

# COUNTRY DANCE AND SONG

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# Country Dance and Song

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Cover: Wilcox's Orchestra of Keene about 1852, showing typical instrumentation of the period: cornet, clarinet, two violins, and base viol. Henry Harvey Wilcox, cornetist, at left.

## Contents

<b>The (Almost) Uncensored Phil Merrill</b>	
by Tom Phillips .....	1
<b>Nineteenth-century Leap-year Balls in Central New England</b>	
by Michael McKernan .....	10
<b>Long-sword Dancing in England</b>	
by Anthony G. Barrand .....	15
<b>Traditional Dancing and Dance Music of the Monadnock (N.H.) Region (Part II)</b>	
by Ralph Page .....	23
<b>Round Dances</b>	
by Rev. Charles B. Goss .....	30

# THE (ALMOST) UNCENSORED PHIL MERRILL

by Tom Phillips

For more than fifty years, Philip Merrill has been the master musician of the Country Dance and Song Society. He discovered English dances at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York, in the late 1920's. In 1929 he moved to New York City and began playing piano for the country-dance classes run by May Gadd, then CDSS national director. Phil was a fixture on the staff of Pinewoods Camp from the late 1930's to the early 1980's, and starting in 1949 he played every summer at the John C. Campbell Folk School in Brasstown, North Carolina. He was music director of the society from 1964 until his retirement in 1980, and until last year he played regularly for the Tuesday night dance classes at Duane Hall in Greenwich Village. Even in retirement, he still plays dance music with an irresistible joy and ferociousness: "I have never been able to be casual about playing," he says, "You have to be one hundred per cent uncasual."

Phil plays piano for country dancing, plays concertina and three-hole pipe for morris, and can call a square dance with nothing but himself and his accordion. He has also been a musical mentor for countless younger dance musicians including me. The following interview shows his musical vision and his incomparable irascible personality. It took place in January, 1984, at Phil's apartment in an ancient Manhattan hotel, where Phil has lived with his roommate, Jimmy Quillian, since 1940.

*Tom:* Let's start at the beginning. Where were you born?

*Phil:* In Maine, I'm a Maine-iac. Augusta, the capital of Maine, on the Kennebec River. Paul Bunyan was a close friend of mine. He taught me how to run the logs on the river. Us kids would run the logs out to the boom. That's why I have good balance.

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*Tom Phillips is a fiddler, caller, and dancer in the New York area and assistant professor of journalism at Columbia University.*





*Phil Merrill at the CDSS Christmas Festival in New York City, c. 1976.*

*Tom:* Is that dangerous?

*Phil:* Oh, my goodness yes, very dangerous. You know those logs could come together and crush your head like that! They'd sink, and you'd run on to the next one. But once you got out to the boom, the boom was firm, because that guided the logs into the mill. That was great training for dancing, leaping from log to log, and staying on a big one when it teetered. What better training for the morris dance, for keeping your balance on the balls of your feet? I always thought the best basis for morris dancing or country dancing would be log-running.

*Tom:* Your job was to guide the logs in?

*Phil:* We didn't have a job. The job was getting out to the boom, just for the hell of it. I don't know how kids stay alive. But I don't think kids do anything dangerous like that anymore. Other than shooting each other, but that's no fun.

*Tom:* Tell us about your education.

*Phil:* I went to public schools, and from there to the Eastman School of Music in Rochester. My father supported me for the first year, but from then on I supported myself, for four years, playing music. Playing for dancing school, ballet, playing the organ for silent movies, every kind of racket.

*Tom:* How did you start country dancing?

*Phil:* We did that in school. Melville Smith was on the faculty and he loved Cecil Sharp and all the things that were being done in England, so he organized a group of young students to do morris dancing.<sup>1</sup> I saw them dance in the theater and I went through the ceiling. So I danced and played from then on.

Smith was influential in getting them to have English dancing instead of this so-called physical education, which was stupid. My first year there we had to go over to the university and run around the balcony. So Melville got them to get Marjorie Barnett, who taught morris, sword and country dancing three times a week, as part of our schooling. And that was my downfall.

*Tom:* When did you arrive in New York?

*Phil:* In 1929. But in thirty-one, I had TB. And that took me out of active life for six years, two years in and out, and eventually four years in the Adirondacks, in hospitals.

*Tom:* When did you get involved with CDSS?

*Phil:* Well, the minute I came to New York. Marjorie Barnett had gone up to Rochester to take the Eastman School job. She had had a ghastly time in New York, because there were great battles going on. I don't know what they were about, but there were some New Jersey people who resented an English person coming over and butting in. And then May Gadd came to New York from England to take her place. And I played for her classes when the regular musician couldn't come — I played a lot.

*Tom:* What was May Gadd like back in 1929?

*Phil:* Oh, Gay was delightful, jolly, very attractive, with an hourglass figure. A very beautiful dancer. The English really work technically at their dancing. It was a very different approach — for instance, in the morris you practiced a step in detail. I don't think the morris is any better as a result. But, you know, the British are that way.

*Tom:* Is it that way traditionally?

*Phil:* Oh no, I think it was just the scholarly attitude of Sharp. He took everything seriously. I understand he was a very jolly person, but I think with professional people he was very fussy about details.

*Tom:* May Gadd was a strong personality, wasn't she?

*Phil:* Oh yes. And of course she made a lot of people mad, because she was very, uh, inelastic. I loved her, but there were times when you wanted to just throw her off the Brooklyn Bridge. But it was that kind of thing that made her able to do the job she did. It wasn't easy. As I say, there was that other element she had to face, the ones who resented her presence. So they were trying to do her in all the time. There would be these big meetings, and I remember being called up by both sides in the conflict. But I was new then, so I didn't pay any attention.

*Tom:* The society was rather small back then, right? It wasn't until the sixties or seventies that it got to its present level.

*Phil:* That's right. The beginning came with the new materials, the publication and use of the Community Dance Manuals.<sup>2</sup> At first we just did Playford dances. But thank God, eventually it changed. Just think of a whole evening of Playford dances!

*Tom:* It was May Gadd's decision to include some American dances, right?

*Phil:* Yes. At first only contras. And I called square dances when they finally did it. But I did my own square dances as well, outside of CDSS.

*Tom:* I know you went to England, too. When was that?

*Phil:* I went several times, but I stayed over there three months in fifty-two. I did a workshop in contra dances at Cecil Sharp House in London, and called American dances all over, ending up with a marvelous two weeks in Oxford.

*Tom:* Is that where you met William Kimber?<sup>3</sup>

*Phil:* Yes, Gay and I ran a party at one of the colleges at Oxford, and Kimber comes from Headington, near there, so he came over and played in the band. I was so pleased. And afterwards in this courtyard when we were saying good-bye, he was with a lady friend, and they were backing the car out, here was his concertina on the running board! And I yelled and howled and just saved that concertina. I'll never forget that, that was my good-bye to William Kimber.

*Tom:* He was quite a musician.

*Phil:* Yes. "Bean Setting" was one I remember him playing, because I was so fascinated by the three-count measure in the B music. There is a bar of three instead of two at the end, and then the A music starts right away. Some musicians don't do it the way Cecil Sharp wrote it, which is the way Kimber played it.<sup>4</sup>

*Tom:* This brings up a whole thing about when you take traditional music, and regularize it, or —

*Phil:* — you purify it.

*Tom:* Right, you purify it. And you lose something.

*Phil:* Of course. It's the most natural thing in the world. We're so used to two and two makes four, and four and four makes eight, it's alarming if something has nine instead of eight in it. It's such an awful shock to one's system. That's why it's such a relief to hear some Greek music, or music in five or nine or something.

*Tom:* Well now, you went to the Eastman School and you learned the classic style. But somehow you've managed to overcome your musical education.

*Phil:* That I disagree with. You see, I don't think there's any difference between playing "Newcastle" and playing a Beethoven sonata. Traditional music isn't any different. It's music. Oistrakh or Stern would play a morris dance just exactly as well as a traditional fiddler. Why not? There are the same musical demands. You know, you don't have to be a gutsy person who's never had a lesson in your life to play dance music well. I get a little pissed off whenever I hear something like you just said — I overcame my musical education.

*Tom:* I just meant you're not prejudiced against an extra beat, an extra measure.

*Phil:* Well, no one who is classically trained would ever be, 'cause they play them all the time. Also, it's a great advantage being able to read music. That's another painful discussion I've had with people. You know, they say the way to learn music is to learn it by ear, otherwise you're not *really* a folk musician. You have to be an ignorant musician, or you're not really a real folk musician. That's the worst b——t I ever heard in my life.

*Tom:* When you play for dancing, what are the most important things? What are your priorities?

*Phil:* Well, there are notes to be played. There is rhythm to be kept. I suppose rhythm is the most important. You could dance "Newcastle" to a drum — in fact I'd rather dance "Newcastle" to a drum than lots of people's playing.

*Tom:* Now here's where you really disagree with Cecil Sharp. Sharp said dancing depends on music, it begins with music.

*Phil:* Yes, and the first musical instrument was a drum. And people were very happy to dance to a drum. And then they developed the human voice, and all you really need is either

a human voice or a drum. Now at Pinewoods, I've known classes to stand around if the musician was late, and think they couldn't dance! I claim that any teacher who can't run a class without a musician doesn't deserve to be called a teacher.

The English used to have these examinations, to get a certificate to teach country dancing, and I always felt that part of the exam should be teaching without music. These teachers could tell you the third figure of "Parson's Farewell," but what had that got to do with teaching? There was no proof that they knew anything about the music, that they could do yup dum dum daddle ump dum dum, and give you a dancing tempo. To me it was a farce.

I preached doodling at camp all the time, it was my favorite theme. If a teacher has an inexperienced musician, he better g——d well doodle, because that's the only way you can help the musician! And that's why I would like to run a course for a lot of teachers who can't even say ta dumpta dee.

It's best to do it with the whole group at once, dancers as well as musicians. If you're calling a dance and you have musicians who've never played that tune before, how are they going to know how it goes? Say if you're doing a grand square, and you go out on the floor to do a visual demonstration, which is the great thing to do. You go out and you say just watch this figure, and you yourself go ti ta yaa ta ta taa ta ta ti taa ta taa — that immediately tells the musicians how it goes. And you haven't imposed on the crowd, and you haven't imposed on the musicians.

But now if you start the dance without that, and they've never played it before, the music will be all wrong. It can be anything, you haven't told them anything. But many times in my career, some teacher will say, "It's too fast" or, "A little slower." Now what does that mean? It means nothing! You have to say it goes ti ta yaa ta ta taa, that's all there is to it.

*Tom:* Besides rhythm, you also provide a tremendous amount of variety when you're playing for dancing.

*Phil:* Yes, that comes from experience. I'm not especially talented that way, but I was always able to improvise.

*Tom:* That variety is important, isn't it? I mean, if you play the same thing over and over again, it can get tiresome.

*Phil:* Even if you play the same thing over and over again, it requires the same involvement and concentration. Many things I do not improvise — for instance, "Hunsdon House" and things like that, which I've played thousands of times. But I have to be involved. It's funny, repetition doesn't mean boredom to me. Of course, that's the test, that's proof that they're great tunes, to stand that repetition. You know, you can't really say you're tired of those English tunes. With "Jingle Bells" or something, you'll say, Christ, if I ever hear that thing again I'm going to jump out a window. But you don't ever say that about "Morpeth Rant," or "Newcastle." I don't.

People have said to me, you've been playing "Newcastle" since 1926, how can you possibly do it? But I can sit down right now and play "Newcastle" and be just as fascinated as I was then, just as involved.



*Tom:* You're also very firm in your ideas about tempo. To me, you're the king of tempo. And that's one of the things you really get upset about, the right tempo for the dance.

*Phil:* Well, teachers have different ideas about tempo, and they should decide. But I have often been shocked at the lack of sensibility on the part of some teachers as to tempo. An undanceable tempo to a dance! That's no fun. There are tempos at which a dance is impossible to do. If a dance isn't comfortable, forget it. I can't stand these people who insist that "Morpeth Rant" is played in Morpeth like a rat race. I don't care, let them do it as a rat race. I'm not interested in rat races, and I don't give a damn whether it's traditional or not, if it's uncomfortable and people can't do it, I refuse to play it that way. I mean, who wants to do it?

*Tom:* I've also heard you express a lot of irritation about contra dances, especially jigs, played too fast.

*Phil:* Well, I'm from New England, and I must admit that New England tempos are these comfortable, casual tempos. I know I'm a little prejudiced because I heard so many traditional jigs and reels in Maine. But I know that the young crowd likes a faster tempo, I'm not objecting to that.

*Tom:* Actually, some of the young crowd agrees with you, and they're slowing it down.

*Phil:* I know. I was very pleased to hear this wonderful contra band. They're brothers, I think.

*Tom:* Randy and Rodney Miller?

*Phil:* Yes. It seemed to me they have a nice comfortable tempo. I like them very much.

*Tom:* Among your other pet peeves are complicated, "challenging" dances. Didn't you say once that "Step Stately" was the dance that ruined the Country Dance and Song Society?

*Phil:* Oh, no no. It was just that, partly as a joke, I always said Gay's insistence on doing "Hundson House" drove more people away from the society than it brought in. Those dances are fine for a group who enjoy learning that way, but they are absolutely unusable for a gathering of normal people. You see, to do it well you have to be technically equipped to move well and *slowly*. Now you know the average person does not move that well, and is unhappy at that speed. You have to be highly experienced and have sufficient control of your body to enjoy a dance like that. It's very beautiful, but when you do it with a bunch of beginners you're trying to interest, I just think it's a terrible mistake.

I've known teachers to do a program of Playford dances, and then start a dance like "Hunsdon House" or some tricky, so-called challenging dance, fifteen minutes before the end of the dance! It's good to challenge, but don't challenge them just before they say good-night.

*Tom:* You've told me that the only dances that matter are the last two on the program.

*Phil:* Exactly. And the beginning. If people have a good time, they forget the middle.



*Tom:* About contra dances, you've often said it doesn't really matter which ones you do.

*Phil:* Well now, take everything I say with a grain of salt. But contras of course are so similar. There's some like "Rory O'More" that are more complicated, that have a little difference, but most of them are just the same figures in different spots. That's why contra evenings are a great success, because they're repetitive. People are not being continually challenged. You can start a contra dance without giving instructions beforehand, there are six or eight calls that people automatically do.

*Tom:* I know you do some old-time New England squares as well. Did you learn them when you were a kid in Maine?

*Phil:* No, I used to go to dances in Maine, but they didn't do four-couple sets. They did only contras. And a circle, which was probably like a "Portland Fancy." I used to play often in grange halls, when I was in high school. We played graduations in these halls in tiny towns, and they'd do contras and some sort of circle dance. They would do "Haymakers Jig" and "Lady of the Lake" all the time. And of course, I thought these contras were just the end of the world, the most decadent thing anyone could do.

*Tom:* You were contemptuous of these contra dancers?

*Phil:* Oh, yes. Country bumpkins. Little I knew they'd be my greatest pleasure in another twenty years.

*Tom:* I suppose it's just the point of view you take.

*Phil:* Well, I loved jazz and I always played jazz, and I loved ballroom dancing, so I couldn't understand how anyone could do this stuff. So I just held my nose and looked the other way.

*Tom:* Did you play in a jazz band?

*Phil:* Yes, with six or eight people, when I was a junior in high school. Sometimes I played six nights a week. I was the youngest, all the rest were adults. I played piano, and sometimes saxophone. I consider that an important part of my background. People who've played Handel sonatas all their lives don't necessarily know tee YUMP ta dee da DA daa, although they should! As I say, there's no difference between Beethoven and a country dance, but to *them* there is, to a lot of these classical snobs. But I was glad I had that jazz.

*Tom:* What does it give you?

*Phil:* It gave me a sense of beat, not just beat but UPbeat, you know, the "pah" in the oompah. People have to have that same life, even if they're playing "Hunsdon House." You can't play "Hunsdon House" well unless you can play "Somebody Stole My Gal." It has the same upbeat as "Hunsdon House," but people don't realize this. You have to have the same dum DA dum DA dada dum. There's no difference between that and "Somebody Stole My Gal" or "It Had To Be You." You have to be up before you can come down, so if you keep up all the time, that's what makes people uncomfortable. They're dying to get down but they never get a chance, because you're always lifting them up again. That's what makes 'em mad.

Tom: And it's anger that makes them dance?

Phil: It's misery! The whole thing is just irritating people with that rhythm. It's like sticking a pin in 'em. Ow! If you don't see people twitch, you're a failure.

Tom: So it's ultimately a matter of causing pain and discomfort in the world?

Phil: Absolutely.

1. Melville Smith (d. 1962) was a noted organist and music educator. He was director of the Longy School of Music in Cambridge, MA, from 1941 to 1961.
2. A seven-volume set of traditional English and American Dances, published by the English Folk Dance and Song Society between 1949 and 1967. These are still in constant use today.
3. William Kimber (1872-1961) was a legendary concertina player and morris dancer.
4. See Cecil Sharp and Herbert C. Macilwaine, *The Morris Book*, Part I (Yorkshire, England: EP Publishing, 1974 [1912]), p. 80. Sharp actually writes it as a nine-count bar at the end of a 6/8 section. Phil says many musicians put in a rest at the end, to keep the 6/8 sequence regular. Kimber didn't. "Bean Setting" can be heard on *The Art of William Kimber*, Topic Record 12T249 Mono, available from CDSS. The record is rerecorded from old 78's, and Phil says the tunes come out faster than he remembers Kimber playing them.

# Nineteenth-century Leap-year Balls in Central New England

by Michael McKernan

*Come Ladies, now is our chance,  
To choose our partners for a dance:  
In gallantry we will appear,  
And have our time this Leap year.<sup>1</sup>*

The special leap-year activities once common in the Northeast, and perhaps throughout the country, first came to my attention in the course of my research on the history of social dancing. This article is based on nineteenth-century newspaper references from the area around Brattleboro, Vermont. The events and customs give us a glimpse of our heritage for leap year 1984. Leap year in mid-nineteenth-century New England was the occasion for reversal of some important social conventions. Every four years, women were granted the "privilege" of inviting men of their choosing to social events. Leap-year privileges carried with them the responsibility for organizing, managing, and paying for the celebrations. Such a party took place on January 17, 1856, when the ladies of Weston, Vermont, "asserted their rights" and organized a sleigh ride to North Londonderry, Vermont. They held a ball, paid the checks, and adopted as their motto, "Death to Old Bachelors."<sup>2</sup>

A "leap-year party" is simply "a party during a leap year, to which women invite men," particularly as practiced, according to one dictionary, in the 1880's.<sup>3</sup> During the period in question, people socialized in many ways, including community gatherings for plays, tableaux vivants, group singing, lectures, and concerts. Leap year events, however, usually had a specific format: almost all references to leap year mention sleigh rides, social dancing, and dining, rather than the other activities. These three activities were the popular pastimes of the era, and since most leap-year socials took place during the winter, sleighing seems a

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*Michael McKernan is a contra- and square-dance caller, teacher, and musician, and one of the fathers of the Brattleboro dawn dances.*

natural inclusion.<sup>4</sup> However, the group procession in organized sleigh rides went far beyond the simple mechanics of getting from place to place. Group sleighing was a popular entertainment by itself.

A more likely reason for the leap-year format comes from the special opportunities that allowed women to take over male roles in the courtship process. Women frequently took the driver's seat in sleighs and carriages, seated the men at the dinner table, and gallantly catered to men's whims at the dance.<sup>5</sup> These reversals of social norms were dramatic and satisfying, which may explain their leap-year popularity.

When the women took charge, they treated the men well, "danced them all night and returned home the next day."<sup>6</sup> At a hastily organized Brattleboro leap year ball in 1860,



The ladies with becoming energy and perseverance made their imprompter [*sic*] arrangements in distributing invitations, engaging carriages, &c. When the appointed evening arrived they sallied forth in carriages in search of their "fellows" whom they escorted to the Hall in excellent style, and to whose wants they ministered in truly an attentive manner. . . . The floor during the evening was managed in capital style, far exceeding the achievements of the other sex in the same department.<sup>7</sup>

At a "German," where intricate dances and waltzes were intermixed, in Brattleboro in 1884, "there were many ludicrous examples of the force of habit when some Gentleman tried to be officious but was promptly marched to his seat by the ladies."<sup>8</sup> Thirty-five couples participated in this leap-year event, dancing seven "plain figures" plus the "German." Also, in 1884, the women of Bellows Falls, Vermont, had a dance and "availed themselves of the leap-year privileges to settle the bills, etc., and very successfully closed with the game of 'the devil among the tailors.'"<sup>9</sup>

Research so far has provided documentation of leap-year customs from 1840 into the 1890's. Earlier references may be hard to find for several reasons. Small-town newspapers, which were most often displays of the interests and views of their editor/publishers, did not pay much attention to social matters until the 1840's. By the late 1850's, local items concerning dancing, sleigh rides, and music were much more common. It is likely that the same activities went on to some extent during earlier years, but were not deemed newsworthy. While many printed invitations to dances held before the 1850's still exist in museums and private collections, none of the early specimens I have seen refer to leap-year events.<sup>10</sup>

Of course, not all leap-year social events were organized by women. Since newspapers often noted specific leap-year occasions, events not so identified were probably managed and funded by men. The annual firemen's balls would have received extraordinary attention if organized as leap-year events. The Hydropath Engine Company of Brattleboro held their dance and hosted nearly 150 couples on Friday, January 6, 1860, as a conventional ball, almost certainly run by the fireman rather than the ladies.<sup>11</sup> In the same year, the Brattleboro Cornet Band, an all-male organization, held a benefit promenade concert, levee, and dance to raise money for new instruments — without mention of any role reversals.<sup>12</sup> Leap-year customs were an alternative, but did not exclude or totally replace conventional social modes during the rest of Brattleboro's year.

Most leap-year parties seem to have been organized by informal groups rather than by long-standing women's organizations. One exception is from 1876, when the Brattleboro Rebecca Lodge, the women's branch of the Odd Fellows, held a sleigh ride, dinner, and dance excursion to what is now Newfane, Vermont.<sup>13</sup> The only women's organizations commonly mentioned in mid-nineteenth-century Vermont newspapers were church societies. While they often sponsored dances as part of their yearly fund-raising activities, no reference to church groups running leap-year events has been located.<sup>14</sup>

Some people even professed to be shocked by leap-year socials. In 1856, a Brattleboro newspaper editorialized,

Leap Year is a great institution. Never before, within our recollection, have its merits been so fully tested as during the present year. From all quarters our exchanges come laden with details of balls, rides, and social parties, instituted

and carried out by the ladies who have availed themselves of the privileges of leap-year. The charming creatures find it vastly agreeable to have some voice in the selection of their partners and seem not disposed to waive this privilege. In the Greenfield [Massachusetts] papers of the present week we have particulars of a ride to Deerfield and a ball at the "Pocumtuck," given by forty-nine of the ladies of the former place. Our brother Eastman of the *Gazette* was the accompaniment of a fair damsel, while our old friend Stebbins, surnamed "Josh," was similarly provided for. To that good class of elderly dames who are given to gossip and who take "Mrs. Grundy" for authority, all this must have been particularly shocking. Happily the world still moves.<sup>16</sup>

The "shock" attributed to some older women could be an indication that the 1856 style of leap-year observance was not in vogue in previous generations. But, then, dancing and some other forms of social intercourse were always frowned upon by a segment of the population even at the peak of their general popularity.

An incident involving torn-down publicity suggests some opposition to leap-year customs. In 1868, the women of Brattleboro hosted a dance at the town hall and issued a public invitation to all men to attend. Curiously, the bills advertising this event were torn down by persons unknown.<sup>17</sup> Typically, tickets to a leap-year ball were sold to individual women who paid for themselves and their partners. An open invitation to all the men in town probably meant that no dinner was served at this event since attendance was uncertain — and the men had to pay their own way. Perhaps the men wanted better treatment.

The cost of any mid-nineteenth-century ball was substantial. Typical admission for non-leap-year dances was two or three dollars per couple, "full bill." Full bill included a meal, admission to the hall, and, often, horse keeping. Alternative to the last item, hired carriages might call for people at an added cost of twenty-five or fifty cents per couple. Some balls had admission prices of five dollars or more. An 1856 leap-year event cost \$1.50 for a Guilford, Vermont, party. An 1860 event in Moravia, New York, which had the motto "Our Time Has Come," cost two dollars. Calculations from U.S. Government statistics suggest that an 1850 dollar had at least twelve times the purchasing power of a 1980 dollar, so each woman paid the equivalent of about \$24 dollars to entertain her beau.<sup>18</sup> Men might well have been enthusiastic about the leap-year custom, but the dislocations in women's personal finances caused by leap-year activities might have been enormous. In 1860, girls doing "chamber work" at a Brattleboro spa were paid a wage of two dollars per week.<sup>19</sup> Direct costs of taking a man to a leap-year ball could have used up a week's pay before even thinking about a fancy ball gown.

Some of the elaborate, gender-differentiated role-playing of the past has been abandoned in modern society. It is often hard even for the country dancers of today to understand the pleasures that were enjoyed in the dances and figures of the old days, though a number of them are still being danced in the 1980's. Leap-year customs provide a faint mirror of nineteenth-century behavior that gives a clearer picture, through inversion, of the distinctions between women's and men's roles in social dancing and other settings. The question of what the effects of this practice of role reversal were on the people involved might be answered simplistically: "merriment." But the irony couldn't have been totally lost on women as they pioneered the cause of social and political equality.



1. Leap-year ball invitation, March 9, 1894, Plymouth Vermont; in the Vermont Historical Society broadsides collection, Montpelier, Vermont.
2. Brattleboro *Vermont Phoenix*, February 2, 1856; "Death to Old Batchelors" seems to have been a common concept in the nineteenth century. Various other references lead the author to believe that this was based on the idea that such men were not contributing to the progress of the nation.
3. *A Dictionary of Americanism*, Mitford M. Mathews, ed. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1951), p. 963. The inclusion of "leap-year party" in this particular work suggests that it was considered to be a predominantly American custom; however, many European references also exist.
4. One reference to a summertime leap-year party in the *Vermont Phoenix*, July 21, 1860, tells of a Columbus's Birthday celebration in Newfane, Vermont. Another reference has been found to an October event (see note 18).
5. There are several references to women, in lieu of men, driving to leap-year events, including this verse from a song composed and sung by Mr. Fuller of Lowell [Massachusetts] for a Stage Driver's Ball held in Concord, New Hampshire, on Friday, January 10, 1840, and described in the Bellows Falls, Vermont, *World of Music*, 1:2, p. 16, of the following week — collection of Richard Michelman, Brattleboro, Vermont:

To the single females who ardently strive,  
Yet fear it's too late a good bargain to drive,  
to make their PROPOSALS to TRANSPORT the MALES.

The pun is derived from the stage driver's competition to transport the mails.

6. *Vermont Phoenix*, February 25, 1860.
7. *Vermont Phoenix*, March 3, 1860.
8. *Vermont Phoenix, Record and Farmer*, February 1, 1884.
9. *Vermont Phoenix, Record and Farmer*, January 18, 1884.
10. See *The American Book of Days*, Jane M. Hatch, ed. (New York: Lanford Wilson Co., 1978), p. 218, for more European background. In 1868, a Massachusetts paper printed the following: "It has been remarked that the ladies do not appear to appreciate the privileges of leap-year. The following is the old Saxon law on the subject: 'Albeit, as often as leape yeare dothe occur, the women holdeth prerogative over the menne in the matter of courship, love and matrimonee: so that when the ladie proposthe it shall not be lawful for menne to say her nae, but shall receive her proposal in all good courtesie.' Girls, this law has never been repealed." — Greenfield, Massachusetts, *Gazette & Courier*, February 10, 1868.
11. *Vermont Phoenix*, January 7, 1860.
12. *Vermont Phoenix*, January 28, 1860.
13. *Vermont Phoenix*, January 18, 1876.
14. There are many references to ladies' societies holding fairs and festivals, some of which included dancing. The *Vermont Phoenix*, January 5, 1856, advertises one event in Chesterfield, New Hampshire, featuring the Cochran & Cole Quadrille Band.
15. *Vermont Phoenix*, February 16, 1856.
16. Brattleboro *Vermont Record & Farmer*, January 29, 1868.
17. Prices are based on invitations and related items in the author's collection.
18. Leap-year-party invitation, December 19, 1856 — collection of Richard Michelman. Dance invitation, October 26, 1860, from Moravia, New York — collection of Kit Barry, Brattleboro, Vermont. My estimate of 1850's purchasing power is based on *Historical Statistics of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of the Census, 1976).
19. *Vermont Phoenix*, August 8, 1860, advertisement.

# Long-sword Dancing in England

## Part I: Definition and Resources

by

Anthony G. Barrand

Ceremonial or “spectacular” dances associated with seasonal occasions in England are now commonly, but confusingly, referred to under the general rubric of morris dances. Until the early twentieth century, a morris event was restricted almost exclusively to participation by men and was performed at one distinct time of the year. A large variety still exist in England and many have been revived or borrowed by contemporary groups throughout England and North America. Cecil Sharp, who collected and notated many of these dances between 1905 and 1914, distinguished two forms of “sword” dance within the broad category of the morris: “Long-Sword” and “Short-Sword,” although it is by no means clear that these terms had much currency among traditional dancers.

### *Distinctive Features of the Sword Dance*

Both forms of sword dance are distinguishable from other types of morris by virtue of the fact that the performers, usually numbering between five and eight, carry a metal or wooden bar which links them in an unbroken chain for most of the dance. This use of the bar, today commonly the size and shape of a yardstick, is significant, for there are implements such as sticks, handkerchiefs and, even, real swords present in other forms of the morris but the primary function of these implements in other genres is not one of linking the dancers to each other. The student of the dance must be careful in examining performances called “sword” or “dirk” dances, such as are found on the Isle of Mann or among the Basques, to notice that the weapon is not used to join the dancers together.<sup>1</sup> Such performances are not related to the English sword dances although linked dances in Flemish communities (staves and “swords”) and from Spain (handkerchiefs) probably are.<sup>2</sup>

Sword dances differ from other English forms of the morris in terms of the locations in which they are found. The sword dances were, until recently, confined exclusively to the old English counties of Yorkshire, Durham, and Northumberland (and perhaps North Lincoln-

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Anthony G. Barrand, PhD., is Associate University Professor of Anthropology at Boston University and a specialist in English morris and sword dance.

shire) and appeared during the twelve days of Christmas, typically on December 26th (Boxing Day), New Year's Day, or Plough Monday (first Monday after Twelfth Night). The long-sword dances as collected in this century were performed by six and/or eight performers in Yorkshire and southern parts of County Durham, whereas the short-sword, or "rapper," dances included movements for five, six, or seven dancers.

The implements for the long-sword were and are, obviously, longer than those used for the rapper, but the most distinctive difference is that the long-sword is performed with relatively stiff or inflexible links 30-38 inches long whereas the rapper requires a device that can be bent double and has a swivel handle on one end. The different dances might be better labeled "stiff" and "flexible" rather than "long" and "short."

All of the English sword dances share a feature not always found in linked dances performed on the European mainland: the "lock", "rose" or "nut," in which the swords are interwoven in a star configuration that is held aloft at some point in the dance by one of the performers. A special feature that emerges in the long-sword dance is that the center of the lock is large enough to accommodate a head after the swords are tightly interwoven. Many of the dances include a moment in which an extra performer (the "captain," "witch" or "fool") stands or kneels in the center of the ring of dancers while the lock is made around his neck. At Grenoside and at Loftus, the lock is "broken" as each dancer pulls this sword out of the lock and the extra dancer falls or kneels down. In the Handsworth and Kirby Malzeard dances, as danced by Barnsley long-sword dancers, the clown or captain carries the lock off at the climax of the dance. The placing of the lock around the neck of a victim is not unknown in the rapper sword dance although the swords are not, indeed cannot be, tightened. The Basque Sword Dance of San Sebastian climaxes with the captain being raised by four of the dancers as he stands on a platform made by interweaving the daggers.<sup>3</sup>

### *Where Is It Performed?*

In *The Sword Dances of Northern England*, Sharp observed that the sword-dance is "essentially an indoor dance."<sup>4</sup> This may seem surprising to those familiar with the Cotswold morris but both forms of the sword dance were just as commonly danced in the pubs or the kitchens of large houses as outside. As temperate a climate as England may boast, it can still get very cold at Christmas and some traditional dancers I have talked with saw no special virtue in dancing outside.<sup>5</sup>

### *What Are the "Swords"?*

Melusine Wood (1945) argues very cogently that the term "sword" was in common use in England to refer to anything of size and shape similar to a sword and did not necessarily imply a weapon of offense. In particular, she suggests that the implements used for both the rapper and the long-sword dance are derived from trade tools. Her best guess is that the long sword as such was a "scutch blade" or "scutcher," a tool used in the preparation of flax. She acknowledges that there is a possibility for an alternative origin in the wooden "sword" used by sailors for weaving or plaiting mats, belts, and gripes. Douglas Kennedy (1939) suggests that this alternative origin might explain why the Flamborough dancers carry their

wooden swords in the left hand since sailors would work the weaving sword with the left hand to keep the right free to adjust the warp and weft. This provides a very elegant explanation for the fishing village of Flamborough, but Haxby, the other village to use a wooden implement, is many miles from the sea.

These arguments must be tempered by two observations. First, English working-class men would not have commonly owned swords as weapons. The sword was a gentleman's right, and peasants fought with pikes, cudgels and bows. There may, of course, have been a few swords around that were brought home as souvenirs of a foreign war. Second, however, there are records of European dances which made use of weapons. The sword dance of the Nuremburg Cutler's Guild is an accessible example.<sup>6</sup> This could mean that the dances had their origin from actions with real weapons but were continued with trade tools as substitutes.

The swords, it must be noted, do not have sharpened edges. They are not used as weapons at any time during any of the English or European dances. In some locations, such as Sleights, they are decorated with ribbons tied through a hole drilled near the "point." They serve, then, not as weapons but as links between the dancers and this must be the starting point for any consideration of origins.

### *Where Do the Dances Originate?*

Linked dances in circular formations seem to have been common in many cultures for a very long time (Sachs, 1937), but there is no evidence of a linked dance with implements in Britain before the end of the sixteenth century.<sup>7</sup>

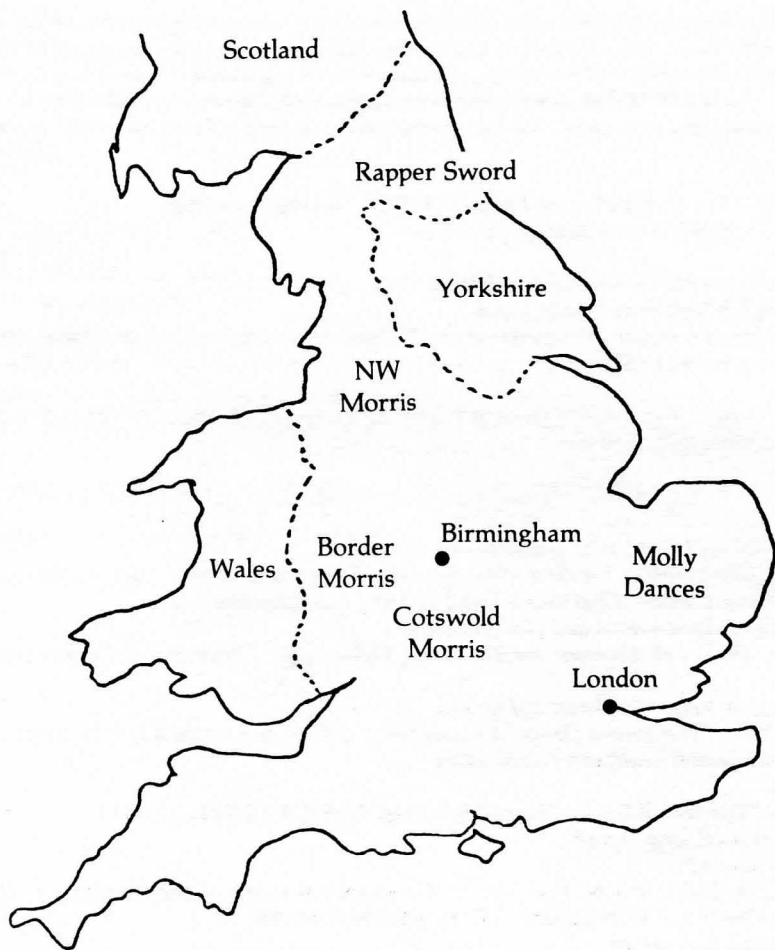
The stress, here, must be on the notion of "linked" sword dance. Both Strutt (1801) and Brand (1913) refer to dances and pastimes involving the dextrous use of swords by one or more dancers and tests or displays of agility involving jumping around and over the points of sharp swords. Olaus Magnus (1555) describes a linked sword dance, and after the seventeenth century there are numerous reports of the persistence of the sword dance in the northern counties.<sup>8</sup>

But is the dance "descended from pagan rituals"?<sup>9</sup> Readers familiar with my criticism of the survival or fertility-rite theory of the origins of the morris (Barrand, 1980) will anticipate that my response is in the negative. The most current thinking based upon the evidence is that the sword dance as we know it today is descended directly from a set of displays involving swords created among German guilds of miners. These artisans traveled around Europe during the late medieval period opening up new mines and advising local entrepreneurs on the operation of these investments. One finds sword dances in places where the cartel operated. The earliest references are from Nuremburg in 1350 and Dorcracht, Holland, in 1392.<sup>10</sup> Whether the guilds based their inventions on dances that were extant in some part of Europe is not known. There is no evidence of any similar dance prior to this time but there are those who argue that there must have been linked dances that were passed on orally but which were not observed or commented upon. I prefer to speculate that the invention of complex spectacular dances needed two things that only became available during the long period of prosperity which marked the end of the so-called Dark Ages: enough leisure time for practice and for creative activity and enough wealth among either

the population or the participants to cover the significant expenses of costumes and implements.

What can be said with certainty, however, is that the dances survived into this century and to this day because they served an important function or need within the community and among the dancers themselves. As often as not, the motivation was to collect money at a time of the year when people felt like parting with it and were in need of entertainment. Within Yorkshire and County Durham, the sword dance with its attendant songs or play seems to have thrived throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and dances still maintain active regionally distinct styles. These styles have often been obscured by the teaching of the EFDSS and the CDSS as based on Sharp's three volumes of notations. The aesthetic features of the dance as currently practiced in Yorkshire will be the subject of the second part of this article.

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*Map of England outlining the old county of Yorkshire, the locus of most collected long-sword dances, and showing the approximate regional centers for other forms of the morris.*



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The references listed here are all reasonably accessible to the North American student of the dance. The reader interested in references that occur in sources available only in English libraries or collections can obtain a more complete accounting from the Vaughan Williams Library at Cecil Sharp House, Headquarters of the English Folk Dance and Song Society, 2 Regent's Park Road, London. The late Dr. Russell Worley prepared good bibliographies on both the sword and the morris dances and the librarian will supply these upon request. The bibliography indicates the genre and those sources with usable dance notations.

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# Traditional Dancing and Dance Music of the Monadnock (N.H.) Region (Part II)

by Ralph Page

*Editor's note: This is the second part of a two-part article. Part I described the history and evolution of country dancing in the region.<sup>1</sup> Part II describes the bands, old-time fiddlers, and fiddle traders of the Monadnocks, followed by accounts of the old-time dance events, customs, and costumes of the region taken from local newspapers of the nineteenth century.*

## *Bands, Fiddlers, and Fiddle Traders*

A variety of instruments were used in the makeup of the old-time dance orchestra. From an item in the *New Hampshire Sentinel* for November 13, 1879, we read that the "Keene Quadrille Band was reorganized for the season of 1879-80, with the following artists: E.S. Paramenter, first violin; F. Harlow, second violin; C.H. Holton, flute; James Spencer, clarinet; T. J. Allen, cornet; M. M. Smith, trombone; C. F. Holton, basso & prompter." This would be the typical dance orchestra of that period. Piano and drums were added around the turn of the century. When I was growing up early in the century, a typical orchestra consisted of two violins, cornet, clarinet, and piano. Occasionally, a bass viol was added if there was someone in town who could play it. We didn't think too highly of a small orchestra of three or four pieces that included a set of drums in its makeup. We thought that the drummers "clap trap" distracted from the tune.

For generations, the dancers of the Monadnock region have been "orchestra oriented" instead of fiddle oriented. Fiddlers were deemed important to the success of a dance, but other instrumentalists were deemed worthy of mention. The names of bands, prompters, and band members that I have come across most frequently in the later nineteenth century are worthy of notice. Bands included Dickinson's of Swanzey, Pratt's of Gilsum, Appleton's of Peterborough, Second Regiment Orchestra of Keene, Maynard and Wheeler's of Keene, Bachellor's of Fitzwilliam, the Keene Quadrille Band, the Reynold Sisters of Keene, Barrett's of Munsonville, and Goodnows of East Sullivan. Prompters mentioned in dance advertisements included F. L. Roundy of Gilsum, Wallace Dunn of Munsonville, George Long of

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*Ralph Page is the dean of New England country-dance callers and editor of the country-dance journal Northern Junkett from his home in Keene, N.H.*

Keene, and C. F. Holton of Keene. Band members included T. S. Allen and Will Barrington, cornetists of Keene, and Samuel Rockwood, bass violist of Swanzey. Ed Waite was a cornetist of Dublin whose playing as an encore of "The Last Rose of Summer" is said would have brought tears to the eyes of a marble statue.

Locally, the Beedle Orchestra was thought to be the equal of any of the big-city organizations that boasted paid players. Consisting of twelve pieces, it gave the dancers the joy of dancing to a "full sound." Edward Bagley, its trombonist, later became famous as the composer of the "National Emblem" march, played by concert bands all over the world. The Jim Connors Orchestra of Surrey was famous for their galops, which drew a crowd anywhere in the region. Jim Connors, the leader, played fiddle and trombone, his brother Charley played banjo, and the team included Roland Whitney piano, Frank Naramore cornet, and a drummer, Ed Worsley. Of course the music varied. A newspaper account dated February 17, 1870, describes a ball given in the flag-draped Cheshire Hall by the Grand Army of the Republic veterans by noting, "The music by the Keene Quadrille Band was excellent. The Grand Army Quadrille arranged expressly for the occasion by Prof. Merrill and containing many of the bugle calls which were so familiar to those who were in the service was received with universal enthusiasm."

The old time fiddlers I remember were a lively crew. There were flocks of fiddlers and peddlers at sheep-shearing days in the Connecticut River valley, and those days often ended with a sheep-shearer's ball. When you say that "John Doe" was the best fiddler in the Monadnock region you are treading on dangerous ground, because every fiddler worth his salt is the best fiddler in the world to somebody! When I was growing up in Munsonville, if you knew that Chester Towne, Romy Farr, Levi Messer, Forrest Barrett, Arthur Maynard, or Herman Wright was the lead fiddler in the orchestra, you knew that it would be good music, properly played. Later, there was Gene Gober, Russ Allen, Lawrence "Rocky" Carroll, Al Quigley, and Dick Richardson in the same category. Today, we put Harvey Tolman, Jack Perron, and Rodney Miller up there with the best in the business.

Itinerant fiddlers used to travel the county staying the night or a couple of days at various homes, one night of which was devoted to playing their music for the folks in town. Word was passed around and young and old made a visit to the home to listen to the concert of dance music and folk-song tunes. After playing for an hour or so, the fiddler would pass the hat, collecting money for his concert. One of the better itinerants was a blind man known simply as "Blind Dunbar." He always drew an appreciative audience, and he was good enough to hire a town hall occasionally and charge an admission to all who came.

All of those fiddlers had real personality. One of them used to put on a fancy calico coat every time he played, and he soon got to be called just "Calico Jim." Chester Towne of Munsonville was a top-notch fiddler at the turn of the century. He was an admirable first violin with an orchestra, but he would only play when he wanted to. For years he was thought to be a tippler because sitting by his chair he always had a whiskey bottle from which he imbibed freely between dances. One night someone sneaked a nip from the bottle and discovered that it was cold tea. Many years later, I purchased his violin at auction for three dollars and taught myself to play on it. John Taggart of Sharon and Peterboro had an orchestra with a fine reputation, and he wrote contra-dance tunes as well, notably "John A's

Hornpipe," "Sharon City," "Russell's Jig," and "Elisha Frederick's Tune." His songs and music are described in H. Thorne King's *Sliptown: The History of Sharon, New Hampshire*.<sup>2</sup>

Charlie Cavender and Elwyn Barrett of Peterboro were another pair of gifted musicians. A left-handed fiddler, Cavender was said to be able to play when sound asleep. He couldn't read music, but he had a remarkable ear. As a boy, he would drop a pile of wood on the way to his mother's woodbox and race for his fiddle to play tunes that he was trying to remember before they could leave his head. Barrett played the bass viol and when he got excited would even play the melody of "Chorus Jig" or "Fisher's Hornpipe." In those days, the bass viol was always bowed and never picked, and it must have been a spectacle to see him bowing "Fisher's Hornpipe" with his swallow-tail coat flying around behind him.

One of the best fiddlers in the 1930's was Lawrence Holmes. A musical family, the Holmes brothers originated a dance called "The Merry Dance" and wrote the music for it. It was popular for many years in Stoddard, Nelson, Hancock, and Antrim, New Hampshire. One night when the Munsonville Orchestra was playing for a dance in the Stoddard Town Hall, a sudden snow storm trapped everyone — or at least gave them an excuse to go on dancing. About three o'clock the story goes, the orchestra began to play "The Merry Dance," and the prompter, my uncle Wallace Dunn, let it go on and on until Will Story, the cornetist, laid his cornet across his knees and demanded to know in a loud voice "if this is a dance or a G. D. overture!"

Years ago there were men in the region known as "fiddle traders." Forrest Barrett of Peterboro and Leon Hill of Hillsborough were the best known; others were Frank Steele of Roxbury and Dick Richardson of Marlboro. Hill and Barrett were trained musicians and excellent violinists and were obsessed by fiddle trading. They would draw the bow caressingly across the strings of their own fiddles and get hair-raising screeches out of the other fellows'.<sup>3</sup> I have traded with each, each time having to give a little "boot" to get a better fiddle than the one I traded. Al Quigley and I used to visit Leon Hill with joy because he inevitably got to playing the old-time quadrilles from orchestrations that he owned. He gave me two pointers: "When selecting a violin, play it yourself, hear someone else play it, and play it in company with other instruments"; and "I'd rather have a violin evenly bad than unevenly good."

Both Hill and Barrett owned good violins they would sell only for cash, but each owned a dozen or more, some of commercial make, that were trading stock. They knew their trading stock by name, identified by the fiddlers who had played them, by the place they came from, or by some quirk that marked them. There was the "dark Keene," the "light Keene," the "Blind Rice," the "Joe Bumblebee" once owned by a French woodsman so called. This last one was a real good fiddle, by far the best of the trading stock. I got it from Leon Hill and soon after sold it to Gene Gober of Keene, who still owns it. There was the Bertha Mason, the Giff Steele, Bart Steele's Boston, the Rumrill Maginni, the Arey, the Emery — and Barrett had a long monologue about who had or had not owned the REAL Emery. There was even "the fiddle the ham fell on": an early owner had brought it home after fiddling for a dance and left it on the kitchen table directly under a home-cured ham that hung from a beam overhead; during the night the string broke, and the ham fell and bashed in the top of the fiddle; cleverly repaired, it bore that name forevermore.



Barrett, who was a veterinary doctor, had three remedies for fiddles, or so we used to say: red ink, shoe blacking, and horse liniment. He had a compulsion to round off the corners of the bridge of every fiddle that passed through his hands. He and Hill always claimed that the other got the best of every trade they made together. Many times they swapped "even up" but each one to keep his own G-string. Their collections of violins and Dick Richardson's—who said he had 25 of them altogether—have all now disappeared, and I don't know what has become of them. Barrett and Hill used to speak in awed tones of the "Conant violins." Conant lived in Brattleboro and made superlative violins, all dark colored and many almost black, and considered the best that could be obtained in the Monadnocks.

### *Dance Events Before 1900*

The Monadnock region featured a great variety of dances throughout its history. Firemen's balls and promenades were common. Election-year balls were numerous, as newspaper stories reveal. Leap year set the ladies free to run balls, sometimes closing the hotel bars and limiting the gents to only one "segar." Kitchen junkets were famous, and a few farmhouses had ballrooms built into them to accommodate dancers, sometimes up attic, on the second floor, or even over the woodshed; such was the Caleb Wright place in Sullivan, Tom Hasting's home in East Sullivan, the Balcom place in Stoddard, the old Sumner Fisher place in Munsonville, and one on Beech Hill in Keene. Sleighing parties finishing up in late-night balls are frequently described in the newspapers of the region, and special trains are reported as having carried parties of dancers to other towns for dances, sometimes getting snowbound on the trip. Calico balls required ladies to dress in calico dresses, and at least one pillowcase-and-sheet ball is recorded as being an amusing event to watch at Walpole in 1876. In 1886 in Keene, 175 people danced at a Washington's-birthday ball in powdered wigs, silk knee britches, buckle shoes, and velvet coats, with ladies appropriately attired. Once a month dances were held by the Grange, Masons, Odd Fellows, Knights of Columbus, Hibernians, and other organizations. The following material is only a small part of what I have collected from local newspapers.

By the way, the region was well aware of its own tradition. On January 15, 1886, the *Cheshire Republican* noted, "We are in ownership of invitation cards, for social balls, given in the years 1814, 1815, and 1818. They are tastefully printed on the back of playing cards. . . . We also have one for a sleigh ride and ball, from Capt. Breek's Assembly Rooms, Westmoreland. The card is headed with this question: 'Fugit Irreparabile Tempus.' It may be interesting to young people, in getting up dances, to know something about how they were managed in earlier times." Another correspondent in the same issue wrote that Alfred Farwell, Chesterfield's oldest man, told him that it was the duty of floor managers to select gentlemen's partners for the ball; if the ladies declined they were left without partners. On his first dance he escorted his partner to the ballroom, each walking at arm's length from the other, as too many married people of the present day now do, he continued.

For many of the fancy-dress balls, professional orchestras were imported from Boston or Worcester to furnish music. Inevitably, the balls opened with an hour-long concert to which a separate admission was charged. Overtures by the whole orchestra and solo numbers by the more talented individuals were featured. Few local orchestras could compete with the

quality of music thus offered, though Atherton's of Peterboro and Beedle's of Keene could certainly do so, and did. Attendance varied, but as many as fifty to sixty couples turned out on even the worst winter nights and attendance of 150 or more is commonly reported. The New Hampshire *Sentinel* advertised the Firemen's Ball to celebrate Washington's birthday as follows, "The exercises of the evening will consist of Singing, Sentiments, etc., interspersed with Music by the Keene Brass Band and other entertainments — to conclude with Dancing. Music by the Keene Quadrille Band, seven pieces. The Dancing will be under the direction of Kendall Crossfield, with competent Assistants designated by a Rosette" (February 11, 1859).

Behavior was a regular concern. The *Sentinel* of December 24, 1874, announced the January 1 dance saying, "It is very gratifying to learn that the assembly dances, held once in two weeks at the town hall [of Winchester], are conducted with commendable decorum, and are exercising a refining influence upon the young ladies and gentlemen who attend them." To the *Sentinel* from a Chesterfield correspondent on January 15, 1874, came the note, "The village managers present one item which our friends at the Centre would do well to copy . . . Strangers have to do the best they can for partners, having to look on all evening or walk up to a strange lady and invite her, WITHOUT AN INTRODUCTION, to dance, which is repulsive to a well bred gentleman, and embarrassing to the lady . . . Possibly this friendly hint may remind the committee of their duties in the future." A leap-year dance by the ladies Universalist society of Hinsdale in 1880 was reported as "a decorous dancing party. The most audacious youngster did not dare to execute 'the double shuffle,' even to the entrancing strains of Pinafore by the orchestra." But all was not always smooth, as Richmond's "C.M." complained on January 12, 1884: "The dance at J. Allen's last Friday evening was well attended, 53 tickets being sold. Most of those in attendance came for a good time; while a few from Winchester and Swanzey sought to make the night hideous, insulting the peaceful ones and rendering much unpleasantness. If young men cannot go out of town and conduct themselves in a gentlemanly manner they had better stay at home. A responder told the "delicate" C. M. that he had something "loose in his mental machinery."

A variety of occasions called for dances. The Cold River *Journal* reported of a "supplementary" dance after a storm cancelation in February 1885, "The 'high-toned' sometimes called the 'Codfish aristocracy' were not there. The common folks — the laborers, the 'muscle' of society were there — and they all had a good time." C. D. Colton's "old-time popular Thanksgiving dances" at the Alstead Hotel in Alstead carried on a tradition from the Humphrey House before him. O. H. Harding opened his newly refurbished hotel in South Stoddard on March 20, 1874, with a late dance to the East Sullivan Quintet Band. The Cheshire *Republican* (March 1, 1874) described a celebration in the new Lower Asheulot schoolhouse, furnished mostly at the expense of Captain Ansel Dickinson: "The exercises consisted mainly in what most people take pleasure in — dancing, to the superior music from Slate's Band, relieved at times by the music of the 'old line,' consisting of two violins and a clarinet." When Christopher Robb, lumber baron and woodenware manufacturer rebuilt his burned-out factories in South Stoddard, a dance celebrated their reopening on October 15, 1880: "About two hundred ladies and gentlemen were present. The East Sullivan Quadrille Band of five pieces furnished music for dancing in the upper story of the mill, which was

enjoyed until midnight, when supper was announced and all repaired to the lower level. . . . After supper, dancing was resumed and continued until early morning." In Chesterfield, early in March, 1881, Mr. and Mrs. Worcester Farr celebrated their golden anniversary by leading two hundred guests in the "ancient figure 'Reel of Eight.' "

During the winter months a popular pastime for the young dancers of Keene was to arrange a "sleighting party" to a nearby town for the purpose of holding a dance in that particular town's hall. The pages of three country weekly newspapers mention a dozen or so every winter. They went something like this: A group of us would start thinking it would be nice to have a sleigh ride to Marlow, or maybe Gilsum, Hinsdale or Winchester, and have a dance in the local town hall. Once in a while we'd like to have supper at a small hotel in the town followed by general dancing. We would contact the owner of the hotel, discuss the costs of a supper and a dance. Then, if all were agreeable a time for setting out on the drive would be set as well as a rendezvous so that we would all drive to the place in a long line of sleighs, each equipped with strings of sleigh bells draped across the horses' shoulders. Occasionally we would bring our own musicians with us. At other times we would engage the services of the town's own orchestra — and there were several excellent small town orchestras in the area.

One such sleighting party was written up in the *Cheshire Republican* for January 21, 1882, and was remembered and talked about for years after the actual event took place. Old-time and modern (1882) costumes were worn and sleighs up to fifty and a hundred years old were mustered out. One team of matched chestnut horses was driven by a family coachman who sounded his English post horn going and coming, to the disgust of a correspondent in Gilsum who claimed it could be heard five miles away. Some of the costumes were as follows: "Miss Pittsinger wore a scarlet pelerine, fox fur victorine with muff to match, 104 years old, and pumpkin hood; Mr. W. R. Porter, a fur coat and very ancient beaver hat; Miss Sherman, a blue silk pumpkin hood lined with cherry satin and a black cassock; Mr. W. C. Stone, a fur coat of American bison and black bell-crowned beaver hat. The party occupied Warren's pung, drawn by a trotter with running mate, on which were sleigh bells distinctly heard a mile away. . . . Miss Alexander was adorned with dark blue shawl with palm leaf figures, and a Florence straw poke bonnet; a bandbox over fifty years old, made by one Hannah Davis, was taken along, in which to keep the bonnet when not in use; Mr. D. W. French appeared in dress parade, in George Foster's ulster, a Horace Greeley hat and a red, white and blue muffler, three yards in length. This couple was merry in an old Stewart sleigh drawn by a spirited horse with strings of melodious bells. Miss Hattie Locke looked charming in a lovely black silk velvet bonnet, purchased in New York, twenty-five years ago; her hands were hid in a fitch muff, much admired when in style, measuring fourteen inches in length and thirty-six in circumference." Needless to say there is much more. When they arrived the Marlow Quadrille band started up the dancing in the hall adjoining Colonel Pett's Forest House hotel, on "the spring floor of which was a novelty to many." A hot turkey supper and more dancing followed, until early in the morning when the party returned in a temperature recorded as 26 degrees below zero, and a few "slightly frozen" ears were reported.

The variety of dances seems endless. "Old Folks" balls at various times in the 1880's

featured "Money Musk," "Fisher's Hornpipe," "Speed the Plough," and "Hull's Victory." Quadrille bands often provided the music. "The Big Six Assemblys" of Keene in the 1880's and well into the 1890's provided splendid balls in a hall that was claimed to be New Hampshire's best. The ball described in a newspaper item on February 14, 1890, featured the Germania Band of Boston, with violinist Edith Christie and prompting by Mr. Percy Hayden. The hall was electric lighted, and catered refreshments were served at intermission at eleven o'clock. The *Cheshire Republican* of March 1, 1877, described a Masonic ball with Greene's Band of Fitchburg: "The ball itself was not fairly set in motion until 9 o'clock when the grand march commenced, lasting until the signal for forming sets for the quadrille was given. The conspicuous regalia of the Sir Knights, the neat, black suits of the civilians and the rich, pretty and stylish dresses of the ladies blended in happy effect as they flitted hither and yon in the many labyrinths of the intricate quadrille or the dreamy waltz. At midnight the party adjourned to the dining hall where they partook of a bountiful supper. . . . After supper, the dancing was resumed, and there being twenty-four dances on the programme the festivities were prolonged until nearly daybreak."

My mother's first ball was the dance given by Christopher Robb on October 15, 1880. She went with her father Isaac Dunn, and brother Wallace, with whom she danced many times during the evening. Uncle Wallace used to say that "he always liked to dance with Laurie because she never danced through a figger — she floated through it." In other words, she was light on her feet. I have heard mother say many times, how proud she was to dance Pat'nella with her father at this particular ball. Pat'nella was the showcase dance of the era for all the best dancers, and Grandfather Dunn was considered one of the best in the region. Needless to say the record could go on to include the firemen's balls and the Swanzey "Old Line Dance" referred to in Part I, which ran from 5:30 to midnight with every dance a contra dance, and accompanied by a turkey dinner and poetic readings for intermission.

In a current history of Jaffrey, a chapter about town recreation states that "the best orchestra had three pieces — two violins and a spittoon. When the spittoon was filled, the dance was over!"<sup>4</sup> And so is this article.

1. "Traditional Dancing and Dance Music of the Monadnock (N.H.) Region — Part I" in *CD&S*, 13, omitted footnotes to S. Foster Damon's *History of Square Dancing* on paragraphs one and five, p. 3, and on the first paragraph of p. 4, which should have carried attribution to Damon's excellent work. Newspaper accounts from the Keene (New Hampshire) *Sentinel* are on microfilm at the Keene Library; a number of other newspaper items are from the Cheshire County Historical Society in Keene.

2. H. Thorne King, Jr., *Sliptown* (Rutland, Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1965).

3. Howard N. Chase, "Fiddle Traders," *New Hampshire Profiles*, 4:4 (1973). Chase never knew Barrett but might have known Hill, and some of the information is my recollection and some his.

4. Albert Annett and Alice E. E. Lehtinen, *History of Jaffrey New Hampshire*, vol. 2 (Peterborough, New Hampshire: Transcript Printing Co., 1937).

# Round Dances

by Rev. Charles B. Goss

POETS and novelists have idealized the pleasures of dancing since the dawn of society, as containing about as much pleasure to each throb as anything ever invented. I am not going to show that round dances are not a great pleasure, for they are. But I will show that the pleasure is entirely such a physical one as no pure girl or woman or man should enjoy outside of marriage. In other words, that all such pleasures are wicked. I do not mean that everyone who dances round dances is lewd or lives an adulterous life, but that at such places the holiest ties of marriage are made a jest. I have had a youth as joyous and gay as a bird, but no unholy joys of a round dance have marred its purity. Young girls who feel the fires of this pleasure coursing through their veins in a sensuous flood do not analyze the sensations. They do not know what it means, except that it is most superlatively pleasant.

This feeling is a part of love. In its highest pleasures love is the sweetest of all earthly bliss, but people are not ready for their daughters to learn this fact outside of matrimony and through the delights of a waltz. Pleasures are not to be enjoyed if they are wrong. I know no Christian but would admit that the highest pleasures of love are wrong if indulged in outside the marriage state, and yet this dancing pleasure is the beginning of that very thing. No language can describe to the young girl the full nature of the emotions of a first round dance. But when felt, they are yearned for more and more. It is a part of the wonderful emotion of love, and through this emotion comes the love and life of the world. Some try to get around this and deny it and say, "You judge others by yourself." Yes, I do admit, that I do in this, judge others by myself. There are emotions and sensations common to every man and woman. This is one; it is the source of the greatest and supremest pleasures, as it is of the keenest and most painful sorrows. Before marriage the sexes must experience for each other only a spiritual bliss, a kind of anticipation of a soulful time after a while, when the spiritual can be properly blended with the physical. Hence the coming in contact, as they do in round dances, body to body, eye to eye, with the man's arms around the girl, arouses a sexual instinct, that should not be permitted to rise until after marriage. Well may the thunders of

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*Rev. Charles B. Goss is an opponent of country dancing. Our copy of his essay is courtesy of the Stowe-Day Library of the Mark Twain Memorial, Hartford, CT. It is from Hot Shot Fired at Fashion's Follies (Chicago: Standard Pub. Co., 1890), pp. 492-4.*

the Roman Catholic Church, and of every other church, having a regard to the purity of its members, be hurled against these pernicious round dances.

An innocent young girl thus coming into contact with the body of a man in the round dance feels the fires of delightful passions thrill her, and she trembles with the joyful feeling of something she does not know about, except that she wants to enjoy it as often as possible. She feels a pleasure she does not understand.

But all this pleasure arises from one and only one thing — sexual passion. If not, why can not men dance with men or women with women until their eyes shall flash, their cheeks burn, their lips part, their breath come short and quick, their forms tremble and instinctively press closer to their partners till they are as close to each other as a ball-room costume will permit, and their heads droop toward each other? Why not all this when the same sexes dance together, if the pleasures are not sexual passions, instead of the harmony of sound and rhythm of motion? The answer is plain. Round dances live only because they are based on the firing of the sexual instinct. They are wicked — nothing but evil — and all pure women should abhor them. But will they? I fear many who read these words will not. Kissing in the parlor is tame wickedness compared with the seductiveness of the round dance. Parents, teach your children to understand these truths, and keep them out of temptation. O, fathers and mothers, bring your daughters up to shun the round dances and keep away from public balls, and then your sons will stay away, too. Public balls are all, places of evil, gotten up almost altogether on a financial basis, where promiscuous dancers attend whom pure woman would only touch, outside of a dance, with gloved hands. This I know. I cry out earnestly against the inconsistency that will permit a woman to come in bodily contact with a man in a round dance, whose hand she would only touch with her gloved hands.

