

## The Poussette

In The Manual we read that Miss Milligan wrote *The Scottish Country Dance* in 1931 and *Won't you Join the Dance* for Paterson's in 1951. They served as the main instructional books for teachers until the first Manual in 1992. What many newer members probably don't know is that Allie Anderson, Principal Teacher of PE at James Gillespie's High School for Girls, Edinburgh, and John M. Duthie MA, wrote *A Complete Guide to Scottish Country Dancing*, published by McDougall's, one of Scotland's main educational publishers. Much of the book is similar to what we find in Miss Milligan's writings. There is more about the teaching of children as you would expect from someone who was doing it on a day to day basis, unlike JM. And, of course, they recommend skip change when turning corners after setting. Anderson and Duthie, however, present two versions of the fast-time poussette. The first is the same as the one we do today.

The second version of the poussette is described as a variant and they say it was danced in the South-East Border Counties of Scotland. This version starts in the same place with dancers' hands the same, but both begin on the right foot. They maintain that the tradition of the men starting a poussette on the left foot is a relic of the late 19th century when the poussette was done in waltz hold and the couples waltzed round each other. The instructions are the same as far as bar 5 - into the centre. Instead of turning half way on bar 6, the dancers only turn a quarter so that they are in a line facing up or down the dance. On bars 7 and 8, they use skip change to turn with both hands into sidelines. They point out that the quarter turn on bar 6 is much easier than the rather awkward half turn - even more awkward for the man on the left foot! They also like this version as it keeps the basic rule of country dancing (with the exception of slip step): you start with the right foot on the 'strongest rhythmic beat of the bar'.

They finish their description of this version by saying, "A good poussette is one of the most enjoyable of the dance movements and coming as it does at the end of a figure it should be swung through like a well danced reel."

We know that our current version was an invention. Two whole bars to retire a tiny distance should have rung historical alarm bells! A two-handed turn at the end would certainly finish it off with a swing! Allie Anderson and John Duthie seem to have been neglected in the history of country dancing.

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