DANCING design:

story of Angus McCaskill, grandfather of EC's Jick; his coming from Scotland in 1889 to homestead in Montana--a story of love, the land and time, to crank out an early blurb for myself. It's not much known, but the high tide of homesteading in Montana, which was the foremost homestead state (32 million acres taken up by homesteaders) was 1914-1918; a boomtime when people thought Montana was going to be the last great grain garden of the world. Last frontier, wagons & Model Ts

land homesteaded in Montana bigger than state of NY or Pennsylvania.

Homestead Act of 1862: 160 a. homesteads on the surveyed public domain, for living on the land and improving it for 5 years; filing fee of $26

Land Ordinance of 1785 provided for rectangular survey system: six-mile-square township as basic survey unit; simple and accurate way to describe land--ranges measured westward from principal meridians, townships measured from base lines. It imposed a grid system on the land; as if streets and avenues...

section 16, schl section; straight roads, towns extruded along them; Iowa-like linoleum floor.

English metes and bounds: boundaries by physical description, streams, trees etc.
Isaiah Bowman's definition of "frontier"—living "a life of experiment"—instead of "a settled agricultural practice, the frontier community is in a state of unsettlement."

—the sodbusters' frontier.

—if you take the entire population of the Continental Divide states—Mont., Idaho, Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico—from Canadian border to the Mexican, a span of 1200 miles;—the population (7,076,000) is less than NYC's (7,164,000 in '84)

—the laws of historical gravity: people of English Creek having been thru the Depression, the sheepmen of Dancing undergoing hard times after 1893 and they and their families being hit by WWI and the flu epidemic. (1 of every hundred Montanans died of flu between Aug. 1918 and June 1919—as if AIDS had killed 2½ million of current US population)
A lot of my own words, about 150,000 of them, have gone into a story of Montana homesteaders—a novel of mine that will be published in September, called Dancing at the Rascal Fair. My two young heroes, in 1889, leave Scotland to come to the great American land pantry—to seek their homesteads. Early in that book, I've tried to write of what the dream of finding your place in a new land must have been like to those young men: (p. 8, begin "Like the duke of dukes... End "with full feathers on"

as these two have taken up their land and are in the work of making homesteads. Later, in the homestead work, there is this passage about how that dream is turning out: (p. 90, whole graf begin "Here then is land.

And although the setting of Dancing at the Rascal Fair is in northern Montana, around Dupuyer, rather than my own family's chosen acres southeast of Helena, and the residents of the fictional valley I call Scotch Heaven are not my own forebears, the historical experience of homesteading I thought could be summed up in an epigraph from my own father: