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Dance Calls Series 2 - Nebraska Folklore

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NEBRASKA FOLKLORE
PAMPHLET TWENTY-FOUR

DANCE CALLS

SERIES TWO

NEBRASKA - WRITERS' PROJECT
LINCOLN - NOVEMBER, 1939

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KEARNEY, NEBRASKA
Ladies bow and gents bow under
Hug 'em tight and swing like thunder.

These, and similar lines, were once part of a popular form of entertainment in Nebraska—the old-time dance. These dances, in vogue during the 1870's, 80's and 90's, followed conventional patterns, the dancers guided through the steps by appropriate calls. It was according to the voice of the caller, accompanied by lively music, that partners and couples swung, turned and bowed in unison.

Towns were few and far between in those days and settlers had the natural urge to get together in groups, a longing intensified by their isolation, which, during periods of deep snow or heavy rains made it difficult or impossible to make trips for any great distance. So the practice arose of using first one and then another prairie soddy, though in some sections the pioneers met in barns or machine sheds (see Introduction to FOLKLORE PAMPHLET No. twenty-two). Often the "guests" would gather without prearrangement, owing to lack of communication facilities, and prepare to "water down" the dirt floor for the dance. At other times, when more elaborate preparations were made, rough wooden boards would be laid on the ground in the open or a crudely built barn would be used, from which the horses and cows had not been removed. The caller and fiddler (often the same man) would begin, positions would be taken, and the dance would be on.

Among the dances the quadrille, better known as the square dance, was one of the most popular. The callers used variations of calls brought to this State by the emigrants, and occasionally composed calls of their own. Many callers could conduct a dance an entire evening without repeating the same call.

Mr. DeHart, a pioneer who lived near Central City, says that the dance in these early days was not always so joyous. There were times when another element, fleas, would enter the dance. The fleas seemed to know that the prairie ladies were at a disadvantage to "crack 'em." In spite of their tiny size, they had bites like hot pincers and were often the cause of wild activity. Some of the girls, in retaliation, became expert flea crackers.
But, fleas or no fleas, the pioneer dance maintained its popularity among Nebraskans for many years. Such dances are occasionally held even today, especially in small towns on Saturday nights. All of the calls reproduced in this pamphlet have been obtained from native Nebraskans who sung, and in some instances created them. They have never appeared in print before.

* * * * * * * * *

Fillmore Greenfield, of Lincoln, is a versatile devotee of the old-time dance who both plays and calls. He learned the following seven calls from his father, who was a pioneer and dance caller in Nebraska during the 1870’s. Mr. Greenfield adds variety to his calls by giving them sensational names, such as "Swing Old Adam," "Grapevine Twist," and "Swing Aunt Sally," which help express the spirit of these particular dances.

**SWING OLD ADAM**

(6 - 8 time)

Balance to your places, and all swing,
All the men left and promenade.
First gent lead out to the right.
Swing old Adam
And now swing Eve.
Don't forget old Adam
Before you leave.
(Repeat three more times.)

Second gent lead out to the right
Swing old Adam
And now swing Eve.
Don't forget old Adam
Before you leave.
(Repeat three more times.)

Third gent lead out to the right, etc.
(Repeat as above.)

Fourth gent lead out to the right, etc.
(Repeat as above.)

(Then all four ladies go through the same maneuvers.)

First lady lead out to the right,
Swing old Adam
And now swing Eve.
Don't forget old Adam
Before you leave.
(Repeat.)

Second lady)

Third lady ) Repeat as above.

Fourth lady )
GRAPEVINE TWIST
(6 - 8 time)

(This lively dance creates a very pleasing sight on the floor.)

Balance to your places and all swing.
All the men left and promenade.
Join your hands and circle to the left.
First couple break
With the grapevine twist.

[First couple is the one nearest to the music.]
(Repeat three more times.)

Second couple
Third couple Repeat as above.
Fourth couple

HONEST JOHN
(Tune: "Honest John")

(This call has good rhythm and is unusually artistic for a square dance.)

Balance to your places and all swing.
All the men left and promenade.

First couple lead out to the right,
Hold right hands.
Sashay by and how do you do. [Couple makes a low bow.]
Sashay back.
That was pretty well done
Right and left through,
Right and left back
And on to the next.
(Repeat three more times.)

Second couple
Third couple Repeat as above.
Fourth couple

TRAVEL ON AND TRAVEL ON

(The first man, in this dance, won't be around to bother for awhile after he "gets back home" after swinging the ladies 16 times, 4 times around.)

First couple lead out to the right and swing.
Swing the ladies and travel on
Swing the next and the next.
(First man swings each lady four times and repeats four times.)

Second couple same.
Second man swings ladies as above.

Third couple ) Repeat as above.

Fourth couple )

(The above dance is sometimes run into three or four dances—making it a marathon square dance to see who can remain on the floor the longest.)

THE OCEAN WAVE

Balance to your places and all swing. All the men left and promenade. First gent and opposite lady Hold right hands across. Swing with your right, Back with your left, Balance all four in a line. Be sure to take your time.

Break in the center And turn half around. And cut a figure eight With the lady in the lead. Break in the center And the gent in the lead. (Repeat three more times.)

LADIES BOW AND GENTS BOW UNDER

(This dance is so violent that it sometimes causes accidents. A lady in Eagle, Nebraska, is said to have suffered a broken leg at a barn dance doing this number. The men swing the ladies so violently that sometimes their feet are lifted off the floor. If their hold is broken they may hit a wall or window. This dance is not permitted in most halls, though there is no law against it.)

First couple lead out to the right. With the eight hands high Ladies bow and gents bow under. Hug 'em tight and swing like thunder.

Second couple )
Third couple ) Repeat as above.
Fourth couple )

SWING AUNT SALICY

First gent lead out to the right, Swing the girl with the crooked nose, And on to the next. Swing the one with the great big shoes, Now the one with the great big feet, Now the one that looks so neat. (Repeat three more times.)
Albert Bauer, who has a deep booming voice, was born in Cass County over 80 years ago. He remembers calling dances in that county at a time when the only law enforcement officers were vigilance committees. He sang the following four calls in rough slab log barns, schoolhouses, and in soddies where, to the tune of "Buffalo Gals," and "Turkey in the Straw," the pioneers swung and whirled.

CIRCLE TWO-STEP

(The caller, in this unusually complete two-step, opens the dance by having the partners two-step once around, after which they go through a variety of maneuvers.)

Promenade all, [link arms]
Ladies step forward
Gents step back.
Everybody two-step.

[Then, after an interval]:
All the men left.
Right and left.
Everybody two-step.
Ladies to the inside,
Gents to the outside,
In a circle,
Circle around.

Everybody two-step.
Gents to the inside,
Ladies to the outside,
Circle around reverse.
Everybody two-step.

[Then, after an interval]:
Promenade with your partner.
Ladies to the north,
Gents to the south.
Forward and back.
Forward and right and left through,
Forward and two-step.

QUADRILLE

(Tune: "Turkey in the Straw")

All join hands and circle to the left.
Break and swing, and promenade back.
First couple out to the right,
Four hands around.
Right and left with the opposite couple.
Right and left back,
Two ladies change,
Change right back with a half promenade.
Lead to the next.
(Repeat three more times.)

Second couple }
Third couple } Repeat as above.
Fourth couple }

QUADRILLE

(Tune: "Buffalo Gals" in quick step time)

All join hands and circle to the left.
Break and swing and promenade back.
First couple balance and first couple swing.
Promenade the outside ring.
Right and left with the couple you meet,
Opposite couples the same.
Swing your opposite partner.
Now your own if you're not too late,
Hurry up George get a move on.
All the men left.
Grand right and left—
Promenade all.
(Repeat three more times.)

POLKA CALL

(Mr. Bauer thinks this interesting call is one of the oldest in the State, having been used in Cass County in the sixties.)

Join hands and circle to the left,
Meet your partner and promenade back.
All the men left,
Right hand your partner,
Promenade to place.
First lady out to the right,
Three by three with a polka step.
Three hands around,
Lead to the next,
And solo gent,
Three by three,
And six hands around.
(Repeat three more times.)

Second Change
Join your hands and circle to the left, (Repeat three more times.)

* * * * * * * * * * * *

The following call was sung by Robert Rustermeier, of Lincoln. Mr. Rustermeier has a tall figure and bright piercing eyes which give him magnetism. His voice is clear and distinct, with great carrying power. He has called in three counties, and used to dance and call at the same time. He knew 125 calls, which could be mixed up in such a way that about a thousand variations could come from them.

First couple balance out,
The couple on the right.
With the half circle turn.
Ladies ballinette
And gents counter dance.
On to the next.
(Repeat three more times.)

First couple balance out,
The couple on the right,
Lady round the lady,
Gent round the gent.

The lady round the gent
Four half around
Balance on through
On to the next.
(Repeat three more times.)

First couple balance
To the couple on the right.
Right and left,
Circle six,
Then circle eight,
Round once on the left eight.
Cast off four little gents.  
On to the left eight.  
Promenade to your seats,  
You know where.  
(Repeat three more times.)

First couple forward  
Up to the center and back.  
Lady to the right,  
Gent to the left.  
Forward up to the center,  
And cut off four,  
Two on the side,  
With the lady to the right  
And the gent to the left.  
Forward up and retreat back.  
Cut off six  
Three on a side.  
Return balance and swing.  
(Repeat three more times.)

William Carson, of Lincoln, has the clear ringing voice of the natural-born dance caller. He had charge of many dances in Holt County during the 1880's and 90's. Mr. Carson says that available space for dancing, in those days, was limited; so, in order to accommodate the crowds, sets were called to the floor in numbers. For instance, the couples who had numbers from 1 to 16 would make up the first dance, 16 to 32 the second dance, and so on. In this way everyone had an opportunity to dance, though not at the same time. The following are four of his most popular calls:

DOUBLE SASHAY

First and opposite couples,  
Forward and back.  
Forward again and cross.  
Cross right back.  
Two ladies change,  
Change right back.  
Double sashay.  

[The caller, if he so desires, can mix the couples after the dance has opened by making partners out of the first and third couples, second and fourth, third and first, fourth and second.]

LIFE ON THE OCEAN WAVE

Salute your opposite partner,  
Now your own true love.  
Swing your opposite partner,  
Now your own true love;  
Promenade around the hall  
With the polka waltz.  
Balance to the next.  
(Repeat three more times.)

HONEST JOHN

(Another quadrille, bearing this name, was sung by Fillmore Greenfield. It is recorded in the first part of this pamphlet. A comparison of the two calls shows that there was a wide range of style among calls of the same name when used by different callers.)

Sashay by and honor John,  
Sashay back,  
Salute your honor.  
Right and left through  
Right and left back.  
Two ladies change,  
Change right back.  
Balance to the next.  
(Repeat three more times.)
POP GOES THE WEASEL

(Nearly everyone knows the popularity of this tune among old time fiddlers. Few, however, know the square dance of this name. Yet, when the "Pop" was twanged on the fiddle strings in the early days the ladies immediately made an arch with their hands and the gents ducked under.)

First lady out to the couple on the right,
The monkey chased the weasel.
Circle three and half around, "Pop" goes the weasel.

Second lady
Third lady
Repeat as above.

Fourth lady

VIRGINIA REEL

Professor H. C. Filley, Chairman of the Department of Rural Education at the University of Nebraska College of Agriculture, sponsors old-time dances on the University campus, in an attempt to bring back their popularity. The Professor has seen much of pioneer life. He tells how certain early Nebraskans "who were dead set agin' dancing" used to dance the Virginia Reel, thinking it was a musical game.

Meet in center.
Swing round, right hands,
Swing round, left hands,
Swing round, both hands,
Do-si-do.

Meet in center, right hands across,
Meet in a promenade down the center,
Swing partner with right hand.
Swing first of partner's line with left hand.
Swing partner - right hand,
Swing second of partner's line with left hand,
Swing partner, etc. [and continue to end of line].

Leaders skip down center to places at head of line.
Around the outside, lines following
Leaders join hands and form a bridge under which
Other pass. [This leaves head couple at foot].
Continue until first couple gets back to place.

Mr. Patrick Oliver drove a horse car in Lincoln for a number of years. He also called at square dances, at one time (over 40 years ago), when the only music was a man whistling. The following are four calls he used in the days when "Old Dobbin" plodded along Lincoln streets to the accompaniment of the screeching and clattering of flanged wheels.
PUT ON STYLE

First couple balance and swing,
Lead out to the right of the ring.
Right hand your partner
Sashay by and honor your partner.
Sashay back and put on style.
Right and left through
Right and left back.
Lead to the next.
(Repeat three more times.)

Second couple
Third couple
Repeat as above.
Fourth couple

CUTTIN' THE MUSTARD

First couple lead out to the right of
the ring.
Four hands half,
Right and left through,
Right and left four.
Right and left six
Right and left back.
Four hands half.
Ladies do-si-do,

Gents the same.
Break and swing opposite partner,
Then your own,
And on to the next.
Four hands half.
(Repeat three more times.)

CHANGE HALF AROUND

First couple balance and swing,
Change opposite partners
And swing half around.
Change again,
And swing half around.
Right and left through
On to the next
And change half round.

All the men left, grand right and left,
Promenade home.

Second couple
Third couple
Repeat as above.
Fourth couple

FORM A STAR

Four gents to center of the bar
And back.
Four ladies to the center
And right hands across.
Swing half around
Back by the left.

Pass your partner once and swing.
Pass your partner twice and swing.
Pass your partner three times and swing.
Clear around and swing your partner.
Balance home.

CHANGE THAT PARTNER

A dance was held one evening in 1882, near Waverly. It took place on
the second floor of a new barn, a roomy hay mow with unfinished rafters reaching
to the ridge of the roof. Crude benches lined the walls. A dozen lan-
terns that hung from the cross ties lit up the room. On the floor were the swirling shadows of men and women—a dozen dance sets crossing and recrossing the broad expanse of the mow.

The sleepy head of a young boy was peering upon the noisy scene on the floor from underneath a bench. The name of this boy was Perry W. Jewett. Mr. Jewett has never danced or used this call since this evening in 1882, yet he has been able to reconstruct the entire call for the interviewer.

This dance is unusual because, during its execution, the couples change both places and partners three times, coming back to their original positions and partners on the fourth change.

Garrett Kaufman, of Lincoln, who called dances in Waverly between 1880 and 1885, also remembers this call. Mr. Kaufman says it has been used at intervals since that time but that it was at the height of its popularity in the 1880's.

Swing in your opposite partner,
In the center.
And out to the side.
Forward and back,
Forward and cross over,
Forward again and swing to place.

[The dancers are now completely mixed up, having changed both partners and positions.]

(Repeat the foregoing three more times and then on the fourth change, the dancers will find themselves back in their original places with their original partners—or should.)

All the men left,
Grand right and left,
Promenade home.

Then:
"Side four forward," etc.

[The remainder is the same as first change.]
(Repeat three more times.)

As a spectacular impressive group dance unusually pleasing to the eye and sense of rhythm this dance has few equals and it marks the early Nebraska dancing as a distinct art.

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BUFFALO GALS
(Tune: "Buffalo Gals")

Claude "Pat" Haggarty, of Lincoln, who has called dances in Nebraska since the early '80's, became popular through his use of smooth-flowing singing calls. Pat's favorite call is "Buffalo Gals." It is different from the version that is generally used, and in many ways it is better because of the continuity of action that it contains. Pat says that this call is es-
especially well suited for small country dances, and is most effective when sung to the music of the same name.

Balance all, swing all,  
Join hands and circle left,  
And promenade around.  
First one little girl run around the outside.  
And around the outside  
And around the outside  
And one little girl run around the outside  
And pass your partner  
And swing all around.

And two little girls run around the outside  
And two little girls run around the outside  
And around outside  
And around outside  
And pass your partner  
And swing 'em all around.

And three little girls run around the outside  
Around the outside  
Around the outside  
And three little girls run around the outside  
And pass your partner  
And swing 'em all around.

And four little girls run around the outside  
Around the outside  
Around the outside  
And four little girls run around the outside  
And pass your partner  
And balance home.

Everybody dance! All the men left,  
Grand right and left,  
And hurry up boys  
And pat her on the head.  
If she don't like biscuits  
Feed her corn bread.  
Keep again', don't wait  
Till you get straight,  
Promenade home.

Second Part

First one little boy run around the outside  
Around the outside  
Around the outside  
And one little boy run around the outside  
Pass your partner and swing 'em all around.

And two little boys run around the outside  
Around the outside  
Around the outside  
Two little boys run around the outside  
Pass your partners  
And swing 'em all around.

Three little boys run around the outside  
Four little boys run around the outside  
Balance home, everybody dance.  
All the men left,  
Right to your partner,  
And go right and left,  
Meet your partner, promenade the ring as you are.

CENTER COUPLE SWING

(Pat says that this dance, which has been a Nebraska favorite for years, is especially well suited for the larger halls.)

First couple lead out to the right of the ring.  
Right and left through  
And swing at the wall.  
Center couple swing  
Right and left through,  
And swing in the hall  
And center couple swing.
Pioneers Like Simple Life

Although the social life of the Nebraska pioneer was meager, nevertheless, some play varied the monotony of steady toil on the frontier. House raisings, house warmings, and log rollings brought the early settlers together in enterprises where play mingled with work. Quilting parties and paring bees afforded means of social recreation for women and girls; while shooting matches and circular wolf hunts were sports enjoyed by men and boys.

Dancing was probably the most popular form of social intercourse among the young people. When a dancing party had been arranged, the portable bedstead, loom, spinning wheel, table, and pick and barrels were moved outside the cabin and chunks of wood with slabs resting on top were arranged along the wall for seats. Couples arrived at early candle lighting. Someone in nearly every neighborhood could scrape the fiddle and the cabin soon re-echoed to the strains of “Money Musk,” “Old Dan Tucker,” “The Arkansas Traveler,” “Old Zip Coon,” and “Pop Goes the Weasel.” The Virginia reel, the stately minuet, and the old-fashioned cotillion were favorite dances.

When the fiddler shouted “Get your partners for a cutty-lilly!” there was a prompt and eager response. Then, keeping time with his feet, head, and body, he called the figures of the dance, the more complicated the better. “First four forward, and side four divide; change partners in center, and swing to the side; and keep on around” started a rhythmic shuffle. “Ladies to the center, and gents walk around; pass by your partners, and swing ‘em around; and all promenade” was promptly obeyed by the dancers. Then, “On to the next one! salute and sashay; and double shuffle, the old-fashioned way; and grand right and left” increased the fun. Often the merry-makers danced until the eastern sky began to show signs of the coming dawn, when each boy on horseback with his girl behind set out for home.

“Pioneer fun was often rough and not very refined,” declares a state historical society, “but it was not vicious.” It reflected the simple tastes of the early settlers and afforded some relief from the dull routine of securing a hard-earned living on the frontier.
And four hands around.
Ladies doe and gents you know,
Chicken in the bread pan,
Pickin' out dough.

Lead to the next couple,
And right and left through.
And swing at the wall,
And right and left back,
And swing in the hall.
Four hands around,
Ladies doe and gents you know.
Do-si-do and chicken in the
bread pan,
Pickin' out dough.

Take that lady and on to the next,
And right and left through

PICKIN' OUT DOUGH

First couple lead to the right,
And four hands around,
And leave that lady,
And on to the next,
And three hands around.
Gents follow up,
And three hands around.
Three by six,
And a polka swing,
All the men left, Grand right and left,

FOLKA SWING

Meet your partner
Promenade home.

Second couple
Third couple
Fourth couple

(Please note: The given text is incomplete and contains some missing or unclear elements.)

Pat says that one of the customs often observed at pioneer dances was to call "As you were" after a change was finished and the dancers had promenaded home. Refreshment trays would then be passed around. Afterwards, the dance would proceed, since everyone was already in dance formation. Callers, during such an intermission, often called two changes.