kilt. Not only that, but he owned a pair of ghillies and knew how to dance! This was the first of many Friday nights full of dancing, laughter, and joy. After class we visited the Tin Palace for pizza. In the years that followed, Ibby, Sandy, and Flossie would take me to Scottish concerts, including one at Sanders Theatre in Cambridge, MA, featuring Jean Redpath and Alasdair Fraser. The best times were when they brought me to Salem to dance with Sally Dee and the Wee Bluets.

In time, these women became second mothers to me. I lived at Sandy's house from 1992 to 1994, while I was a student teacher at Exeter Area High School. During that time, I met my wife Laura, who also began dancing in Durham. After our wedding, we lived in an apartment at Flossie's house in Stratham.



*An impromptu jam session after a night of dancing, June 2, 2018.*

### **The White Mountain Scottish Country Dancers Begin**

In the fall of 1995, I got a teaching position at the White Mountain Regional High School in Whitefield. There were no dance classes in the area, so I decided to start one in Lancaster. The class included my parents, Deb and Eugene Montgomery, Mary Ellen Cannon, Larry and Dusty Bessinger, Edith Chessman, Dan and Terrie Jones, and Lisa Norseworthy. Although my parents and Edith had learned to dance with Brenda, most of the others were beginners.



Those first few months were filled with enthusiasm. Not only did the class learn the steps and the figures, but they also experienced a profound sense of community. At the end of every class, we would return to my parents' house to laugh and talk about the dances we learned that evening. One night we spent an entire class on *Mairi's Wedding*. I had drawn out the diagonal half reels of four on a chalkboard, but the dance still fell apart many times, resulting in great hilarity. Once we figured it out, the class wanted to dance *Mairi's Wedding* every week.

By June, 1996, we were ambitious enough to ask Viveka Fox and Susie Petrov to play for our first Spring Frolic. Our 26th Frolic will take place June 7, 2025, at the Lancaster Town Hall. The story of how we got to that remarkable milestone will be continued in a future issue.

In the meantime, you are warmly invited to join us!

<https://calendar.google.com/calendar/u/0/r/day/2025/6/7?pli=1>



*In addition to being an SCD teacher and class leader, **Bill Tobin** is an accomplished harpist and founder of the New Hampshire Highland Harp Ensemble. His latest and fifth recording of solo harp music, Have In Hand, encourages the idea that to make the world a better place we must start with what we have in hand ([https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=OLAK5uy\\_k2io3ATrX0mbn3\\_b0MMXkHO0zKQZSvHXM](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=OLAK5uy_k2io3ATrX0mbn3_b0MMXkHO0zKQZSvHXM)). When not playing music or dancing, Bill teaches mathematics at Lake Region Union High School in Orleans, VT, and lives with his wife in Peacham, VT.*



# ***Finding Scottish Fiddle & Dance***

## ***Barbara McOwen***

Hello Friends — *Tartan Times* Co-Editor Linda McJannet wanted to know something about my pathway into Scottish country dancing and music. It was a long, many-many-stepped process. There was a music path and a dancing path and eventually they converged.

My music path came first. When I was four, I remember my mother playing “How Much is that Doggie In the Window” over and over on our record player. When she was in her 90s, I downloaded music for her and included the Doggie song because I thought she really liked it. It turns out she played it over and over because *I* liked it and would go to the piano to pick out the tune. As a result, she signed me up for piano lessons in San Francisco. I continued piano through high school, playing Chopin, Bach, Beethoven, Schubert--not that well but getting through some pretty big pieces.

In the fourth grade, I asked my parents for violin lessons because I wanted to be in the orchestra. They refused, wisely saying I shouldn't spread myself too thin. Nonetheless, at age 16, I took it upon myself to find a violin and a special teacher, Jack O'Brien, who was the second violin of the renowned Griller Quartet.



*Barbara McOwen and her fiddle*

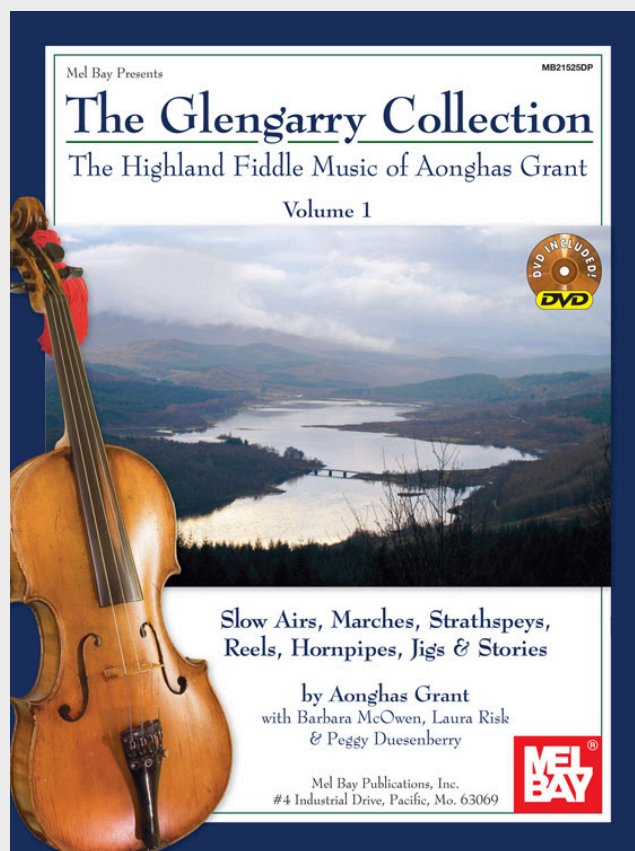


I studied piano and violin through college, graduating in 1971 from UC Berkeley, majoring in music because I couldn't think of anything else. At this point, I knew nothing of Scottish fiddling, though I was well grounded in harmonic progressions, counterpoint, ear training, and the history of music.

During the folk revival of the 1960s, dancing also entered my life. I noticed some friends at lunchtime doing what turned out be Balkan line dancing. They invited me to join them on Wednesday nights at the Khuner home. Felix Khuner was the principal second violinist of the San Francisco Symphony, and Gertrude Khuner taught movement and exercise.

I learned a lot of dances --Serbian, Greek, Croatian, Bulgarian, the Swedish Hambo, and I'm pretty sure there was a Scottish country dance in there somewhere.

Sunni Bloland, a dance professor at the university, also sponsored classes and request dancing in the Hearst Gym three times a week, attracting hundreds of people eager to dance. While I was still in high school, I had to have a fake ID to get in; but because of the dancing I'd been doing at the Khuners', I was among the more experienced dancers.



*Volume 1 of a 2 volume annotated musical compilation co-authored by Aonghas Grant, Barbara McOwen, Laura Risk, and Peggy Duesenberry*

Later, as a student at Berkeley (with a real ID), I was asked to teach the advanced class on Tuesdays and to lead the request dancing on Fridays. I loved the Greek island violin music, Macedonian rhythms and melodies, and the strong upbeat of Croatian music, though I couldn't imagine playing any of it. At one point, Sunni decided to charge a nickel for admission, and after a year or two there was enough money to send four people to the renowned Stockton Folk Dance Camp. One of the four was me.



My experience at Stockton brought music and dancing together. The teachers were from Poland, Macedonia, Germany, Quebec, Greece ... and Scotland. Stewart Smith was the Scottish dance teacher of choice for years at Stockton, and he was my introduction to Scottish country dancing. I absolutely loved him--and strathspeys!

While the other teachers flew in from abroad, Stewart was based in San Francisco, so in the fall I attended his classes and began highland and ladies step, too. Stewart mentioned from time to time that the music we were dancing to --all recorded, all accordion bands of course - really should be played on the violin.

I learned much later that Stewart, who had grown up in Perthshire in the 20s and 30s, was a student of the last "Dancie," Dancie Reid. Over the previous hundred-plus years, Dancies taught Scottish dancing accompanying their classes on the fiddle. So, Stewart's casual remarks about the fiddle reflected his cultural grounding. And, through Stewart, I might also be in the Dancie line of succession.

Stewart encouraged me to go to the RSCDS Summer School at St. Andrews, and in 1973 I did. After St. Andrews, I traveled around Scotland twice and started collecting Scottish tune books. I stayed in London with friends of friends for several months and spent 2 weeks in Europe with a Eurail Pass visiting people I'd met in St. Andrews. I even miraculously bumped into folk dance friends from Berkeley.

Though I was living on a shoestring, I had bought a fiddle for 10£ and tried out tunes from my tune books. I met an American fiddler in a pub in Paris, and we played a few tunes together, earning enough francs for a cup of tea.

In November, I came home and showed up at my usual Berkeley Scottish dance class. The tiny class was suddenly huge, six sets, with two dynamic teachers - Linda Long and Ken McFarland. Among the new people was a good-looking bearded fellow named Robert. . .

*[Look for the rest of the story in a future issue of the Tartan Times. --Ed.]*



**Barbara McOwen** is a fiddler, composer, fiddle teacher, and SCD teacher, who lives and teaches in her purpose-built studio in Arlington, MA. In addition to recording many CDs, she is co-author of *The Glengarry Collection*, an annotated compilation of the music of Aonghas (Angus) Grant, the Left-Handed fiddler of Lochaber.



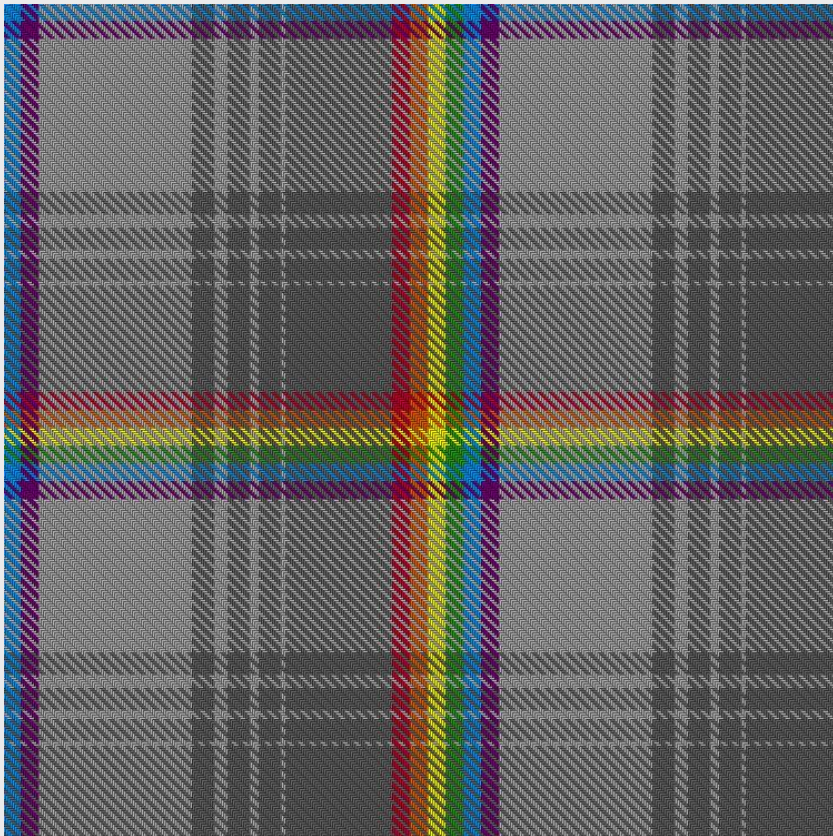
# ***This Times' Tartan***

## ***Out & Proud***

**Designer:** Steven Patrick Sim

**Reference#:** 13525

**Registration Date:** 1 June 2022



Steven Sim was inspired by the LGBTQIA2+ community and his own life to create this tartan. The tartan pays homage to the 1979 Pride Flag created by Gilbert Baker. In both the '79 flag and this tartan, the rainbow colors each represent an idea - Red for Life, Orange for Healing, Yellow for Sunlight, Green for Nature, Blue for Serenity, and Purple for Spirit.

It also recalls the New York City Stonewall riots in June 1969 - one of the most well known catalysts for the gay rights movement and activism. The 69 light grey threads in the tartan represent that iconic year of change, as well as Sim's own birth year - to recognize his personal journey. The 48 dark grey threads represent Sim's age when he embraced his own self-acceptance.

The changing from dark grey to light grey alludes to the process of personal acceptance and coming out, reflecting also on a calm spirit and serenity.



# ***Stay Tuned!***

A quick preview! Unless otherwise directed, consult the calendar on the website for time, place, and other details

<https://rscdsboston.org/event-calendar.html>

## **~Upcoming Dance Events~**

**Jun 23, Mon - 8pm** - Cambridge Class' End of Season Party & Ice Cream Social - Watertown, MA

**Jun 30 - Jul 4** - ESCape - Pinewoods Camp, Plymouth MA

**Jul 4 - Jul 7** - Scottish Session 1 - Pinewoods Camp, Plymouth MA

**Jul 7 - Jul 12** - Scottish Session 2 - Pinewoods Camp, Plymouth MA

**Aug 9, Sat - 3-7PM** - Chelmsford Class Party & Potluck - Chelmsford, MA

**Aug 23-25** - Summer's End SCD Weekend, Fairlee VT

**Oct 4, Sat - 12-7PM** - Fairlee Autumn Social - Fairlee, VT - Walk-through at 12pm, Dancing at 2:30pm, Potluck Supper at 5:30pm

**Oct 18, Sat - 5:45-10PM** - Brunswick Annual Fall Dance Party - Brunswick, ME - Potluck at 5:45pm, Dancing at 7pm

**Oct 24, 25, 26** - Albany Fall Frolic, Albany, NY

## **~Upcoming Musical Events~**

**Jun 15, Sun - 3:30-7PM** - Gaelic Club - The Canadian-American Club - Watertown, MA

**Jun 18, Wed - 7:30-10PM** - Boston Scottish Fiddle Club session - Watertown, MA

**Jun 22-28** - Arcadia Festival of Traditional Music & Dance - Bar Harbor, ME - More info & registration at <https://acadiatradfestival.org/>

**Sept 19-21** - New Hampshire Highland Games & Festival - Loon Mountain, NH - More info & tickets at [nhscot.org](http://nhscot.org)