

History of Square Dance

- And Square Dance in Manitoba
- Part One

By Eva Blyth

Introduction

Linda Hayden is a very tenacious person. When she asked me to consider becoming Historian, I said NO! three times, but the third time she twisted my arm. Had I known how long it was going to take and the amount of research I would have to do – I might still have said NO. I set the annual meeting of 1984 as my deadline and finished by the skin of my teeth.

The first few pages deal with the roots of square dancing, information for which I had or found pretty authentic sources. I have mentioned most of these sources throughout the pages, so won't go into them again.

The rest of my booklet, starting on page 9, is actually a condensed, very condensed, version of our Journal, and a little bit from the Callers Association. Having been on both the Federation and the Callers Executives proved to be an asset.

It was a headache sometimes trying to decide what to include and what to pass by. When you consider that I was trying to cover 32 volumes of 9 issues each - add it up - $32 \times 9 = 288$. I had to dig for information for the first 4 volumes (lost, stolen or strayed) by going back and forth over newsletters from clubs -- Presidents reports, and Maurice Lansdown's "Grapevine" - bless his heart. I got a lot of information from him - so those first four years are fairly well covered. That left me 252 issues of Journal at hand - I couldn't afford even one page per issue without writing a book. Some may think I spent too much time on one thing and not enough on another - but if you have any complaints - don't come to me!

This has not been a one person effort - my husband deserves a big vote of thanks. He proofread most of my pages (and even he missed some typing errors. I don't apologize for my typing - I never was that good, and have grown rusty. As I finished three or four pages, Peter took them to work and ran them through the copying machine, and we won't thank his company, because they don't know how much paper they have donated! Peter also vacuumed, cashed dishes, prepared quite a few meats, did a couple of washes, and put up with my bitchiness when I got tired and cranky when the typing went wrong.

One copy of the history goes to the Editor. There are two extra copies and we have the original. If 50 years from now this is lost, I will come back and haunt you.

PAST PRESIDENTS OF THE MANITOBA SQUARE AND ROUND DANCE FEDERATION
EASTERN DIVISION

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>NAME</u>	<u>CLUB</u>
1952-53	Charlie Ward	Circle 4
1953-54	Jack Webb	Allemande 8's
1954-55	Maurice Lansdown	Whirlpegs & Circle 4
1955-57	Trevor Wignall	Northern Twisters
1957-59	Scotty Thompson	Sashay 8's & Circle 4
1959-60	Harry Clarke	Whirlwindsors & Whirlpegs
1960-61	Ted McNeill	Local Yokels & Whirlpegs
1961-63	Thord Spetz	Les Allouettes & Roundelay
1963-65	Colin Hugo	Allemande 8s & Pairs N Squares
1965-67	Dick Carson	Bourkevale
1967-69	John Dempster	Gay Garrys
1969-71	Doug Beatty	Airway Reelers
1971-72	Bus Kenyon	Les Allouettes
1972-74	Ernie Corder	Headingly Hoedowners
1974-76	Paul Kostuck	Swinging 69s
1976-78	Syd Lentle	Airway Reelers
1978-79	Bob Geyson	Whirlaway Westerners
1979-80	Elmer Greenslade	Portage Pairs & Squares
1980-82	Jim Fenton	Paws N Taws
1082-84	Linda Hayden	Frontier Flutterwheels
1984-85	Joyce Aquin	St. Claude Prairie Squares

SQUARE & ROUND DANCE ROOTS Compiled by Eva Blyth

Man has danced, in one form or another since the beginning of time. The middle ages saw the growth of social dancing in Europe and England. The Church controlled the theatre and only religious plays were presented, but the common people had a wonderful time with their folk dances. They danced for fun alone.

In time the nobles also began to dance. They changed the simple dances of the common people into elaborate affairs. They wore brilliant and expensive costumes and danced at court before the King and Queen.

The growth of cities brought a new class of rich merchants and tradesmen. They wished to show off their wealth and social position, so they took up the stately dancing of the nobles. Social dancing became more intricate and difficult - soon dancing masters were needed to teach the new steps.

The Renaissance (about 1500) brought again the refreshing influence of the common people. A new liveliness took the place of the stately dances of the Middle Ages and this influence was felt in all the countries of Europe.

Late in the 1600's, England's country dances came into style. Of these the "contradance" (line) and the square dance were most popular. The minuet from France and the German waltz were popular in the 1700's.

Early in the 1300's there developed dances for couples. One of these was the Quadrille - it was like the old English square dance, though originating in France, and remained popular for over 100 years.

The Cotillion, a ballroom dance similar to the quadrille was one of the most popular dances in the 1800's. A head couple led the rest of the dancers through the various steps and patterns. It called for at least four couples, but any number of couples could join in. If you were invited to a "Cotillion" you were invited to an evening of dancing, and the dance "cotillion" was usually the last dance of the evening.

The following article is neither dated nor signed, so the author is unknown. It is so well written, however, that I think it should be incorporated "as is" into our History of Square Dancing in Manitoba. (Square Dancing in Manitoba is also the title of the article).

"Historically, it is difficult to factually state when folk-barn dances commenced in Manitoba, however, early records reveal that in 1801, favorite pastimes of settlers along the Red River were, smoking, chewing tobacco, telling tall tales and dancing. Due to the shortage of women, men danced with men. Music was provided by humming, whistling, hand clapping, beating sticks on a piece of stretched buffalo hide, rattling bones together, and blowing on the open end of an empty cider stein.

The men would form two lines facing one another and a caller would tell them what to do - allemande that gent to your left, allemande that gent to your right, walk all around that opposite gent, give him a swing, etc.

In 1803, explorer Alexander Henry spoke of "pemmican parties" (pemmican was a lean-fat from bison (buffalo)) and used as a substitute for many foods, or to augment other foods. During these Red River parties, a fiddler played and sometimes called,

Whilst the men and women danced, or sometimes the fiddler played while the dancers performed what was then called the Red River jig. At this time white women were a scarcity, it must therefore be assumed that the women were Indian, perhaps Metis.

In 1811, the Earl of Selkirk commenced mass immigration to the area of the Red River

settlement. It was about this time that white women began to arrive in small numbers. Along with these immigrants -from Ireland, Scotland and France, plus mercenaries -from Switzerland and Germany (who were used to police the area) came new dance steps which added to the flavour and colour of the old Red River jig.

From 1818 to 1870, a grand influx from many other ethnic groups introduced still newer and more sophisticated types of folk dancing.

Marriages always took place on Thursdays which resulted in one continual celebration of eat, drink, dance and be merry. Fiddlers provided the music. The dancers wore special moccasins, usually beaded and embroidered for the occasion, often wearing out more than one pair at a wedding.

The dancing commenced on the Wednesday prior to the wedding and continued day and night up to Sunday. How did they keep up with it for so many days? That was simple -the log barns and other rooms not used for dancing and feasting were spread with buffalo robes, with homespun woolen blankets laid on top, where young and old alike could catch a few hours or even a few minutes sleep. The homes on the narrow Red River lots were close together and neighbours were glad to accommodate any overflow. The main problem was that the men still outnumbered the women, resulting in some pretty tired women.

In the 1870's the barn dance was extremely popular. The ruggedness of the men contributed to the adoption of the barn dance primarily because they could let themselves go, whereas the waltz made them feel somewhat uneasy. Sophisticated-type dancing was considered to be for the high and mighty and the men in uniform.

About 1880, certain rules of etiquette at dances were suggested, and included the elimination of the vile habit of chewing tobacco, drinking before and during dances, cleanliness, and the pros and cons of wearing beards and long hair; the height feet should be lifted off the floor, the speed at which the dance should be performed, where and how the lady should be held and maneuvered across the floor. Needless to say, the men still in majority paid little or no attention to these suggested rules until the women utilized their feminine intuition and refused to dance with any man who did not abide by the rules." End of article.

I cannot vouch for the authenticity of the marriage account, but in my research I have read that in those early days of hardship, a newly raised barn was an excuse for a "Barn" dance. What else did they have to relieve the strain of hard work? They had brought with them the necessities only - there would be no room for pianos or organs, even if they had had them at home. Some of the Scots brought their bagpipes -the sound of the pipes and the bleating of sheep were the first indication that the boats of settlers were arriving on the 27th of October 1812.

The fur trade was the chief source of Canadian wealth during the 1600's and 1700's. Beaver and other fur bearing animals made the Manitoba region important during the late 1600's.

English fur traders entered the rich fur country from Hudson's Bay. French Canadian traders came westward from Quebec during the 1700s. The adventurous fur traders paddled their birch bark canoes up Manitoba rivers and travelled through unexplored forests and plains. They traded with the Indians of the regions, and built forts and trading posts in the wilderness.

In 1731, La Verendrye and his traders built a series of forts along the route they took searching for a way across the country to the Pacific Ocean. One of these was Fort Rouge on the site of present day Winnipeg, built in 1738. In 1783, the North West Company was established in Montreal to compete with the Hudson's Bay Company. This competition forced the Hudson's Bay to build posts to defend its trade.

While the fur companies competed for trade, plans were being made for Manitoba's first

farm settlement. In 1811, Thomas Douglas, fifth Earl of Selkirk obtained land, a grant from the Hudson's Bay Company involving more than 100,000 square miles along the Red River. Lord Selkirk sent several groups of Scottish Highlanders and Irishmen out. In 1812, the first group of men arrived to take over the tract of land and to start clearing it for the families of settlers who would follow shortly. Due to interference on the part of the North West Company, the boats were late arriving, and it had been necessary to spend a cold miserable winter at York Factory. In one of my books there is reference to one miserable evening when a Scot began to play his pipes, until men began to "dance" upon the frozen shore - thereby building up their morale.

It was the last day of August when these men finally ended their trip by boats, canoes, and portage and landed where the Assiniboine meets the Red. They set up camp on the east side of the Red River opposite the mouth of the Assiniboine, where the North West Company had their Fort Gibraltar. The men started clearing land and building cabins on Point Douglas. On the 27th of October, 1812, seventy-one men, women and children were safely landed.

The Red River Colony lay in the heart of the North West Company's area of operation. As the colony expanded, it interfered with fur trade and the company became hostile. Company trappers in the region were mostly Metis, and the company turned them against the settlers. The Metis weren't above painting themselves up, putting feathers in their hair and disguising themselves as Indians. They burned homes and destroyed crops. On reading their history, the early settlers had a grim time of it - hard grueling work, sometimes little variety to eat, frosts that killed crops, and the uncertainty of never knowing when they would be raided and their homes burned. The Indian chief, Peguis, and his tribe (true Indians - not Metis) were friendly to the settlers ~ sometimes supplying them with food, and Peguis on more than one occasion warned them of Metis mischief brewing, then the settlers would flee to the fort. The violence reached a climax in 1816. A new governor, Robert Semple, had been sent out from England to replace Miles MacDonnell who had been forced to leave by the North West Company. A "dance" was given in Semple's honour and the night he arrived "before the new two story house, pipers strutted and played."

However, as I started out to say, the climax of much pestering and shooting, burning, etc. came when the Metis massacred Robert Semple and about 20 men in the battle of Seven Oaks.

Peace was finally restored after the North West Company combined with the Hudson's Bay Company in 1821.

The Dominion of Canada was created in 1867. Under pressure from the British government, the Hudson's Bay Company agreed in 1869 to give up its rights in almost all of Rupertsland for \$1,500,000.00. Great Britain began making plans to unite this vast region of Canada. The Metis held no legal title to their lands and were afraid that they would lose the land to British-Canadian settlers who would pour in after the union with Canada.

The Riel Rebellion is history, and there is no need to go into it here. Manitoba became Canada's fifth province on July 15th, 1870, and Winnipeg became the Capital.

The expected land rush of settlers into Manitoba began after 1870. Between 1871 and 1881, the population more than doubled. During the 1890's thousands of settlers came to Manitoba. By 1901, the population of Manitoba had increased to more than ten times that of 1871.

In December, 1905, Mr. Ralph D. Paine writing for the *Outing Magazine* caught the spirit of "An Old Fashioned Country Dance". He was writing of the American country dance with its revolt against the formality of the Quadrille and the dancing master, its neighbourly and informal atmosphere, and its homespun improvisation. The Catskill Mountains in New York provides the

setting for the dance which he describes as the "kind of dance you and I used to know years and years ago when we went to barn-raising and the husking bees. . . ". It is early June and the natives are gathered at a summer resort to "shake a loose foot" in accordance with the unwritten truce which each year gives them the hotel for one day before the arrival of the city folks.

The girls arrive in their Sunday best except for their dancing shoes which each girl carries in her hand, preferring to walk to the dance in the stout and battered footgear in which she milks seven cows by the time the sun peeks over the hills.

As evening comes on the revelers assemble in the casino to dance. A professional floor master has been imported from the city by a misguided management in preference to an old fashioned "caller". The trouble this floor manager gets himself into fills more than a page - the old timers begin to get more and more fed up with this haughty youth with his Frenchified phrases and his desire for round dances. He lacks snap and ginger - is a fish out of water. His polished calls are drowned in shouts "for the real thing". The upshot is that the dancers push him aside and coax an old timer who has called country dances in his shirt sleeves, from one end of the country to the other for forty odd years. He protests, even while they are shoving him out to the middle of the floor... "Sho, I ain't called a dance in three years. You folks have been getting too newfangled for us old time sports. I'm too old to be making a fool of myself, hell, if you must have it, let her go. Give me a chair to mount and we'll make her hum as long as I can bark".

No more tepid phrases from "The Dancing Masters Manual"... "All hands round and don't let me catch you loaf in.." And so it goes until dawn, when the dance begins to break up so that the dancers can get home for milking time.

The 1900's have seen great changes in ballroom dancing. The young people found the waltz tiresome. They turned to the group dances, to the dances of the North American Creole or Negro, or the dances of the South American countries. The Negro influence showed in new rhythms which took the world by storm. In 1900, people danced the "one step" and the "turkey trot". The "cake walk" (ancestor of swing music) was followed by the "fox trot", the "shimmy", the "Charleston", and the "black bottom". Latin America contributed the Cuban "Habanera", which the Argentineans turned into the "tango". This gained wide popularity before World War 1. After it came the Paso Doble, the rumba, and the conga. These gave way to the mambo, cha cha, and the meringue. The ballroom dance reached its highest point of violence and frenzy as the jitterbugs danced to swing music in the 1940's. Rock n Roll dancing replaced jitterbugging during the 1950's and 1960's. The "Twist" became a big favourite of the rock n rollers.

I cannot pinpoint any dates, but would imagine it would be in the middle, perhaps even earlier, of the 1900's that groups started up to try to keep alive the folk dances of all nations.

Square Dancing never was "forgotten" - it was simply pushed aside as the younger people were caught up with the new "couple" dances. (You could "cuddle up" in a nice dreamy new waltz, (not the old German version) or a slow hesitation dance - much more romantic). But... the square dance was still there in the rural communities there would be two tips of square dancing one early in the evening, one towards the end of the evening. The last one would not be performed quite as smoothly as the first tip there would have been too many trips by some out "behind" the barn to tip the old bottle up. But the minute that orchestra started to play square dance music (and it may only have been a fiddle, a piano and perhaps a banjo or guitar, or even as we became more modern, a saxophone) there would be one mad rush to fill the squares - and in those days ANYONE could square dance. If you had never been in a square before you simply took No. 4 position. By the time it came around to your turn, you

knew what to do. It was more or less all "visiting couples" in those days. That was back in the 20's and early 30's. I can vouch for that, for I was there. The tips were danced with exuberance rather than style, with the men trying to swing the girls off their feet. In a small school house, one night where there was no stage, in a rough "Basket Swing" somebody's arm slipped and I fell on top of the violin player and broke his bow. That put a stop to my square dancing for a while it was just too rough. I would only get up if I was promised faithfully that the dance would be done smoothly, as intended.

I am fortunate in having several books written by people concerned in preserving the old folklore. Jim Fenton gave me one written by George Wade, who with his Corn Huskers had been broadcasting half an hour each week from Canada's Cheerio Station CKGW, Toronto, since 1928. The book was written in 1933, copyright by Thomas Burt & Co. Toronto, Ont., then copyright United States of America - International copyright secured. George Wade and his Corn Huskers had been acclaimed by thousands as the most popular and best Old Time Dance Orchestra on the North American Continent. The book gives many of the old calls with the fill in patter that was used in those days, plus how to call and dance the Waltz Quadrille, the Circassian Circle, a Progressive Barn Dance, and the Virginia Reel. I have no idea how long George Wade continued to be on radio after 1933. The book refers to his remarkable personality, and as one who excels in originating and calling the Old Time dances.

Two other books I have were given to me by the Division of Physical Fitness & Recreation, Department of Health & Public Welfare. One is "Old Manitoba Square Dances" - a collection of folklore for use by Community and School groups in the province.

Front page reads. . . "All too often sections of our Manitoba folklore have been lost because no one has taken the time to set them down on paper. This has been true of the Old Manitoba Dances which provided so much recreation and exercise to the early settlers and pioneers of the Province. It is therefore with pleasure that we were able to have Mr. Ed Gray, one of the better callers, of what might be called the "younger set" write out for us the detail in regard to these old bits of Manitoba. Because of the interest by schools and community groups in this form of recreational skill, it is presented to you for your use and enjoyment. "

Mr. Gray's foreword states. . . "This group of dances was compiled not by an authority nor an expert - just a student like you. The list is by no means complete and certainly not original.

The intention is to bring together as many MANITOBA AREA square dances as can be remembered. They are for use by groups or clubs. In this way we'll keep alive our old dances, in addition to learning the new ones that are currently popular.

Not so long ago - in the 30's - it was the custom to visit around the neighborhood on Saturday nights, especially in the suburban areas of Winnipeg. It was not unusual to see a gathering where men would play and dance alternately. Those present would dance in shifts because of lack of space. Callers would sometimes fiddle while prompting - or dance as lead couples and call too."

People were brought closer together in those days, by good fellowship and healthy recreation through square or old time dancing. The book is full of the old time calls - "Dip and Dive", Darting Nettie Gray", Right and left Six etc.

The partner to this book, also put out by the Division of Physical Fitness & Recreation, is "Memories of Old Manitoba - a collection of round dances popular to the Province, written also by Mr. Gray, contains both dances and music - the music having been transposed by Mr. Geo. Ryckman and Art Young, both of Winnipeg. In certain of the old tunes, where ready

references were not at hand, Mr. Ryckman, Mr. Young and Mr. Gray collaborated in recalling them "For our use. Some of the Rounds -"German Schottische or Seven Step, Bon Ton, Manitoba Jersey, Meet and Toe Polka, French Minuet, Rye Waltz, Schottische - several variations, Polka Step, Aurora Waltz, Highland Schottische (as remembered by many old timers), Social One Step Two Step -note couples are in social dance position and moving around the room counterclockwise. Take turns at will in either direction. The Three Step, The Four Step, Veleta Waltz.

The books were given to me to try and interest some of the patients in the nursing home I worked for I had been to a seminar. However the social workers were dreamers. Our patients were the type we called heavy duty - some not of this world -some too ill, some not capable of even understanding what we were talking about. So the books found their way into my filing cabinet and just came to light again when I started digging for old information.

The next two books I have are No. 1 and No. 2 "American Square Dance " as broadcast in "Happy Hoe Down" - published in London England, quite similar to the Canadian ones - with the calls and the music and how to call them and how to dance them – ‘Smile at your partner new", Lady in the ring", actually the music is more familiar than the calls "The Girl I Left Behind Me", "Little Brown Jug", "Crackin' Corn", "Canadian Stars", "The Texas Star", "John Brown's Body", "Solomon Levi", "Oh Dem Golden Slippers", and "Mademoiselle from Armentieres".

At one time or another have danced them all - even called one or two about fifty years ago - but I've forgotten them all.

The next two little booklets I have I inherited -from Don Hill - they are put out by Sets in Order with calls getting just a little more complicated - one is "Square Dancing" the newer and advanced dances with a glossary of terms, by Bob Osgood and Jack Hoheisal. It is a 1950 book and there evidently had been a beginner and an intermediate book. A few familiar names are in this one, Cal Golden, Ed Gitmore, Slim Pickens. The second book was compiled by George Elliot - "A collection of Breaks and Fillers" a 1954 book, but George had been calling since 1946.

The last little book has Thord Spetz' name on the outside - a 1957 booklet "Musical Mixer Fun" as used by Ray and Arvid Olson.

So you see if you had these books, or one or two of any number of others printed just like them, and if you had a good voice - anyone just anyone could become a caller in those early days, especially in the 20's and 30's. It was just a matter of memorizing set patterns. In Ralph McNairs book, in his introduction is this very interesting paragraph. . . "The revival of the old-time dances has been building steadily since the publication in 1926 of Henry Ford's "Good Morning", a collection of the old dances. About that time there were many other caller and teachers, who worked along at compiling and preserving the figures and calls with their picturesque phrases. To these people is due a large measure of credit for the fun and recreation which today's dancers enjoy. The revival of the square dance was beginning to take hold by the late 1930's and was best characterized in the work of Dr. Lloyd Shaw and his Cheyenne Mountain dancers in Colorado Springs. They set many a toe to tapping, and many a couple to swinging to the calls of the old-time cowboy dances. Dr. Shaw literally carried the gospel to thousands of people and made converts of them all. The Square Dance was back!

Reference is also made to World War 2 and the related problem of entertaining the servicemen. Square dancing helped solve this problem, with its amiable sociability, introductions were made painless and the men were made to feel at home no matter where they

were. The existing square dance groups were opened to the servicemen, and the USO and other organizations sponsored square dances for the men in many places where groups did not already exist.

Is anyone familiar with the name "Margot Mayo"? In April, 1950, there were 12 lessons articles, with pictures and diagrams, showing how to do "the basic square dancing steps, and some of the advanced figures" by Margot Mayo "leading Square Dance Authority" written specialty for the Tribune. I have eight of the twelve - inherited from ????. They include - Ladies Chain - Birdie in the Cage - Pop Goes the weasel -Right Elbow Swing, etc. Now I know why one stubborn senior citizen simply would not take a right hand and put his opposite by in a "Right and Left Thru". In fact, he told me I wasn't teaching square dancing right at all! According to this article, in 1950 the figure called the "right and left" (no mention of the word "thru") was done by two opposite couples moving across the set, passing each other with the ladies between the men. "When the couples get across the set, they join their inside hands and turn around. The turn is effected by the lady moving forward, and the man backing up. This completes a "half right and left", and the regular full figure is done by the couples repeating the figure and ending back in home position".