



American Callers Association

P.O. Box 2406
Muscle Shoals AL. 35662

PH 256-383-7585- Fax 256-383-7583 Email Mac @americancallers.com Web page WWW.americancallers.com

October 2009
Newsletter

"This activity is about having fun while exercising your mind and body, and about connecting with new people and old friends in a safe, social environment, via the common bonds of dance."

...Friendship, tolerance, fun, staying connected, and inclusiveness are qualities that never go out of style

It's the time of year that some people are starting new dancer classes. It our hope that this year will bring better classes for all. The attitude of clubs today should be the statement above to get new dancers and keep them. I see some clubs today that have the attitude we would rather dance what we want and not be bothered by new dancers. That attitude is a recipe for extinction. Many of the attitudes we see today are the result of levels and dancers thinking that they are better dancers than they really are. I hope someone will remind them that someone had to help them when they started. That's my soap box for this newsletter.

Election of Board Members

We have two fine callers that agreed to run for the board. They are Gene McCullough and Tom Roper.

Gene & Marty McCullough have been square dancing since 1964. They took lessons in Empire, Michigan. Their teacher/caller was Bob Barnes, now residing in Florida. The class became the Frontier Whirlers from Empire, Mi. After Bob decided he couldn't continue to make the trip to Empire. Gene bought Bob's old equipment and taught the next class. He called for the club until they were transferred to Biloxi, MS where Gene called for a club there until their transfer to Glendale, AZ. Gene & Marty formed a club, The Flying Squares, at Luke AFB and guest called some for clubs in the area.

In 1968 Gene received a letter from some friends in the Philippines. The Pampanga Promenaders had 10 squares and were dancing to tapes. Gene called for the club until his transfer back to the States in 1971. He was the club caller for the Flying Squares of Griffiss AFB, Rome, NY in 1971 and 1972. During that time Gene attended a school for callers in Keene, NH with Jim Mayo. That was the year he recorded Shantytown on the Top label.

1973 found Gene and Marty in the Washington, DC area where he called for the Andrews AFB Jet Squares, The Saturday Night Specials, the Alexandria, VA Alexandrians, the Bachelor and Batchelorettes who danced at the Pentagon and a teen club, The Yellow Rockers, as well as guest calling for many of the local Washington area clubs. Gene was President of the National Capital Square Dance Leaders Association (NCASDLA) and was one of the host callers for President Jimmie Carter's Peoples Inaugurals Ball that was held at Union Station in 1976. Gene & Marty founded Marmac Specialties, a square dance business that provided engraved badges to clubs around the world and for the FBI and USAF Honor Guard. The business grew and they became distributors of most square dance labels and provided a note service to callers.

After his retirement from the USAF Gene and Marty moved to Ormond Beach, FL. Gene calls for The Casselberry Hoedowners and the Deland Honey Bees in Florida. He also calls for many demo dances and guest calls at many Central Florida clubs. Gene joined Paul Place and The Traveling Hoedowners, in the making of a boxed set of DVD/CDs with Mainstream and Plus dances in 2008.

Gene has been married to his greatest supporter, Marty McCullough, for 52 years. They have two children, 9 grandchildren and two great grandchildren. Gene and Marty are active in their church and community and actively promote square dancing wherever they go.

Vote for one

Tom Roper _____ Gene McCullough _____

Please mail you vote to American Callers at P.O. Box 2406 Muscle Shoals, Al 35662

Tom Roper became involved in the Square Dance activity in 1975 when he and his wife Suzy were persuaded to take beginner lessons. After dancing about 6 months, the "calling bug" bit him and he called his first tip shortly thereafter. In 1977 Tom began booking dances in his Tri-State area and soon after was club caller for 3 clubs. He kept up his clubs until the company he was plant manager for closed, at which time he decided to start calling and traveling full time. Since 1982, Tom has been on the road traveling some 75,000 miles a year, calling in almost every state of the U.S. and the overseas countries of Saudi Arabia, England, Norway, and Sweden.

Tom calls all levels thru A-2, has recorded numerous records on such labels as Coyote, Jo Pat, Lou Mac, Global, Four Bar B and most recently Crown. He has called at 30 consecutive National Square Dance conventions since 1978, and has been featured caller at many State conventions and festivals around the country.

Tom, his wife Suzy, son Cody and daughter Jordan make their home in Omaha, Illinois, a small town in the Southeastern corner of the state from April thru October traveling some 40,000 miles during the summer. Tom is resident caller at Tower Point RV Resort in Mesa, AZ from November thru March each year. From the beginning of the dance, till the final tip of the evening, you can feel the excitement in his music and share in his enthusiasm.

Tom strongly feels that regardless of the level one dances, square dancers, should "HAVE FUN DANCING."

SAD NEWS

We were informed of the passing of a very talented caller from Metairie, LA. Fred Bouvier. Fred had been calling for 54 years. This man brought many happy hours of fun to so many people in the New Orleans area and anywhere he called a dance. He will be missed. Thanks to Oscar Sill for letting us know.

THOUGHTS ON SQUARE DANCING (Among other things)

By *Chip Hendrickson*, who started calling on September 22, 1951.

NOTE: These are thoughts and observations and are not necessarily in a sensible order. Just as they came while typing. Not an excuse, just a fact. It is part of a particular culture at a particular time. Pay attention to this.

Recreations of old-time dances (Revolutionary and Civil War, nineteenth and early twentieth century) appeal to "a small(er) segment of the public. Richard Powers and his Vintage Dance movement is *very* healthy. Country Western Line and Couple dancing is done to music that had, and still does have, a large general public following. This is not just in the south and southwest but in rural areas everywhere. One example is upstate New York. Dancing to this music is "natural" to a large number of modern Americans and is up-to-date as far as they are concerned. The outfits being worn at these dances have been made a part of our culture by the media and myth. By sheer weight of numbers, Country Western Line and Couple is closer to being a "national folk dance" than square dancing and its allied dance forms.

Remove the "allied dance forms" And how many people do you have? It's possible the number of people "driven out" of square dancing by poor judgment, ineptitude, self-seeking agendas, incompetence, etc. may be more than dance today. Not provable, just a thought.

Square dance music is part of a very small culture today. The old community dances held in so many towns across the country are just about all gone. These dances were a part of the culture of the areas they were held in and the music played was part of that culture. Are these cultures still here? How big? Will they be the salvation of club dancing? Don't bet the ranch on it. The dances done at these places are usually spoken of in a disdainful tone as "barn dances" by today's "in" square dance folks. The fact that callers like myself call to *thousands* of these ordinary people every year hasn't yet sunk in.

At these dances mentioned level is not a factor. I and others offer the same programs year after year and are booked months to a year ahead. The pay is excellent, there is no preparation, no one comes over to ask us to "raise the level" and all ages and skills mix together. This being a throw back to the community dances of the past. Dancing to the phrase is easily taught, mostly by calling that way. I, and others, use more than just the square formation at these dances. Most of the people I deal with are middle and upper-middle class and don't have time for lessons (upon lessons, upon lessons). Many tell me they dance Country Western regularly. What's going on here?

Dancing, or the lack of it, is reflected in the movements, ideas, pressures, etc. of modern society. In the 1990s one might ask if people have the time needed to take the many lessons required to be a club square dancer. It's been reported to me that in some areas the club dancers/callers don't specifically tell the new prospects how many lessons are needed to become a proficient dancer. Is this fair? Honest? Especially if they realize that the long learning period is *not* a selling point for the activity. Let's get 'em hooked by making it seem like nothing and then they'll stay on and take more and more lessons and workshops and workshops, etc.

Who benefits primarily from all these classes and workshops? The dancers? The callers? We "know" what's best for them and how really great square dancing is, don't we? (Like our dear elected officials?) Or do we need bodies to pay bills so we can dance at the levels we want?

I knew of a club in CT that ran lessons and then picked the best dancers for club membership and dropped ("froze out") the rest. Anyone else ever hear of that?

The *music* being used in club dancing is primarily beat with the lift being supplied by the "chuck" sound and not individual notes as is found in more traditional styles of music -lots of times you can't easily hum along to it. And the hoedowns? Rhythm, but is there much music?

Is the activity geared towards pleasing and entertaining the overwhelming majority of dancers (the public) or towards the vocal minority. Again, resemblances to the political arena of today. Is the activity being used by callers as a means of finding self-fulfillment? Regardless of whether this is beneficial to the dancers? Why do people Dance????

The statement; "Friendship is Square Dancing's Greatest Reward" may be true but it is naive to think square dancing has a corner on that "reward." The idea of community can be found in dozens of dance activities and non-dance activities.

Why Do People Dance????

I believe that this feeling of community has kept people in club dancing longer than many would have cared to stay. Today there are more opportunities (competition) for people to become involved in other "communities" and the numbers are telling the club dance activity that this is what's happening like it or not.

In the late 1950s Ed Gilmore figured that with the number of basics available one could dance about a million different combinations of patterns before having to start all over. Maybe we should have stopped adding "new" material then.

Boredom is self-induced. In any area of anything. Think about it. If a caller can't get across a good set of interesting dance patterns in five or six minutes, he or she ought to try a different activity as he or she doesn't quite know what they're doing. If the dancers aren't getting it, it's the caller's fault. I learned this from Ed Gilmore, Al Brundage, Bruce Johnson, Pancho Baird and a host of other national leaders years ago. It was the quick judgment of a caller's ability in those days. Another was picking up the needle at the end of a musical phrase. The only reason for a caller is to guide people through a evening of dance in a dance form that allows a pleasant evening of dances.

Competition is cultural and learned. Dancing does not *need* to be competitive to succeed and be fun and relaxing. Competition is a choice and leaves few winners and many losers and losers leave. If the "losers" keep coming back one is building on a strange personality base. Or maybe they intuitively feel the activity is a good one and are hoping to find a leader/caller that will express this. Obviously this is happening on a grand scale at present.

I think it was Ed Gilmore who coined the phrase to describe the direction organized square dancing was heading; "Close order drill with women." Today he'd probably say it; "Close order drill by couples." Close-order drill won't attract the general public, will it? "If you can't dazzle 'em with your brilliance, then baffle 'em with your poor timing, figures and body flow." Just keep the chatter going, and have something "new."

"If YOU can't call good, call fast" was another judgment used by callers years ago. I think it still holds true today.

The need for new basics was created by callers. It can be stopped by callers. To call one who keeps inventing "new" basics a great choreographer is stretching the point. I've written many "basics," published few, and guarantee I could sit down and come up with a dozen or more in a very short time. Don't ask about quality, however and it wouldn't mean I was a "great choreographer." Prolific, maybe.

Learn how to adapt to change because it's the name of the game. The game is not dancing but life. Dancing is just an expression of same. You can read all the dance manuals written, take extensive caller's courses and miss the whole point. And what's the point? A program that allows people to learn to dance a very short time. We need dancers not experts.

Still In the Talking Stage

We had very few members that said they could attend a September meeting, so few that we could not justify the cost of a meeting. The majority wanted it to be some other time. So it's back to the drawing board on this and we will try again.

Contra Page: The 2009 National Square Dance Convention.

PART I: I was at the Long Beach, California, Convention Center, Wednesday through Saturday, June 24,25,26,27. Diane too, of course. We commuted, Anaheim to Long Beach and back, daily. Thanks to a route previously unknown to us we actually enjoyed each trip, breakfast along the way. About the convention, however? That is very difficult. You would be surprised at the amount of time and thought I have given to the question. To describe the convention in a fair way I have to describe it in terms of to day's square dancing picture, about which there are serious problems. As I see it, of course. This is entirely different from all the good thoughts about work and enjoyment that come with any convention. That said, I have told myself, over and over again, that maybe it is better to close my eyes, let the emperor keep his new clothes, and wait for a new day. Alas, it is not to be so.

PART II: There is a sense in which square dancing, as we know it today, is the victim of its own successes. **HALLS**, for example. Once upon a time there were wood floors. They encouraged my two feet to watch each other. They encouraged my feet to watch your feet to check spacing to move smoothly. Above all to pay attention to the timing and phrasing of the music. Feet had a sense of importance in those days and they liked it. Huge tanks for halls, with cement floors, have destroyed all that. But, perhaps, not permanently. My thought is that when a new dance movement appears it will be energized, at its core, by groups that once again dance in small halls with floors of real wood. **SOUND & SOUND EQUIPMENT.** In the past fifty years nothing has done more damage to the "dancing" element of square dancing than the various seductions that come with new technology, chief among them being "thumb control". In short order the most important parts of the music were "thumbed out." Dancers then moved exclusively to the voice of the caller, or nearly so. **FIGURES & SIGHT CALLING.** The splash of figures that erupted decades ago changed circular motion to digital motion, made timing an optional event, and destroyed the unity of the dance floor. Sight calling made matters worse. Tomorrow, to correct things, some complex calling skills will be needed. Keeping the best of the present and, at the same time, putting musical feet back into the picture, is the new challenge. As I see it, the young caller who can master the necessary skills will be the new hero.

PART III: *There* is an elephant in the room: a worked over truism that needs to be worked over one more time, but in a new light. It is about the advanced and advancing age of dancers. The new truism is that we no longer have a square dance movement at all. What we have is an age related physical activity designed to exercise the mental and motor skills of a target population. What has happened is clearly important in it's own way, but it doesn't look like square dancing. No swinging, no coordinated promenades, no conspicuous attention of the feet to the music, etc. (To be continued.)

Hal Rice, 1919 W. Coronet #227, Anaheim, CA 92801 (714) 778-0848

Oct 2009 Notes

Change the Wave

Formation: *Any Ocean Wave.*

Definition: *Ends of wave Cross Fold & Touch 1/4 Centers in new Wave Trade and Single Hinge. Ending position Ocean Wave.*

Heads Square Thru--- Swing Thru---Step thru and Face In--- Touch 1/4--Boys Run
Swing Thru---Swing Thru again---**Change the Wave** Ends Circulate, Hinge---
Boys Trade---Boy Run---Star Thru---Pass Thru---Left Allemande.

Heads Pass the Ocean--- Ladies Trade---Recycle---Pass Thru--- Swing Thru---
Swing Thru---Step Thru--- Face In---Pass the Ocean--- **Change the Wave**
Swing Thru--- Boys Run---Star Thru---Veer Left---Wheel & Deal---
Left Allemande

Heads Square Thru---Touch 1/4---**Change the Wave**---Boys Run---Couples
Circulate---Ferris Wheel---Square Thru 3/4---Left Allemande

Heads Square Thru --- Touch 1/4---**Change the Wave** --- Boys Run---
Wheel & Deal---Swing Thru---Step Thru---Face In---Right & Left Grand

Heads Touch 1/4--- Boys Run--- Swing Thru---Step Thru---Face In--- Pass the
Ocean---Girls Trade---**Change the Wave**---Centers Trade---Girls Trade---
Pass Thru---Wheel & Deal--- Double Pass Thru---Leaders Trade---
Allemande Left

Heads Touch 1/4--Boys Run--Swing Thru-- Boys Trade---**Change the Wave**
Centers Trade---Girls Trade---Pass Thru---Bend Line---Pass the Ocean--
Recycle---Allemande Left

