

IN PIONEER TIMES

The Hills are Alive with History

Thora O'Grady

One day a friend and I were hiking in the Gowlland Range. Stopping to admire the panorama from Jocelyn Hill, I asked, "How did this hill get its name?" As synchronicity would have it, a woman from a nearby group of hikers overheard my query. "It's named after my mother, Jocelyn Weaver Bridgeman."



photograph courtesy of Nancy Braithwaite

Jocelyn Weaver Bridgeman,
the "Jocelyn" of Jocelyn Hill

Too amazed to pursue further information at the time, I later contacted Jocelyn's daughter, Nancy Braithwaite, of Salt Spring Island.

She told me that her mother was a little girl in the early 1900's when a friend of the family, Commander Parry of the survey ship HMS Egeria, gave her name to the splendid look-out point. Later Jocelyn married Captain Grant, the first commandant at Royal Roads Naval College.

Another early clan which left its mark on the Highlands were the Holmes, a well-known Victoria family. Suffering from ill health, William Holmes bought the Pike homestead from Caleb's son, Henry because he thought the bracing mountain air might help his constitution. The family's Chinese 'houseboy' kept the household functioning as genteely as possible under such primitive conditions. William's son, Cuthbert, who was later honoured as a Freeman of the city of Victoria, became secretary of the Highland school board, which ran the little red schoolhouse that is still tucked away on a hill above Millstream Road. The family name is commemorated in Holmes Peak, the high point on the ridge to the northwest of the Pike House where the powerlines drop down across Saanich Inlet.

Less well known is Scafe Hill, which looks like a matron's bosom bisected by several power lines. One can see it clearly, driving west along Munni Road south of Goodland Farm. The present Barker Road reaches close to the base of this hill which was named for the Scafe family who moved into the area in the late 1880's and at one time ran a lime kiln on Millstream Road. In the same area, but closer to Fizzle Lake, was a lumber mill, operated by Charlie Siemens. Another memorable dweller in that region was Dave Brotherston, who with his wife, Vera, lived on the southern slopes of Scafe Hill. Dave tended his flock of purebred Scottish Blackfaced sheep throughout the Highlands. A native of the Lammermuir Hills in the Scottish Border country, he had, in his younger days, driven a flock of sheep right across the Australian continent. Hiking on Scafe Hill's twin peaks today you will encounter incredibly beautiful meadows of Garry Oak.

Like most place names, those of the Highlands have many interesting tales to tell.

Highland resident Thora O'Grady teaches drama to Victoria secondary school students. With her husband, Highland Councillor Bill Vogel, she is an avid hiker of our local hills.

PROFILE

Sheila Kennedy Jane Mendum

The first thing you notice about Sheila Kennedy is her poise and grace. Her posture is erect and elegant. She has a quiet, purposeful strength about her. Sitting at the table, overlooking the tranquil view of Pease Lake, I learn more about Sheila and her life, past and present, both at home and away from the Highlands.

Sheila was born and raised in London, England. When asked how she came to be involved in ballet, she explained that her family skated, and that her interest in dancing evolved from there. She took some dance classes as a young child, but when she was nine the war began and she was sent off to boarding school, thought to be safer than London during the Blitz. When the war ended she was still only fifteen, but she graduated two years ahead of time, and then could devote herself entirely to her passion - ballet. From the start she studied the Cecchetti Method, (pronounced che/KET/tee), based on training methods developed by Enrico Cecchetti, (1850 - 1928), an Italian-born dancer, choreographer, and ballet master. His method had an immense influence on the international world of dance, including the Imperial Russian Ballet and Diaghilev's Ballets Russes. For several years, the renowned ballerina Anna Pavlova employed "the Maestro" as her private tutor. His method has been perpetuated the world over by generations of dancers whom Cecchetti taught and it has been used in Canada by the Royal Winnipeg Ballet and the National Ballet School. Sheila herself studied under one of Cecchetti's pupils, and is an enthusiastic proponent of the method, finding it broader, less detailed, and more naturally in harmony with the human body than other methods. It is self-regulating, requiring candidates to demonstrate firm ability before they are able to meet the next challenge. "It forms a particularly good basis for modern dance," says Sheila. She progressed quickly, and by the early age of eighteen had earned her majors and begun to dance professionally in the ever popular British pantomimes. She was on her way. Suddenly, however, her brief stage career was interrupted by a serious back injury. Sheila then turned to teaching dance. This was to become her lifelong vocation.

In 1952 Sheila married Henry, a Canadian citizen working as a solicitor in London. They had four children, three daughters and a son. Sheila continued to teach ballet. After an enjoyable vacation in British Columbia, Henry and Sheila decided to move to Canada to raise their family.

Henry found a home in Salmon Arm, and Sheila and the children soon followed. After a time, Henry was appointed as Registrar of Land Titles in Kamloops. They moved to Dallas, close to Kamloops. It was a great area in which to raise children as it afforded them plenty of freedom in which to run, play, and explore. Sheila started a dance class in basic movement at the local elementary school, after hours. She has always felt that having a live musician as opposed to using recorded music is of great benefit to students, as it allows the teacher to provide necessary tempo changes or repetitions quickly, and so the class was accompanied by a pianist. After a couple of years, the pianist's husband was transferred to Victoria, a move that adversely affected the lessons, but as luck would have it, just three weeks later Henry was hired on at the Land Titles office in Victoria. The family settled in Cordova Bay, and eventually Sheila and the same pianist resumed classes, again at the local elementary school. However, the fences and yards of Cordova Bay proved a little too limiting for their growing and exuberant family, and Henry and Sheila began to seek a place that afforded more wildness and freedom in which to make their home. In 1969, the Highlands offered just that.

Sheila fondly remembers the three summers spent camping at the property adjoining Pease Lake prior to moving there. It took some time to establish a driveway, as the property is situated on a hillside, but eventually, the Kennedys took up residence in the Highlands. Sheila agrees that it was and is a fine, enriching place to raise children.

Sheila worked in collaboration with the George Pearkes Clinic providing basic creative movement classes to physically challenged children, both individually and in groups. She found this teaching very rewarding. "We could get the children to make the motions their physiotherapists desired, while really enjoying themselves." She feels happiest in this work; but presently her time is committed to a multitude of other ballet-related tasks.

In 1971, Sheila was invited to become an examiner for the Cecchetti Society. She now travels far and wide, examining all levels of ballet, including teaching and Diploma candidates. These trips are intense, for she is in popular demand to instruct classes between the examinations, and there is a great deal of paperwork involved in the examining process. Life 'on the road' has its challenges; it is sometimes difficult to sleep

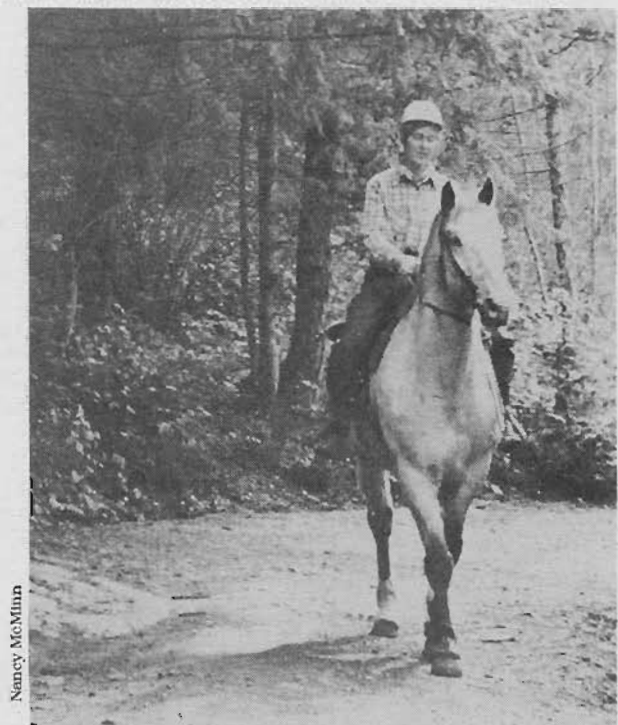
amongst the unaccustomed noise of busy cities when one is used to relative tranquillity here in the Highlands, and Sheila is always glad to return home. She attributes her high level of fitness to life as a Highland resident. "It seems that something always needs doing, and one just does it."

Sheila's strong belief in the merits of the Cecchetti Method has brought her to her current position as chairperson of the Cecchetti Society Canada. Appointed in 1994, her life has been a whirlwind of activity ever since. The Method has sound roots, she explains, and is now passing from the first generation of dancers, gaining modern day strength and popularity. Now is the time for thoroughgoing organization and standardization on a worldwide basis so that Cecchetti's legacy can achieve its true potential. Sheila likens this process to a maturation, but like any growth process, it presents its challenges. Cecchetti taught only professional dancers, so it has been necessary to work backwards from his teaching in order to detail the method for instructing children, and agreement is necessary throughout the Cecchetti world, in order to standardize exams and qualifications. Communicating with other branches of the Society on these issues can be complicated because each branch has evolved in its own way. Sheila has been active in facilitating this international consensus. Artistic & interpretive differences among teachers and performers though vital, have made the process difficult, requiring a lot of energy and skilful negotiation. Currently, another important task is that of officially incorporating the Cecchetti Society Canada. When her role in these projects eventually diminishes, Sheila hopes to return to her favorite occupation, teaching young people the art of dance. Meanwhile, she is resolute that the preservation & promotion of Cecchetti's legacy is worth all the effort and that only positive results lie ahead.

Sheila produces a newsletter for the Cecchetti Society, and assists with the Cecchetti Summer Schools held regularly in B.C. and Alberta. Through her encouragement, a book entitled, "CECCHETTI: A Ballet Dynasty", by Livia Brillarelli, was recently published in Canada. She is currently involved in organizing the Canadian tour of The Cecchetti Photographic Exhibition, an historical collection put together by residents of Cecchetti's home town, Civitanova Marche, a small seaside town on the Adriatic coast. It has been in the U.S. and will travel worldwide after its Canadian tour. Sheila feels it has significant educational value here, and will be well worth viewing.

Sheila spoke about dance and basic movement in relation to young people. She feels that education in schools should include exposure to dance, taught by qualified dance instructors. But she is very sensitive to the needs of children. She

is concerned for young people who spend a great deal of time studying and practising one discipline, whether dance or something else. She believes strongly that childhood freedoms should not be sacrificed, that balance is so important. "Your body is your instrument in dance, and that can be difficult. You are always being told that something needs improving, and that can lead to feelings of negative self-image. A healthy perspective is vital." "Some teachers believe that they need to eradicate all that went before in a student, that it needs replacing. I could never do that. I work with what I've got." Concerning herself, she says one never stops learning, at any level. Notably, Sheila returned to studying and earned her Cecchetti Diploma at the age of 51. Though she modestly claims not to have set a precedent, it seems that several other Canadians have since followed suit.



Sheila Kennedy riding near Pease Lake in the '70's

Sheila regrets not having time to contribute more of her energy to the local community at present. She looks pleased at her own suggestion that maybe some day there could be a basic movement class for young people right here in the Highlands. Perhaps a local musician could be found to accompany the lessons...

When able, Sheila likes to indulge her interest in birds, trees, and flowers. Swimming and gardening are also favourite activities and she cares for the couple's two horses as well. She loves classical music, especially Mozart, although her tastes are diverse, and of course she attends both modern and classical ballets whenever possible,

Sheila strikes one as a remarkable person. Determined to see the vision she holds for dance become a reality, she brings both energy and an admirable dedication to her vocation. She told me that living here renews and recharges her, that she takes something of the Highlands with her whenever she travels and teaches; that this might provide a fresh and special quality not found in less natural environments - a profound affirmation of the place we call home.

The Cecchetti Photographic Exhibition will be at the central branch of the Vancouver Public Library, 350 West Georgia, in

the month of March. This is situated near to the Queen Elizabeth Theatre, where the Royal Winnipeg Ballet has its season on February 29, March 1 and 2, and Ballet B.C. performs on March 28, 29, and 30. For more information on Ballet B.C., phone Jody Bredo, 604-669-5954.

Island Dance Studio, situated in the Western Communities, is the only Cecchetti-based dance school in Victoria. For more information contact Christine Richardson at 478-7617.

Born in Port Alberni, Jane Mendum grew up in several Vancouver Island communities. A talented spinner, weaver and seamstress, Jane homeschools her two daughters and takes an active part in Highland community affairs.