

The Tartan Times

Volume LXXIII - Issue 4

Winter 2025



*A Publication of the
Royal Scottish Country Dance Society
Boston Branch*

www.rscdsboston.org

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Warm Thanks, Warm Memories, and Warm-ups

In the midst of a spell of winter weather, this issue of the *Tartan Times* celebrates warmth.

Jen Schoonover highlights new guidance from the RSCDS about safe and effective ways to warm-up for Scottish country dancing. Jen, an experienced dance teacher and researcher of Scottish dance, contributed to the new guidance, and she encourages all dancers and teachers to check it out. As a member of the RSCDS, Boston Branch, you can access the guide by logging into the "**My RSCDS**" area on the official RSCDS website or [click here](#). Don't be surprised if future SCD classes omit some familiar exercises and include some new ones!

In "*The Road to Tullochgorum*," Barbara McOwen shares part two of her life-long journey with Scottish music and dance. (Part one appeared in the 2025 Summer issue, now on the Branch website.) Barbara is well known to *Tartan Times* readers, but the list of achievements in her bio may still surprise you. Her article, however, provides a very personal and moving account of the serendipity, persistence, risk-taking, and community support that contributed to her becoming an inspirational champion of Scottish fiddle on both the East and West Coasts of the US. We are blessed indeed to have had the benefit, directly and indirectly, of Barbara's talent, creativity, and dedication for five decades. Thank you, Barbara, for giving us so many warm memories!

The Kudos section offers warm thanks to another founding spirit of the Branch. On October 27, at the Cambridge Class's Halloween Party, MaryEllen Scannell received the Society's Branch Service Award, a handsome certificate signed by the RSCDS Chairman, Gary Coull. MaryEllen's contributions span all the Branch's activities, from teaching, running Pinewoods sessions and the Ball, serving on and chairing Branch committees, hosting the Pinewoods Benefit Ball, to cooking for dancers at Cardigan weekend and making costumes for the Demo Team. We are grateful for MaryEllen's outstanding contribution—and for her inimitable style and spirit. Slainte! (*Check out the note at the end of the Kudos page to learn how you or your class can nominate someone for this award in the future.*)

As always, let us know what's on your mind and what you'd like to see—or write about-- in a future issue of the *Tartan Times*.

All best wishes for a happy—and warm—New Year!
Linda McJannet and Nikki Lauranzano
Co-Editors, tartantimes@rscdsboston.org

Finding Scottish Fiddle & Dance - Part 2: The Road to Tullochgorum

Barbara McOwen

Hello Friends — I charted my music path in the Summer issue of the *TT*, and here's how music and dance converged.

In 1973, at the urging of Stewart Smith, my SCD and highland teacher, I attended RSCDS Summer School at St. Andrews and traveled around Scotland collecting tune books. In November, I came home to Berkeley and showed up at my usual Scottish dance class. The tiny class was suddenly huge, four sets, with two dynamic teachers, Linda Long and Ken McFarland, and among the new people was a good-looking bearded fellow named Robert.

Ken knew I played the violin and encouraged me to play for the class. I found out that Robert played the guitar, so I asked him to join me. After class, dancers would drive to a Scottish pub in San Francisco. The jukebox included Jimmy Shand records; Jack, the pub's piper, was keen to play for us, so we did Mairi's Wedding every week, playing a 40-bar dance to 32-bar phrasing because Jack couldn't figure out the extra 8 bars.

As more musicians joined us, I began to write out and arrange tunes from my collection. My university music courses paid off big time! In 1974, I was given a scholarship to go to Boston for a workshop taught by Angus MacKinnon. Jean Redpath was also there, and I met many Boston people – Roger and Judy Shaw, Marianne Taylor, Julie Smith, Gillian Charters, Sylvia Miskoe, Evelyn Murray, and Cal Howard, among others. Ken encouraged me to take the RSCDS teaching course, which seemed a natural step, but I also had a full-time job (as graduate student assistant in the Department of Classics), so I started a lifetime of being too busy.

I began what I called “open rehearsals,” which drew several dozen people. Nine of us coalesced into a band, and we started rehearsing in earnest. Robert switched to bass for the band, joined by Paul Machlis (piano), a drummer, two multi-instrumentalists (fiddle, banjo, hammered dulcimer, bass, mandolin), Pat Rosenmeyer (flute), and two additional fiddles. We were asked to play for the big SF Branch Weekend at Asilomar, and we also traveled to Fresno and Victoria. People encouraged us to make a record, and I received unsolicited \$100 checks from supporters.

So, into the recording studio we went. Dancers came, too, and danced in the hallway while we played. Our first LP, *A Camp of Pleasure*, came out in 1975, followed by two others.



(Alphabetical by Instrument)

*Jane Landstra (Dulcimer & Violin), Ken Embrey (Hardanger Fiddle & Tenor Banjo),
Carol Ginsburg (Flute), Patricia Rosenmeyer (Flute), Robert McOwen (Guitar),
Will German (Mandolin), Paul Machlis (Piano), Roy Kaitner (Snare Drum),
Karen Nelson (Viola & Violin), Barbara Bouwsma (Violin),
Vaughn Wolff (Violin)*

Meanwhile, Robert attained his Ph.D. in Mathematics in 1978 and started a one-year fellowship at NYU, and we moved to Greenwich Village. The Berkeley musicians, including Paul Machlis, Margo (Khuner) Leslie, Kim McGarrity, and Lyle Ramshaw, kept playing after we left. When Alasdair Fraser moved to San Francisco in the early 1980s, he found a Scottish fiddle network already in place!

We enjoyed everything about New York--sights, restaurants, Broadway, ballet, opera – and we got involved with the New York Branch. We met Jim McIntyre, a champion Irish fiddler, and Colin and Sarah Garrett (fiddle and piano respectively). The five of us formed a band and played for several events in the area. We came up to Boston for the Pinewoods Benefit Ball and the Highland Ball and played in the second Branch-sponsored Burns Night concert in Sanders Theatre. Meanwhile, Robert applied for jobs and landed a tenure-track position at Northeastern University. So, it turned out we were moving to the Boston area!

Robert and I got married in August, 1979, and by the time we moved to Boston in September, I heard that we were forming a band. It was more of a rumor than a fact, but at Pinewoods we met Duncan Smith and Christine Anderson, who were very interested in playing. Someone recommended Ed Pearlman as a 3rd fiddler. (Ed was the American fiddler I met in Paris in 1973!) Someone else recommended Brian Flannery, a young drummer, and, *voilá*, Tullochgorum! With later members, including such stars as Susan Worland, Beth Murray, Anne Hooper, Peter/Kate Barnes, Susie Petrov, and Marianne Taylor, the band played up and down the East Coast and points west including Chicago and California. Ken McFarland featured us on one of his tours of Scotland and Robert and me on several others. Tullochgorum has recorded several albums and has been a major source of music and musicians for Pinewoods and for many subsequent bands.

TULLOCHGORUM



SHINING LIGHTS

AN ALBUM OF SCOTTISH COUNTRY DANCES
DEDICATED TO OUR TEACHERS

*Tullochgorum's most recent album, released 2011
From right to left: Robert McOwen (bass and guitar), Anne
Hooper (fiddle), Peter Barnes (piano), Barbara McOwen
(fiddle), and Paul Henle (percussion)*

A couple of years ago, I realized I had been playing for Scottish country dancing for 50 years. That kind of took the breath out of me! At about that time, I discovered that some sort of aging thing is affecting my bow arm, and I can't play up to dancing tempo anymore. That also took the breath out of me. However, I'll be keeping my hand in, learning new tunes, teaching a dozen people each week, being a band leader if not a player, producing books of tunes, and writing requested articles about the music and my life as a musician. So, here I am, still too busy!

As you can tell from the narrative, this has been an unplanned life – I just followed my nose and did the next thing. One thing for sure, I was very lucky. I'm grateful for that, and for all the people around me, including Robert, who let me fiddle my life away.



Barbara McOwen is well known to *Tartan Times* readers, but some may not know the extent of her contributions. As noted in the "Kudos" section of an earlier issue, in 2024 she was named "Scot of the Year" by *Scots in New England*. She was the first Music Director of *Scottish Pinewoods*; she co-founded the *Boston Scottish Fiddle Club*, the *Cameron Music*

Club in New York, the *Strathspey and Reel Society of New Hampshire* (now the *New Hampshire Scottish Music Club*), and the *Boston Harbor Fiddle School*. She was Music Chair for the NH Highland Games and chaired the National Scottish Fiddle Championship for many years. She instituted live music for Boston Branch classes. Barbara is also the author or co-author of music books, including *The Glengarry Collection* (3 volumes), and as composer, arranger, and player, she has recorded a total of eight CDs for Scottish dancing. It is no wonder that in 2010, the Society's Chairman in Edinburgh awarded her the coveted RSCDS Scroll of Honor for her service to and enrichment of Scottish music and dance. We are blessed indeed to have had the benefit of Barbara's talent, creativity, and dedication for these many decades.

Rethinking Warm-Ups & Cool-Downs: New Guidance from the RSCDS

Jen Schoonover

Over the years, ideas about what movements are healthy for humans have changed. For instance, some teachers used to recommend exaggerated stretching on the barre or floor as soon as dancers came into the dance space. However, exercise science research over the past 10–20 years has made strides in learning which practices are healthy and which may be injurious.

To share these insights, the RSCDS recently put together an updated Guide to warm-ups and cool-downs. Many of the warm-ups teachers use became codified before some of this research was done. A fresh look at warm-ups can help teachers be safer in the movements they lead for dancers to follow and can provide variety and greater engagement as class begins.

The Guide also shares information about why we do warm-ups. Warm-ups provide a transition from everyday actions and reduce risk of injuries. The Guide suggests a two-step approach. First, a cardiovascular section to help increase circulation and raise the body's core temperature; then, exercises to strengthen and increase the range of motion of joints, muscles, and ligaments. The Guide includes specific exercises that teachers can incorporate to achieve these cardio, strength, and mobility goals.

The Guide likewise describes why cool-downs should be included in classes and suggests a two-step structure here, as well. Cool-downs provide a transitional time for the heart and breathing rates and blood pressure to return to pre-exercise levels. The RSCDS suggests this should be the aim of the first phase of a cool-down. Stretching exercises can follow, which help maintain or enhance the range of motion for muscles, tendons, and ligaments. Stretching exercises are most effective at the end of classes when the body is still warm from the more vigorous activity of dancing.



THE ROYAL SCOTTISH COUNTRY DANCE SOCIETY

Cover of the new guide, published by the RSCDS, with dancers performing a point and flex exercise.

The Guide also lists some exercises that are now outdated and possibly injurious. These include:

- Static stretching during warm-ups
- Bouncing/pulsing during stretches
- Tilting the head back, including in head circles
- Holding hands for balance
- Ankle circles
- Lower leg/knee circles

The Guide also suggests that teachers and dancers pay close attention to the alignment of dancers' knees and feet as they perform demi-pliés. One way teachers can help dancers achieve good alignment is to suggest keeping the soles of their feet firmly on the floor during this exercise, including heels and both the medial and lateral sides of the balls of the feet.

The Guide is available to all RSCDS members when logged in to “myRSCDS” on the Society [website](#)

- Go to Member-Only Content and scroll down to Resources or [click here](#).)

I suggest checking it out to get new ideas and fresh inspiration for changing your warm-ups this year, whether you are teaching them to others or looking to keep your own body in fine dancing form!



Jen Schoonover is a dancer, an award-winning choreographer, author, and teacher of Scottish dance forms including highland, country dancing, and Cape Breton Step. Her interest in the history of Scottish dance has led her to research dances from non-competitive and non-standardized traditions. Jen's "Conditioning" classes at Pinewoods, which explore different points of origin for the primary elements of movement, are delightfully popular.

Kudos to MaryEllen Scannell for The Branch Service Award



Three Generations of Dancers
(from left to right)
Catherine Scannell, MaryEllen Scannell,
Ellen Woods,
Ela & Ember Woods

At the Cambridge Class Halloween party on October 27, 2025, Mary Ellen Scannell received a Branch Service Award from RSCDS Headquarters in Edinburgh. The photo shows MaryEllen, in a splendid costume of her own making, flanked by her daughters Catherine Scannell (left) and Ellen Woods (right), both of whom are Scottish dancers, and by her granddaughters Ellie and Ember Woods. Catherine and Ellen kept the secret and conveyed key intelligence about MaryEllen's favorite dances

The award was a surprise to MaryEllen, but not to the 70+ Boston dancers (in-person or on Zoom) eager to thank her for her many contributions. They included the members of the Salem Class, which MaryEllen has led for decades, grateful attendees of the many Balls and Pinewoods Scottish Sessions she has chaired, and intrepid participants of the Cardigan Mountain ski-dance weekends for which she often cooked. The second half of the program featured her favorite dances. Many thanks to MaryEllen for her decades of service, leadership, and enthusiasm for Scottish country dancing! *Slainte!*

Editors' Note: The Executive Committee is eager to honor our most dedicated volunteers with this award, the existence of which had slipped under the radar. We encourage members and classes to suggest worthy recipients. The guidelines for receiving the award and the nomination form can be found at: <https://rscds.org/get-involved/membership/member-recognition>. Please send your suggestions to secretary@rscdsboston.org. As noted on the website, it is rare for a Branch to be granted more than one award per year, so it may take us a while to make up for lost time!

This Times' Tartan

Auld Lang Syne

Designer: Not Specified

Reference #: 240

Registration Date: 01/01/2002



This specific tartan was debuted on January 25th, 2002 at the Beach Ballroom in Aberdeen, Scotland in honor of poet, Robert Burns' birthday.

Robert Burns (1759-1769), a Scottish poet and lyricist, is widely thought of as the national poet of Scotland. He is one of the better known poets to have written in the Scots language, though a good deal of his work was composed in a 'light Scots dialect' meaning it could be understood by the wider English speaking audience. And true to form, it was in these works where he was most incendiary about his political commentary.

He is considered a pioneer of the literary Romantic movement, and after he died, his work was used as a huge inspiration for the foundations of both the Liberalism and Socialism movement. He is a celebrated Scottish cultural icon all around the world. In 2009, he was voted as the Greatest Scot in a public vote run by STV, a Scottish television channel.

Burns' poem & song '*Auld Lang Syne*' is often sung at Hogmanay (the last day of the year) and at other New Year's celebrations.

Stay Tuned!

A quick preview! Unless otherwise directed, consult the calendar on the [website](#) for time, place, and other details.

~Upcoming Dance Events~

Jan 26, Mon - 7:45pm - Watertown, MA - Cambridge Class' Annual Burns Night party

Mar 14, Sat - 5PM Hors d'oeuvres, 6:15PM Dancing Starts - West Hartford, CT - New Haven Highland Ball - West Hartford Town Hall Conference Center 50 S. Main Street, West Hartford, CT 06107

Mar 15, Sun - 11AM - Wallingford, CT - Brunch and Dancing Polish National Alliance Park 171 N. Plains Industrial Road, Wallingford, CT

Mar 21, Sat - 7:30pm - 10pm - Weston, MA - SDCEA Scholarship Dance

May 8-10 - Boston Highland Ball weekend, Melrose, MA - [Ball Info](#)

~Upcoming Music Events~

Jan 15-18 - Cambridge & Somerville, MA - Boston Celtic Music Festival - See [Passim's website](#) for more details!

Jan 16, Fri - 8PM - Groton, MA - Altan - Performing at the Groton Hill Music Center - [Ticket Info](#)

Jan 24, Sat - 5PM - Windham, NH - NH Pipes & Drums with Scottish Arts present Burns Night - [Ticket Info](#)

Feb 9, Mon - Portland, ME - Dropkick Murphys with Cam Webster - [Ticket Info](#)