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**Culture at the Core: Invented Traditions and Imagined Communities.**

**Part I: Identity Formation**

In the twentieth century the category “Scottish traditional dance” emerged, characterized by four distinct forms: Scottish Country Dance, Cheilidh Dance, Scottish Stepdance, and Highland Dance. Prior to this, dance in Scotland was neither labeled “Scottish” nor “traditional.” Communities simply adapted dances and movements, incorporating new ones as they appeared, to express their respective cultures. The upheaval caused by historical events at the end of the nineteenth century brought to the fore a sense of Scottish nationalism. Such ideas necessitated the redefinition of individual and community identities. Traditions unable to adapt to this purpose disappeared; new traditions were invented to take their place. A notion of authenticity played a significant role in forming the new traditions, helping to define the categories “Scottish” and “traditional.” Understanding how authenticity functioned suggests the ways different Scottish identities were constructed using traditional dance.

This article may be divided into three parts. Part I explores the question, “What is tradition?” Tradition is used colloquially in many ways, and has accrued a number of meanings. Thus, its meaning and its relationship to the complementary concepts “invented tradition” and “authenticity” must be explained. Part II deals with the development of nationalism and dance in Scotland from the medieval period to the nineteenth century. A clear understanding of the past will facilitate comprehension of those elements of historic nationalism and those forms of dance that have been drawn
upon or ignored in the creation of twentieth century Scottish traditional dance. Part III offers an analysis of the four genres of traditional dance that exist in Scotland today. It aims to answer the question, “What identity have the participants created in each genre?”

**Tradition, Invented Tradition, and Authenticity**

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “tradition” as something that is passed down, usually orally, from one generation to the next.¹ In this definition, its transmission process defines tradition. When a piece of tradition, that is, a story, a tune, or a dance is passed on from one person to another, it is something thought worthy of transmission and something that is often “improved” as it is imparted. It is through this process, usually a long one, that a given piece of material gains in value. Age and transmission, then, are intrinsic characteristics of tradition so that “traditional” has come to imply both longevity and continuity. Béla Bartók, the Hungarian composer and ethnologist, suggests another definition for tradition. He defines it as the spontaneous expression of a people molded within its community.² Unlike the previous definition, this one captures the function of tradition. That is, traditions exist within a community or context, and are expressions of that community’s identity.

An “invented tradition” is defined and functions much like a tradition. Eric Hobsbawm describes it thus:

Invented tradition is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values or norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past.³

Much emphasis is placed on giving a practice a suitable history. Whether this history is a long one, extending back several centuries, or a short one, connected with a past
captured by recent events, this link establishes age, a central feature of tradition, and places the invented tradition in an appropriate community, defining values. Repetition is utilized to approximate the other aspect of tradition, the transmission process, which allows the group to mold it. However, unlike traditions as defined by Bartók, invented traditions are not spontaneous group expressions but, rather, a calculated expression by one person or group to promote a desired set of values.

Authenticity is an elusive concept whose meaning changes depending on the context. It is usually defined as “the original” or “unaltered.” Through the philosophers Jean-Jacques Rousseau and John Herder, who located the authentic in the rural folk, however, it gained another meaning. Rousseau believed that only those untouched by society were capable of an authentic human experience. The closest that sophisticated, urbanized people could get to this experience was through a romanticized vision of rural folk and their culture. Thus, expressive “folk” culture was the medium of authentic human experience, and amateurs and academics alike collected and compared folklore with unabated enthusiasm to obtain something original and unaltered, that is, the version most authentic. Not surprisingly, the use of the word had tremendous attraction to many.

A nation such as Britain has socially constructed boundaries to designate societal membership and, by definition, requires the dissolution of the separate cultures within those boundaries to create a national one. However, if not all groups are treated equally in this process, those politically or economically disadvantaged are likely to reassert their culture or elements from it at some later point in time. Invented traditions are one way of reasserting a minority identity. Understanding nationalism’s development in Britain reveals the historical significance of the several identities that emerged with Scottish nationalism.

Nationalization began in Britain with a strong centralized administration in the thirteenth century. The British quickly incorporated the many cultural groups living within the area
that is now England. The Celts, living in outlying regions, maintained their distinctive identities. Celts in the Highlands of Scotland differed dramatically in culture as well as social structure from those who lived in what is now England and Lowland Scotland. The similarities between the latter groups and the British facilitated the Anglicization of Lowland Scotland. The Highlanders, however, maintained their distinctive social structures. Thus, Highland and Lowland identities came to be defined in opposition to one another, described as Celtic versus English.

This division was compounded by the political and economic annexation of Scotland under the Union of Parliaments in 1707. The gentry, particularly those in the Lowlands, who disdained their fellow countrymen as “barbaric,” needed no encouragement to become Anglicized. Much effort was put into learning English, and, not surprisingly, the gentry aligned themselves with English culture, in social dancing as in other aspects of life. Thus, class was another distinction that emphasized the split between Highland and Lowland.

Anglicization gave the gentry much power, but did little to help those in the Highlands. In the first half of the eighteenth century the English, with the help of the Lowlanders, subdued the warring and cattle-stealing Highlanders in a series of battles that culminated in the rout at the Battle of Culloden in 1745. Not long after, the carrying of guns, the wearing of kilts (the traditional garb, although not as we know it today), and the playing of bagpipes were outlawed in an attempt to stop further military advances and to destroy the distinctive Celtic culture. These actions had important consequences. They highlighted Celtic otherness and gave it such key symbols as the kilt and the bagpipes. Moreover, they increased the antipathy between the Lowlands and the Highlands, rather than between Scotland and England per se.

Economically, the Highlands fared no better under English rule than under Scottish rule. From the eighteenth century into the mid-nineteenth century, the Highlands relied on raw materials industries, cattle and wool, making the economy heavily dependent on English trade and capital.
Many people were forced off their land during the Highland Clearances between 1750 and 1850 to make room for sheep, causing mass emigration to Canada and the United States. Once the cattle industry collapsed, opportunities for the remaining Highlanders were limited. Scotland’s dependent economy caused what Michel Hechter, in his book *Internal Colonialism*, calls a cultural division of labor. Economic inequality, often fought along class lines, was in Scotland fought along cultural lines, with the Highland Celts pitted against the English and the Lowland Scots.\(^{viii}\)

Industrialization was the catalyst that brought the conflicting identities developed in the preceding several centuries to the fore. Full economic and political integration of Scotland into England was completed by the late nineteenth century. Because this process did not eliminate inequality between the Highlands and the Lowlands, social stratification occurred along cultural boundaries, rather than national ones creating two distinct cultural groups, economically disadvantaged, culturally marginalized Highlanders versus wealthy, Anglicized Lowlanders.

At about the same time (1850), educated Scots began to redefine their relationship with England. They decided to stop educating their children in England and instead brought English education and cultural refinement to Scotland.\(^{ix}\) Although nineteenth-century Scottish culture drew very heavily on English prototypes, Scots initiated it and considered Scottish as opposed to English. Scottish nationalism of this strain, at least in theory, ignored Lowland and Highland differences and defined the Scots in opposition to the English.

The Celtic Revival, on the other hand, drew its inspiration from the economic and political oppression of the Highland Celts. The Celtic Revival Movement began in 1903 with the founding of the Celtic Congress. Not a political entity, the organization at its first meeting prioritized the creation of a culture that differentiated Scottish and English identities and stressed affinities with other “Celtic” nations such as Ireland. Celtic Revival leaders cultivated a non-industrial, rural image. Consequently, their focus was the Gaidhealtachd,\(^{x}\) the Gaelic-
speaking areas, also known as the Highlands. They drew on such symbols as the kilt and bagpipes, banned by the English, to represent their identity. Although the nationalism in this movement drew strongly on the cultural distinctness of the Celtic Highlands, it was generally perpetrated by educated Lowlanders, and, like the previous movement, defined itself in opposition to the English rather than Highland versus Lowland.

The history of the late nineteenth century illustrates three distinct streams feeding the river of national identity in Scotland. One focused internally on the differences between the poor, Celtic Highlands and the wealthier, Anglicized Lowlands. The second attempted to mold English refinement into a uniquely Scottish culture. The third differentiated itself from England by drawing on Celtic symbols. When creating Scottish traditions, different groups chose distinctive historical elements to symbolize Scotland and its history. Their respective decisions are reflected in what they consider traditional. The following brief history of Scottish dancing gives the reader a reference point for examining the identities imbedded within twentieth-century Scottish traditional dance.

Before the eighteenth century, dance existed in two contexts, ritual and social. Ritual dance was performance at festivals. The dancers, specially chosen and trained, usually acted out stories through dance steps and mime. None of these dances exist today in their original versions. All of the stories have disappeared. Indeed, the last recorded ritual dance was the Perth Glover’s dance performed for King James IV in 1633. The most famous remnant of these rituals dances is the Sword Dance, perpetuated through the military and Highland Dance competitions. However, the version done today has no documented basis in any old dance, because the old steps are not known.

Social dancing in Scotland resembled social dance in the rest of Europe. In medieval times, dances were done in rings to extemporized vocal music. At this time there was little distinction between the dances of different classes. During the Renaissance, however, a division occurred between the
dancing of the upper and lower classes. Although the context of upper class dancing remained social, the steps and patterns became so complicated that dancers required training and the dances, choreography. Dancing masters provided both. The music also changed from vocal to instrumental. Consequently, by the eighteenth century, dance differed across the social spectrum.

The eighteenth century witnessed several major changes that affected the development of dance in Scotland. The Union of Parliaments in 1707 reorganized the power structures in Scotland causing the power of the church to wane and dance, the favorite pastime, to move into public dance halls. In Edinburgh, the first public dance hall opened in 1723. These halls were only for the gentry, and the dancing associated with them reflected aristocratic values. Meanwhile increased wealth and closer ties between the Scottish aristocracy and England stimulated a desire to keep up with London fashions and led to balls being held with greater frequency.

Balls were elaborate, formal affairs where a mixture of minuets and country dances, usually English, were done. Although English in origin, these country dances were favored by the Scots and incorporated into their repertoire in the eighteenth century. Young men and women took lessons from dancing masters to learn the figures, movements, and etiquette appropriate to such events. The increase in the number of balls and the enhanced skill of the dancers led to a dramatic upsurge in the creation of new dances. Hence, many refer to this period as the “Golden Age” of Scottish dance. However, by the end of the eighteenth century, the public dance halls in Edinburgh were losing their constituency. Young people preferred dancing the less formal country dances in pubs.

Dress influenced the dances as they developed in this upper-class environment. Women were expected to wear ball gowns and light, soft, heeled shoes or slippers. Men wore dress trousers, jackets, and soft, patent leather shoes. Because of the soft shoes, no rhythm pattern made by the feet could be heard. Because of the length of their dresses, women could
not perform high extensions or complicated steps. They never raised their arms, while men, in order not to disturb their jackets, never raised theirs above the shoulders. Only a few distinctive steps were used. Instead, emphasis was on the dance’s many figures. Traveling steps were smooth, and the back was held upright, as in the minuet and as appropriate to elite dance. These dances clearly reflected the culture of the upper classes in which developed in Scotland.

The most important result of the rapid development of dance among the urban upper classes was the impact it had on dancing in non-urban areas. The catalyst for change here was the itinerant dancing master. From the end of the eighteenth century until World War I, virtually every person in Scotland took dancing lessons. This had several effects. First, people in non-urban areas learned the same dances as the gentry; only they wore boots and came from communities that regularly made rhythm with their feet. Rather than delicately holding hands, dancers linked their arms together and used heavy-footed rhythmic steps. Thus, the rural folk, representing a lower class, transformed the delicate movements of the elite into a dance that expressed their own culture.

The “dancies,” as the itinerant instructors were called, also taught their best students solo dances to be performed at “finishing” balls held at the end of a term of lessons. These dances included some steps learned from people in the remote parts of Scotland but more often were based on steps from eighteenth-century stage character dances. Performed in hard shoes, these became the basis for twentieth-century Highland Dance. The last contribution of the “dancies” was to record existing dances and ones they had created, making them accessible to a wider audience. David Anderson’s Ballroom Guide, first published in 1886, became one of the most significant sources of earlier forms. From such sources, people could reconstruct and revive old dances.

By the mid-nineteenth century, public dance halls had opened in many small towns throughout Scotland. These halls institutionalized social dancing as a pastime. People did not differentiate between reels and the newest circle dances.
Both were considered social dancing, one not more Scottish than the other. The average dancer was quite skilled and ready, as well as eager, to learn the newest dances. Dance also occurred outdoors, at weddings, and in an old Gaidhealtachd institution, the cheilidh house. In such places, the generations mixed, and the older dances were done along with the new. Thus, continuity was maintained, but change not stifled as young people incorporated their favorite dances into their repertoires. Rural Scotland maintained a living dance tradition right up to the beginning of the twentieth century.

High dances, which developed into the modern-day Highland dances, were mostly choreographed in the nineteenth century. They are distinguished by the lightness of the stepping (even though often done in hard shoes), as opposed to the heaviness of English clogging or Scottish Stepdance. The High dance’s specific origin is not known, but they were created and taught by dancing masters who were trained in ballet and in stage dance. For example, the Highland fling was originally a step in a reel, and the first recorded instance of it as a separate dance is at the Northern Meeting in 1841. The jigs and the hornpipes of present-day Highland Dance originated in clog dancing, an extemporized rhythmic dance imported from England, while much of the manner and costume came from the music hall stage.

The High dances referred to as ladies’ stepdances originated in the nineteenth-century dancing master’s repertoire as well. These dances were typically performed by girls in contrast to the Highland dances, which were done by boys. Unlike the latter, ladies’ stepdances were not performed by professional dancers at competitions in the nineteenth century. These dances would have been done only by children at finishing balls, or used as interludes in stage performances, particularly in England.

The First World War dramatically changed people’s lives and the practice of social dancing. Dancing had reached its peak in Scotland in the nineteenth century and most of the dances we have today are vestiges of this period. By the beginning of the twentieth century, dancing throughout much
of Scotland had lost its popularity. This was particularly true in urban areas where new dances, including jazz and other styles learned abroad, squeezed out older ones. However, in rural Scotland, the old dances continued to be done with enthusiasm, alongside the newer ones. At the same time, national identities were becoming increasingly important. Many Scots began looking for a dance to call their own, one that represented Scotland to them. Four styles of dance arose and were codified over the next several decades: Scottish Country Dance, Highland Dance, Cheilidh Dance, and Stepdance. The next section of this paper focuses on the development of these genres of dance and their function as markers of Scottish culture and identity.

The Royal Scottish Country Dance Society (RSCDS) was formed in 1923 by Jean Milligan, a woman with means and a vision. Scottish Country Dance is a form of social dancing that ignores the styles of the dances immediately preceding it, drawing instead upon the country dances done by the upper classes during the eighteenth century, known to some as the “Golden Age” of Scottish dance. Today, Scottish Country Dance is done all over the world, and symbolizes Scotland to many. It began as an invented tradition that utilized notions of authenticity to justify its creation. An examination of the dance elements “chosen” indicate the identity that Milligan expected to establish through the “invention” of Scottish Country Dancing.

Scottish Country Dance movement and set arrangements draw upon the elite style of eighteenth-century ballroom dance. The movements, although fast at times, remain graceful. The back is held upright, and the feet are pointed and turned out. The hands, when held, are done so elegantly, just below the shoulder. Other formalities reminiscent of upper-class life have been maintained as well. A Scottish Country Dance Ball begins with a grand march, in which everybody parades around the room with a partner. When each pair reaches the front of the room, their names and titles are announced. The march is concluded by the men leading the women into lines that stretch length of the dance floor, men one
side, and women on the other. When the music begins, the couples bow or curtsy to each other and begin weaving the different figures.

Scottish Country Dance, however, did not revive all aspects of eighteenth-century dancing in Scotland. Minuets, the main dances performed at eighteenth-century balls, were not adopted. The attire, although it remained formal also changed. No longer were ball gowns, britches, and formal dress shoes worn, but rather white dresses and tartan sashes for the women, kilts for the men and soft ghillies for both. Analyzing the elements that were chosen, whether disregarded or added, will indicate the identity sought.

The choice of elite movement brought from England immediately indicates the second “stream” discussed above: those who wanted to incorporate English refinement into a Scottish identity. The country dances, unlike the minuets, precisely illustrate the identity desired. They are dances, brought from England, that became popular and were subsequently scotticized. The change of clothing visually reinforces Scottish identity. The kilt and tartan, eighteenth-century phenomena, were associated at the time with the lower classes until they came into vogue at the very end of the century. Having become markers of identity as invented traditions, they clearly symbolize Scotland to viewers of the dance. Likewise, the shoes were borrowed from Highland Dance, another invented tradition that was strongly symbolic of Scottish culture at the time.

The concept of authenticity played a crucial role in Milligan’s justifying these decisions. She always drew on what she called “authentic” steps, that is, steps that had been written down. When a conflict emerged between recorded versions, Milligan always chose the oldest source. Another goal she stipulated for RSCDS was to collect old books and pictures of Scottish dancing. The desire for old material is not surprising because invented traditions need context. In this case, the eighteenth century served to provide the necessary context. Her use of written material gave the invented tradition two of its three crucial components, age and context.
Milligan’s use of the vocabulary of authenticity, however, allowed her to abandon current dance practice and replace it with an invented tradition that skipped a century and still maintain a sense of continuity. For example, Milligan claimed that much of the authentic dance material had been lost rather than transformed during the nineteenth century.

Although Milligan utilized the vocabulary of authenticity in relation to dance steps, she did not subscribe to all its connotations. She did not, for example, locate the “authentic” in the folk. Milligan specifically argued that country dances were not folk dances because all strata of society did them. She called them popular dances, finding them representative of all of Scotland, at least in terms of steps. Her program recalled the nationalist identity that arose at the end of the nineteenth century when upper-class people wanted a culture that represented Scotland as an entity distinct from England. These elite Scottish Country Dance proponents also desired a refined style comparable to that found in England. Thus, instead of choosing a movement style evocative of the lower, rural classes, Milligan focused on the refined upper-class style that came from the eighteenth century.

The use of authenticity to justify an invented tradition significantly influences how a form can change. During the creation of Scottish Country Dance, most dances were eighteenth-century reconstructions. Eventually, a technique emerged from the process of re-creating dances. It is this technique that remains relatively unchanging and today defines Scottish Country Dance. At the same time, new dances proliferated. This outcome is not surprising given that the elements labeled as authentic were steps (and movements) rather than dances. Although innovation was allowed, it did not go unchecked. The newsletter, Dance Archive, was established specifically to publish dances in their “correct” form. Once a dance was published, along with recommended music and tempo, it was not allowed to change. The convention was established that if a dance was not liked, a new one should be created rather than the old one changed. The Archive sought to accommodate innovation while preserving.
the “original,” in order to maintain authenticity and thus the identity projected by Scottish Country Dance.

Highland Dance as it exists today is a child of the Celtic Revival movement. It is a highly standardized solo dance form done mostly in competitions at Highland games in Scotland and the diaspora—Canada, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. Highland Dance has existed in some form since the end of the eighteenth century and has existed in a similar form since the nineteenth century. However, standardization in 1952 structured its development and changed its identity.

The dances and steps of Highland Dance come from the itinerant (often Lowland) dance masters of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Not only did they teach the country dances to students, but also solo dances to their best pupils. However, as noted above, many of the Highland dance steps are not, as reputed, centuries old, but derived from stage dancing of the day. The dancing entered the Highland games first as interlude entertainment between piping events. It later developed in a competition circuit for “professional” or highly skilled male dancers.

Unlike in Scottish Country Dance, Highland Dance does not communicate identity through the choice of steps but rather through its supporting lore. Much of this lore suggests a romanticized Celtic world that fought English oppressors. The Sword Dance, linked to warrior life, represents oracle by dance. Done before battle, it was said that if the dancer touched the sword during performance, then the battle would be lost. The dance known as the Sean Triubhas, which translates into English as “baggy trousers,” has movements that refer to shaking off the pants that people were required to wear when the kilt was outlawed, a reference to Scottish conflict with the English. The dance form is buttressed visually by Scottish symbols as well. The kilt is worn and the bagpipes are played, even though this is a rather late development coming when the form became a part of the Highland games, another highly conscious symbolic event. The identity wrapped up within Highland Dance, found
mostly in extra-dance elements, reflects that of the Celtic revival. This was a primarily Lowland movement that identified with the oppressed Celts to differentiate Scottish from English.

Very clever inventors of tradition, the creators of Highland Dance established the necessary elements—age, continuity, and context—entirely through lore. Age and context (although both fabricated) are ascertained through the stories that accompany the dance; continuity through their constant repetition in the Highland games. Although the vocabulary of authenticity played little direct role in establishing the form, Rousseau’s and Herder’s authentic, romanticized notion of folk facilitated such a powerful use of lore. Authenticity actually played a more active role in maintaining Highland Dance. In 1952 the Scottish Official Board of Highland Dance (SOBHD) was created to standardize the form. Authentic dances and steps were chosen from the repertoire of famous dancers and written down. A combination of an official body, a rigorous judging system, and teaching organization preserved the exactness of execution, or the authenticity of the steps.

The use of authenticity in this case is more restrictive than with Scottish Country Dance because it envelops not just the steps, but the dances and many of the extra-dance aspects of the form. Thus, there is very little room for innovation. Indeed, what was once a highly innovative form, judged on its performance values, has become a cluster of symbols that are difficult to change. Innovation is limited to choreography competitions and usually involves transposing solo dances into group performances, rather than creating new dances. Dancers may create new dances, but they must use steps from the tradition. Moreover, the music must be considered Scottish, and some sort of tartan must be worn. Thus, the symbolic structure remains intact to keep the identity viable.

Scottish Stepdance, although an extremely old form, has been only recently revived in Scotland in the last ten years. An active tradition in the Highlands and Islands until the end of the nineteenth century, it survived only in the
It is a solo, rhythmic extemporized form of dancing similar to tap. There are several basic steps on which all other steps are built. When Stepdance was revived in Scotland, the steps were known, but the extra-dance aspects had to be defined in order to suggest the identity this dancing represented.

Stepdance’s use of rhythm and hard shoes immediately associate it with the Highlands, where this type of dancing has its history. It gains this association, and consequently its identity, more substantially, however, from the context in which it is developing. Those who have taken up this style of dancing tend to be involved in the burgeoning traditional arts movement, including the Feisen. Stepdance is an integral part of the Feis movement, taught alongside Gaelic language and music. However, it is rarely taught beside other forms of dance, such as Scottish Country Dance or Highland Dance. The association of Stepdance with the Cheilidh House, the center of the Gaelic community, makes it evocative of pre-industrial Highland Scotland. It draws from similar sources as the Celtic revival movement which fostered Highland Dance, but unlike this movement, it makes no pretense to represent all of Scotland. Rather it represents the Gaelic Highlands in opposition to the Anglicized Lowlands. It does not utilize any material Scottish symbols but finds its identity in elements of the Cheilidh House, the connection between musician and dancer, and the idea of community.

Although the idea of authenticity is less prevalent in Stepdance than in Scottish Country Dance or Highland Dance, it occasionally surfaces. The champions of this type of dance claim its authenticity by saying, “This is the real stuff, the old stuff.” Thus, it is both age and the context of the Gaelic Cheilidh House and what that represents that makes it authentic. Gaelic culture is the basis for distinguishing the authentic in this instance. Any elements that can be considered Gaelic — rhythms, instruments, informal presentation style – can be utilized to represent this tradition.

Therefore, Stepdance has significant room for innovation. However, because the community itself is the authentic
element, it must innovate together, accepting or rejecting aspects of change, as it did in the past. Creativity consequently abounds. All steps are made up. Although there are basic steps in jig, strathspey, and reel time, and a few standard steps, movements can be added at will. The goal of the dance is either to accentuate the rhythm of the music or add a rhythmic counterpoint. Therefore, as traditional music becomes more rhythmically complicated so does the dancing.

Cheilidh Dance has almost opposite goals from Scottish Country Dance or Highland Dance. Although the dances are also country dances, they draw on much later dances in that tradition, ones primarily from the nineteenth century, and are usually done in the style previously characterized as rural. Unlike Scottish Country Dance, Cheilidh Dance started informally as a “craze” around 1975. It manifested itself in universities, the traditional music scene, and at the Riverside Club in Glasgow. It began as a rather spontaneous expression of Scottish youth identity, a manifestation of an alternative Scottish identity to that found in Scottish Country Dance and Highland Dance, the traditional forms of the establishment. It has become a “new” tradition.

The dances are drawn from country dances, quadrilles, and round-the-room circle dances done frequently at weddings and rural gatherings. There are set dances such as Strip the Willow and the Virginia reel done in lines like Scottish Country Dance; couple dances like the military two-step, the Canadian barn-dance, and the gay gordons; the eightsome reel, a quadrille; and the waltz. There is nothing orderly about Cheilidh Dance. People haphazardly find partners and form sets, and the romp begins. There are no steps per se. People run or walk wildly through the figures and dances. One does not grasp hands elegantly but links elbows instead. Although Cheilidh Dance has the same roots as Scottish Country Dance, its movement projects a rural, lower-class identity, rather than an elite upper-class one.

The dances themselves (or their age) are not important. The focus remains on the fact that the dances are known or learned easily by many people. They recall the famous
West Coast tradition of the Cheilidh house, which brought people together to share music and dance. However, because Cheilidh Dance has none of the features of an invented tradition—age, continuity, or context—it cannot reflect an identity other than that of its participants. It is unselfconsciously Scottish. It is Scottish because Scottish participants do it at Scottish venues. Not surprisingly, the language of authenticity plays no role within this form because there is no identity that has been consciously formed or that is in need of maintenance.

In Cheilidh Dance, as opposed to Scottish Country Dance, innovation does not lie in new dances but in technique and movement. There is no standard technique. The more creative and showy the transformation of the steps, the more praised the dancing. For example, a Scottish Country Dance pas de basque will be done as a stomp kick with the dancer landing as loudly as possible on two feet and then flinging one leg as high as possible into the air. Orderly traveling steps, become racing romps to one end of the hall and back. Anything too dignified will inspire the comment, “You need another beer!” People express themselves in the way they do the dances.

Four distinct identities have been described above: three that surfaced in the nineteenth century, and one contemporary identity. Scottish Country Dance represents a nationalistic pan-Scottish identity. Drawing on the elite style of country dances done in the eighteenth century, Scottish Country Dance is able to use dances done by all Scots as well as distinguish Scotland from England without losing English refinement. Highland Dance, on the other hand, functions to distinguish the romanticized Celts, or Highland Scots, from their Lowland counterparts. Stepdance draws on a Gaelic, Westcoast identity, or Highland identity. Finally, Cheilidh Dance portrays a more contemporary identity.

Each of the four “Scottish traditional dance” genres allow different levels of innovation. In those communities where identity is defined by their traditions, as in the case of Highland Dance and Scottish Country Dance, there are few opportunities for innovation. Change is controlled, and the
constructed identity maintained through the language of authenticity. As a result, it is mainly Highland Dance and Scottish Country Dance that can be transplanted to other countries by anyone who learns the tradition and follows the codes of dress, movement, and behavior. However, in those communities where identity is established by their dancing, as in the case of Cheilidh Dance and Stepdance, innovation is boundless, curtailed only when the community denies change as a legitimate expression. Their very freedom represents a threat to the survival of specific forms, since they evolve continuously. At the same time, having few material symbols associated with them, they cannot easily exist outside of the Scottish communities that gave them birth. The above distinction between how identities are formed and maintained, through tradition or through dancing, becomes important in understanding the role of these specific dance genres in community formation that will be discussed in next year’s issue.

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**End Notes**


vi Ibid., pp.109-118.

vii Ibid., pp.149-150.
x The Gaidhealtachd refers to the Gaelic-speaking areas of Scotland.


xii At the end of a term of lessons, each dance master would have a finishing ball in which students demonstrated what they had learned.

xiii Character dances were typically performed as interludes on longer theatrical bills. Although used in Scotland, these dances were mainly developed in England.

xiv The cheilidh house was a gathering place in the Gaidhealtachd in which people of a community would congregate on a cold winter night to dance, play music, and tell stories.


xvi Hobsbawm, *The Invention of Tradition*, p. 23.

xvii The Highlands and Islands is a term used in Scotland to refer to the north of mainland Scotland and the Western Islands such as Uist, Harris, and Lewis. It also implies the Gaelic-speaking areas.

xviii Cape Breton is an island in the Northeast part of Canada. Populated by Highland clearance emigrants, it has continued the traditions of the Highlands of Scotland without much outside influence until the 1970s. The styles in Cape Breton are used in Scotland as a model for its old styles.

xix The Feis Movement was started to re-introduce those in the Highlands and Islands to Gaelic traditional culture, including language, music, and dance.