

Tribute to Rae MacCulloch – Glengarry’s Queen of Dance

Written by Mary (McDonell) Wattie – The Glengarry Games

The author, Mary, danced under the direction of Rae MacCulloch for many years and later taught with the MacCulloch School of Dancing in the Maxville Area.



The Glengarry Highland Games and all of Glengarry County lost one of their beloved ambassadors when Rae MacCulloch passed away on Christmas Day 2009.

Rae’s Glengarry roots run deep. Born in Montreal to Glengarrians Donald Archibald Grant and Josephine St. Jacques, Reynalda (Rae) Grant grew up in Montreal and moved to Glengarry in 1954 after marrying her best friend and love of her life - Alex MacCulloch. She began teaching dancing in her sister Sybil and husband Hughie Cameron’s farmhouse kitchen in Glen Roy in 1955. Little did Rae, Alex and Sybil know they were laying the foundation for what would become an internationally renowned dance troupe – the MacCulloch Dancers.

Shortly after their move to Glengarry, Rae and Alex became involved with the Glengarry Highland Games. It became a life-long family commitment that continues into the third generation. Until his death in 1993, Alex served on the Highland Dancing Committee as a member and later Director with Chairpersons Clarence and Verna MacGregor and Jean McInnis Campbell. In the early years Rae’s students competed in the open dancing competition at the Games and were part of the Massed Highland Fling during Opening Ceremonies. By the early seventies, the MacCulloch Dancers appeared as a regular feature of the Friday Night Tattoo, and lead the Massed Highland Fling at the Opening Ceremonies. As her focus began to shift away from competition to performance, Rae and eventually her daughters continued as members of the Highland Dancing committee until the late 1990’s. Rae was proud to be appointed a Director-at-Large of the Highland Games after Alex’s passing. Rae’s daughters Heather Forbes and Deborah Wheeler carry on the tradition, as directors of the Navan and Glengarry branches of the MacCulloch School of Dance. Several of her granddaughters are also involved as teachers. Sons Greg, Jamie and Lindsay have all been involved with various Highland Games committees. Greg was involved for several years with track and field events; Jamie is the Official Photographer for the Games and Lindsay is the Chair of the Clans committee.

Rae’s love of the Glengarry Highland games was legendary. The MacCulloch Dancers receive invitations to perform at festivals all over the world. But any event – no matter how prestigious, that conflicted with the Games was politely refused. Each year at the beginning of July, she and daughters Heather and Deborah began preparing for the Tattoo. It was most fitting that two of the major highlights of her professional career played out at the Games. 2004 marked the 50th Anniversary of the MacCulloch School of Dance, and a reunion was organized for the Games. No one could have been prouder to be invited by President Perry McConnell to be the Guest of Honour July 31, 2004. Not

even the relentless rain and mud that day could dampen her spirits. Although the Opening Ceremonies were delayed and shortened, the sun beamed down on Rae as she declared the 2004 Glengarry Highland Games officially open. Later in the afternoon, 504 past and present students – including some from her very first class in Glen Roy, took to the infield with Rae to dance a choreographed number that combined both Highland and Step dancing. Accompanied by the Glengarry Pipe Band, and Rob Taylor and Jackie Smith of the Brigadoons, 505 dancers set a Guinness World Record for the “Largest Massed Performance of Highland & Step Dance”. Anyone who saw Rae dancing in the front row with her sons, daughters and grandchildren, or saw her dancing around the track after the record was set, caught a glimpse of the immense pride and pure joy she experienced that day. It was also fitting that the Glengarry Pipe Band and members of the Brigadoons accompanied the dancers for that performance. Rae was very proud of her long-time association with the Glengarry Pipe Band, the Brigadoons and other area musicians who accompanied the MacCulloch Dancers at the Games as well as other local and international events.

Rae seldom missed the monthly Games meetings. As her health deteriorated, she wanted the Games Executive and Directors to know she hadn't quit; she just wasn't strong enough to go to the 2009 fall meetings. Her heart was set on attending the Annual General Meeting and she was very sad that it was not to be. She was missed.

This year as the MacCulloch Dancers take to the field for their performance at the Friday night Tattoo, every dancer past and present will feel an empty space in their heart. But Rae will be watching over the dancers on the infield; reminding them to smile, keep their head and arms up, knees back and most important of all - Don't Stop! When the Tattoo is over, have a wee dram and do a little step in her memory. Raise your glass in a toast to Rae MacCulloch - Glengarry's Queen of Dance.

