

# *The Tartan Times*

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## **Editors' Introduction: Good Work, Good Help**

March 8 ushered in Daylight Savings Time, and the first day of spring is not far off, a welcome prospect after our snowy winter. Renewal and rebirth are not prominent in the larger world at the moment, but many members of our community work hard to ensure the Branch continues to thrive, to preserve its past and create its future. This issue celebrates several such individuals and initiatives.

The RSCDS, Boston Branch is now in its 76<sup>th</sup> year, and in May we will host our 75<sup>th</sup> Highland Ball (having had to cancel during the pandemic). Much of the history of those years has been preserved in the Branch Archives, housed in the Special Collections of the University of New Hampshire Library, along with other records of folk culture in New England. Thanks to the expertise of dancer and Executive Committee Member Hana Lang, we are reviving the Archives with a reinvigorated system for donating and for encouraging donations. You can get a glimpse of our holdings to date by clicking on the "finding aid" embedded in the article.

While some of us are AI skeptics, AI can be a good help in doing the good work of sustaining our community. Hana reported that she used AI to create the handsome border of her flyer about the Archives. At the Pinewoods ceilidh last summer, webmaster Meyer Billmers went further: he asked AI to produce a poem about an error-prone Scottish dancer. The resulting "Ode" was both hilarious, big-hearted, and remarkably well informed about Scottish country dancing figures, etiquette, and common mistakes. Later, Meyer asked Gemini, Google's AI, to summarize the joys and benefits of SCD. The result was also impressive: the first point rightly highlighted SCD's "social heartbeat." A link to

the description is now permanently available on our website, as well as in Meyer's article.

In the end of course, we rely on good people to do the good work of the Branch. The Kudos section celebrates David Thompson and his decades of leading and teaching the Branch Class in Belfast, Maine. His dedication, enthusiasm, and resourcefulness have been appreciated by generations of Maine dancers, and they were recently recognized and honored with a Branch Service Award from RSCDS headquarters in Edinburgh. Thank you, Dave!

As the Branch calendar turns into spring, the Nominating Committee will be looking for candidates for the two at-large positions on Exec, two members for the Nominating Committee, and election (or re-election) of the President and Secretary. Please consider how you might use your skills to help the good work of the Branch and ensure its annual rebirth and renewal—and if asked to serve or run for office, say “YES!”

Happy Spring, everyone. We hope to see many of you at the SDCEA Scholarship dance on March 21 and at our Gala 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Highland Ball Weekend, May 8-10!

Linda McJannet and Nikki Lauranzano, Co-Editors  
John Crabtree, Circulation\*

\*Special thanks to John, who also formatted this issue for electronic delivery.

# Reviving the Archives

Hana Lang

***Editor's note:** In recent decades, activity with respect to the Branch Archives has been sporadic. When we had a librarian or someone with archival training on Exec, submissions were robust, but in the last decade or so, submissions declined. When Hana Lang joined the Executive Committee in the summer of 2025, she agreed to be our liaison for the Branch Archives. As it turned out, in Hana we once again had a person with professional training in archival work and an interest in preserving our history for posterity.*

*This past summer, we delivered a large tranche of documents collected by former Branch President Evelyn Murray and stored for several years by another former Branch President, Jean Farrington. In doing so, we discovered that Elizabeth Slomba, the curator of Special Collections at UNH, was eager to receive our records and other materials and to enrich the Scottish music and dance portions of their holdings related to folk culture in New England. (For an itemized overview of the RSCDS Boston collection, click here. <https://library.unh.edu/find/archives/collections/royal-scottish-country-dance-society-boston-branch-1848-2012> ). Hana spoke with Elizabeth to clarify which materials could be donated and to establish a mutually convenient donation process.*



*From the archives: Tartan Times January 1967 edition  
commemorating Jeannie Carmichael*



*From the archives: Tartan Times cover from 1959*

*To inform Branch members of this effort and encourage participation, Hana summarized the plan for collection in an email that went out to Class Leaders to share with their dancers. She also created a handsome flyer with the essentials. (See below.) Hana reports that she got “good help” from AI in designing the flyer! We can’t predict what future generations will be interested in, but thanks to Hana and the efforts of our Class Leaders, event coordinators, and interested Branch members, the records of the Branch will once again be more systematically preserved. Thank you in advance for responding to the call!*

## **Help Preserve our History — Donate to the Archives!**

Special Collections and University Archives at UNH Durham collects, organizes, and preserves RSCDS Boston Branch materials alongside other collections related to traditional music and dance in New England donated by organizations and individuals. Collections such as “The Marianne Taylor Papers” and “RSCDS Boston Branch” serve the research needs of students, musicians, dancers, historians, and UNH faculty, as well as the general public.

In 2012, Gregor Trinkaus-Randall delivered the initial collection of materials to the UNH Library. What is now the “RSCDS Boston Branch” collection has grown over the years through the efforts of Evelyn Murray, Jean Farrington, and Jeff Hopper, among others, who collected items and donated to the archives. While UNH is currently working with RSCDS Boston to establish a system whereby digital materials can be donated, physical materials are still very welcome.

Examples of items that can be donated are print memorabilia, dance books, Ball programs, name buttons, Tartan Times, Pinewoods Gazettes, newspaper articles, photographic prints, DVDs, CDs, etc. No cloth materials or clothing please.

To simplify the process, donations will be collected each year at the Boston Ball, beginning this year. Watertown/Cambridge dancer Hana Lang is gathering the donations and will deliver them to UNH on a yearly basis. **Bring contributions to the Boston Ball on May 9, 2026!**

If you have questions about items you wish to donate, email Hana at [archives@rscdsboston.org](mailto:archives@rscdsboston.org).



*Hana's flyer, generated with AI assistance*

**Bring contributions to the Boston Ball on May 9, 2026!**

# SCD Meets Google's AI

## Meyer Billmers

Last summer at Pinewoods, I had an idea for a Ceilidh act. I was toying with how I could get Gemini (Google's AI Large Language Model, built into Chrome) to come up with a poem about SCD. I tried asking for poems, composed dances, and parody songs. I used a very simple request, so that I wasn't predisposing Gemini to use specific terms; I believe the query was something like "compose a poem about a new Scottish Country dancer." I wanted to see what it would come up with on its own. I was surprised at what a good job Gemini did, and my audience seemed to agree. Gemini even changed the word "poem" in the query to "ode," one of its displays of good literary judgment!

I also asked Gemini to produce a summary description of SCD. The response was excellent, emphasizing SCD's "social heartbeat" and its physical and mental benefits. Check it out here: <https://rscdsboston.org/scd-ai-summary.html>.

***Meyer Billmers** worked as a researcher in Artificial Intelligence and as a web-based applications designer before retiring. He is active in both International Folk Dance (with the Folk Arts Center of New England) and Scottish Country Dance (with the RSCDS, Boston Branch, for which he has long served as webmaster). Meyer is also an active club and tournament-level chess player (with the US Chess Federation).*



*Meyer and Laura Billmers at Pinewoods in 2025.*

## **Ode to the Endearingly Errant Scottish Dancer**

**Created by Gemini,  
commissioned by Meyer Billmers**

O, Dancer bold, with eager feet,  
Upon the polished floor you stand,  
The fiddle starts, the rhythm sweet,  
A hopeful ghillie in the land.  
The set forms up, the couples bow,  
The caller names a favorite reel,  
You nod, you beam, you know just how...  
Or so you genuinely feel.

The music lifts, a lively jig!  
You skip change forth with right good will,  
Your neighbor aims for something big,  
While you collide upon the sill  
Of the first figure. Turning left?  
Or was it right? A moment's pause...  
Your partner, briefly quite bereft,  
Recovers, bending dancing's laws.

Then, Hands Across, a starry wheel,  
Requires four hands to meet and blend,  
But yours, with passionate appeal,  
Reach out towards the other end!  
The Poussette starts, a push, a pull,  
You somehow end up back-to-back,  
Your energy, while wonderful,  
Has put the set quite off its track.

Through Reels of Three you bravely weave,  
A fourth unwanted, joining in,  
A tangled thread you brightly leave,  
Accompanied by a cheerful grin.

The Setting Step, a neat display,  
Becomes a bounce, a joyful leap,  
You land, perhaps, the other way,  
While ordered dancers secrets keep.

Yet, who could frown? Your boundless zest,  
Your sheer delight in tune and pace,  
Puts grim precision to the test,  
And brings a smile to every face.  
Though counts are lost and figures stray,  
And pathways form anew, unplanned,  
You dance the night in your own way,  
The happiest dancer in the band!

So, whirl you on, let errors fly!  
Let patterns fray and lines dissolve!  
Your spirit lifts the music high,  
A problem only joy can solve.  
We wouldn't change your errant flight,  
Your glorious, mixed-up, merry state,  
You bring the chaos and the light,  
Our wonderfully inaccurate mate!

## Kudos to David Thompson

Thanks to the initiative of Gayle Koyanagi, Donna Griffith, and Dawn Little, members of the Belfast Class of the Boston Branch, their long-time leader, David Thompson, has received a Branch Service Award from RSCDS headquarters in Edinburgh. The award recognizes David for his many years of teaching, managing, and organizing Scottish country dancing in Maine.

Founded in 1982 by Marty King, the class moved to Belfast around 1983 and meets year-round. Having received his Preliminary Teaching Certificate in 1988, David became the principal teacher and class manager in 1994, when Marty left the area. He taught the class for 12 years, led the demonstration team, and continued as class manager until 2021. Since Belfast is in a rural area of Maine, some dancers travel 50 miles or more to attend class.



*From left, Carlton Smith, Dawn Little, Barbara Thompson (Dave's wife) and Dave Thompson demonstrate Scottish country dancing at the Maine Highland Games, 1 or 2 years before the pandemic.*

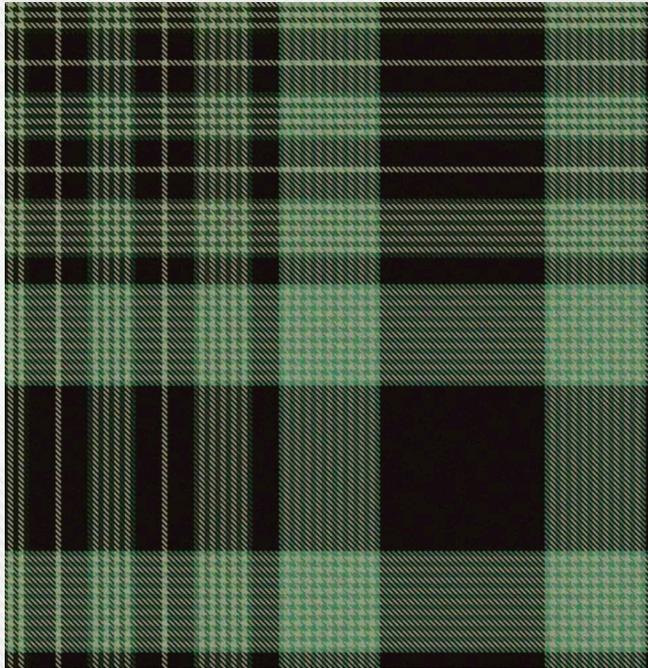
David also provided music with the Tattered Tartans band and created SCD demonstrations, including Scottish tunes and songs. The demonstration team met once a week and provided

monthly entertainment for elder care facilities in the Mid-coast area at no charge. David also cultivated a long-standing relationship with the Belfast Legion of Honor. David is the reason there is still a Belfast class.

Now in his mid-90s, David inspires other dancers as he continues to dance in Bucksport and Belfast. Congratulations, Dave! An honor well deserved.

# This Times' Tartan

3.14159...



**Designer:** Carol A.L. Martin  
**Unregistered, date unknown**

This *Times'* tartan celebrates  $\pi$ , the infinitely non-repeating mathematical constant that is the ratio of a circle's circumference to its diameter. Since  $\pi$  starts with the digits 314, March 14<sup>th</sup> (3/14) is *Pi* Day. When the tartan's pattern is viewed from left to right, the number of the narrow, green stripes, separated by the wider black stripes, correspond to  $\pi$ 's first six digits. According to the designer, the black and green recall the colors of early computer display screens and efforts to computationally calculate the digits of  $\pi$  (currently calculated to more than 100 trillion digits!). Our cover's rendering of this unregistered tartan is notable for its lack of symmetry; like  $\pi$  itself, it breaks the rules of rational patterns!

In mathematical circles,  $\pi$  turns up in unexpected places. One of them is the fight song of the Beavers, Mother Nature's clever engineers and the mascot of MIT:

I'm a Beaver. You're a Beaver. We are Beavers all.  
And when we get together, we do the Beaver call!

*E* to the *u du dx*,

*E* to the *x, dx*.

Cosine, secant, tangent, sine,

*3 point 1 4 1 5 9!*

Integral, radical, *mu, dv*

Slipstick, slide rule, MIT!

To help you remember the initial digits, one mnemonic is the following: "How I want a drink, alcoholic of course, after the heavy lectures involving quantum mechanics." The number of letters per word represent the first 15 digits:

3.14159265358979. The endless fascination of  $\pi$  and the symmetry and elegant repetitions of Scottish country dancing may explain--in some part—its appeal to so many engineers, mathematicians, and people in other scientific fields.

Happy  $\pi$  Day!

# Stay Tuned!

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

## Upcoming Dance Events

**Sat, Mar 21** SDCEA Scholarship Dance, music by Clara Stefanov-Wagner and friends. First Parish Church, Weston, MA

**Sat, Apr 4** North American Festival of Scottish Country Dance. Philadelphia, PA <https://tac-rscds.org/index.php/na-festival>

**Fri, May 8** Welcome Dance, Boston Highland Ball weekend, music by Terry Traub. Chelmsford, MA

**Sat, May 9** Highland Ball with Susie Petrov & Tom Pixton, more. Our 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Ball! Melrose, MA

**Sun, May 10** Highland Ball Brunch and dancing on the lawn.

**Sat, May 16** Fairlee Spring Fling, music by Peter Macfarlane, Viveka Fox, Susie Petrov. Fairlee, VT

**Sat, May 23** Belfast Memorial Day Weekend Dance, music by Karen Steven, Alasdair MacDonald. Belfast, ME

## Upcoming Music Events

**Fri, Mar 13 - Tue, Mar 17** St. Patrick's Day Specials with Tommy & Louise. Somerville, MA [burren.com](http://burren.com)

**Wed, Mar 18** Boston Scottish Fiddle Club session with Katie McNally & Neil Pearlman. Watertown, MA [bsfc.org](http://bsfc.org)

**Fri, Mar 20** - Scottish Fish. Portland, ME [scottishfishfiddle.com](http://scottishfishfiddle.com)

**Sun, Mar 29** Jacqueline Schwab concert, "Be the Light". Danvers, MA [nsuu.org](http://nsuu.org)

**Thu, April 2** Mike Block Trio. Cambridge, MA [passim.org](http://passim.org)

**Sun afternoon, Apr 5** BSFC Fiddle Workshop with Ed Pearlman. Belmont, MA [bsfc.org](http://bsfc.org)

**Thu, April 9 - Sun, Apr 12** Fiddle Hell Online. Featuring Andrea Beaton, Hanneke Cassel, Jenna Moynihan, Katie McNally, Neil Pearlman, more. [fiddlehell.org](http://fiddlehell.org)

**Wed, April 15** – BSFC Session with Elizabeth Anderson. Watertown MA [bsfc.org](http://bsfc.org)

**Wed, Apr 22** – Breabach, band direct from Scotland. Somerville, MA [burren.com](http://burren.com)

**Sun Afternoon Apr 26** NH Scottish Music Club Spring Concert. Concord, NH [nhscottishmusicclub.org](http://nhscottishmusicclub.org)

**Tue, Apr 28** Alasdair Fraser & Natalie Haas. Cambridge, MA [passim.org](http://passim.org)

**Wed, May 6** Elizabeth & Ben Anderson, album release concert. Somerville, MA [burren.com](http://burren.com)

## Monthly Events

- **Sessions at the Canadian American Club** Open mike every Friday night. Gaelic Club on the 3rd Sunday of the month, September through June, and more. Watertown, MA [canadianamericanclub.com](http://canadianamericanclub.com)
- **Lance Ramshaw's Slow Jam** Occasional Friday evenings. It's good to get on Lance's email list, no matter your playing experience - interesting info, tune lists, more. Concord, MA [ramshaw.info](http://ramshaw.info)
- **Scottish Sessions at The Luthier Collective**, hosted by Leland Martin. Occasional Thursday evenings. "Scottish, Cape Breton, and New England tunes at a medium-to-fast pace" Somerville, MA [tuneswithleland.com](http://tuneswithleland.com)
- **Scottish Sessions**, hosted by Adam Henley and friends. Sundays noon - 3PM. Cambridge, MA [mccarthystoad.com](http://mccarthystoad.com)

## And of course...

- **Scottish Country Dance Classes near you!** Boston Branch of the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society offers classes in 4 New England states and New York [rscdsboston.org](http://rscdsboston.org)