

History of the Scotch Four: A Social Step Dance in Cape Breton

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If you have any interest in traditional dance or music in Canada, chances are good that you've heard of Cape Breton step dance, if not seen it. If you google "Cape Breton step dance", you'll get a large number and variety of hits, from articles in the *Globe and Mail* ("How to Look – and Dance – Like a Local at a Cape Breton Ceilidh", June 4, 2011¹) and dancing school websites to histories and bibliographies (e.g., "Cape Breton Step-Dance: An Irish or Scottish Tradition", by Sheldon MacInnes²) and instructional resources.³ And lots and lots of YouTube videos.

Cape Breton step dance is recognized internationally, particularly among "Celtic" music and dance circles. For the last few decades, Cape Breton step dancers have been brought to Scotland on a regular basis to teach step dance. They are regularly hired to teach dance at fiddle and dance camps. And they are frequently featured at Celtic music and dance festivals.

Modern Cape Breton step-dancing involves individual dancers improvising steps and routines in response to the music they hear. The music starts with strathspeys and finishes with reels. Although both are duple time tunes, they each have distinct styles and associated steps (see Sparling 2014, 100-119 for an explanation of the differences in tune types). Solo dancers are regularly featured on concert stages, at both formal and informal ceilidhs,⁴ and at square dances. Although house parties featuring traditional cultural expressions (such as stories, Gaelic songs, music, and dancing) are no longer as common as they once were, dancers still sometimes share a step spontaneously when visiting someone who appreciates traditional dance.

But this improvisatory solo step-dancing is a relatively recent development in Cape Breton, rooted in two older forms of dancing: named solo step dances with fixed choreographies (such as The Flowers of Edinburgh and the Fling) and the Scotch Four, a social dance featuring improvisatory step-dancing. Neither form is practised much today, although the Scotch Four is sometimes performed at concerts and there's a growing interest among younger dancers in its revival. This article offers a history of the Scotch Four in Cape Breton.

It is, of course, difficult to write a history of vernacular culture since so little of it was, in the past, deemed worthy of notice, let alone worthy of documentation and publication. Researching dance history offers particular challenges, since video and even audio recording technology was not readily available

until relatively recently, and written descriptions, when they exist at all, are rarely detailed. Even those few descriptions that do offer details are difficult to interpret. It's hard to render sonic qualities and physical motions into words.

Despite the limitations of studying the history of vernacular dance, we are fortunate that several scholars have made a point of studying traditional Cape Breton dance since the 1950s. Frank Rhodes wrote two important appendices in *Traditional Dancing in Scotland* (1964) and *Traditional Step-Dancing in Scotland* (1996) by the dance scholars Tom Flett and Joan Flett. Rhodes conducted fieldwork in Cape Breton in 1957, interviewing tradition-bearers and dancers from various parts of the island. About 30 years later, Allister MacGillivray published *A Cape Breton Ceilidh* (1988), a series of "portraits" of Cape Breton dancers. Around the same time, in 1986, Barbara LeBlanc and Laura Sadowsky conducted interviews with dancers, dance musicians, and "callers" (people who "call" instructions for square dances) throughout Inverness County (on the western side of the island, where most Scottish settlement took place in the late 18th and early 19th centuries) for what was then called the Museum of Man in Ottawa (today's Museum of History). Another 30 years on and scholars like Mats Melin (2012, 2013, 2015), Pat Ballantyne (2008), and I are researching step-dancing in the present.

The Scotch Four Today

So let's start with the present and work backwards. The Scotch Four can sometimes be seen performed at concerts. Variety concerts featuring traditional music and dance are common during the summer tourist season, from large-scale and long-running once-a-year events like the Broad Cove concert and Highland Village Day, to smaller, weekly events like the Baddeck Gathering Ceilidhs or Thursday night ceilidhs at the Inverness fire hall. Not long ago, I watched a Scotch Four being performed at a Gaelic College concert (July 22, 2015), and friends performed Scotch Fours during Celtic Colours in October. There are a small number of YouTube videos of Scotch Fours performed by Cape Bretoners.⁵

Two couples face each other, with a woman standing to the right of her male partner, in a "square" formation. As a fiddler launches into a set of strathspeys, the couples bow or curtsy to the opposite couple, then to their partners. The women cross

in front of their partners, pass the opposite woman right shoulder to right shoulder, carry on to the opposite woman's home position, then circle around clockwise back to their own original position. Meanwhile, the men remain at home for a few beats, then follow their partners, passing the opposite man right shoulder to right shoulder. However, instead of carrying on to the opposite man's home position as the women do, they circle each other tightly, moving in a clockwise direction, until they face their partner from the centre of what has become a line formation (the women are at the ends, facing the centre, and the men are standing back-to-back, facing their partners). As they move into these new positions, the dancers use one of a few basic, repeating travelling steps. Once they have reached their new positions, they all extemporize a selection of strathspey steps. It's important to understand that the steps are not generally synchronized or pre-planned; each dancer individually chooses and executes steps, regardless of the steps the other dancers are performing. The length of time for the travelling and setting steps seems somewhat negotiable, although shifts from travelling to setting and back tend to correspond to the ends of musical phrases.

When they're ready to travel again, the women move to their right and their partners come forward from the centre so that partners pass each other left shoulder to left shoulder. The women then cross each other in the centre, right shoulder to right shoulder, carry on to the opposite woman's home position and circle back to their own home positions, as before. The men circle tightly behind their partners, pass each other right shoulder to right shoulder, but stay in the centre, ready to dance with a new partner. The women always return to their home positions, but the men constantly change places so that, with each iteration of the setting step, they're dancing with a different partner.

Eventually, the tunes shift from strathspeys to reels, and the travelling step changes, as do the setting steps. But the overall travelling pattern remains the same. Theoretically, the alternation between travelling and setting steps can continue as long as the musicians and dancers desire. However, typically it's two rounds for the strathspey and two to four rounds for the reel. The combination of two different tune types in a single dance is somewhat unusual in vernacular social dance traditions, and is one of the defining characteristics of what the Fletts consider to be a "true" Reel⁶ (Flett and Flett 1972, 91).

Once the dancers are done alternating setting and travelling steps, they travel into a line and face the audience with the women in the centre and the men at the ends. They all hold hands, although one of the women moves forward out of line and proceeds to

dance a few steps on her own while the others dance a basic step behind her. She moves back into line, and one of the men comes forward. Each takes a turn being featured. Afterwards, the original couples put their arms around each other in pairs, promenaded in a circle, and exit the stage, finishing the dance.

I asked some step dancers born in the 1970s and 1980s, who I know are familiar with the Scotch Four, how they had learned it. A couple of them admitted to learning the Scotch Four in the wings of a concert stage just before performing. This told me that the details of the Scotch Four were largely unfamiliar to them; they had not seen it danced enough to know how it worked without instruction, and they certainly hadn't learned it through informal transmission in a home or family context as previous generations of dancers would have. And yet they are aware of Scotch Fours and are interested in performing them. The relative rarity of Scotch Fours today contrasts with their popularity and even ubiquity in the early part of the 20th century.

Memories of the Scotch Four in the 1980s

In 1986, when Barbara LeBlanc was interviewing people in Inverness County about dancing, a significant number recalled the Scotch Four, especially those who had been born prior to 1940. They recalled Scotch Fours being danced at house parties, weddings, schoolhouse dances, box socials, frolics, and at parish picnics.⁷ Indeed, the Scotch Four was, at one time, the most important and popular social dance among communities of Scottish descent. The Scotch Four was a popular "first dance" for wedding couples, together with the best man and maid of honour (see, for example, Stephen Rory MacNeil's description of the wedding reel in MacGillivray 1988, 133-4). Margaret Gillis told LeBlanc that during her father's time, they didn't dance square sets at all, just Scotch Fours. Isabelle MacInnis recalled that Scotch Fours were danced in Marble Mountain until their new hall was opened in 1937, after which she didn't remember Scotch Fours being danced any more. Based on LeBlanc's interviews, it seems clear that Scotch Fours were commonly danced in homes and in small, community venues. When square dances were first introduced to Cape Breton from the US in the late 19th century (Rhodes 1964, 274), they were danced alongside Scotch Fours at house parties. However, square dances were ill-suited for house parties, given the space they require for even a single set of dancers. Once larger parish halls that could accommodate multiple square sets began to be built in the early-to-mid-20th century, square dancing reigned supreme and Scotch Fours were largely abandoned.

What follows are some of the detailed descriptions of Scotch Fours offered by Barbara LeBlanc's older interviewees who remembered Scotch Fours in their youth.⁸ Note in particular the different descriptions of how the dance starts, how the travelling figure works, and the final section of the dance. I have placed them in order from the oldest to youngest interviewees; all were originally from Inverness County in Cape Breton.

That's be the four-hand Reel but that'd be a step-dance. It was very professional if you followed the rules. You went around several times and you faced your opposite partner and you danced opposite her for a while and then you went around again and you met your own and you danced opposite her. That went on for a while and by this time you'd be on for two or three minutes, that'd be about the limited time for a Scotch Four. It was done in a square formation. Every time you danced opposite this partner or whoever then you went around until you get back to the other one. You would alternate dancing with your opposite and dancing with your own. That was about all there was to it. (interview with Donald MacLellan, b. Apr 28, 1903)

There'd be a boy or a man take a girl or a woman with him. They'd set on one end and the same [would happen] on the opposite end. And when the Scotch Four music would start – it's different than the other kind of step-dancing music, reels and all that. The woman [would be] on the right and when the music would start she'd cut across in front of the man and make the circle, one on the upper end – or the other end was the same way – and when they come around to their own position again the men would go out to the centre and do their step-dancing there. They step-danced so much, they'd go through the same procedure again which was taking a little while they'd just about be ending at the reel and they'd make the two circles. The woman made that circle. Now I'm the one that's here and you're there and when the music starts you just go across in front of me that way and you keep on this way following the other couple that's doing the exact same thing we're doing. So I'd walk through the centre of the dance floor behind my opposite man and come back to my place, if I was the girl. Then the two men would get into the middle and they'd step-dance. Then the two women would do that again. As far as I can remember, that's all that was going on. They'd do that same thing two or three times. (interview with Malcolm MacDonald, b. Oct 2, 1904)

Oh yes, they still do [the Scotch Fours] yet. You've got to be a good dancer. You just stand there on the floor. It's supposed to be four in the outfit and it's Scotch. And four people. Two men and two women. They step-dance. It's pretty hard to do, it's got to be born in you. They go in and out, they cross through the centre. It's like a left and right through. When they are all finished they circle around. They step-dance the whole time. (interview with Danny Wright, b. Mar 20, 1912)

The first dance I know of is the Scotch Four. It was danced by four people: two ladies and two gents. They danced the strathspey for the start, the slow part. Then they finished off with a reel. There wasn't too much to the dance, the partners, the two couples, [the] first woman faced the opposite gent. The next time she faced her own. After coming around, they just danced around, one after the other. He let the lady go ahead. And when they came to their place, this gent faced the opposite lady and step-danced. And then they went around again. They did that about four times and then they danced (stepped) all together, they faced the audience. It was all step-dancing when they went around. There were no figures, just the slow part and then with the reel they danced fast but they just went around. They finished off facing the audience. I danced this myself. (interview with Alex Graham, b. Jun 8, 1913)

[In Detroit, where many Cape Bretoners moved in search of work] they would switch to the reel from the strathspey and they done the same thing. This was done by people from Cape Breton. They would go in a circle. Then they would stay in a square formation. They danced the first time with their partner and then with the turn of the tune, they would switch partners and dance with the opposites and they would march around and I think there was four turns. Then they went into the reel. It would be more or less the same. They never got into a straight line. It was always in a square formation. That was in the 50s when Father Hughie had the first concert out there. That would be thirty years this fall (1956). (interview with Mary Jane MacIsaac, b. 1906, and Margaret Macdougall, b. Jan 29, 1916)

There was two couples [in a Scotch Four]. I just thought they'd step-dance for a while and then they'd change partners. The man and woman were opposite one another and then they went around and step-danced for a while in a circle.

And then they'd take the opposite partner. (interview with Donald Roddy Rankin, b. Jan 16, 1919)

There was the Scotch Four and Scotch Eight. The Scotch Eight had four couples. I think it was almost identical only with the two couples, they were doing their thing at the same time whereas with the eight, the head couples would do theirs and then the side couples would do theirs. The Scotch Four had two couples. The ladies changed somewhere in it. They did this strathspey step but then they did like an exchange or figure eight where the ladies chain and at one period they would stay with their opposite partner and they did some of their strathspey there and then they came back to their own partner. The men stayed in their places and it was just the women who changed places. (interview with Isabelle MacInnis, b. Dec 23, 1921)

We would line up two and two. I would be A's partner, I'm B. So B would pass in front of A and move on to the next gentleman. And his partner would move on to here, so that they are just passing. [interviewer: forming a circle?] Yes. And then you did your dance step [back at place in a square formation]. And then you continued. You would shift partners. The lady moved, the man stayed home. (interview with Margaret Gillis, b. Feb 28, 1926; square bracket insertions in the original transcription)

That was just four step-dancers. They'd dance opposite and then they'd change. They'd change from the head and move to the side. Then they'd dance opposite and they'd keep that up until they danced on the four sides and got back to where they started and they'd dance with their own partner then. They'd first dance with their opposites. Then we'd do the four sides and you'd come back to where you started. You had to be pretty good to dance to do that. They all did it when they got drunk enough. They step-danced and they held hands and danced in a circle. The first time it was with your opposite and then with your own. Two couples are standing opposite one another. They hold hands and dance to each side of the square. They stop at each side of the square facing their opposites and step-dance. They let their hands go each time they get to the side of the square after they've step-danced there for a while, they take hands again and they move to the next side of the square. Then they dance opposite the opposite couples there. They do this until they get home. Once they get home, they face their respective partners and step-dance there. That was pretty

near the end of the thing. They may just dance off. They started off with the strathspey and then to a reel. The dance lasted about ten minutes. They changed sides according to the bars in the music. For the reel, they stayed pretty much at home. They did different steps for it. (interview with Dan Hughie MacKinnon, b. July 3, 1928)

I'll summarize some of the major differences. Importantly, it seems that the Scotch Four used to remain in square formation, whereas the modern-day version only starts in square formation before quickly moving into a line formation. Several people make this point explicitly (Donald MacLellan, Alex Graham, Mary Jane MacIsaac and Margaret Macdougall, Margaret Gillis, and Dan Hughie MacKinnon) while others do not, although most of the other descriptions are consistent with a square formation throughout. Dan Hughie MacKinnon's description is distinct in that he describes partners remaining together and in a square formation throughout the dance, but they move to a new position on the floor after each travelling step, as though moving around the points of a compass. It is likely no coincidence that his kind of "progressive" movement is common in square dances. Dan Hughie MacKinnon is also the youngest of the interviewees quoted here, and his description may indicate ways in which square dancing was beginning to affect the Scotch Four. Malcolm MacDonald's description suggests a line formation with his reference to the men in the centre.

The descriptions of the travelling formations are generally vague, but it is worth noting the vocabulary used. Donald MacLellan and Alex Graham talk about going "around," suggesting a circular travelling movement. Mary Jane MacIsaac, Margaret Macdougall, Roddy Rankin and Dan Hughie MacKinnon refer explicitly to a circle. Based on these comments, I think the women would cross in front of their partners, their partners would fall in behind (creating a circle) but the women would do a rotation and a half, winding up in the opposite woman's home position whereas the men returned home every time. There is otherwise no reason to have the women cross in front of their partners to start the circular travel step. This also means that the women would change places, which several of LeBlanc's interviewees noted (Isabelle MacInnis, Margaret Gillis), whereas it's the men who trade places in today's Scotch Four.

Danny Wright describes going "in and out, they cross through the centre," which may mean that, assuming they're in a square formation throughout, there was a simple crossing pattern (the women might trade places first, then the men). However, Mats Melin has a different interpretation, believing that "in

and out” refers to a circling movement while “cross through the centre” may refer to figure-of-eight movement (personal communication, Aug 20, 2015). It is hard to say what might be correct. Isabelle MacInnis describes a more complex figure-of-eight interaction which may be the same as the one associated with the Foursome Reel in Scotland (see below).

Only Alex Graham describes a final section during which the dancers face the audience, as can be seen in present-day Scotch Fours.

Based on these descriptions, it would seem that there are significant differences between the structure of the Scotch Four at the beginning of the 20th century and its structure today. There seems to have been a gap when Scotch Fours stopped being danced socially and when they began being danced presentationally on stages. Barbara LeBlanc’s interview with Mary Janet MacDonald is telling in this regard. Mary Janet MacDonald is a very well-known step dancer and dance teacher. She describes having to learn a Scotch Four and her uncertainty about the details. It was clearly not something familiar to her; it was not something she had been accustomed to dancing in her youth, or something that she regularly saw others dancing, even though she was brought up among well-respected musicians and dancers, and in Mabou, a community where traditional Scottish-derived culture continues to have a strong presence:

We did a Scotch Four not very long ago, over two years ago Minnie and I and Natalie and Tammy [ca. 1984]. We did a Scotch Four as a number in about four concerts in a row one summer. It was Father [John] Angus Rankin [who told us how it’s done?]. We had a hard time finding out the proper way of doing a Scotch Four. We weren’t that sure. But we did it, but we did one part wrong we found out afterwards. The idea was we were just four and two were facing their partners and when the strathspey started you went around to the left. Then you went around once more in the strathspey. Then we were facing the opposite partner, and then the reel began and you danced facing one another and then you went around and you came around again facing the opposite partner and at the end you split up and ... there were just four of us. This is a step-dance, the Scotch Four. It is supposed to be two men and two women. We had synchronized dancing too but that wouldn’t be necessary. It is important to remember the direction you go in. You go to the left one time and to the right one time. I think you only do it twice in the strathspey and twice in the reel. (LeBlanc interview with Mary Janet MacDonald, b. Feb 17, 1952)

The fact that they got a part of the dance wrong is potentially significant. For one, it underscores the fact that the Scotch Four was unfamiliar to the performers – it was not something they had seen performed much, if at all. For another, it had the potential to shape future iterations of the Scotch Four, since many younger dancers have learned to dance a Scotch Four from watching it on stage. It’s possible that a mistake in a staged version of the dance could become regularized as part of the dance. In a similar vein, I have seen the YouTube videos cited above used as a reference for learning the Scotch Four today; any mistakes would be perpetuated and ultimately integrated into the tradition. It is possible that some of the differences I have identified between modern and historical versions of the Scotch Four resulted from accidental modifications such as those described by Mary Janet MacDonald.

The Scotch Four at the Turn of the 20th Century

So what is the early history of the Scotch Four? Where did it come from, and how did it come to be practiced in Cape Breton? I now turn to Rhodes and the Fletts for their insights. In 1957, Frank Rhodes came to Cape Breton and interviewed a slate of older tradition-bearers and dancers. He found that:

The dances taken to Cape Breton Island by the Scottish settlers seem to have consisted only of “four-handed Reels,” “eight-handed Reels,” a group of solo dances, and a few of the old Gaelic dance-games. Most of the various forms of four-handed Reel danced in Cape Breton Island have close affinities with the old West Highland Circular Reel [described by the Fletts; see below] – they consist of setting steps danced on the spot alternated with a simple circling figure, the setting steps being performed with the dancers either in a straight line or in a square formation. I also met one form of the four-handed Reel in which the dancers swung each other instead of setting and in which the travelling figure was performed by the diagonal pairs changing places. This last form ... was described to me by the oldest of my informants, Mrs Jack MacDonald of Scotch Lake (she was over 100 at the time when I visited her). (Rhodes 1964, 270)

Unfortunately, Rhodes’ fieldwork records and interviews remain in his private possession and are not publicly available. We therefore must accept his interpretation of his interviewees’ words. However, his description of the Scotch Four is consistent with the recollections of LeBlanc’s older interviewees.

The Fletts, who conducted research in Scotland, describe the old West Highland Circular Reel, to which Rhodes likened the older Cape Breton Scotch Four, as follows:

The ladies [standing next to their partners and facing the other couple] begin by passing across in front of their partners; ... the men stand still for the first two bars, then on the third bar they join in the circle a quarter of circumference behind their partners. All four then dance round, equally spaced round the circle ... and finish in a line of four facing partners. (1964, 157)

[After setting to their partners,] the four dancers again dance round in a circle, all now starting together. The ladies move off directly to their left, while the men dance out to the left and join in the circle a quarter of the circumference behind their partners.... The ladies dance a complete circle, while the men depart from the circle on the last two bars of the phrase, so that all finish [facing their partners, as before]. (1964, 158)

Like the Scotch Four, the West Highland Circular Reel is danced to a combination of strathspeys and reels, and involves the alternation of travelling and extemporized setting steps. The circular travel movement is reminiscent of the travel steps described by LeBlanc's older informants, although they generally recalled that the Scotch Four remained in a square rather than moving into a line. So where did the line formation come from? The Fletts speculate that it came later, believing that the circular formation was best suited for dancing in Scottish black houses with their central fires (1964, 159). Scottish settlers in Cape Breton did not build black houses; rather, they built wooden homes with wooden floors (perfect for percussive dance) with chimneys and fireplaces built on walls rather than central fire pits. The circular travelling figure would not have been necessary in this context, although it no doubt continued to be practiced among some dancers, while others introduced innovative alternative figures.

Rhodes agrees with the Fletts, speculating how the in-line formation may have come to be:

I am inclined to believe that the square form of the four-handed Reel is older than the in-line form, and that the latter arose through two sets of the four-handed Reel being danced side by side in the eight-handed Reel, and there being flattened out to give the dancers more space. (Rhodes 1964, 278)

It is also the case that today's Scotch Four seems to have been influenced by Scotland's Foursome Reel, a very popular dance in the Lowlands and eastern Scotland in the early 1900s, and similar to the Highland Circular Reel in many ways, including the fact that it's for two couples, it involves both strathspeys and reels, and it alternates travelling and setting steps. The similarity in name itself suggests connections. However, the Foursome Reel's travelling formation is quite different from that of the Circular Reel, involving a more complex interweaving in a figure-of-eight movement rather than a simple circular movement (see Flett and Flett 1964, 143-8; Flett and Flett 1972). It is also characterized by arm movements and finger snapping, neither of which is a part of the Scotch Four or Circular Reel. Today's Scotch Four starts off like the Foursome Reel's figure-of-eight, but deviates with the women moving in a half circle, and the men's part attenuated so that they stay in the centre of the line.

Rhodes believes that the Foursome Reel came to influence the Scotch Four in Cape Breton, but only long after the initial Scottish immigration and settlement of the late 18th and early 19th century:

Up to about 1939, the Scottish Foursome Reel, with its "Figure 8," was known only to those people on Cape Breton Island who had travelled outside the island, and I could find no evidence that it was ever danced at the ordinary dances among the descendants of the old Scottish settlers. The situation in Cape Breton Island thus provides strong evidence that about the period 1800-20 [the period of peak immigration from Scotland to Cape Breton] the Foursome Reel, with its "figure 8," was not used in the West Highlands and the Western Isles (and indeed in more central regions of the Highlands such as Lochaber) [from whence most Cape Breton Scottish settlers came], and that the common Reel for four in these districts at that time was circular in pattern. (Rhodes 1964, 270)

Rhodes indicates the figure-of-eight travel movement had become popular in Cape Breton by the time he conducted research in the 1950s, although it was not, according to his research, something that had come with the original Scottish settlers. Today, the travel movement seems to be different again from all previous versions. It is not a complete figure-of-eight movement, but neither is it a simple circle or crossing of places. My guess is that it evolved as younger dancers attempted to revive the dance form but were unsure of its structure.

Another significant difference today is the final section during which the dancers face the audience and each dancer comes forward to be individually

featured. Although Danny Wright (b. 1912) describes this section, he's the only one to do so, and I wonder whether it was something that he remembered from his youth or was something that he had seen or performed closer to the time of his interview in 1986. It would certainly make sense if it had been added to the Scotch Four when it began to be performed on stage. The Scotch Four was originally a social dance; it was meant for participation and not necessarily for an observing audience. The social aspect of the dance is clear in the orientation of the dancers towards each other (in both the square and line formations), rather than towards an outside audience. This dancer orientation is a feature of most, if not all, other social dances, from couple dances to progressive country dances to square sets. The final section shifts the orientation from dancers to audience: the dancers face towards an audience rather than towards one another.

For all that it was a participatory, social dance, the Scotch Four also had something of the spectacular to it. Several of LeBlanc's interviewees noted that only very good dancers could dance a Scotch Four. It required many steps and endurance. It's clear that people enjoyed watching dancers in a Scotch Four. It was therefore not a stretch to turn it into more of a presentational dance form. Several of LeBlanc's interviewees recalled that special stages were constructed for Scotch Fours at picnics – separate from the square set stages that were also built. Stages were necessary in order to provide a suitable dance floor outside and are not in and of themselves indicative of a presentational orientation. The square dances, for example, were meant as a participatory activity at the picnics rather than as a showcase directed at an audience. However, Malcolm MacDonald, in his interview with LeBlanc, recalled that the Scotch Four stages were raised to ensure that the dancers' feet were visible to non-dancers who gathered around to watch. And the fact that Scotch Four stages were separate from the square set stages suggests that there was something distinct about the Scotch Fours.

Parish picnics began to decline in popularity by the 1950s. Other traditional Scotch Four venues (schoolhouse dances, box socials, and house ceilidhs) had all declined by this time, and so did the Scotch Fours. Meanwhile, square dances held in many newly constructed halls across the island continued to grow in popularity and a new event, the community concert, began to be held. The annual Broad Cove concert, the first of these concerts, started in 1956 as a parish fundraiser (just as the picnics had been in years prior) and continues to this day, featuring an outdoor variety concert of primarily local talent. Others followed, including Highland Village Day, the Big Pond Festival, and the Glendale concert. All feature a raised concert stage and a formal seating area

for the audience. It is at one of these concerts that one is most likely to see a Scotch Four today. If the final Scotch Four lineup did not start before this period, it almost certainly did at this point. However, I have not been able to pinpoint exactly when the final lineup was introduced, or by whom.

Conclusions

By drawing on the fieldwork conducted in three different periods (1957, 1986, and the present day) by three different scholars (Rhodes, LeBlanc, and me), we can see the evolution of the Scotch Four, a social step dance from Scotland that enjoyed a period of popularity, decline, and revival in Cape Breton. I have focused on the overall structure of the dance without any reference to the steps themselves – the topic for a whole other study! Over time, the Scotch Four has changed – sometimes deliberately (such as the final line-up) and sometimes not (such as the changes to the travelling figures). This is, of course, no real surprise to anyone familiar with living traditions. The “gap” between practice and memory during the decline of the Scotch Four certainly facilitated the introduction of change when it began to be revived. Regardless of the fact that change is to be expected, it is always interesting to trace specific changes and to consider what conditions might have led to them. It is also worth creating an accessible history so that contemporary dancers can learn about the dance they perform, and make educated decisions concerning its performance.

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⁸ It's important to note that these transcriptions are Le-Blanc's, not my own (Museum of History Control #B312 f6-9, Accession #LEB/SAY-Ac-1-41). It is clear that the transcriptions offer significant passages word-for-word but summarize other sections. Unfortunately, I have not cross-referenced the transcriptions with the audio recordings. However, the recordings, along with the transcriptions quoted here, are available in the Museum of History's archives and will shortly be available via the Beaton Institute's digital archives (<http://beatoninstitute.com/>).

Notes

¹ Available online: <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/travel/destinations/how-to-look---and-dance---like-a-local-at-a-cape-breton-ceilidh/article582029/>. Accessed Aug 17, 2015.

² Available online: <http://www.ibiblio.org/gaelic/Albanuadh/4.2.html>. No date. Accessed Aug 17, 2015.

³ For example, Mary Janet MacDonald's *A Family Tradition: A Cape Breton Stepdancing Instructional DVD* (http://www.seabrightproductions.ca/A_Family_Tradition_DVD.html).

⁴ "Ceilidh" (pronounced KAY-lee) is the Gaelic word for "visit", but has come to refer to a formal variety concert featuring local talent.

⁵ Two good ones are <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i6qTWcsUEis> and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6GXM5_GLgKw.

⁶ Many dance scholars, including the Fletts and Rhodes, capitalize the word "Reel" when referring to a dance in order to differentiate it from a "reel" tune. I have maintained that practice here as well.

⁷ Single-room schoolhouse dances used to be held to raise money for the teacher's salary. Box socials involved young, single women packing a meal into a box she had decorated. The boxes were auctioned off to young, single men. The men then ate the meal with the woman who had decorated the box he'd bought. The auction followed a dance. Frolics are communal work events, such as barn raisings, and were almost always followed by a dance. Parish picnics were outdoor community events designed to raise money for the church; square dancing and Scotch Fours were generally popular inclusions.

