Squaring Off: The Forgotten Caller in Cape Breton Square Dancing[1]

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Square dancing forms a vibrant part of the traditional music scene in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia.[2] In addition to the weekly West Mabou square dance, monthly dances and occasional square dances can be found across the island year-round. The number of square dances balloons during the summer months. But quite unlike most other square dance traditions in North America, Cape Breton square dancing rarely features a caller, a person who calls out the movements so that dancers do not have to remember them and can focus instead on performing them, listening to the music, and socializing with other dancers.[3] While callers are generally absent from Cape Breton's square dances today, they were once essential. When ethnologist Barbara LeBlanc, together with her friend, Laura

1. I would like to thank Kate Alexander, Amanda Daly Berman, Kristin Harris Walsh, Sherry Johnson, Barbara LeBlanc, Chris McDonald, and Mats Melin for offering feedback and suggestions for improving earlier drafts of this paper. I would especially like to thank Sherry Johnson for suggesting that the decline of the Cape Breton caller may have been tied to the absence of similar calling traditions in other forms of vernacular Scottish dance, and also tied to the rejection of a cultural authority figure. I am also grateful for research funds provided by Cape Breton University and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

2. Cape Breton, part of the province of Nova Scotia, is a small island on Canada's east coast. It has an aging and declining population of less than 150,000. It has long had an international reputation for its deeply rooted cultures, particularly the Scottish Gaelic, French Acadian and Indigenous Mi'kmaq traditions.

3. Callers are still occasionally hired to call at some events. Such events usually serve as instructional or introductory dances and are not considered to be part of the regular "core" dances popular among serious and committed dancers.

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Sadowsky, conducted extensive fieldwork with Cape Breton dancers, callers, and dance musicians in the mid-1980s, almost everyone mentioned callers.[4] Calling had clearly been a vibrant part of square dances until the 1970s.

Cape Breton's traditional culture is revered for being conservative, by which I mean that change occurs slowly and incrementally (see Toelken 1979). Change is often lamented vocally. I regularly hear concerns about the fiddle tradition today: there aren't enough young people interested and those who are don't know the tradition satisfactorily; there's a lack of an informed audience; people are too busy to participate in traditional culture; there aren't enough contexts in which traditional music can be performed and transmitted; etc. I have never heard such laments about the loss of the caller, nor is there evidence that there were ever any such laments. Change is constant and inevitable but, in Cape Breton, it is usually accompanied by debates about what kinds of changes are appropriate and by resistance. The dearth of stories about callers today strikes me as significant.

In this article, I argue that the lack of documentation of square dancing in Cape Breton has created the material conditions (or more appropriately, their absence) in which it became possible to "forget" the caller. I draw on social anthropologist Paul Connerton's types of forgetting (2008) to explore the motivations that encouraged the forgetting of the caller or, rather, redirected mental energies towards more valued aspects of the island's social dance tradition.

In addition to drawing on my own fieldwork (which I began conducting in 1998) and personal experiences living and working in Cape Breton since 2005, I draw extensively on LeBlanc's extraordinarily rich Inverness County Dance Project. Inverness County is one of four counties on Cape Breton Island and is widely accepted as the region strongest in traditional expressions rooted in Scottish Gaelic culture. Although square dancing is an island-wide tradition rather than one associated with a particular region or ethnic group, square dances are most frequent in areas with significant populations of Scottish descent, and my own informal observations suggest that people of Scottish descent form the majority of square dance attendees.[5]

Cape Breton square dance's "archive," a repository of "supposedly enduring materials" including texts, videos, and images (Taylor 2003:19), is minimal; scant documentation exists to assert the caller's place in square dance

4. Commissioned in the mid-1980s by Carmelle Bégin at the Museum of Man (now the Museum of History) in Ottawa to research the vernacular dance traditions of Inverness County, Barbara LeBlanc and Laura Sadowsky interviewed almost sixty people of all ages involved with vernacular dance. These are all freely accessible through the Beaton Institute at Cape Breton University (https://beatoninstitute.com/inverness-county-dance-project).

5. Square dancing also has a history in Cape Breton's Acadian communities, but a consideration of this history is beyond the scope of this article (see LeBlanc 1986).

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history, making it possible for the square dance caller to quietly disappear. Given the minimal nature of its archive, the square dance exists primarily as repertoire, the enactment of embodied memory (ibid.:20). The establishment of a "scenario" through repeated square dances over many years and in many locales means that the square dance is likely to change only minimally with each iteration. In Taylor's conception of the term, a scenario is more than an individual performance or collection of events; we might think of it as something like an archetype or a theme, something that is repeated and varied over and over again. As such, "the scenario structures our understanding" (2003:28). Much as literary genres create "horizons of expectations" for readers (Todorov 2000 [1976]:199), the repetition of Cape Breton square dances has established a square dance scenario with a reasonably consistent event structure, set of behaviours, and required etiquette.

Although each square dance is a new performance and there is always the potential for change, previous performances are not completely forgotten and exert pressure on each subsequent square dance to conform. Square dances are performed palimpsests through which the traces of change can be found. Slow, minimal change makes it possible for performers and participants to believe that the square dance scenario of today is representative of the square dance as it has always been in Cape Breton. The current absence of the caller suggests a past in which the caller never existed.

History of the Square Dance in Cape Breton

A square dance typically involves four couples standing in a square formation, although the number of couples in Cape Breton square sets has expanded recently, which I explain below. Each group of eight dancers is called a square or set. Each dance consists of several parts, each of which is a "figure." Today, Cape Breton square dances typically consist of three figures, but in the past, they consisted of up to six.[6] For the uninitiated, it can seem like each figure is a discrete dance as the music stops between each figure, and because each figure consists of its own combination of distinct movements. However, it is generally understood that all the couples who dance in the first figure will dance each of the subsequent figures.

While other forms of vernacular dance in Cape Breton's Scottish communities, such as Scotch Fours and step dancing (discussed below), can be traced back to Gaelic-speaking settlers, the square dance arrived in rural Cape

6. Most of LeBlanc's interviewees associated either three or four figures with the square dance, but several recalled that there were five or even six figures at one time. It is not entirely clear when, why, or how the number of figures decreased.

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Breton from New England in the early twentieth century (Kennedy 2001:221; Gibson 2017:104). The square dance is an Americanized form of the French quadrille, which arrived in America in the final years of the eighteenth century and was "the principal dance of fashionable society" by the 1820s (Jamison 2015:34). The square dance, as it came to be known to differentiate new American versions from European quadrilles (ibid.:43), remained popular throughout the nineteenth century, but declined as new dances became fashionable in the early twentieth century.

A number of different quadrilles came to the United States from Europe. The quadrille was far more complicated than the dances it replaced, such as the cotillion, and, among the upper classes at least, it required dance instruction. "Calling" evolved because it made the dances accessible to the lower classes and rural communities without access to dance instruction. A caller would call out the movements so that it was no longer necessary to know the dance in advance. According to Philip Jamison's research, calling was an African American innovation (2015:51-57). Although there is no known evidence one way or the other, the tradition of calling likely came to Cape Breton along with the introduction of the quadrille/square dance.

Prior to the introduction of the square dance, the most common type of social dancing among Scottish descendants in Cape Breton was Scotch Fours (Sparling 2015). Dancers have always claimed that the Scotch Fours came to the island with the earliest Gaelic-speaking Scottish immigrants, who arrived in large numbers from the late eighteenth until mid-nineteenth centuries. Scotch Fours involved two couples who performed basic travelling steps as they changed both place and partners, alternating with complex percussive steps improvised individually on the spot. The music involved sets of strathspeys and reels.

When Barbara LeBlanc conducted her research in Inverness County in the mid-1980s, she spoke with several older people who recalled the shift from the Scotch Fours to the square dance in the early decades of the twentieth century. The Scotch Fours were danced at house parties, weddings, schoolhouse dances,[7] box socials,[8] frolics,[9] and parish picnics. Whereas the Scotch Fours took up very little floor space, the square dance required quite a bit of room and was

7. Schoolhouse dances were held as fundraisers to raise the local teacher's salary.

8. Box socials were community fundraisers. Young, single women prepared a box filled with a cold meal for two. Young, single men bid on the boxes, supposedly without knowing their makers. Once a young man had won a box, he learned the maker's identity and the two ate the meal together. Box socials always included a dance, usually before the box auction. See also Davey and MacKinnon (2016).

9. A frolic is a "work bee" at which some kind of large-scale job was completed by a group of neighbours (e.g., barn raising, spinning wool) and was typically followed by a dance. See also Davey and MacKinnon (2016).

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not easily accommodated in small houses. It was not until communities began building parish and community halls that square dances became common and ultimately displaced the Scotch Fours[10]:

> You probably would have seen the same kind of square dance danced right back to 1915, 1920. I really don't know for sure [though]. Whenever the changeover came from traditional Scotch Fours that were danced at picnics and the old 8-hand reels, [that's when] this type of square dance came in. It would be somewhere back in the 20s. (Greg Smith, b. 1938, interview, 14 July 1986[11])

> I can only recall Mrs. Campbell and these others [dancing Scotch Fours] once. From then on, it went to the square set and if there was somebody in the hall that would do a step-dance, they did it individually [rather than as part of a Scotch Four]. The hall reopened in 1937. (Isabelle MacInnis, 1921-2016, explaining when Scotch Fours stopped being danced, interview, 23 July 1986)

What is worth noting is that, despite having been introduced to Cape Breton in the late nineteenth century, square dancing did not become really popular and visible on the island until the 1930s-50s, when large venues began to be built. By the 1960s, at least one square dance was held every night of the week in Inverness County during the summer months, and sometimes two or three. Even outside of the summer months, square dances offered a popular form of weekend entertainment.[12]

The Caller in Cape Breton

When square dancing was first introduced to Cape Breton, the caller (also known as a prompter) was one of the dancers.[13]

10. Unfortunately, little documentation exists on the history of public halls in Cape Breton (Addison 2001:12). However, it is possible that they were built as an extension of the parish picnic tradition, which raised funds for church parishes starting in the late nineteenth century and typically involved both music and dance, as well as food and games. This assumption is supported by the fact that a number of parish halls were not insulated and therefore suitable only for summer usage (e.g., Addison 2001:40, 44). It makes sense that there would have been a desire to build a structure that would allow picnic activities to take place even in inclement weather.

11. All interviews are with Barbara LeBlanc and Laura Sadowsky unless otherwise noted.

12. Several of LeBlanc and Sadowsky's informants specified where dances were held each night of the week, particularly in the 1950s.

13. When calling first emerged in the United States, the caller was generally the fiddler rather

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> The prompter danced. I'd be kind of in the first figure. That's the way I prompted all the time. I'd be in any of the sets. (Robert Gillis, 1922-2007, interview, 11 July 1986)
>
> It made it a lot better when the caller was in the set. There was nobody going wrong then. When the dances moved to the halls, the caller started being on the stage. (Duncan A. MacDonald, 1913-n.d., 13 July 1986)
>
> The prompter would be in one set and he had to call loud enough. (Isabelle MacInnis, 1921-2016, interview, 23 July 1986)

The caller could call while dancing as long as square dances were held in small venues with only one or two sets dancing at a time. The caller's voice could carry to the other dancers. The caller played an important role, helping to keep the dancers coordinated with others in the same square, with the music, and between squares. The caller helped orient dancers unfamiliar with the dance. The caller also encouraged couples to fill an incomplete square, and he (the caller was almost invariably male) would prevent more than four couples from dancing in a single square.

Once larger halls began to be built, the caller could no longer be heard from the floor. So the caller began to call from the stage where the musicians played, rather than as a dancer in a set. The caller used a microphone to ensure that he could be heard, particularly since the music was also amplified.

Even as the change in venue resulted in the growing popularity of the square dance event, it negatively impacted on the intimate relationship between caller and dancers. The caller's job professionalized. Initially, callers called for free, perhaps given free admission to a dance in return for their talents as callers. Later on, however, they began expecting payment, reinforcing a shift towards a sense of professionalization and increasing the metaphorical distance between dancers and callers.

In 1986, when Barbara LeBlanc was conducting her research, quite a few people commented on the caller's role in restricting the number of dancers in a square. Extra couples mean that each figure takes longer to complete as there are points when each couple must execute a particular movement. The lengthened dance also challenged the fiddler, who had to extend his or her playing with suitable tunes until the dance was finished. Some really disliked extra couples in a set while others were indifferent or felt that it was a small price to pay if it meant greater interest in the dances.[14]

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than one of the dancers (Jamison 2015:51-59).

14. By the 1970s, square dancing had started to decline in popularity. Anxiety about its future was fuelled by the broadcasting of the 1971 documentary, *The Vanishing Cape Breton Fiddler,* on CBC television (see Thompson 2006).

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I think if the sets are kept shorter, [it's better]. I think it's crazy to drag the sets out. I think it screws everything up when there is too many in the circle. [But] not too many people go along with a rough prompter. And a prompter really has to get rough to keep four couples to a set. I don't think that it is too bad to have six couples to a set; you could still have a good set with that. But any more than that—but I suppose you have to draw a line, right? When you see a whole whack of couples in a set, it's a fiddler's nightmare. (John Morris Rankin, 1959-2000, interview, 5 July 1986)

There is nothing that can disrupt good dancing or good fun more than once you started getting up into sets, in a dance in Mabou or something like that, and they have eleven couples to a set. Well, first, if you have an odd number, [it] isn't going to work. Then you get a lot of confusion. The only way you can iron that out—well, with six couples, you can still have a good set. Cause it's still an even number. But if you have newcomers and you are trying to teach them or somebody from out of the area who doesn't know the set, they can get them confused and very discouraged and they sit down. (Denise Olson, b.1967, interview, n.d. [July 1986])[15]

When I started out first, I remember it was always four couples to a set. That would be, I would say, 1940 or '41, '42. If the fifth couple came in, somebody would tell them [to leave]. It wasn't too safe. But right now I don't pay so much attention to how many couples are to a set, myself. I just play and let them enjoy themselves whatever way they will. I think that, possibly handy [to] the stage, there is always a certain crowd, certain ones that try to get close to where the music is and they may be better dancers. They try to keep the sets to four couples. I did notice that. (Buddy MacMaster, 1924-2014, interview, 17 July 1986)

At most of these dances, you start up with four couples and end up with about ten couples in a set. Everybody just joins till you form a great big circle. It's hard to dance the actual square set per se. Everyone joins in and you have a lot of fun. (Sandy MacIntyre, b.1935, interview, n.d. [July 1986])

Decline of the Caller

If fiddlers found it difficult to play for square sets with more than four couples in them (requiring both a larger tune repertoire and greater playing stamina), and if many dancers complained that the larger sets ruined the dancing experience, why were extra couples accommodated in sets? When did it begin to happen

15. An even number of couples is essential for some movements. For example, in the Sydney/Iona set, couples trade places in the second figure. The more couples in a set, the harder it is to know who the opposite couple is. An odd number of couples in the set further complicates this move.

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and what were the circumstances that led to the addition of extra dancers? What happened to the caller, whose job it was, in part, to control the number of dancers in a square?

Joe MacDougal was born in Judique in 1922 and was a well-known caller. He was very articulate about what he considered to be the origins of the larger square sets:

> [The big sets,] I'd say this started in Judique. This big set business—I'll tell you what brought it on. When I was young, my wife and Robert Gillis and the rest of us, when we first started going to dances, we wouldn't get in a set together, we'd get in with the older people who knew how to dance. That's how we learned to dance. They'd be glad to get a young fellow in. And after a few sets, you could do it.... It was no big effort to learn it but you did have to learn. Unfortunately, there was kind of a clique went to a high school in Judique, they must have figured when they got up too high, they had more education, they had—or something. I don't know what the stink was, but anyway, they wouldn't get in sets with us [experienced dancers]. They'd go off by themselves. It didn't matter to them if there was 4, 5 or 6 couples. Of course they were just gee-ing and haw-ing and they weren't doing the set properly anyway. (Joe MacDougal, 1922-1993, interview, 14 July 1986)

Joe was also a "rough" caller in that he expected dancers to follow his instructions; he was neither gentle nor particularly diplomatic. Joe himself describes what happened when he tried to enforce a four couple limit in each set:

> I prompted out there [in Glencoe Mills] for about 10 years when they restarted [in the 1960s]. I got into all kinds of arguments. I got lots of insults too. I didn't care. I was just as stubborn as they were. Finally, they started complaining about me that I was spoiling their dance trying to get them to do the dance right. So they quit asking me to go anymore, which I wasn't sorry for. I was fed up.

Father Eugene Morris, a respected step dancer and supporter of traditional music and dance, commented on the tensions between cultural conservatism (restricting sets to four couples) and social codes of inclusivity and conciliation (reluctance to turn couples away):

> Maybe [there are more couples in a set today because] we don't have as many prompters. Joe MacDougal was one of our main prompters when I was younger and he was very insistent on four couples. And he would be sitting up on the stage and Buddy [MacMaster] or whatever fiddler was playing and if a fifth couple came in the set, sometimes he would jump right off of the stage and sometimes literally take you right out of the set and say, "Ok, three more couples to join this extra couple!" And he wouldn't start the set until that was completed. Like I say, he hasn't been prompting much the last [while] so if you have a fifth couple [wanting to

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> dance], the easiest thing is to join the four couples that are there already. People are very reluctant to say, "oh well, you can't dance with us." I think that there are many times that they would like to say that! They would like to say, "how about starting your own set?" But they are very sensitive about this. You would be hurting somebody's feelings. Something along that line. And that's kind of nice too. It has its pros and cons. (Fr. Eugene Morris, b.1935, interview, n.d. [July 1986])

According to the memories of long-time participants in Cape Breton square dances, then, one of the reasons given for the decline of the caller is that a select group of youth refused to follow the caller's directions. Even if others did not attribute the change in the number of couples per set directly to the actions of particular youths, a number of LeBlanc's interviewees noted that younger people seemed to like the larger sets more than the older people did. The attitude and actions attributed to youth are certainly consistent with the zeitgeist of the 1960s and 1970s. For one, a defining characteristic of the "counterculture" was that youth resisted authority. The rise of rock 'n' roll in the 1950s was accompanied by individual social dancing, dancing in which each individual chose his or her own moves rather than conforming to a predetermined choreography. Rock 'n' roll was also a youth-oriented music and culture, one that appealed specifically to a young demographic. It ushered in an era in which popular culture was strongly demarcated according to age groups. Square dancing, by contrast, was a form of dance that involved all ages in a predetermined set of figures.

> You're in competition with your rock bands. People have a tendency to let their culture fall by the wayside. You see a lot of younger ones dancing the square sets now and I don't think they really realize the right way to dance the sets. They just jump in and they dance. (Joey Beaton, b.1949, interview, 30 June 1986)

Barbara LeBlanc describes the co-existence of square dances and other forms of "trendy" popular dances through the decades, including round dances (foxtrot, waltz, and polka) in the 1950s, rock 'n' roll dances in the 60s and 70s, and discos in the 80s (1986:151). In his 1986 interview, dancer Ronnie Haché (b. 1967) noted that younger people tended to prefer rock 'n' roll dances to square dances. Coralee MacDonald (b. 1972) told Barbara LeBlanc that she liked rock 'n' roll and square dances equally (interview, 5 July 1986). When youth began dancing in large sets with their friends, they resisted the "rules" of the square dance, resisted the caller's authority, resisted the knowledge (and opinions) of elder dancers, and created a set specifically for their peers, rather than a set that integrated young and old dancers together.[16]

16. The kinds of changes that were occurring in square dancing were also being paralleled in other expressive traditions, particularly music, in the 1960s and 1970s. For example, piano

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The increased set size put the caller in a difficult position. He could try to call the dance, but if every set was a different size, each set would be at a different point in the figure. Some callers focused on a four-couple set, calling for them and allowing other sets to get by as best they could:

> The relationship [between caller, fiddler and dancers] is good if you've got four couples to a set who know how to dance. But if you get those 8 and 10 couples in a set, and you cut [a figure] off [after a set with four couples is done], they figure they are only half done. Then they are mad. (Joe MacDougal, 1922-1993, interview, 14 July 1986)

Alternatively, callers could try to force limits on the number of dancers in a set, resulting in "rough" calling and outright confrontation that seems to have ended with organizers no longer hiring particular callers, or perhaps any callers at all.

Whatever the reasons for the decline of the caller, it had fairly significant impacts on the square dance tradition. At one time, different square dances were known in every community, as documented by Jørn Borggreen (2004).[17] The decline in callers was accompanied by a decline in the variety of square dances. As Cape Bretoner Nona MacDonald-Dyke recalls, square dances in the 1970s and earlier consisted of a variety of dances, all called:

> To begin with, the caller knew dances from all over. At a square dance, he'd call different sets, from different areas. [At] a dance in Middle River, he'd call a Middle River set, a Baddeck set, or a Margaree set. Each community had their own set usually, but a caller knew lots of sets, hence the reason for a caller. Folks would travel from all over for a square dance, and would learn new sets that way. (pers. comm., 29 September 2016)

Without callers to remind dancers of the distinct moves and figures in each square dance, dancers had to rely on their own memories and the number of regional square dances declined. Today, only two square dances are regularly danced on the island: the Sydney set (mostly danced on the eastern side of the island) and the considerably more well-known West Mabou set (mostly danced on the western side of the island). Other square dances are occasionally danced and some individuals are trying to revive lesser-known sets. But these are the

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accompaniment to fiddle (and pipe) tunes was changing rapidly, incorporating a number of influences from popular music (McDonald 2017). A number of influential Cape Breton musicians came of age during this period, including Jerry Holland, Dave MacIsaac, the Barra MacNeils, and the Rankin Family, who later made names for themselves as innovative professionals. Young Cape Bretoners consumed both traditional culture and popular culture, and the desire to explore potential intersections between both, as well as the desire to put their own mark on traditional expressions, inflected traditional culture in a variety of ways.

17. Borggreen documents thirteen regional square dances. Significantly, they were not identified by Barbara LeBlanc's interviewees in 1986; rather, her interviewees talk about the predecessors to these regional square dances: the Plain and Saratoga Lancers and the Caledonian square sets.

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exceptions. As the variety of square dances declined, the same square dance came to be danced repeatedly at a single event. It is the case today that if one attends a dance in, say, West Mabou, attendees will dance the West Mabou square set repeatedly over the course of the evening, rather than dance different square dances as Nona MacDonald-Dyke described above.

While some dancers really disliked dancing in square sets consisting of more than four couples, others accepted the change because the benefits outweighed the costs. As hinted earlier, some people felt that if increasing the square set size would engage youth, then it was a change worth making. Other unexpected social benefits also accrued. By dancing the same square dance repeatedly, dancers stopped having to worry about remembering figures. After dancing a particular square dance two or three times, many dancers can remember the patterns. For those who travelled the island to attend square dances, the declining number of regional dances meant fewer dances overall to recall. As the number of couples in each square increased and the caller's involvement decreased, the number of figures in each regional square dance also decreased and those that remained were simplified, as dance scholar Mats Melin documents:

> The [West] Mabou Set has changed in recent years, from earlier versions of the dance.... The first figure [now] consists of the original first and last parts, the middle parts having been eliminated as these figures require [exactly] four couples. Since I first attended a dance, in 1995, the second figure has lost one middle part—the right-hand and the left-hand wheel by the women in the centre—as it is difficult to dance this particular part when there are more than four couples in the set. After two jig figures, one reel figure has been lost altogether; probably the most popular figure at present is the ... last reel figure. The jig parts are sometimes danced for longer, with more repeats of the movements to make up for the loss of parts. Having said that, since about 2007 or 2008 I have noted that at times the jig figures (in the Mabou Set) are danced for a shorter length of time, while the reel part is kept going for longer, a sort of highlight of the dance.... I have also observed that some couples will sometimes join in only after the reel is played, indicating that the jig figures may be merely a lead-in or warm-up to the final figure. (2015:114-115)

Without having to worry about the movements and the figures, dancers were free to socialize more, as well as to give greater attention to the music. Quite a few regular dancers will only attend dances at which particular musicians are performing, so great is their sense that the quality of the dance experience is affected by tune choice and the manner in which the music is played.[18]

18. Although not all dancers focus on dance music critically and attentively, Kimberley Fraser, a fiddler, step dancer, and pianist, is quite adamant that many do. She says that the repetitive

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Another effect of the decline of the caller was the change in the relationship between the dance and the music. Quadrilles and square dances are choreographed so that a particular dance move can be completed within a phrase of music. Normally, a change in musical phrase parallels a change in movement or dance figure. For example, couples might swing for eight bars or conduct a "grand chain" over thirty-two bars. The caller helped to ensure alignment between the choreography and the phrase structure of the music. With the decline in callers, dancers stopped paying attention to phrase length. The tempo and rhythm are still very important, but the shift from one movement to another seems to happen organically today rather than because the dancers have come to the end of a musical phrase.[19] This shift in dance-music relationship may have been the result of the increased size of the squares, which would mean that more phrases would be required for every couple to complete a particular movement. Consequently, moves that would normally be complete within a tune (before the musician moved on to a new tune) now might cross from one tune into another.[20]

Why Was the Caller Forgotten?

A number of factors outlined in this article likely worked together to create the conditions that resulted in the decline of the caller, including the counterculture and the value of youth resisting authority; the decreasing intimacy between

square dance frees the mind to focus on the fiddler. She believes that this is a common experience among dancers, evident in dancers' reactions to changes in the music (with whoops and hollers, for example) rather than to changes in the dance (author's interviewa with Kimberley Fraser, 1 May 2015). Fiddlers in Cape Breton are sometimes known as either "dance" fiddlers or "listening" fiddlers, illustrating a deep awareness of performance qualities that facilitate the dance (see, for example, Doherty 1996:236-40; see also Graham 2004:174-177; Herdman 2008).

19. The West Mabou square set is particularly famous for having integrated solo step dancing into the third figure, as I discuss later in this article. Cape Breton dance scholar Mats Melin reports that some fiddlers today will actually shift to a tune suitable for step dancing when they see square sets moving into that part of the figure, even if they are in the middle of another tune (rather than complete the tune, as they normally would). In other words, fiddlers are changing tune structures and groups of tunes on the fly in order to respond to the dancers, yet another modification to the music-dance relationship (pers. comm., 17 July 2017).

20. However, Ken Perlman states that square dancing in neighbouring Prince Edward Island was always oriented to the beat of the music and not to the phrase structure: "Generally, the fiddler would start playing and dancers would begin their routine at just about any convenient point in the tune; they would then continue dancing to the beat until the entire figure was completed" (2015:241).

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caller and square dancers; and the professionalization of the caller.[21] The expansion of the square set and the concomitant loss of the caller resulted in some fairly significant changes, including a changing relationship between dance choreography and musical phrase structure, an increasing amount of time required to complete a figure, the need for fiddlers to have larger tune repertoires and performance stamina in order to play throughout the lengthened figures, and the decline in the number of distinct square dances typically performed as well as the repetition of a single square dance at any given event. While many lamented the caller's demise, others noted some unanticipated benefits, including the increased participation of youth and, with the repetition of a single square dance at an event, greater opportunities to listen to the music and to socialize.

I have traced the decline of the caller, but I have not yet explained why the caller seems to be largely overlooked in any present-day conversation about the history of the square dancing tradition. It is worth considering the age and origins of the square dancing tradition in Cape Breton, recognizing that square dancing is neither a particularly old tradition on the island, nor one that was brought with settlers from Scotland, unlike the dance traditions that it replaced. Although square dancing has been known in Cape Breton for over a hundred years, it remained a relatively informal and infrequent dance tradition in the home until large halls began to be built in the early twentieth century that could better accommodate them. When LeBlanc was doing her research in 1986, people could still recall the shift from Scotch Fours to square dancing; square dancing's entire local history could still be recalled in living memory. Its heyday was in the 1950s and 1960s, only twenty to thirty years prior to LeBlanc's fieldwork. We are thus dealing with a relatively new dance tradition that was in the process of being adapted to local conditions and values when LeBlanc was conducting her research.

Paul Connerton is particularly well known for his work on social memory (1989). Memory, as he points out, is meant to prevent forgetting. However, while there is a tendency to view forgetting as a failure of memory, Connerton argues that forgetting can be deliberate and purposeful. He describes seven types of deliberate social forgetting (2008), although I will focus here on three:

1. Forgetting that is constitutive in the formation of a new identity: Forgetting makes way for newly shared memories in the construction of a new identity as, for example, among immigrants in a new home.

21. Ken Perlman documents a very different history of the Prince Edward Island square dance caller, who he says had largely disappeared by the 1930s because regional square dances had become well enough known that they were no longer necessary (2015:245-246).

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2. Structural amnesia:
   Memory is focused on socially valued information while less valued information is forgotten as, for example, in a patrilineal culture that can trace a family back generations along the patrilineal line but only a few generations along the matrilineal line.
3. Forgetting as annulment:
   When overwhelmed by information, we learn to selectively remember some information and forget other information, often relegating the "forgotten" information to an archive where, because it is technically retrievable, we can afford to forget it.

Forgetting for Identity Purposes & Structural Amnesia

In the case of forgetting for identity purposes, we are dealing with the migration of a dance tradition—rather than of a group of people—from one community (northeastern United States) to another (Cape Breton) and the construction of the identity of that tradition in its new location. Cape Bretoners clearly found square dancing compatible with at least some traditional values and aesthetics or they would not have adopted it and it would never have become so popular. At the same time, it was adapted in various ways for its new context.

In the 1980s, when Barbara LeBlanc asked people of Scottish descent about the origins of square dancing, a number of them believed that it had come to Cape Breton from Scotland with settlers:

> I would guess that our ancestors that came over here forty to a hundred years ago from Scotland, that they took the music with them, that they took the step-dance with them that is lost in Scotland today. And I would guess that they took the square dance with them also. (Doug MacPhee, b. 1930s?, interview, 25 June 1986)

> Donald Roddy: [Square dancing] definitely comes from Scotland.
> Mary: I think it comes from Scotland. (Mary and Donald Roddy Rankin, interview, 2 July 1986)

> They [square dances] originated in Scotland. They came over with the settlers, and the music and the pipes. (Donald Hughie MacDougall, 1923-n.d., interview, n.d. [July 1986])

> [Dance is] from Scotland. Even the square set that they do today. (Malcolm MacDonald, 1904-n.d., interview, 5 July 1986)

Reinforcing square dancing's connection to Scotland were adaptations made to some sets to make them more consistent with Scottish forms of vernacular dance. Especially famous, for example, is the integration of solo stepping in particular figures of certain Cape Breton square dances. The third figure of the

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West Mabou set, danced to reels, includes a movement in which the men line up facing a line of women.[22] While facing each other, there is a brief opportunity to show off one's solo steps before couples reunite and move back into square formations. The integration of stepping into particular square sets appears to be a Cape Breton innovation and is certainly widely celebrated as such by Cape Bretoners. Cape Bretoners have persistently argued that step dancing came to the island with Scottish settlers, even though solo step dancing was unknown in Scotland for a time and despite counterarguments that Cape Breton step dance was either a new form of dance amalgamating elements from several dance traditions, or a bastardized version of Irish step dance (MacInnes 1994; Melin 2005, 2015; Ballantyne 2016). The integration of step dancing—associated with Scotland and early settlers to Cape Breton—helps to reinforce the sense of square dancing as a Scottish tradition.

Cape Bretoners familiar with square dancing elsewhere in North America have argued that the distinct dances in Cape Breton offered further evidence of their Scottish origins:

> I imagine [square dances] came from Scotland.... I had a book on those Saratoga Lancers and Plain Lancers and it was all much different than what you do here. I can't remember the name of the book. I sent to the States for it. It was advertised in some paper or something. I was startin' out and it said how to learn to call sets. So I just sent for the book. But when I got the book, it was so much different from here that it was no good to me. I never tried it because the old-timers would never have danced that here. (Danny Wright, 1912-n.d., interview, 4 July 1986)

Despite the fact that Cape Breton square dances sometimes shared the same names as dances elsewhere (several of Barbara LeBlanc's interviewees named the Saratoga and Lancers as sets danced in Cape Breton, although I never hear these names used today), Danny Wright believed that Cape Breton square dances were distinct and unique, providing further evidence that Cape Breton's square dances had come from Scotland directly and not from elsewhere in North America. Meanwhile, Malcolm MacDonald (1904-n.d.) specifically identified the calling tradition as Scottish: "People that called in this area here [in Mabou], these calls came from Scotland" (interview, 5 July 1986).

It is possible that as long as square dancing was believed to be of Scottish origin, people of Scottish descent felt obliged to maintain the tradition as it was (supposedly) practiced in Scotland. The putative Scottish connection ensured that the calling tradition, as part of square dancing, was deemed worthy of main-

22. In Cape Breton, traditional gender dance roles are still the norm (Alexander 2014), justifying the use of gendered terms here. At the same time, it is becoming more common to see same-sex dance couples among a younger generation.

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taining. The belief that square dancing originally came from Scotland meant that participating in square dances—so long as they remained (supposedly) identifiably Scottish in their execution—could function as an articulation of Scottish heritage and identity.

By contrast, Acadians did not know where square dancing had come from, but they did not believe that it had come from Scotland:

> Je ne sais pas d'où ça vient. [I don't know where it comes from.] (André Aucoin, b. 1959, interview, n.d. [July 1986])

> Pour moi, c'était toujours içi. C'a été toujours içi. Même avant mon temps.... Ça a toujours été dansé à Chéticamp. Je ne sais pas d'où ça vient. [For me, it has always been here. It was always here. Even before my time... It has always been danced in Cheticamp. I don't know where it comes from.] (Luce Antoinette Bourgeois, 1914-2005, interview, n.d. [July 1986])

The Acadians had no sense of square dancing as a cultural inheritance or legacy of their settler ancestors for which they feel a duty to preserve and maintain, whereas Cape Bretoners of Scottish descent did. Today, however, thanks to more recent scholarship (e.g., Kennedy 2001, Melin 2015, Gibson 2017), more is known about Cape Breton vernacular dance traditions and it is more commonly known that square dancing did not come to Cape Breton directly from Scotland. It is possible that the recognition that square dancing is a recent cultural import from the United States has released Cape Bretoners from a sense of having to carefully preserve and maintain square dancing, including calling, as a distinct cultural practice and legacy. Moreover, given that no other form of historical vernacular Scottish dance had a calling tradition[23]—indeed, as noted above, Jamison argues that square dance calling is an African-American innovation—there may well have been a sense that calling was actually not "Scottish" enough, that it does not fit the understanding of what authentic Scottish vernacular dance was at the time of settlement in Cape Breton.

23. Complex Scottish dance forms, such as competitive Highland dancing and Scottish country dancing, require instruction and classes prior to performance rather than calling during a performance. There is no evidence of calling accompanying the vernacular dances of the Highlands and Islands from whence Cape Breton step dance and Scotch Fours came (see, for example, Flett and Flett 1996, 1964). Although Scottish ceilidh dances involve a caller, it is a relatively modern dance form (Morrison 2003:18) and, consequently, it is possible that the calling tradition was actually imported from North America rather than an indigenous tradition. Mats Melin notes that quadrilles did not come to the Highlands and Islands until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, long after emigrants had settled Cape Breton (pers. comm., 2 August 2017). He also reports only ever having heard once, in Durness, of a *fear-an-taighe* (emcee) restricting square sets to four couples and it was not clear whether he also called the dances (ibid.).

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It is also worth considering that locals may have found the growing authority of the caller problematic. I have written elsewhere about Gaelic Nova Scotia's repudiation of competitions, arguing that there is no appetite for an authoritative judge to identify "the best" musicians or dancers (Sparling 2011). Nova Scotia Gaels would rather identify their best performers informally in a manner that allows several people to be "the best."[24] Part of that construction involves the conception of Nova Scotia Gaels as egalitarian and consensus-oriented rather than hierarchical. In my understanding of the Nova Scotia Gaelic community's sense of itself, the authoritative and authoritarian caller would not fit comfortably. It therefore made sense to let this tradition go, an example of "structural amnesia": that which is deemed to have less cultural value is not carefully remembered, practiced, and/or documented. This view is supported by the fact that although I do often hear people wish for a return to four-couple square sets, such desires are not accompanied by a wish for the return of the caller. It is not that the caller was deliberately forgotten, but that the caller was not deliberately remembered.

Forgetting as Annulment

Quadrilles were complex dances—so complex that they required instruction until the advent of the caller made it possible to learn the dances without formal lessons. In this instance, we might consider the caller a repository of choreographic information, a kind of performing archive. The caller is, of course, a performer who is co-present with dancers; he is not an "archive" in Taylor's sense. His calling is an example of embodied knowledge. At the same time, dance knowledge is concentrated in a single person (the caller) rather than retained by all dancers. Various dancers may well have expert and detailed knowledge of one or more square dance structures, and most dancers would have a reasonable familiarity with them, but it is the caller who is vested with the authority and responsibility of remembering them. We may see this as a kind of intermediary step between Taylor's repertoire and archive in that calling is still an act of performance but it also represents a separation between the source of knowledge (the caller) and the knowledge user (the dancer) (Taylor 2003:19).

With knowledge of the dance structures left to particular individuals, it was easy to move to the next step: documenting and "archiving" (this time in Taylor's sense) square dancing. Borggreen's collection (2004) documents the many square dances once practiced in Cape Breton, as do the videos that LeBlanc made during her fieldwork. Such materials are archival in that they are (supposedly) enduring materials (Taylor 2003:19). The Cape Breton dance community

24. I have argued elsewhere that Nova Scotia Gaels are constructing a distinct identity for themselves that, by and large, is defined in opposition to mainstream or hegemonic Anglo-Canadian society (Sparling, forthcoming).

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has allowed significant portions of its square dance knowledge to be archived with individuals and in actual archival institutions, giving the impression that square dance knowledge and history is safely documented and stored. Dancers are thus freed from the responsibility of remembering themselves.

Taylor reminds us that, despite myths and appearances to the contrary, archives are selective (rather than comprehensive) and mediated. Where some objects are selected for archiving, others are not—the archive selectively "forgets" particular objects and practices. I find it compelling that there are remarkably few histories or studies of square dancing, particularly in Canada.[25] On a broad level, this lack is evidence of an academic lacuna and the dismissal of vernacular dance as a legitimate subject of study. But it also suggests a local blind spot, particularly when compared to the extensive studies of vernacular dance music, published collections of dance tunes, and archival collections of instrumental tune recordings. This absence is, of course, in part due to the challenges of describing dance in words, and due to the lack of technology available to record dancing until relatively recently. But there is an absence not just of detailed dance instructions (even though countless square dance guides and call guides were published elsewhere, such as *Dick's Quadrille Call-Book* [1878], a number of which circulated in Cape Breton, and which offered models for documenting dance instructions), but also an absence of general square dance descriptions, whether in diaries, newspapers, or county and parish histories.

Conclusions

In this article, I have traced the history of the Cape Breton square dance caller in order to demonstrate that the caller did, in fact, play an important and prominent role in island square dances until the tradition of calling declined in the 1970s. I have also sought to explain why the caller may be absent from current accounts of square dance history, identifying a number of local and global

25. A number of publications address aspects of square dancing in North America, although a comprehensive history of even a single style—let alone of square dancing across North America—awaits study. Simone Voyer documents quadrilles and cotillions in Quebec (with some consideration of the Maritime provinces in Canada; 1986, 2008). Craig Mishler (1993) and Byron Dueck (2006) address square dancing in Indigenous communities in Alaska and Manitoba, respectively. Philip Jamison has investigated the evolution of square dance calling (2003) and both Jamison and Susan Spalding have written about square dancing in their books on Appalachian dance (Jamison 2015; Spalding 2014). Colin Quigley has written about the effort to have square dancing declared a national folk dance in the U.S. (2001) while Henry Ford's interest in vernacular social dance and fiddling music has also received some scholarly attention (Brucher 2016; Gifford 2010; La Chapelle 2011).

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socio-cultural pressures that likely had an impact on the calling tradition. As the caller disappeared from Cape Breton square dances in the Scottish communities, a combination of predictable and unpredictable changes occurred in the square dance. Many saw changes such as the increase in the number of couples in each set and the loss of a variety of square dances at any given dance event as having a deleterious effect on the dance tradition, but these changes also created opportunities for increased socializing and attention to the music. Both social interactions and knowledgeable appreciation of traditional music, particularly its relationship to dance, are highly valued in Cape Breton. It seems that these values trumped the value of cultural conservatism.

Understanding the decline of the calling tradition, however, does not explain its absence from accounts of the tradition, particularly when, by comparison, the changes to and losses within other related traditions are regularly highlighted. Connerton offers some means by which to understand the disappearance of the caller from discussions of the square dancing tradition. I have suggested that as long as square dancing—including the practice of calling—was believed to have come from Scotland, people of Scottish descent who identify strongly with their Scottish heritage would have felt pressure to maintain the practice. Once it became clearer that the calling tradition was not Scottish in origin, the sense of investment in it decreased. It might still have persisted if it had not embodied practices that ran counter to strongly held values, such as the desire to engage youth, to be broadly inclusive, and to avoid conflict and authoritarian roles. Meanwhile, the sense that the calling tradition had been documented meant that it could be "safely" forgotten in living practice.

Ultimately, in this article I have used the Cape Breton square dance caller in Scottish communities as a case study not just for considering why and how change occurs in a self-professed conservative tradition, but how that change can be normalized through a process of forgetting. Many Cape Bretoners who love traditional music and dance are proud of their cultural conservatism, believing that they faithfully preserve their expressive traditions, including dance, through oral and performative transmission. In forgetting the caller, Cape Bretoners can also forget that square dancing has not been a particularly conservative tradition and, in fact, has changed rather substantially. When discussing traditional cultures, the emphasis tends to be on memory: transmission processes—whether oral or not—are all about how the memory of practices is maintained and transmitted. In this case, however, we see how an investigation of social forgetting offers different insights and new understandings of change in general, and of change to Cape Breton square dancing and square dance events in particular.

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Interviews

All interviews with Barbara LeBlanc and Laura Sadowsky were conducted in June and July 1986 and can be found at the Museum of History and at the Beaton Institute. In the Museum of History, please consult interview transcripts (control #B312 f6-9, accession #LEB/SAY-Ac-1-41). Audio and video recordings are available through the Beaton Institute via the Inverness County Dance Project online: https://beatoninstitute.com/inverness-county-dance-traditions.

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