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Mrs. Betty French
Editor, MVDN
5207 Weddington Drive
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Dear Betty:

Enclosed is the information on the dance figures including, revised and rewritten, the material John Pappas gave you earlier. Page 2 is a continuation of page 1. Pages 3 through 6 can each stand alone. Two subjects are on each of pages 7 and 8. I typed it this way for your convenience.

I am also enclosing just for your information a partial list of books we have researched for dances and background material.

The main purpose in writing this is to show the similarities of modern figures to their ancestors.

If you have any questions or need any clarification, feel free to call, My number is 252-3514.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Louis H. Hyll

Enclosures 2

Our Pilgrim Fathers landed on Plymouth Rock and immediately invented American square dancing. Right? There is a distinct impression that many people think so. In a way they are right. Our English ancestors brought their dancing with them, in New England as well as Virginia and the rest of the seacoast.

Most countries have some sort of square formation dance as a part of their ethnic folk dances, the most direct ancestor of American squares seems to be the French Cotillon (Anglicized as "cotillion") which the French adapted from the English longways (contra) type of dance.

Ralph Page has observed that the dance must fit the dancing space. The English danced in large public assemblies where the longways type of dance was appropriate. The French preferred dancing in their homes where their salon was square. Eventually they adapted the longways into a square for eight alternately calling it "cotillon" or "contredanse Francaise." The French used very fancy, intricate footwork, almost ballet steps in their cotillions. In comparison with country dances, the cotillion was very short, so the dancing masters wrote additional "changes" or verses to be danced between the cotillion figure in order to lengthen the dance. It was very popular in America from 1760 to 1820, but the Americans never used quite so many steps or so fancy footwork as the French. Incidentally, the heads were numbered 1 and 2, the sides 3 and 4.

Over the years the term Cotillion gradually came to mean a fancy dress ball. The Cotillion as a dance did not die, however, it merged and blended with the Quadrille, a freer, more exuberant, less intricate dance. It was presented at Almack's, perhaps the most famous of England's Assembly Rooms, in 1815 by Lady Jersey, one of Almack's patronesses. Within a year, it was brought to the U. S. and soon became the new dance sensation. That was the beginning of the end for the Cotillion.

A quadrille doesnot specifically need four couples. The Fledermaus Quadrille is danced in contra lines, couple facing couple, with any even number of couples from as few as two couples. It is a German dance of the late 19th Century. Another German quadrille, Jaegerquadrille, is danced by three men, each with a lady on either side, in three rows of three all facing the head of the hall.

The Lancers was and is a very elegant form of the quadrille. P. J. S. Richardson, an English authority, says it is an English dance. It was first danced in Dublin in 1817 and at Almack's periodically thereafter. But it was not until the 1850's that this dance took hold. Two other names for square dances are Caledonians and D'Alberts, both from the 19th Century.

These quadrille square consisted of five or six parts or dances put together into one dance.

There are many similarities in our modern square dancing to our ancestors', not only in the dances or music, but in the figures. Of course you are all familiar with circling, right and left stars, forward and back, right and left grand, and promenade. Figures such as these are common to nearly all countries and also to children's party games. Terms such as do sa do come from the French. The Cotillion and Quadrille directions originally were in French. After all, Paris had been the cultural center of the world for hundreds of years. The French term "dos a dos" literally is "back to back."

"The Allemande, as is signified by its name, is of Allemanic or German origin." (Polite and Social Dances) The term Allemande means to turn or turning. There is a couple dance named Allemande dating from the 1500's. It is danced in Varsouvianna position and, except for the turning, seems to be similar to our couple dance Varsouvianna, perhaps better known as "Put Your Little Foot."

The Caller/Teacher Manual indicates a description for an allemande dated 1811, "The man at A and the lady at B move around each other's situation back to back," which sounds like a do sa do.

There is an allemand figure done in cotillions and country dances of 200 and more years ago which is more like the back-hand jitterbug swing done in some areas in traditional or old-fashioned square dancing.

The French words "A La Main" mean "by the hand." In earlier cowboy days, one could hear cowboys say "all the men left."

The blending of these two terms may have resulted in our allemande left.

The grand square has a long and varied history. It is found in a dance, Hunsdon House, in a book of English Country dances suggesting that that dance "evolved from country or peasant dances during the 16th and 17th centuries." (Folk Dances of the British Isles) This would indicate the age of the grand square figure as 300 to 400 years. The dance is a square formation numbering 1, 2, 3, 4 clockwise instead of counter-clockwise, the opposite of today's modern square set-up. The book in which this dance is found very carefully diagrams each of the eight movements, and indicates the action is done with sixteen running steps, four on each of the four sides. The discription is much as the figure is done today.

Marlbrouk Cotillion (1808) has a modified grand square. Heads meet in center, rigadoon (a fancy step); five both hands to opposites and chasse (sashay) out to side places, rigadoon, chasse back to center and fall back to places. Sides wait the first eight beats then chasse sideways away from partners, rigadoon, chasse back to places and rigadoon. This is then repeated with the side couples moving to the center.

Howe's Complete Ballroom Handbook (1859) contains several sets in which a grand square appears. Specific instructions are given for two sides of the square but the other two sides are nebulous. First four forward to center, join opposite and chasse to the right and left to place of side couples, then chasse to right and left round to place where they meet partners. The "first four" are the head couples.

Good Morning (1926) indicates all action in the grand square as being forward, instead of facing, the sides turn their backs to each other.

In all these squares each side of the individual square is executed with four full counts with four running, chasse, or walking steps. The square sets took a large space. It is noticed today that with the smaller sets many dancers use only three steps on each side of the square, but it still takes 16 beats of music for a grand square.

Let's take a look at square thru. Certainly this is a modern figure. Right? Of course it is - with a history that goes back well over 200 years, that has its counterpart in modern English and Scottish Country dancing. They both call it "rights and lefts." The difference, you ask? Yes, there is a slight difference. When the English, the Scots, and incidentally our Colonial ancestors, dance a "right and left," after completing the figure, they immediately face the center of their set. Whereas, the modern square dancers do not turn after the final pull-by.

Incidentally, there is a figure in the Hunsdon House mentioned for grand square as being 300 to 400 years old called "a portion of a 'circular hey'." (Folk Dances of the British Isles) Heads grasp right hands (of opposite) and pass by right shoulders. Partners then grasp left hands and pass by left shoulders. This certainly is a half square thru.

This "circular hey" or early rights and lefts is the figure from which grew our more modern right and left thru. Some authors feel the grand right and left also grew out of this figure for four.

One of the extended basics, ocean wave has been around for many years. It is the basic figure in Hull's Victory, a contra dating from the War of 1812, the only difference being in the hand hold. Hull's Victory uses a "pigeon wing," that is, hands held at shoulder height.

Part of the chorus figure of the Queen of Diamonds Cotillion (1809) consists of an ocean-wave star figure similar to an allemand thar figure with the ladies joining right hands and joining left with partners for a sideways balance.

There is also an ocean wave in the third part of the Fledermaus Quadrille.

There is another ocean wave done in traditional square dancing that was danced in this area not too many years ago. Couple one dances forward and back while couple two separates and dances around couple one back to place. This is then repeated by couple two moving forward and back while couple one moves around.

Cast off, cast around, cast (a person moving around another person) is and was used in country dancing, English, Scottish, Colonial, as well as modern contra, as a method of progression.

Substitute. "Undoubtedly this movement was created to add a bit of spice and surprise into the action and to involve the inactive couple who might otherwise be 'standing out' a rather lengthy pattern. In addition, it has proven to be a truly versatile basic." (SIOASDS, The Caller/Teacher Manual, Extended Basics)

However, this movement exists in an old English Country Dance called Greensleeves. It is said to depict the turning inside out of the sleeves. The directions are given two ways: with the lead couple arching while the trailing couple skips under; and the lead couple backing under the arch of the trailing couple.

There is one particular aspect of square dancing that is truly American. That is the caller. In some old books one who calls is mentioned but seems to indicate the person who calls the name of the tune to the musicians, the name of the music and the dance being the same. The caller, as the person indicating which figure follows another, seems to have sprung into prominence during the 1850's, although there is some evidence for "calling" some forty years sooner, and was often the lead fiddler in the orchestra, perhaps the only musician.

Modern public address systems made it easier for a caller to be heard easily by large numbers of dancers. The caller really came into his own after WW II with the advent of portable amplification equipment and good, recorded music.

A Choice Selection of American Country Dances of the Revolutionary Era
Keller & Sweet

24 Early American Country Dances, Reels and Cotillions
James Morrison

The Ralph Page Book of Contras
Ralph Page

Heritage Dances of Early America
Ralph Page

Social Dances of the 19th Century
Phillip J. S. Richardson

Dances of France
Dubois/Andral

The Art of Dancing & Six Dances
Kellom Tomlinson

Down Memory Lane with Arthur Murray
Dannett & Rachel

Old Time & Sequence Dancing
Michael Gwynne

Howe's Complete Ballroom Handbook
Elias Howe

Good Morning
Mr. & Mrs. Henry Ford

World History of Dance
Curt Sachs

SIOASDS Caller/Teacher Manuals,
Basics, Extended Basics, and Contras

Prompting
Schell

Folk Dances of the British Isles

Folk Dancing in America
Eleanore Wakefield

The History of Square Dancing
S. Foster Damon

Dick's Quadrille Callbook
W. B. Dick

American Country Dances
Elizabeth Burchenal

Apologie de la Dance
F. de Lauge

English Folk Song & Dance
Iola A. Williams

The Morris Dance (11 dances)
Josephine Brower

English Country Dances

Polite and Social Dances
Marie Ruef Hofer

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