

ALUMNI CONNECTIONS

Connecting dancers past, present, and future

News and Features

Tartan Day on Ellis Island

Hosted on Ellis Island, the event highlighted the contributions of Scottish immigrants who came to the United States.

Mary Stewart: East Region

A beloved Scottish Dance instructor who immigrated to New Jersey and dedicated her life to sharing the art of Scottish dance.



Mary Stewart (1970's)

Seeds of US Scottish Dance

An exciting initiative dedicated to preserving the legacy of our influential dance instructors from across the United States.

Future Features

Add to our Alumni newsletter. Send us pictures and stories to include in our future posts.

Welcome

Welcome back to the latest edition of our alumni newsletter. Here you will find exciting updates and events, but also stories, memories, and achievements of alumni like you.

We would love to hear from you if you have stories, photos, or ideas to share. Let's keep the spirit of Scottish dance alive together.

Contact Info

email: alumni@scotdanceusa.com
find and follow us on
[facebook](#) and [instagram](#)
sign up for alumni connections by
clicking below



ALUMNI CONNECTIONS

Connecting dancers past, present, and future

Tartan Day on Ellis Island



[Click here for the Mass Fling](#)

A “Celebration of Highland Dance” was the theme for the 2024 display of Tartan Day on Ellis Island. The exhibition featured interpretive panels, costumes and videos related to highland dance. Ellis Island also hosted live performances of dancers and pipers entertaining passengers as they debarked from the boats that brought them to the island. These dancers came together from the US, Canada, Australia, and Scotland completing the day by dancing a mass Highland Fling in front of the iconic New York City skyline.



ALUMNI CONNECTIONS

Connecting dancers past, present, and future

Mary Stewart

By Felicia Maloney



The Mary Stewart Highland Dancers performing at the Garden State Arts Center in Holmdel, New Jersey

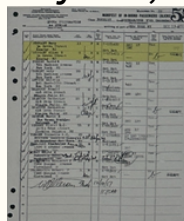
Have you ever wondered how Scottish Highland Dance traveled across the pond to the United States? This biography is the first of what hopes to be many stories documenting Scottish dancing's early beginnings.

We will begin with one of the early teachers in the Eastern Region.

Mary Noon Stewart was born in Glasgow, Scotland on January 19, 1918. She was the sixth of seven children. Her parents William and Catherine (McKinley) Noon were hardworking people. Mary brought the art of highland dancing with her to America. It is believed Mary danced while in Scotland and won a trophy at an unknown event.

By age 23, she met her future husband, Allan. They were married on April 12, 1941 in Scotland. After a WWII injury, the Stewarts sought a change of climate due to Allan Stewart's arthritis. They chose Kearny, NJ because Mary's Uncle Colin Stewart lived there and could sponsor them. Allan Stewart came first to America to secure a job and a place to live. Then, in December 1951, after about a weeks journey, Mary and her nine year old son Allan, arrived on the SS Ryndam in Hoboken, NJ. Some years later, another son, Richard, was born in the United States.

Kearny, NJ was named to honor Major General Phil Kearny, Commander of the New Jersey Forces in the Civil War. With a development of industry in this area, the Clark Thread Company of Scotland built two large mills in neighboring East Newark, NJ. These mills brought thousands of Scottish immigrants to the area providing jobs in their factories. By 1951, Kearny was 60% Irish and Scottish. Mary would come to have many friends here making her feel at home.



Mary Stewart

When Mary came to America, she brought her culture with her. She became involved in groups such as: The Daughters of Scotia Bonnie Doon Lodge 10 (later becoming grand chief), the Order of the Eastern Star Arlington Chapter 66 and Kelvin Chapter 66, as well as becoming a member of the Siloam Shrine 17. It was at one of these meetings that Elizabeth Morrison, Margaret Morrison Howard's grandmother, approached Mary about dance lessons for her teenage daughter, Beverly. According to Allan Stewart, Mary's son, Mary had to work out the beats and bars with Beverly because she was hard of hearing. This was difficult for both teacher and student as this was a time when people with disabilities were often not accepted into group activities, such as dance. Since Mary and her family lived in an apartment, she needed a place to teach. By 1953, Mary was teaching dance in the Masonic Temple, before moving into the local Scots American Club which offered social and cultural events for the community. In 1967, with classes growing in size, she moved her lessons to the basement home of Christine McAllister, a friend in the Eastern Star. As time went on, Chrissie's daughter Diane also began to take lessons. Mary Stewart continued to teach in that basement for nearly 50 years. Her husband, Allan, built a dance platform there for the dancers to rehearse. He also crafted wooden swords as hilts for practice.



As her school grew, dancers began entertaining senior citizens as well as hospital and cancer patients. Dancers were often requested at weddings and Burns' Nights. Her dancers even entertained presidents Lyndon Johnson and Bill Clinton. In the 1970's, dancers performed in a made for television Christmas movie starring Bette Davis. One group of dancers spent a week performing throughout New York City in locations such as Lincoln Center, the McGraw Hill Buildings, and at the Plaza Hotel for Mrs. General Mac Arthur. Other dancers were able to work with the New York City Ballet, while additional dancers pre-recorded a rendition of The Nutcracker, with the Garden State Ballet. The ballet was a multicultural version which was shown on Christmas Day 1977. In 1995, The Mary Stewart Highland Dancers made another appearance in "Brigadoon" at the Papermill Playhouse in Millburn, NJ. In attendance at that performance was then New Jersey Governor, Christie Todd Whitman.

Mary Stewart



Taken at the Opening Night of Singlton at the Passaic Playhouse in 1999
L-R back row Meghan Miller, NJ Gov. Christie Todd Whitman
L-R front row Alexandra Allison, Kelly Morelato, Nicole Mulligan and Mary Stewart
Photo -credit Learned Kindred of Currie

Mary was very active in her church, the Knox Presbyterian, located in Kearny.

She served on many committees in helping to preserve the heritage of the Scottish community, one being the The Scottish Heritage Committee. In 1977, this group erected a monument honoring all immigrants of Scottish heritage and their contributions. The monument is located in Riverbank Park, along the Passaic River, in Kearny. Various sections of the park are dedicated to historical figures and events. The Wallace Glen section, honors Scottish Patriot, Sir William Wallace and is the home of the Scottish Monument that honors all those of Scottish decent. It is on that monument that the Mary Stewart Highland Dancers are listed as contributors. James Aitken, original owner of the well known Argyle Fish and Chips, was also a big part of this project.



Monument to Scottish heritage in Kearny, NJ

Mary was recognized as Artist of the Year in 1999 by the West Hudson Council for the Arts in Kearny, NJ. She was part of the founding members of the organization known as USHDA, (United States Highland Dancing Association, about 1965) where she served as representative of District 7. USHDA was the precursor to FUSTA (The Federation of United States Teachers and Adjudicators, founded in 1980) and now

ScotDance USA. Mary was a member of FUSTA and the BATD. She judged in Scotland, Canada, and the United States. Mary was a BATD examiner and life member. She became the dance chairman for the Scottish Heritage Festival at the Garden State Arts Center, now PNC Arts Center in Holmdel, NJ which occurred annually in October for over thirty years. On the morning of the Arts Center event, her students, along with Shirley Bell's dancers (also a NJ dance teacher) performed on the main lawn in a Highland Games type of simulation. That same afternoon there would be another performance on the big stage with famous entertainers from Scotland, such as Peter Morrison. With the help of many of her dance parents, she was able to hold the annual Kearny Indoor Competition for dancers in the surrounding areas to compete against one another.

Mary Stewart

In the late 1960's many teachers across the US, began studying and preparing for their judges test. According to the Highland News March 1966 edition, which was an USHDA newsletter, John and Cathy Hynd, Marguerite Reid, Vera Miller and Sheila McMillan were the first five members of USHDA to pass the judges test here in the United States. Having our own US judges allowed the dance community more flexibility in hiring judges for competitions. Some time after this, with the encouragement of Sadie Simpson (Scotland), Mary Stewart passed her judges' test and was honored by her students and dance parents for this accomplishment.

Mary retired from highland dancing in February of 2000 due to health reasons. She then moved into her country home in Andover, NJ with her son Richard. This home was built by her husband Allan Stewart some fifty years before. Many of her older dancers have fond memories of going to Mrs. Stewart's summer home for a dance lesson.

"The parents would carpool on a summer day. Upon arrival, the dancers took turns practicing on her porch overlooking the neighborhood below. You see, Mr. Stewart was a carpenter and had built this house on top of a steep hill.

Walking up the steep driveway was a workout for your calves. Once class was over there was lunch at the picnic table, then down to the lake for an afternoon of swimming. The day would end with a barbecue back at the house and then the long drive home. It is recollections such as these, that made dance memorable.

Another was the bus rides that Mrs. Kelsch (mother to Joanne and Debbie) organized to go to a competition. These were the times when families only had one car or didn't drive far. The camaraderie developed on those bus rides, once again, made highland dancing much more enjoyable. On one such bus ride returning from Scotia, NY, while the TV show the Brady Bunch was popular, the dancers began rewriting the Brady Bunch theme song starting something like this.

"Here's the story, of a lovely lady, who was busy with two boys of her own....." Now, many of Mary's students may also remember Mrs. Stewart scribbling the dances we were to perform at an event on a napkin or scrap paper minutes before we were to dance. Not much time for mental preparation. St. Patrick's Day events were always fun. Mrs. Stewart would always show up in her orange dress. "

Mary Stewart

“During classes we were excited to get a chicklet (chewing gum) to chew so we hopefully wouldn’t need a drink and then of course the bathroom. You see, since lessons were in the basement there was an old slop sink and one metal cup which all drank from. It’s amazing we didn’t get sick. The bathroom was difficult since it was someone else’s house. But again, we all survived. It was things like this that gave us the greatest memories. In that basement was a small bulletin board with group pictures of dancers in the school, mostly the “older girls” who we all strived to be like, our role models. Things may have been much simpler then, but it was the beginnings of the classes, workshops, events, and competitions that we all enjoy today.”- Felicia Maloney, former Mary Stewart Highland Dancer



Jimmy Graham, Felicia McAngus Maloney, Debbie Kelsch, Mary Stewart, and Margaret Morrison Howard at a dance engagement in Ocean Grove, NJ.

Of the roughly 200 students that came through Mary’s door, six of those dancers carried on Mary’s tradition of teaching highland dance. They are Margaret Morrison Howard, Felicia McAngus Maloney, Maria Josenhans, Gail Houston Bacon, Nadine Sengebush Pirie, and Karen Campbell Mahoney.

Mary Stewart passed away on October 16, 2001 after suffering from a brain tumor. She is survived by her son Allan and his wife Sharon who went on to have five children, four boys and yes, one girl, Sharon. Sharon danced and carried on the family tradition. She later married and had three girls, Olivia, Emily, and Amanda. Olivia and Amanda also danced, carrying on the tradition one more generation. Mrs. Stewart would have been so proud of them.

In Mary’s obituary, she is remembered for bringing voice and motion to Highland Dancing as an art form with a lengthy heritage and proud tradition. Thanks to all the dedicated teachers who in the early 1950’s and 60’s cared enough to bring highland dancing to the United States. Through their perseverance, as well as the Official Board in Scotland, Highland Dancing was standardized and recognized for what it is today.

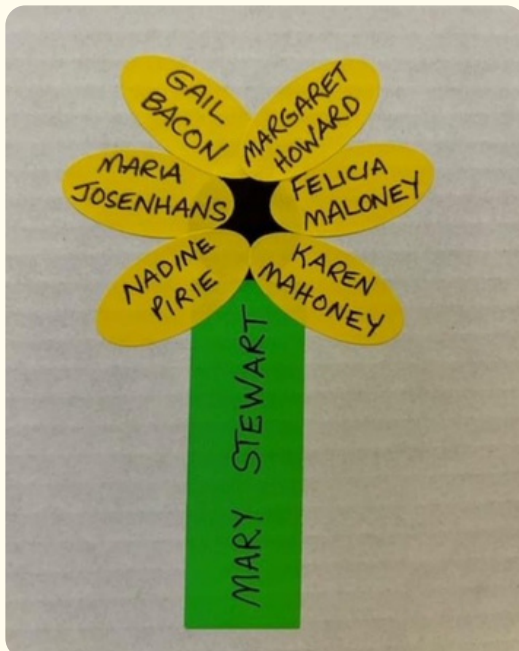
ALUMNI CONNECTIONS

Connecting dancers past, present, and future

Seeds of US Scottish Dance



The Seeds of US Scottish Dance Project is a project dedicated to preserving the legacy of influential Scottish dance instructors who played a pivotal role in promoting and teaching traditional dance worldwide. By tracking and documenting the lives, contributions, and stories of these teachers—many of whom immigrated and brought Scottish culture to new regions—this project aims to honor their impact on the global Scottish dance community. With your help, the project ensures that the dedication and artistry of these teachers are remembered and celebrated for future generations.



How can you help the project grow?

Send us any information you have about teachers past and present.

- Who inspired *you* to teach?
- Who did *you* inspire to teach?
- Do you know who taught your dance teacher?
- Any other information you can send!

[Click here to send us information](#)

ALUMNI CONNECTIONS

Connecting dancers past, present, and future

Seeds of US Scottish Dance



The Seeds of US Scottish Dance project was showcased at the ScotDance National Championships in Boston this year. Attendees participated by writing the name of a teacher on a green stem, followed by the name of a student who later became a teacher on a yellow petal. This display beautifully illustrated how the art of Scottish Highland Dance has spread across the country through generations of dedicated dancers and instructors.



ALUMNI CONNECTIONS

Connecting dancers past, present, and future

Get Featured in our Newsletter

We Want To Spotlight YOU!

The United States has so many amazing Scottish Highland Dance Schools across the country. We'd love to hear from you! Please send information about your dance school so we can feature you in our next newsletter. Share your school's story, achievements, and anything that makes your community special—let's celebrate the rich diversity of Scottish Highland Dance across the country together!

[Click here to add your awesome school!](#)



Send us pictures!

Everyone has a collection of memorable photos from competitions, Burns dinners, festivals, dance classes, and more. Send us your photos—old and new—so we can create a historical archive that showcases our incredible Highland dance legacy!

Email: alumni@scotdanceusa.com
or send on Instagram or Facebook