



## News from Canada—From the Dining Room to a Summer Assembly

by Maxine Louie

I would like to tell the tale of the Toronto English Country Dance Assembly, which started as a small group of dancers in my house, with the dining room table pushed into the kitchen to make room for a dance floor, in March 2012. We had been talking about having a weekly group for some time, but no place was available that was affordable until I decided that having a house dance was a positive start. We had to squeeze through the narrowness between the living and dining rooms, and occasionally dancers would rest on the sofa at the end of the line, but we had a good time and learned great dances with our caller, Cathy Campbell. We discovered that we were amiable dancers who were also amenable to volunteering to help keep the project going.

Our first name was Toronto Friday Night English Country Dance, as that was our night, and we described it as a wonderful way to start off the weekend. When summer came, we danced outdoors in the nearby parks of Toronto's east end, but always with the threat of rain or excessive humidity. Dancing outdoors required access to washroom facilities nearby and open during our dance time.

In October 2012, we were able to get into the Ralph Thornton Centre, a beautiful, renovated neoclassical building, designed in 1913, that used to be a post office, in Toronto's Riverdale/Leslieville area. The only stipulation was that we were open to the community, which has always been the philosophy of English country dance as well as contra dancing anyway. We have attracted many locals of various ethnic backgrounds as well as dancers from all over Toronto through Meetup. In lieu of admission, we encourage donation for those who can. Donations are used for membership in CDSS, purchasing dance music and books, equipment, and a special donation to Deborah Denefeld's project for veterans with PTSD.\*

photo by Dorian Louie



In August 2014, after much agonization over a new name, we officially became the Toronto English Country Dance Assembly, allowing us to finally build our website (<http://www.tecda.ca>). We continue to meet every Friday night for our weekly dance. We also worked in conjunction with Toronto Contra Dancers (<http://www.tcdance.org>) to host the occasional English dance with callers or musicians who were both ECD and contra trained. We want to expose the contra dancers to the amazing music and dance patterns that make English country dance so special.

That we have continued to grow over the last three years is the result of the voluntary spirit of almost all the dancers, each contributing what expertise they can to grow the whole organization, whether it be working on the website, flyers, booking, social occasions, videography, and especially our caller, Cathy Campbell. Her next project is to groom more callers.

### Marianne's Dance

Last winter, Marianne van Ooijen, one of our dancers who is a retired but very active professional costumer, said she wanted to celebrate her fifty-five years in Canada with a Regency dance, and that she would sew ten new dresses and some vests for dancers who did not have Jane Austen style dance outfits. We thought this exceedingly generous on her part, and came up with a plan to have the recipients of the outfits donate towards the dress-up dance, as well as charging a nominal fee to cover costs. Over the next six months, Marianne sewed twelve dresses and eight vests, all individually fitted and each unique.

On April 17, "Marianne's Anniversary Ball" was held at our dance hall at the Ralph Thornton Centre. Her guests included family, dancers from other dance organizations who she befriended prior to joining TECDA, as well as our own group. Cathy called, with live music provided by Kevin Budd and Daev Clysdale. Marianne's ally in costumes, Sarah Boutillier, offered her photography services, Peggy W. organized the dining experience, and many other volunteers helped make the evening run smoothly. (Richard Jacob has posted the video of the dance on our website.)

### Toronto's Summer Assembly

This June, TECDA sponsored the first multi-English country dance get together in southern Ontario. Altogether there were nine callers who came from Spencerville in the east, to Guelph in the west. The original invitation extended to London,

Owen Sound and parts further south, a two hour driving radius from Toronto. Despite horrendously unsummer-like weather, we had a good turnout of dancers and callers. Those who came were treated to a delicious refreshment of strawberry shortcake, using Ontario strawberries in their prime, real whipped cream, and homemade biscuits.

The idea for the Summer Assembly had three roots. The Ontario Folk Dance Association hosts several potluck dinner/dances throughout the year, excellent opportunities for the various folk dance clubs in the greater Toronto area to get together. That seemed like an idea that would benefit our ECD community. I had attended dances in Rochester, New York, where they had many callers over the course of the evening, each calling a couple of dances. Another good idea. Lastly, after attending the "Puttin' on the Dance" conference in Ottawa, March 2015, I resolved to stop procrastinating and start organizing. Everything thing fell into place with local volunteers, baking, shopping, decorating, and callers from across the region contributing their time and talent.

We hope this will be the first of many future Southern Ontario get togethers.

\* See <http://www.deborahdenefeld.com/dancing-well-the-soldier-project.html>.

Web extra! More photos are on our website, <http://www.cdss.org/cdss-news.html>.



The Summer Assembly, 2015. (back row, 1 to r): Relative Harmony: Jonathan Avery, Shawn Johnson, Rick Avery; (middle row:) callers Walter Zagorski, Dale Hyde, Cathy Campbell, Judy Greenhill, Tom Calwell, Myra Hirschberg; (front) Susan Bunting and Tara Bolker. Photo by Maxine Louie.

*"News from Canada" features news about Canadian events and groups. Ideas for articles should be sent to Bev Bernbaum, [wturnip@sympatico.ca](mailto:wturnip@sympatico.ca), or to Rosemary Lach, [rosemaryklach@shaw.ca](mailto:rosemaryklach@shaw.ca).*