

The Lancers

(Ireland)

When Joe McNamara was young, set dancing was done at house dances. Some of the homes where sets were danced were: John Kinley's, O'Brien's Castle, Crusheen; James McNamara's (Joe's father), Drumbaniff, Crusheen; Mickie Littleton's, Drumbaniff, Crusheen; Paddy O'Connor's, Cappafean, Crusheen.

Some of the popular musicians who played the fiddle were: Katie Costello (later played with Michael Coleman in America), Rathclooney; Delia (also played the concertina), Mary, and Winnie Littleton, Drumbaniff, Crusheen. Others who played the concertina were: Mrs. Cuneen, James and John Costello, Rathclooney; James McNerney, Drumbaniff, Crusheen; James McNamara, Drumbaniff, Crusheen. Those who played the accordion were: Joe McNamara (played with the Tulla *Ceili* Band from 1953 until 1963), Drumbaniff, Crusheen. Patsie Kinley (John Kinley's father), O'Brien's Castle, Crusheen, played the flute. Petie Littleton, Drumbaniff, Crusheen, played the tin whistle and the concert flute.

Joe McNamara first saw the Lancers about 1931. Joe learned the Lancers from John Kinley who brought the set to the area from South Galway. John Kinley was about twenty years older than Joe. "John Kinley picked it up at a wedding in South Galway. At that time there were kitchen house dances maybe only three times a year. It was hard to see all the figures. John Kinley was anxious for everyone to dance the Lancers, but no one knew how to dance it. No one knew the full set, only himself. There might be only two in the house who knew it, and they weren't too clear about it either."

Joe McNamara recalls, "House dances stopped during the war (World War II) because they were illegal. The *gardai* would come and close them down. The government wanted the revenue and tax. Priests stopped the house dances, but they built parochial halls and got licenses and had their own dances. "*Ceilithe* were started during the late forties and early fifties by Irish language teachers. No sets were allowed because sets were not considered Irish. Sets were danced at an odd get-together in the home - a return from England, or a wedding. *Comhaltas* (*Comhaltas Ceoltóiri Eireann*) organized the first *Fleadh Cheoil* in Athlone in 1953 and started reviving set dancing. The Caledonian Set was danced in the competitions. Because of emigration there were no crowds to dance, so the generation of the fifties missed out. Modern music and show bands became popular, so today people between the ages of thirty and fifty can't dance.

"I often saw John Kinley in pubs and he was anxious for the two of us to get the Lancers going. And we would often go through it in the pubs having an old chat about sets. He always hinted on me that we should get it going." Joe McNamara revived the Lancers in 1980. "I had to go back in my memory and remember the set as I saw Kinley dancing it and work out one figure from another until I got it into the shape of a set. I might see that danced in my young days, and I might not see that set danced twice in a year. There was that drawback that I had to remember the set after not dancing it for forty years. I usen't to sleep and I often went through a figure [while unable to sleep]. I was teaching [set dancing] at Crusheen at the time. I did it one figure at a time. I had to take one figure, do that and see how it worked out. Then on to the next figure. It took a lot of memorizing."

Now about twenty-five people dance the Lancers in the Crusheen area. Joe and Biddie McNamara have also taught the Lancers every summer since 1983 at the *Scoil Samhraidh* Willie Clancy in Miltown Malbay, Co. Clare.

The Lancers—continued

The Lancers has been published in *Irish Dances*. In general, *Irish Dances* describes the way the set is danced today, except that the terminology differs in *Irish Dances* from the terminology used by Joe McNamara. For example, listed below are the figures and movements, first as called by Joe McNamara and second as in *Irish Dances*:

AS CALLED BY JOE MCNAMARAIRISH DANCES

Lead around	Lead Around
Wheel	Swing
House	House
Pass off and wheel lady opposite	Advance & Swing
Pass through	Square
Wheel lady on the left	Swing
Dance in	House
Twirl	Turn the Lady
Ladies dance to men's side and men dance to ladies' side	Pass By
Line up	Advance & Retire
Ladies into the center	Ladies In
Men into the center	Gents In
Hands across	Wheel
Big Christmas	Big Christmas
Lead your partner around	Lead Around
Small Christmas	Little Christmas
Chain all around	Chain & Line Up
Line up	Line Up
Line up	Side Step
In and back	Advance & Retire
Dance back to your own place and wheel	Dance To Place & Swing

In *Irish Dances*, ADVANCE & SWING in the FIRST FIGURE is described as it is danced today for exhibition purposes. This movement, however, was remembered differently by Joe McNamara as Pass off by linking R elbows and Wheel lady opp. Today, on social occasions local dancers dance Pass off by linking left elbows and Wheel lady opp.

Music: Polkas, for example, *The Rakes of Mallow, I Met Mary in the Woods, The Peeler and the Goat, Nora Criona*. 102 beats per minute. 2/4 meter
Reels, for example, *Swallow's Tail, Bag of Potatoes, Sally Gardens, The Longford Collector, Tim Maloney, The Woman of the House, Miss McLeod's*. 123 beats per minute.

Set Dances of Ireland, vol IV, Side A

Formation: Square set of 4 cpls.

The Lancers—continued

I. PASS OFF

Lead around 8: All four cpls face in a CCW dir in the set (M in the ctr with W on the outside). Ptrs hold hands in front at W's waist level (M's R hands hold W's R hands and M's L hands hold W's L hands). All four cpls dance eight threes in a CCW dir around the set passing through each succeeding pos and back to starting pos. During the last two meas W turn CW (one half turn) under M's raised hands to face ptrs in starting pos. All lift up onto the balls of their feet on the 3rd beat of each meas and down on the 4th beat of each meas when dancing threes producing the "Clare style" when dancing to reels.

Wheel 8: All four cpls in "waltz pos."

Pass off and wheel lady opposite 8: 1st and 2nd cpls drop hands and face into the ctr of the set.
(4) 1st M and 2nd W dance four threes into the ctr of the set linking R elbows with each other turning CW. 1st M and 2nd W drop R elbows and end facing each other in the ctr of the set with backs to starting pos.

(4) 1st M and 2nd W wheel in the ctr of the set ending in the ctr of the set with backs to starting pos.

Pass through 8: 1st and 2nd cpls. M dance CW and W dance CCW around the inside of the set. 1st M and 2nd W begin in the ctr of the set where they ended the wheel.

(2) 1st and 2nd cpls dance two threes straight across the ctr of the set. M on the outside of the line pass R shldr to R shldr with opp W while W on the inside of the line pass L shldr to L shldr with each other.

(2) W turning CCW dance two threes through pos opp starting pos on the outside of the line passing ptrs L shldr to L shldr while M turning CW dance two threes through pos opp starting pos on the inside of the line passing R shldr to R shldr with each other.

(4) 1st and 2nd cpls repeat, M turning CW and W turning CCW. On the last meas 1st and 2nd M continue through starting pos to face W on the L of starting pos while 1st and 2nd W continue through starting pos to face M on the R of starting pos.

Wheel lady on the left 8: All four cpls. 1st M with 3rd W; 3rd M with 2nd W; 2nd M with 4th W; 4th M with 1st W.

Wheel 8: All four cpls with original ptrs in starting pos.

Pass off and wheel lady opposite 8: 2nd M and 1st W.

Pass through 8: 1st and 2nd cpls.

Wheel lady on the left 8: All four cpls.

Wheel 8: All four cpls with original ptrs in starting pos.

Pass off and wheel lady opposite 8: 3rd M and 4th W.

Pass through 8: 3rd and 4th cpls.

Wheel lady on the left 8: All four cpls.

Wheel 8: All four cpls with original ptrs in starting pos.

Pass off and wheel lady opposite 8: 4th M and 3rd W.

Pass through 8: 3rd and 4th cpls.

Wheel lady on the left 8: All four cpls.

Wheel 8: All four cpls with original ptrs in starting pos.

The Lancers—continued

House 8: All four cpls dance eight threes in a CCW dir around the set using two meas to turn CW into each succeeding pos to the R until all four cpls are back in starting pos. Instead of the last two threes, cpls sometimes dance step, step, step, step turning CW two times during the 7th and 8th meas. This ending is called a double wheel:

W	R - L -	R - L -
M	L - R -	R - L -
Beats/meas	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4

M slap the ground in front with L feet to end the FIRST FIGURE.

II. THE TWIRL

Lead around 8: All four cpls.

Wheel 8: All four cpls.

Dance in 8: 1st cpl dances eight threes in a CCW dir around the ctr of the set and back to starting pos using two meas to turn CW four times. The other three cpls remain in starting pos.

Twirl 8: 1st cpl takes R hands and dances eight threes in place. W turns CW four times under M's R hand while M dances in place. 1st cpl drops R hands.

Ladies dance to men's side and men dance to ladies' side 8: 1st M and 1st W, still facing each other, dance two threes through starting pos passing each other R shldr to R shldr, dance two threes turning CW into line in side pos ending facing each other, dance two threes back through starting pos passing R shldr to R shldr, and dance two threes into line in side pos ending in a line of four people facing into the ctr of the set. 1st W turns CCW into line while 1st M turns CW into line. During 7th and 8th meas 2nd cpl separates. 2nd M walks to join 4th cpl on 4th W's R forming a line facing into the ctr of the set while 2nd W walks to join 3rd cpl on 3rd M's L forming a line facing into the ctr of the set. All four dancers in each line join hands with each other (R hands in L hands and L hands in R hands) elbows slightly bent with hands a little below shldr height (W's hands on top of M's hands). 1st and 2nd M's R arms are relaxed free at their sides on the outside of the lines just as 1st and 2nd W's L arms are relaxed free at their sides on the outside of the lines.

Line up 8: All four cpls. Both lines of four dancers dance the slide step three times: once advancing into the ctr, once back out, and once into the ctr again. During the 7th and 8th meas 1st and 2nd cpls dance the slide step remaining in place in starting pos while 3rd and 4th cpls dance the slide step backing into starting pos. All drop hands. The slide step is danced as follows:

W	R - L -	R L R -	L - R -	L R L -	R - L -	R L R -	L - R -	L R L -
M	L - R -	L R L -	R - L -	R L R -	L - R -	L R L -	R - L -	R L R -
Beats/meas	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4

Even though cpls dance with their feet fiat on the ground, gliding as they move, all lift up onto the balls of their feet on the 1st and 3rd beats of the 1st meas and down again on the 2nd and 4th beats of the 1st meas. All lift up again on the 3rd beat of the 2nd meas and down on the 4th beat of the 2nd meas. This gives the characteristic "lift" to the dance style in Clare when dancing the slide step to reels.

Wheel 8: All four cpls with original ptrs in starting pos.

The Lancers—continued

Dance in 8: 2nd cpl.

Twirl 8: 2nd cpl.

Ladies dance to men's side and men dance to ladies' side 8: 2nd cpl.

Line UP 8: All four cpls.

Wheel 8: All four cpls with original ptrs in starting pos.

Dance in 8: 3rd cpl.

Twirl 8: 3rd cpl.

Ladies dance to men's side and men dance to ladies' side 8: 3rd cpl.

Line up 8: All four cpls.

Wheel 8: All four cpls with original ptrs in starting pos.

Dance in 8: 4th cpl.

Twirl 8: 4th cpl.

Ladies dance to men's side and men dance to ladies' side 8: 4th cpl.

Line up 8: All four cpls.

Wheel 8: All four cpls with original ptrs in starting pos.

House 8: All four cpls end with a double wheel. M slap the ground in front with L ft to end the SECOND FIGURE.

III. BIG CHRISTMAS

Lead around 8: All four cpls.

Wheel 8: All four cpls.

Ladies into the center 8: All four W. M remain in starting pos while all four W dance the slide step four times: once advancing into the ctr, once back out, once into the ctr again and “bow” (nod their heads), and once backing into starting pos.

Men into the center 8: All four M. W remain in starting pos while all four M dance the slide step four times: once advancing into the ctr, once back out, once into the ctr again and “bow” (nod their heads), and once backing into starting pos.

Hands across 8: All four cpls face in a CCW dir in the set (M in the ctr with W on the outside). W place L hands on M's backs. M place R arms behind W's backs under W's arms with M's R hands on W's waists. M give L hands across at waist level, so that M hold L hands like a handshake in the ctr. All four cpls dance eight threes in a CCW dir around the set passing through each succeeding pos and back to starting pos.

Hands across 8: All four cpls drop hands. M turn CW while W turn CCW to face in a CCW dir. W place R hands on M's backs. M place L arms behind W's backs over W's arms with M's L hands on W's waists. M give R hands across at waist level, so that M hold R hands like a handshake in the ctr. All four cpls dance eight threes in a CCW dir around the set passing through each succeeding pos and back to starting pos. During the 7th and 8th meas, all four cpls drop hands. M turn CCW while W turn CW to face into the ctr of the set and form a circle. M keep R hands on W' waists while W place R hands on M's waists; M place L hands over W's R arms on W's waists while W place L hands over M's R arms on M's waists.

Big Christmas 8: All four cpls in a circle of eight wheel in a CW dir with R feet in the ctr ending in front of starting pos.

The Lancers—continued

Big Christmas 8: All four cpls start with L feet in the ctr and wheel in a CCW dir ending in front of starting pos.

Wheel 8: All four cpls with original ptrs in starting pos.

Ladies into the center 8: All four W.

Men into the center 8: All four M.

Hands across 8: All four cpls.

Hands across 8: All four cpls.

Big Christmas 8: All four cpls.

Big Christmas 8: All four cpls.

Wheel 8: All four cpls with original ptrs in starting pos.

House 8: All four cpls end with a double wheel. M slap the ground in front with L feet to end the THIRD FIGURE.

IV. SMALL CHRISTMAS

Lead around 8: All four cpls.

Wheel 8: All four cpls.

Dance in 8: 1st cpl.

Lead your ptr around 8: 1st and 2nd cpls face in a CW dir in the set. Ptrs hold hands in front at W's waist level (M's R hands hold W's R hands and M's L hands hold W's L hands). 1st and 2nd cpls dance eight threes in a CW dir around the ctr of the set. During the 7th and 8th meas 1st and 2nd cpls pass through starting pos, drop hands, and continue on, 1st cpl to 3rd cpl and 2nd cpl to 4th cpl, to begin hands across.

Hands across 8: 1st and 3rd cpls dance together while 2nd and 4th cpls dance together.

(4) Each person faces in a CW dir and gives R hands across (elbows slightly bent with hands a little below shldr height), so that there are two groups of two cpls each holding R hands in the ctr (W's hands on top). All dance four threes in a CW dir around to pos from which each person started.

(4) Each person drops R hands and while turning CW to face in a CCW dir gives L hands across (elbows slightly bent with hands a little below shldr height), so that there are two groups of two cpls each now holding L hands in the ctr (W's hands on top). All dance four threes in a CCW dir back to pos from which each person started.

Small Christmas 8: 1st and 3rd cpls dance together while 2nd and 4th cpls dance together. Each group of two cpls forms a circle. M place R hands on W's waists while W place R hands on M's waists; M place L hands over W's R arms on W's waists while W place L hands over M's R arms on M's waists. Both groups of two cpls wheel in a CW dir with R feet in the ctr.

Wheel 8: All four cpls with original ptrs in starting pos.

Dance in 8: 2nd cpl.

Lead your ptr around 8: 1st and 2nd cpls in a CCW dir.

Hands across 8: 1st cpl with 4th cpl and 2nd cpl with 3rd cpl.

Small Christmas 8: 1st cpl with 4th cpl and 2nd cpl with 3rd cpl.

Wheel 8: All four cpls with original ptrs in starting pos.

The Lancers—continued

Dance in 8: 3rd cpl.

Lead your ptr around 8: 3rd and 4th cpls in a CW dir.

Hands across 8: 3rd cpl with 2nd cpl and 4th cpl with 1st cpl.

Small Christmas 8: 3rd cpl with 2nd cpl and 4th cpl with 1st cpl.

Wheel 8: All four cpls with original ptrs in starting pos.

Dance in 8: 4th cpl.

Lead your ptr around 8: 3rd and 4th cpls in a CCW dir.

Hands across 8: 3rd cpl with 1st cpl and 4th cpl with 2nd cpl.

Small Christmas 8: 3rd cpl with 1st cpl and 4th cpl with 2nd cpl.

Wheel 8: All four cpls with original ptrs in starting pos.

House 8: All four cpls end with a double wheel. M slap the ground in front with L feet to end the FOURTH FIGURE.

V. CHAIN ALL AROUND AND LINE UP

Lead around 8: All four cpls.

Wheel 8: All four cpls.

Chain all around 16: All four cpls.

(8) Ptrs face each other taking R hands in front like a handshake at waist level and dance one three past each other dropping hands as they pass (M in a CCW dir and W in a CW dir). All continue to dance another five threes giving L hands, then R hands, then L hands again until all meet original ptrs in pos opp starting pos and wheel in pos opp starting pos during the 7th and 8th meas.

(8) All four cpls repeat, beginning in pos opp starting pos and ending in starting pos. This time cpls do not wheel, but rather form into a column facing out from 1st cpl's starting pos. W are in front of ptrs. 1st cpl is followed by 3rd cpl followed by 4th cpl followed by 2nd cpl.

Line up 8: All four cpls.

(4) M dance in a column to their L toward 4th cpl's starting pos while W dance to their R toward 3rd cpl's starting pos. M dance step with L foot, slide R foot to L foot, step, slide R foot to L foot, step, slide R foot to L foot, and one three in a column in 4th cpl's starting pos. W dance: step with R foot, slide L foot to R foot, step, slide L foot to R foot, step, slide L foot to R foot, and one three in a column in 3rd cpls' starting pos:

W	R - L -	R - L -	R - L -	R L R -
M	L - R -	L - R -	L - R -	L R L -
Beats/meas	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4

(4) Both columns dance the same step back across the ctr of the set with W passing in front of ptrs. This time M begin with R feet and W begin with L feet. During the 8th meas when the column of M reaches 3rd cpl's starting pos and the column of W reaches 4th cpl's starting pos M turn CCW to form a line facing into the ctr of the set in 3rd cpl's starting pos while W turn CW to form a line facing into the ctr of the set in 4th cpl's starting pos. All four dancers in each line join hands with each other (R hands in L hands and L hands in R hands) elbows slightly bent with hands a little below shldr height. 1st M's R arm and 2nd M's L arm are relaxed free at their sides on the outside of the line; 1st W's L arm and 2nd W's R arm are relaxed free at their sides on the outside of the line.

The Lancers—continued

Line up 8: All four cpls. Both lines of four dancers dance the slide step four times: once advancing into the ctr, once back out, once into the ctr again, and once backing into 3rd and 4th cpls starting pos. The slide step is danced as follows:

W	R - L -	R L R -	L - R -	L R L -	R - L -	R L R -	L - R -	L R L -
M	L - R -	L R L -	R - L -	R L R -	L - R -	L R L -	R - L -	R L R -
Beats/meas	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4

Dance back to your own place and wheel 8: All four cpls.

(4) All dance the slide step four times with 3rd M and 4th W remaining in starting pos while all others dance back to starting pos to meet original ptrs.

(4) All four cpls wheel with original ptrs in starting pos.

Chain all around 16: All four cpls end in a column. 2nd cpl is followed by 4th cpl followed by 3rd cpl followed by 1st cpl.

Line un 8: All four cpls in a column behind 2nd cpl.

Line un 8: All four cpls. W in a line formed along 3rd cpl's starting pos with M in a line formed along 4th cpl's starting pos. Dance back to your own place and wheel 8: All four cpls.

Chain all around 16: All four cpls end in a column. 3rd cpl is followed by 2nd cpl followed by 1st cpl followed by 4th cpl.

Line un 8: All four cpls in a column behind 3rd cpl.

Line un 8: All four cpls. W in a line formed along 1st cpl's starting pos with M in a line formed along 2nd cpl's starting pos.

Dance back to your own place and wheel 8: All four cpls.

Chain all around 16: All four cpls end in a column. 4th cpl is followed by 1st cpl followed by 2nd cpl followed by 3rd cpl.

Line up 8: All four cpls in a column behind 4th cpl.

Line up 8: All four cpls. W in a line formed along 2nd cpl's starting pos with M in a line formed along 1st cpl's starting pos:

Dance back to your own place and wheel 8: All four cpls.

House 8: All four cpls end with a double wheel. M slap the ground in front with L feet to end the FIFTH FIGURE.