

twentwo.tpt

Interview and filming with Willie Fraser, July 31, 1986

000- Gaelic songs and prayers

061- Mouth music and Maureen dancing.

077- Mouth music

108- Mouth music

133- Mouth music

140- Mouth music.

The tunes that they're playing today, these were the tunes (he just sang them). If a fiddle wasn't in the house when they were learning, he would have sung them. That's the way that she (Maureen) learned how to step-dance and we didn't have too much music in the house. There were no tapes at that time. And she was very young and I would jig the tunes and she'd get out on the floor. It was so easy for Maureen to learn how to step-dance. She had it just the first time she jumped out on the floor. I didn't have to teach Maureen. I used to dance in front of her alot when she was in the crib. The first time she got out on the floor, she danced and she had it right there. We danced in Inverness at old home week. She was just a small little thing and I was so proud of Maureen. And I was doing them big steps at that time and she had them all. Claire was seven when she started. She danced pretty much the same. The boys can dance but they are kind of shy.

181- When Willie started dancing.

I started dancing about 60 years ago, when I was just a little fellow. My father could dance and play the violin pretty good. He had three or four good steps. I learned them steps. I had a dream then. A fellow come to me right in the bedroom all dressed up and he'd show me a step. When he finished a step, a big hatch would open and he'd fall right down. And I'd come downstairs in the morning and my father would say how did you sleep last night and I'd say well, there's this young fellow in front of me, I felt so sorry for him. He was showing me a step and a big hatch would open and he'd go right down. And his father said well if I played a tune for you would you be able to do the step and I said sure. I'd get right out on the floor and I'd do the step. That went on for the longest time until I learned maybe a dozen steps from my dreams. After that I picked up steps from other good dancers.

214-

He was born not too far from here Saint Rose? about fifteen miles from here. My father came from Cape North and my mother in Saint Rose. They could dance a little bit and play alot of music. I kept dancing. There was alot of dancers a that time but it seems I got ahead of them.

When I found out I could dance in front of the big wheels, the music of Angus Chisholm and Sandy MacLean, Donald Angus Beaton...if you could dance in front of them you were something. Then I got a call to go to the Highland Games in Antigonish a long time ago and I danced there for about 12 years. They thought I was pretty good. At that time there wasn't alot of good dancers like today. Dancing close to the floor that means alot. I never went in for quiver dancing. I don't dance too much now after 60 years of dancing.

270-

We didn't have a prompter the other night so it makes it a little harder. We went through the set pretty good.

285- Steps belonging to people.

He'd pick up steps from other people, but most of daddy's steps are his own steps. Most of them are my own. When you get about a dozen nice steps on the slow strathspey and reel you know, then you can make your own if you have it. The same thing on the reel. When you know 12-15 steps then you listen to the music, then you could add on your own steps. But you have got to know the tune and then it's so easy for your feet to do the step. Most of the tunes are Gaelic Scotch. (He sings- 306) He tells the story of the song. (The woman dies without the priest and the devil took her.)

328- Willie's steps.

There aren't other people around who do my steps. Just Maureen and Claire. There's one young fellow Ashley MacIsaac who dances just like me. He's 11 years of age. I think it was a gift to him too. It was so easy for me as soon as I heard a tune, I was out with the steps and it was the same for Maureen. When she was 3 and a half years of age. I'd start the tune and Maureen was out on the floor and she had all of my steps. Maureen is young and she can do them all. I can't do them all now. I used to go up on stage and dance to 2 strathspeys and 2 reels. I'd get off stage and they'd cheer me back. And I'd have to do the same thing over again. I can't do that now. I'm too heavy.

358- Number of steps in their repertoire.

Exactly the way Daddy taught us, when you have 12 steps in your strathspey and 12 in the reel, then Claire and I have different variations of the steps and that can go up to like 100 steps. There are certain beginner steps. You could give them 7 first in the beginner in the strathspey and maybe 10 in the reel. If they go in the advanced class, give them another 10 or so. You correlate the steps one after the other. You have them in your mind before you go up. It's not that you plan it that way, they just seem to come out that way. One step leads easily into another one. You line them up a little bit.

380-

There's alot of good music today but we had good music 60 years ago too. Before my time they had this music and step-dancing just on the



Island of Cape Breton. I moved away from here a little bit in Canada and all through and into the States. Trips and concerts. They haven't got this step-dancing away from here. It's just the Island of Cape Breton. They have a little bit in Boston, but the people are from Cape Breton. A little in Detroit 'cause there are Cape Bretonners there too. There's a Cape Breton Club in Detroit.

398- Danced in Antigonish in 1948.

The concert under the stars. There was only two of us who could step-dance---myself and Alex Angus MacIsaac. We were back and forth there for quite a few years. Then there was the MacDonnells and the Smiths. They were good violin players. Step-dancing and violin too.

407-

People step-danced as much when he was younger in the sets. Many people step-danced back them. They were probably doing the basic rhythm steps then. Maybe they weren't stage people. The hop and the hop back steps. Years ago they were all step-dancers then. Drivin' her pretty good. But they weren't stars by any means and they knew how to go through a square set better than today. There wasn't such a thing as this twist business. Just a square set and violin music.

428- Figures in a set.

There were four figures. Now there's three. Two in the slow and two in the fast. They danced with every partner until they came back home. (Like the figure Peter Mackay called at Scotsville) Maybe there were five figures like in the schoolhouses.

459- Number of couples in a set.

They would double on the heads and the sides. That would be eight couples. A lot of dancing and a lot of pushing. It was the same figures but there were 8 couples---double on the heads and on the sides if they were short of space. You were doubling up. They called that an 8 couple square set. There would be four people on each side. (jigs a tune)

Side B-

000-

If he had eight couples, he could show them how to do it. He shows it to us. The sides would cross over and the heads would cross over. This was for the first figure. Instead of what we were doing the other night. It's like an old quadrille. He's explaining to us the set. First only half the people do the grand chain at one time. Form two little circles of eight and do a grand chain. (101) We haven't got enough people to show it. This was to a fast tune. The figure is the same but it is doubled up. They did a basket too. (162) It was really in a different manner. (It was like all twisting around. (174) finished.