

RSCDS John Muir Branch (Wisconsin, USA)
Number of years established as a branch: 11
Annual Report (June 2013 - May 2014)
Respectfully submitted by M. J. Wiseman, Secretary

The John Muir Branch of the RSCDS has had an event-filled year. Beginning with our Annual General Meeting in June, where some new and some continuing Board members were elected, we danced and socialized our way through the past 12 months. Our branch co-sponsors the Midwest Scottish Dance Weekend held at Beloit College each June, which provides an exceptional teaching and social experience for dancers from throughout the upper Midwest. Our demonstration team performed at two events in the early Fall; one at the Dane County Farmers' Market, the other at an outdoor pavilion within a city park.

In October we held a social evening, which included a Harvest potluck dinner and a viewing of photographs from a recent Scotland tour by several members. In November Cape Briton fiddler Natalie MacMaster performed a concert in Madison and some of us gathered for dinner prior to attending. Trying to avoid the winter snow storms, we held a successful dance party with live music and a potluck supper shortly in early December.

Teaching was a major focus this past year – both to attract new dancers and to help existing members improve their technique and expand their repertoire of dances. In addition to teaching at our weekly dance sessions, our teachers offered several special classes for both beginning and continuing dancers. This included a 4-session class focusing on formations in January; our teachers think we're doing much better as a result. We were especially pleased to offer two well-attended children's classes in the Fall and Spring, with the "graduates" of each attending our Holiday Dance party and Annual Ball, respectively, to dance the first sets with us. Two very enthusiastic youth groups, a Girl Scouts troupe and the Madison Boys Choir, enjoyed learning basic ceilidh dances from us to broaden their cultural horizons.

Our major event every year is our Annual Ball. The theme for this year's 37th Annual Ball was Madton Abbey, a spoof on the popular "Downton Abbey" British television series. This year accordionist Sylvia Miskoe of New Hampshire was invited to join our local band. Because she was here our group co-sponsored a Contra Dance evening prior to the Ball. It was very well attended. Our goal is always to attract a strong regional attendance at our Ball and we succeeded in having the highest attendance of any Ball in the Upper Midwest. The Ball was preceded by an opportunity to have photos taken with life-size cutout figures from the Downton Abbey TV show, and during a tasty dinner, a table quiz was held to test our knowledge of Downton Abbey trivia. Some attendees came in period costumes and prizes were awarded for both the quiz and costumes. After the Grand March a delightful evening of dancing ensued. An after-ball party and Sunday brunch gave participants a chance to reconnect and revive after the exciting weekend.

We are pleased to average 16 dancers each evening, a marked increase from prior years, and have several new members. It has been a special treat to have dancers from around the U.S. and abroad who walk through the door for a night or more.