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Interview with Blaise and Fern MacInnis, July 12, 1986
 Box 575, Hospital Street, Inverness, N.S. B0E 1N0

000- Blaise MacInnis, born in Mabou, 1938.

007- Glencoe Mills square set.

There should be four couples to a set. (8 people) You form a circle and the set is normally done in threes, each figure. So you would go forwards and backwards three times. Then you would turn to your corner and swing your corner partner then back in the circle the same thing, back and forwards three times and this would go on for three times normally. In the old time set, the prompter would do everything in threes. You would only dance with your corner partner three times. Then the set would end. It depends on how the fiddler was how fast the set went. When that set was finished, the second sets (figure) starts in threes too. You dance with your partner and you go around to the right the first time (promenade). Then back in the circle, the same thing, backwards and forwards three times, then you go the opposite way (promenade). Yes it is promenade to the right the first time and then you come back go in the circle, you do the same thing backwards and forwards and you dance with your partner and you go around the opposite way promenading to the left. (050) You do that three times. Normally in a structure set, the caller would, after the third time, would say o.k. and clap his hands and that would be the end of this second figure.

056- The third figure.

You start off right hand to your lady, left to the next lady and you just grand chain around like that. (You just go back to your partner) You'd swing your partner and then you'd grand chain the opposite way, to the left. Then when you meet your partner, you face the music the first time, the head couple would go up, face the music, and turn and she would be on my right going up and we would turn on our left coming back so that we would go through and all the women would be on one side and all the men on the other. The next time around after this same thing with the grand chain you wait for the back of the hall. You face the back of the hall, and that's the same thing we've just done. So you would do that three times in that last figure. The men are on the opposite side. On the first time down, the men are on the right hand side. The next, when you face the back of the hall, they'll be on the left-hand side when they step-dance in the line. When this whole process is done in threes, you come back and you grand chain all the way, you pass your partner and you go all the way back to your partner, and then you promenade around and you form a circle again and that's the end of the set. (After they've formed the lines and step-dance, when they join their partner they step-dance or swing with them and once that's done you grand chain again to the opposite way you've done it the last time.) No after that line up with men on one side and women on the other, you always grand chain to the right. Right hand to your partner, left to the next.

107- Number of couples in a set at Glencoe.

At one time, there would be a head couple. The head couple would always be, let's say if there were four couples, the head couple was usually here. The couple with their back to the music would be couple number four. The couple to their right would be the head couple.

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The head couple would lead around. But sometimes you'll get alot of people who don't remember that from back in the younger ones, it would be any couple that would go. But usually the head couple would lead around. There is probably not a head couple as much today in each of the sets as there was at one time. The head couple was never the caller when he was dancing. The caller very seldom ever gets in a set. He's always usually on the outside of it.

140- When he started going to square dances.

I started going to square dances when I was fourteen, in all the old-fashioned schoolhouses. (This would be in 1952)

151- Eight handed reel.

The eight-handed reel was done in Mabou at a concert. They did it with the women wore black long dresses or skirts with a blouse with the white blouse---Jessie Cameron, Pat MacDonald, this was probably about 10 or 12 years since they did that at a concert. I think that's probably about the only time it's been done and then they sort of do the Mabou set, what they call the last figure. They had the senior Mabou dancers and the junior Mabou dancers which my son belonged to, the Junior Mabou Dancers. They would do just the last figure and they had their own little caller. It was quite popular. My son Glen started when he was about 7 or 8 and went through until he was about 14. He stayed small so he could stay with the group longer. The group changed over the years. I think it is Maureen MacKenzie who teaches them. They'll probably be at the Broad Cove Concert. They dressed in the bib overalls, the boys, and the girls had the plaid skirts and the blouses. I remember as a kid seeing the eight-handed reel done in the old schoolhouses by the old-timers who are long since gone. This would be in the late 40's and early 50's. I was only a kid when I would see them in the schoolhouses. They would be just a group of them who would get up and do the 8-handed reel.

194- Dances in schoolhouses.

The reason for these dances was usually to offset the cost of heating for the winter, so the money they would collect would go to pay for that. And the repairs on the school. Some of it would go for the teachers salary at that time it was all Trustees. So 3 or 4 or 5 people

in the neighbourhood would be trustees and they'd have these bingo games, card plays and dances. It all went towards the upkeep of the school. Grocery bingo games mainly. Everybody would, my mother was at one time president of the home and school so they'd have a bingo game and my mother would bring five pounds of sugar and somebody else would bring something and this would be the prizes. The cards were a nickel a card and when they did have the dances, the fiddler would play for nothing and they had an organ at the school and they'd all contribute their talent for the night. The first dance that I remember, in Mabou on the way to Cape Mabou, a fellow by the name of Frank Sullivan used to have the quarter dances, and it was 25 cents to get in. It was 25 cents to get in and that was it. He had quite a large kitchen (this was in his house). There would be alot of people gathered there. It was for his own and people didn't mind because the people enjoyed it and he lived quite a ways back in the woods type of Glencoe type and people enjoyed the trip with horses and wagons. I was about 10 years old, the first one I was allowed to go to. The day of the dance, I stepped on a rusty nail. I can still remember crying over it. I think that was probably the last one he had at the house.

233- Dance prohibition.

This was not in my time. There was a priest that went around and took all the fiddles out of the houses. This was in Port Hood, Mabou, you know, different old priests. Because the devil was with the music. What I think they probably forgot was that alot of the old women and old men could jig the tunes, what they call mouth music. My mother used to be very good at that at one time. She used to know alot of the old tunes when we were small children she'd bounce you on her knee. The devil was not with the music so much but as the time that went with it. Partying and drinking and whatever---moonshine days. They didn't like that aspect of it.

260- Glencoe figures.

In the old set, the days of the caller, the caller would count it in series of threes. You knew that when you danced with your corner partner three times, then the music would stop. They were shorter sets. Like Buddy plays a long set. You dance with your corner partner and you swing her three times, in a series of three. When you swing with her, it is just a few seconds. Then you break and come back into the set. It could have something to do with the phrasing of the music. In the first figure, you don't see alot of people doing the step-dancing. In the second figure, the ones that can do it, do it a little bit more, because the jig is a little faster and it has a little more up tempo. In the first sets I danced, there were four figures in them. In fact I went to a dance in the early 60's in Whytco., and they were still doing those same four figures.

289- The "lost" figure.

The first figure you danced with your corner. The second figure you danced with your partner, the third figure you danced with your corner and the last figure you danced with your partner again. He thinks it is

the third figure that has been lost. So now you dance the first figure with your corner and the second two figures with your partner. The third one has been cut out.

298- Houseparties.

They'd have a cardplay and then the houseparty, well somebody would say well bring a fiddle and the dancing would start and the cardplay would break up. And somebody would've won the prize, usually a turkey or a goose and that would be about 10 or 11 o'clock and then somebody would bring out a fiddle and the houseparty would start. It could last until early in the morning. Gene Archiboe Gillis told me he played 12 sets one night for a houseparty.

313- End of interview.

Interview with Mary Jane MacIsaac and Margaret MacDougall, August 8, 1986.

314- Mary Jane MacIsaac, born in 1906, Glencoe in an old farmhouse and Margaret MacDougall, born in Inverness, Jan. 29, 1916.

319- Scotch Four.

(In Detroit) 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 their 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 50's when Father Hughie had the first concert out there. That would be thirty years this fall. (1956) It was my father that taught those four. One was my sister and two was my cousin, Jerry MacDonald. Two are dead. Jerry's living but I don't know if he would remember it. And my sister don't remember it. I have my cousin and Irene MacDonald from Windsor and we have it all planned in September we will do the Scotch Four. I will get it on video because I'm sending it to Father Rankin. So I'll send it to you. We will do a switch of videos.

358- Old-Time Sets.

(Mary Jane) When my people arrived in 1836, not my Grandfather because he was dead, but my father spoke about dancing. He said that the old sets in Scotland, there was four figures in them, that's the old ones. There was four couples in it. And only four figures. The first one was join hands and up in the centre. When the figure was over, you'd swing with your opposite partner. Then, they'd cross their hands and you'd walk across holding inside hands. The forward and back (bow) then you'd swing with your own partner then. The four couples would do that. This was the way they learned in Scotland and then it changes when they come over here. My father remembered his father telling about it. When my

father was old enough to dance, they were still here but then they shifted them around and it they put six figures in it. That was in my father's time. And then in my time, it was different again. So they just add on. I remember dancing six figures.

391- Margaret describes the figures.

The Lancers is the last ones, that is what they are dancing today. You went to a kitchen-racket and you danced these squares. You went first couple through the centre you would swing hands and I'd take my partner and you'd go through and you'd return on the outside. The four of them done this. (Like the first figure in Cheticamp). The second slow figure you would do first couple would make a turn with them. You would come half way to the centre. They would do this in couples. Like a right and left through and when you came back the couples would swing partners. The same thing would go for the two couples on the sides. They would cross over and cross back. It is not a right and left through. The opposite gent and lady (420) cross over and cross back. First couples on the heads cross over and cross back. So you sort of made a turn and then you went back. It would only be the opposite lady and gent (one couple is active and they are opposites), Lady and opposite gent cross over and then cross back. They do a little turn on the corner. They would swing when they got back. In the third figure, they did the grand chain and they did not do the wheel about because that was something new in the Lancers. They did right hand to your partner all the way around. I imagine Owen could talk about the first. These are the first sets that I remember (Margaret).

446- Wedding Reel.

Now they were a little different in my time (Mary Jane). The wedding reel, there was eight people in it, four couples. There was six figures in that. I'm going back 72 years ago when my sister got married we had the old house and they danced in the kitchen. There was a stove in the kitchen and they always put it out on the porch in the summertime. After breakfast they danced the wedding reel and now I am 80 and I was 7 years old so that was 73 years ago. I was quite amazed at the whole thing, the wedding reel. They danced six figures---three slow and three fast. After the third slow one, the bride and the groom stood in the centre and every man would have a chance, that's why they waited for the fast figure, would swing with the bride and whoever was dancing with me, they'd swing with the groom (460). Then came back. The wedding couple would be in the centre and they would not move from there. She got a chance to swing with every man until the four couples had completed it. While the bride was swinging in the centre, the groom was swinging with the ladies at each of their places. When it was finished, they'd say grand right and left half ways, and then they'd go up the centre, and everybody swing and they'd go back to the other two fast figures. They did three slow figures, then this one and then they did three fast figures. You need the fast figure for the bride to swing in the centre. That was very very fast. She would have been tired. That would have been like the fourth figure and then they would do the two fast ones. So the first fast figure was that. The other figures were the figures they were doing at that time. I'll never

forget that, the impression it had on me. My sister was in the centre, her and her husband, and the man would come out and bow to her and take her and whoever was dancing with that man, she'd go to the groom. Both of them stayed in the centre. So these two couples were swinging in the centre. It was just one couple at a time. The bride and the groom

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007- are in the centre, and they are both swinging in the centre while the other couples are watching. When we came back, right hand to your partner left to the next and you come around until the next couple. In between each swinging you'd do a grand chain. The bride and groom stay in the middle and they do a grand chain around them (with three couples). There are eight people in this. It was called the wedding 8 hand reel. There would be eight people and the bride and groom was in the centre. So that means five couples. There would not be one of the four couples---they were the centre of attraction. There was actually four couples with the bride and groom in the centre. We have a square made up of four couples. In the centre, we have the fifth couple who is the wedding couple the bride and groom. No there was only four couples and this included the bride and groom. When they did the grand right and left, the wedding couple stayed in the centre. Three couples were doing right to your own. When I got done with you, we did right hand to your partner and then when we come back to our places, the next couple swings with the bride. There were three couples in the grand chain. The bride and groom stayed in the centre.

069- Wedding dances.

They'd finish that set and the next set would be the bridesmaids and the best man and the groom and they'd just dance an average set. And if the father and mother was young enough to dance, on both sides, they would be the other two couples. That was the next one they danced here at my sister's wedding. My father and mother danced with them and the father was dead and the mother didn't come up because there was a big wedding in Inverness after the wedding here. But my uncle Angus and his wife danced for the groom's side of the family. First there was a set that was made up of six figures. The third figure, when the first fast figure came up, they did the thing with the bride and groom in the centre and the other three couples around. When they finished the first set, there was a second set and in that set was the bride and groom, the bridesmaid and the groomsmen, the mother and father of the bride, and then her uncle (or whoever represented the groom's family). In the first set was the bride and groom and whoever was there at the time. It wouldn't be big enough to have other sets going on at the same time. Because it was in the kitchen. Then my father built a stage right out there and they had dancing on the stage. The bride could dance with anybody and the groom could dance with anybody. The first set was meant to be where she was born, in her own home. And it was in the kitchen because that would've been the biggest room. She was the oldest and was the first to get married. The wedding set was supposed to be danced where she was born, in

the house where she was born. We used to call them "kitchen rackets".

130- Kitchen rackets.

Well, they were all dancing and hammering down. Mary Jane says, I'll tell you what I liked in my day we all went to mass in Glencoe and we only had mass once every three weeks and then we went to one house, each Sunday we picked a house after mass after we had dinner, the dinner was always at 12:00, and we'd dance all afternoon, after the mass and everything. The Miller's down there, that was a little village all of its own. There was 13 buildings down there. We went there very often. We came up to the old home here and then we'd go to different houses. And that was going on all summer long. The only time there was a dance in the hall was a box party.

149- Box Party.

The money was for the school. It was all houseparties. The Leahy grandfather played at the school at the Banks that's where I learned to dance (Margaret).

161- Houseparties on Sundays.

In the summertime, the meat wouldn't be so plentiful, 'cause there was no way to keep it. In my father's house, we'd kill a lamb on Friday and we'd have that for a roast or stew or whatever and some other house would have just potatoes and cheese or whatever you had, alot of times bologna alot of homemade stuff, homemade bread and pies and cookies molasses cakes and gingerbread. That's my fondest memory of dancing was in the home, in different homes and in my own home. We were dancing the six figures and maybe they'd only have a violin player. We never had a piano. There wasn't too many pianos then. That's why I still love the violin alone. There was a prompter and they never let anybody get out of order. In Margaret's time it was her husband and Owen Dan. You couldn't beat them. I'll give you a copy of a tape of a concert in Detroit with Buddy John Campbell, Sandy MacIntyre. Then we rented another hall after the concert was over just to have the rest of the night. They danced and he prompted. He would sing along, they made a song of the prompting. He kept time with the music.

205- Why no more prompters.

They didn't loose the prompters, the prompters could not make the dancers obey and they took over and went their way. I call what they dance today a bully in the ring. These sets today makes me lonesome. There is no head or tails to it. In Detroit, I gave my basement and we are trying to get the young ones to revive in the new way. So we had a dance at the Nova Scotia Club and we told everyone to look on at the new beginners to bring back the Saratoga Lancers. In Detroit we are going to have a Halloween dance.

231- Double set.

We used to do that at the Miller's down here outside. I never seemed to like that as much as the four couple one. It was kind of confusing

but we got to like them after a while. It was about the same way as the four couples. There was six figures. In that double up thing, you crossed your hands in the centre. This would be everyone---like a basket. Then you got a hold of the fellows and the fellows would go under the girls. Then the women would go under. Then you would keep on going around. That was the double set. You'd have to have a large room and you could never do it in a private home. We did it outside. You would do right hand to your partner all the way and the ladies formed a line and crossed their hands. Then the men came in and they crossed their hands and you swung around. Everybody formed a circle and then the men came and caught their hands. The women had their hands and they would go around and around.

268- Song-dances.

Margaret says way back in my mother's day, every tune had Gaelic to it. (fiddle tunes). The song-dances, they never saw that. But if there was no violin player and we wanted to dance a set, Uncle Angus would do that. He would jig tunes and even sing words to them and we would dance to that. Sometimes he would take two sticks and he would keep music to the two sticks. And hum the tune and then he would sing it in Gaelic. But he'd tune it in Gaelic too. In order to do that, he'd have to have the two sticks to keep the rhythm and how often we danced that without a violin. We always depended on him.

293- Dance occasions.

We had a dance for the parish. That would be right after the hay was finished so everybody would be home and we'd have a box party. I remember one time eight boxes being made. And we'd decorate them up with tissue paper. We'd curl tissue paper. We could make one for you. So now say you went there with your boyfriend, you'd show him the box before you leave. Then there would be friends of his and this man would come up and stand on an old keg like a molasses keg that was cut down, and he'd auction. Then your box would come up and he'd say how much do I offer for this, and you wanted your boyfriend to get this but there was another guy who had his eye on you so he...How much---25 cents, 50 cents and there might be three just teasing him. I saw over in this schoolhouse here and that's going back 73 years ago---43 dollars. There was a MacIsaac fellow he had his eye on Kay White, she was teaching in Strathlorne and was going with somebody else, when her box came up it was sold for 51 dollars. Margaret was about 9 years old. That was Dougal Macory's sister. The ones bidding didn't have any money, but they knew he wouldn't give it up. He had 50 dollars, that's all he had and it went up to 43 dollars. They were just teasing him. In the box you put the best you had---cookies, cheese and bread and sandwiches---two sandwiches because somebody was going to buy it. Two of everything.

142- Box Party.

Mary Jane says on her 16th birthday, her Aunt made her a cake and her mother said you have to give that up. If you didn't have a boyfriend, you were so nervous who would get it because he was supposed to take you home. This queer fellow got my box, kind of slow and I didn't want to eat

with him---you're young and crazy and I had my eye on someone else. My mother said if you don't go and respect that and eat with him, you'll never get to another dance. Well, I said I'll do that but by God he is not going to take me home. I never forgot my 16th birthday. A lot of people wouldn't claim their box. I don't see why they don't make one box party at the school. (And film it).

365- End of interview.