

another farewell!

Jim Passage



Combine the tenacity and toughness of a frontier woman with love of Scottish Country Dancing and that person is Chris Riker. Here is a thumbnail sketch of her Scottish dancing activities – with apologies that the exact dates are not all at hand. Chris has four photo albums of Scottish dancing – with captions and notations – available for inspection at her new home in Buhl, Idaho. One of us had better drive up there and check out the history of the Santa Rosa Class!

Chris started dancing with the Mill Valley Class more than twenty-five years ago. Chris was living in Kenwood and she drove more than a hundred miles round trip every Friday night. While dancing in Mill Valley, she collected names of others in Sonoma County who might be interested in SCD. John Derek Evans and his wife Doreen moved from Southern California to Sebastopol in the late seventies. The Santa Rosa Class was soon formed, with Doreen as the first teacher, and with weekly classes in Rohnert Park. An active SCD demo team included the enthusiastic Chris Riker.

Doreen Evans passed away due to illness, but the class continued. Chris Riker became a regular teacher, along with Derek Evans and guest teachers as well. Chris recalls making the original arrangement for use of the Santa Rosa Senior Center dining room. Ron Wallace and Gary Thomas arrived from Minnesota in 1989, and were pleased to take over the teaching responsibilities in Santa Rosa. John Derek passed away in 2001, leaving Chris as the last remaining of the three original members of this class.

Art is just one of her many talents. Chris drew a logo for the San Francisco Branch, did the artwork for Asilomar shirts and dance programs. It was Chris who made the first Santa Rosa class banner – white felt with a large rose.

Chris has moved up to live in rural Idaho, in a lovely and spacious home. You will appreciate the joy she feels in her new surroundings when reading this quote from a recent card:

I opted not to hook up the satellite. It is much more interesting to me to stand at the two big picture windows and six bay windows and look out of them at the spectacular canyon of the Snake River. The atmospheric conditions, breezes, and cloud formations change hour by hour, if not minute by minute, making a colorful panorama of the vast prairie. Just by lifting the eyes you can see a northern horizon line of snow capped peaks of the Sawtooth Range of the Rocky Mountains. They turn pink in the sunset and look like a row of strawberry ice cream cones.

She misses all of her SCD friends and sends a warm and friendly “hello” from Idaho. We will miss Chris, too, always the pleasant and cheerful dance partner.

august apple juicing party

Judy and Jack Mathieson (with apologies from editors for omitting this from last newsletter)

We live just north of Sebastopol and have quite a few old apple trees (mostly Gravenstein) on the property. We acquired an old fashioned apple press when we bought the house in 1996. For the past few years we have invited the dancers to come and press apples, bring potluck dinner, and

take apple juice home. Jack motorized the press; so don't be afraid we will wear your arm out! Dancers only have to throw apples into the macerator and help with the pressing. It's a bit messy, but we provide aprons for the stray bits of apple flying around

August apple party continued:

This year's party was in mid-August on a Sunday afternoon. The apple crop was not as good as usual due to rains during blossom and a cold summer. Scab infected the trees, and while the apples were ugly and fewer than usual, we still had enough to make juice and send jugs home. About twenty people gathered on a very pleasant day. Jack loves to show off his Border Collie dogs (originally from the borders of Scotland and England), as he competes in local sheepdog trials, so he gave some demonstrations with our sheep. Kathy and Bill Faherty's BC puppy, Bonnie, was a visitor at the party this year, and she shows herding talent. We may see her competing at the Scottish Games in Pleasanton in the future.

We enjoy having the party, but it is hard to predict when it will be as the harvest varies from year to year. Last year it was in very early August. We don't have class during the summer, so the email list is the only way I can let people know the date. I usually send out an email invitation to the dancers' list, so be sure you are listed correctly and plan to join us next year.

weekend workshop at asilomar

Kathy Faherty



As you may have heard announced in class, our Santa Rosa dancing group is a part of a much larger organization – The Royal Scottish Country Dance Society (RSCDS), whose headquarters are in Edinburgh, Scotland. But our local branch is based in San Francisco (SF Branch). There are many advantages to being a member of the SF Branch, and one of them is the opportunity to participate in the annual Weekend Workshop at Asilomar and get to know other dancers throughout the region.

Asilomar is a conference grounds located at Asilomar State Park just south of Pacific Grove in the Monterey Bay area. The grounds are wooded and located just across the road from one of the most beautiful beaches in California. (*ed. Many of the buildings were designed by Julia Morgan who also designed the Hearst Mansion.*)

The workshop is geared for adult dancers with at least one year of experience and is usually held in the latter part of October. It begins with a Welcome Dance on Friday night in the Great Hall. Participants sign up when they register for classes all day on Saturday that are geared to certain levels and interests. Then there is a ball on Saturday night that is nothing short of magical. The Great Hall is beautifully decorated and banners from all the classes in the SF Branch are hanging from the ceiling. (*ed. Our new class banner, created by Jane Marx, looked wonderful!*) There is a champagne/sherry social prior to the dancers being piped into the hall in a Grand March. The men are in dress kilts and the women in their finest ball gowns. We dance to exquisite live music until midnight, and then head to another location for a ceilidh that is officially over at 2:30 a.m. (Rumor has it that certain people, especially musicians, keep going even after that!)

Sunday morning finds us all dancing again, albeit a little slowed down, and we part after lunch and head home, vowing to return again next year.

Applications for Asilomar come out in the spring to all members of RSCDS-SF Branch. So join now if you haven't already, and look for the application in "The Reel and Strathspey," the official newsletter of the San Francisco Branch.

the valentine's ball

Kathy Faherty

Another very special event sponsored by the San Francisco Branch of the RSCDS is the Valentine's Ball held each year on the Saturday evening closest to Valentine's Day. This year will be the 40th annual and it will be held on February 11 at the Scottish Rite Center in Oakland.

Dancers throughout the region gather for a Sherry Social before the Granch March. Then, after dancing the night away to the music of "The Reel of Seven," we are feted with a Midnight Buffet before heading home. Ron has been teaching the dances that are on this year's program during the second half of the class, but even if you know a few dances in each set, it's fun to attend and get inspired to keep going and learn more. The Scottish Rite Center also has a balcony where non-dancers or those who are sitting out a dance can view the entire spectacle from above. It's amazing to watch the patterns unfold from that perspective. One observer described it as looking through a kaleidoscope!

So come and take a look and even venture out onto the floor. It will open up a whole new world of dancing!

Ed. If you do not have a ball gown, or would like to trade one in, there is a Ball Gown Swap and Tea at the home of Susie Langdon Cass in San Francisco January 22.

youth and family class

Katherine Salinger, age 13

Last September when we started again, two experienced Highland dancers joined our class! Their names are Beth and Mara McLeester. Mara is 21 and has been Highland Dancing for 15 years. Beth, age 14, has been Highland Dancing for 8 years. They are both liking this class very much, and they love dancing with the little children! They also say that the transition from Highland to Country Dancing is quite easy because many of the steps are the same.

We also had someone from Scotland join our Step Dancing Class! Her name is Isla; because she lived there for so long, Mr. Wallace is able to ask her questions about Scotland and that is always interesting!

On December 16th, we performed at the Fircrest Convalescent Home in Sebastopol. The Bonnie family has visited there for almost 20 years. The Beginners' Class performed Dunnet Head, Blue Bonnets, and The Sailors' Dance; the Advanced Class danced Seann Triubhas Willichan, Catch the Wind, Mairi's Wedding, and The Piper and the Penguin, and the Step Class did some Jigs and Reels. From the Highland class Mara, Candy and Amanda also danced. Mara sang "My Love is Like a Red, Red Rose." Scotland, Morgan and Kyle, who play for our Step Class, joined the adults to play for some of the dancing!

All the people there seemed to really love it! It makes you feel good when you perform at places like that!

Thank you, Mr. Wallace!

how I came upon scottish country dancing

Emily Evans

In 1981 I was invited by an acquaintance of mine to go as his guest to watch him Scottish Country dance. Although the idea of watching someone else dance for a whole evening seemed a bit odd to me, when he mentioned that he would be wearing a kilt, my curiosity got the better of me and I accepted his invitation. He said that we would be going down to Oakland; it was some kind of Valentine's Ball. "Okay," I thought. "What are a few hours in a lifetime?"

Those of you who have watched Scottish Country dancing from a balcony will understand what I am about to say. From the balcony at the Scottish Rites Temple you can see the geometry, the pageantry, the elegance. Beautiful ball gowns and men in kilts make for near magic. It is an extraordinary sight when the sets are all lined up and several people are doing the same thing at the same time (well, that's their intent). The live music was simply fantastic, and I was hooked by the end of the first dance. Within a week I had found a class, and I have been Scottish dancing ever since.

And in answer to the question, "How did you learn about Scottish Country Dancing, and when did you start dancing?", we offer the following:

- **Barbara Barrett:** I had watched the performances at the Pleasanton Games. I started September 1996.
- **Chuck Levine and Sara Volat:** We learned from Martie Leys. We started this fall.
- **Sue Osborne:** I learned from Bruce Maxwell. This is a delightful evening. A great way to start the week!
- **Sheila and Edmond Bridant:** During the year I (Sheila) taught school in Edinburgh, I worked with a man who belonged to a ceilidh band. The band hired Edmond to take pictures for their CD and made partial payments with tickets to one of their dances. We came home in 2001 but didn't find the Santa Rosa dancers until January 2004.
- **Bill and Karen Robotka:** Patty Webb told us about these two great teachers in Santa Rosa. We came to check out the class and never left. That was more than 10 years ago.
- **Nancy Roberts:** In the summer of 1993, I attended a Scottish Fiddlers concert in the Luther Burbank Center. During the intermission, the two women next to me began to talk about dancing. I was so thrilled with the music that I asked: "Can you dance to this kind of music?" They told me about the Santa Rosa class and said I could get a flyer at the Games (still in Santa Rosa then). I started dancing that September. The two women were Connie Beall and Deidre Harrison.
- **Scott Serkes:** Paul and Lori Anderson, both avid dancers, invited me and we drove up from Petaluma together for my first few months. Lori kept saying there were more girls than boys and that dance class needed more boys!
- **Bob and Martie Leys:** For years we had gone to the Scottish Games in Santa Rosa with our children. Finally, instead of watching, we jumped in with both feet and began Monday evening classes when Chris Riker was teaching. I took a long hiatus when I went to law school. So happy to be back these past three years.
- **Larry Cooke:** Gary started working with me at a spa in Calistoga and I asked him what else he did. He told me about Scottish dancing and I came and watched. It looked like fun so I joined. I had never danced before in my life and I'm having so much fun.
- **Connie Beall:** My love of ginger cookies led me to Scottish dancing. Emily Evans and her grandmother's cookies were featured in the *Press Democrat*. She made them for dance class so I tracked her down and joined the class in 1992.

- **Susan Scott:** A friend of a friend was a Scottish dancer and suggested that we try it. I started dance class on Friday nights at Piedmont School in Oakland in 1987. After our beginners class we would go watch the experienced dancers at a neighboring school. They had live music and all the men wore kilts. I was hooked!
- **Jim and Celine Passage:** Nancy Roberts taught us “Strip the Willow” at a benefit for Friends of the Old Trees in Sebastopol. We were mesmerized and started classes in September 1993. (Note: It was Yvonne Ross who invited dancers to the benefit.)
- **Yvonne Ross:** It was 1992 and I was performing at the Renaissance Faire, while my husband, Jim, attended the Scottish Games. He saw the dancers, knew I’d love it, got me a flyer, and the rest is history.
Judy and Jack Mathieson: Jack and I met in high school in Redwood City and belonged to a folk dance group. We danced for about 20 years while we lived in Los Angeles, but had stopped for about 10 years when we moved up here in 1996 and Melissa and Vern, former active members of this group, invited us to come to class in September of ’96. Melissa still rents a house on our son’s farm in Sebastopol.
- **Jane Marx:** I had always wanted to do dancing of some type, but when I went to the Sebastopol Celtic Festival in 2000 and saw the Scottish Dancers, I knew that was for me! Since that time, I have taken up Scottish Fiddling, and also do Highland dance, Cape Breton, Scottish Step, and continue with the SCD performance group on Fridays.
- **Kathy Faherty:** I went hiking in Scotland with my sister-in-law in July of 2002. While on a bus on the way to Cawdor Castle, I met Karen Maitland. She told me about SCD in Santa Rosa. I began in September of 2002 and enjoy every minute of it! I’ve also taken up the fiddle and Cape Breton Hard Shoe on Thursday nights.
- **Ann Glenn:** At the Celtic Festival in Sebastopol in 2003, I saw happy people enjoying moving together to fine music! I met Ron and told him, “I want to learn this dance from YOU!” He embraced me (literally), and told me which classes to attend. Now I am nourished by Country Dance, Ladies Step, and Cape Breton Step in a way that probably only my closest friends and family know. I have never stopped appreciating Ron for embracing me so, nor for Gary and his amazingly fine teaching skills.

calendar notes

Our class will be hosting the May 6 San Francisco Branch monthly party along with Dunsmuir Scottish Dancers at the San Rafael Masonic Hall. Stay tuned for more details.

Beginners Ball this year will be June 17 back at Hermann Sons Hall in Petaluma. Watch for flyers.

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