Dance Calls Series Three - Nebraska Folklore

Federal Writers' Project
NEBRASKA FOLKLORE
PAMPHLET TWENTY-SEVEN
DANCE CALLS
[SERIES THREE]
NEBRASKA WRITERS' PROJECT
LINCOLN • APRIL • 1940

CALVIN T. RYAN LIBRARY
KEARNEY STATE COLLEGE
KEARNEY, NEBRASKA
The old-time square dance was a popular form of entertainment in the Nebraska of the 1870's, 80's and 90's. It was not unusual, during these decades, for pioneers to drive twenty or twenty-five miles in order to take part in a dance in a sod house, granary or barn. The violin was the accompaniment for the calls at these dances, though sometimes, when a fiddler wasn't available, a jew's harp or, in some instances, an old-fashioned organ would be used. (See Introductions to FOLKLORE PAMPHLETS 22 and 24.)

All the calls reproduced in this pamphlet have been obtained from native Nebraska dance callers who sang, and in some instances, created them. They are still being used in the State; and there is a tendency towards a revival of the old-time dance.

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

James E. White, of Lincoln, who has fiddled for square dances in Nebraska for nearly 40 years, has accumulated a large library of old-time music. Mr. White, while not a caller, remembers a number of calls. He is especially fond of the singing call, "Irish Washerwoman," on account of its smooth rhythm.

IRISH WASHERWOMAN
(Tune: Irish Washerwoman)

First couple balance, And the gent swing in, Right into the middle, Hold your holds, And make your left foot, And circle again, Keep time to the fiddle, All the men left Lady swing in and gent swing out, Grand right and left, Join your hands and circle about, Meet your partner The lady swing out Promenade home.

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

Claude C. Nagarty, of Lincoln, has been calling dances in Nebraska since the early 50's. Mr. Nagarty, who likes to be known as "Nat," is a sincere caller with a certain manner that makes itself quickly felt on the dance floor, while his voice, with a trace of brogue, carries to the farthest corners of the hall with the sharpness of a whistle.
And circle to your left.
And lead to the right.
With the gent in the lead.
And around that couple.
First couple balance and swing.
And the others.
And four hands around.
And dees-doo.
And chicken in the bread pan, their own.
And their own.
And the gents me-cu.

B R E A K and swing and promenade back,
Honor your lady.
Off the ring.
Gent step through,
And four hands round.
And do-dee-do.
And chicken in the bread pan;
And the ladies do and gents you know,
And the gents me-ee.
And chicken in the bread pan, their own.

Honey Comb
(Fat calls this his honey call.)
First lady lead to the right,
And right hand gent
With right hand 'round,
Offset gent with right hand 'round
Now left hand gent,
With right around
And now your own with right around
Birdie in the cage,
And seven hands around
And all join hands,
Hit 'er down eight when you come around.
Lady swing out,
And honey in the comb.
And seven 'round.
And join hands
And hit 'er down again.
Balance home.
Swing your partner.

Cheat er Swing
(The ladies, if they so desire, may refuse to swing with their partners in this dance. Fat, however, says that the refusal to do so denotes a spirit of miscalculation.)
First lady lead out to the right,
Chaat or swing or do as you like,
Now the one that curls his hair,
Now the one that looks so cute,
And now the Belle of the Ballroom.

Fourth couple
Second couple
Third couple
Repeat as above.

My Gal Is Pretty
(Tune: Billie in the Low Ground)
(This call has been used in Nebraska for over 60 years.)
First couple lead out to the right,
Of the ring.
Four hands around,
You swing my gal,
With the lady
First lady and opposite gent,
First lady and opposite gent
Second couple
Third couple
Fourth couple

FIGURE EIGHT
(Tune: Eighth of January)
First lady and opposite gent, Giv our right hands cross,
Swing where the lady is, And the lady lead around,
Break to the center and swing half around, And cut a figure eight,
With the gent in the lead, And the gent lead around,
Balance home and everybody swing, Balance home and everybody swing,
All the men left, All the men left, And promenade the ring,
And promenade the ring, And promenade the ring,
Second couple, Second couple, Third couple, Third couple, Fourth couple, Fourth couple

CIRCLE THROUGH
(Tune: Ragtime Annie)
First couple lead to the right, And three go around,
Birdie in the cage and three hands around, Gent fly out and four hands around,
Join hands and circle three, And three go around,
Lady swing cut and cut swing in Honey in the comb and three hands around,
And circle three, Birdie fly out and three hands around,
Gent fly out and three hands around, Gent fly out and three hands around,
And three go around, Gent fly out and four hands around,
Ladies dee and gents you know, Birdie fly out and four hands around,
Doc-si-doc and gents just so, Balancing home and everybody dance,
Chicken in the bread pan, pickin' out dough, Chicken in the bread pan, pickin' out dough,
And don't be too late, And don't be too late,
All the men left, right to your partner And grand right and left,
And grand right and left, Pat her on the head,
If she don't like biscuits, Feed her apple jack,
Promenade, Promenade, second couple, third couple, fourth couple

LADY ROUND LADY AND GENTS SO LONG
(Tune: Mississippi Sawyer)
First couple lead to the right of the ring,
Lady 'round lady and gent don't go,
Four hands around, ladies deo,
And gents you know,
With a little more dough,
Chicken in the bread pan, pickin' out dough,
On to the next, and circle three,
Birdie fly out and birdie fly in,
And promenade here,
Fourth couple

GRAB VINE TWIST
(Tune: Haste to the Wedding)
First couple lead to the right, Second couple
And four hands 'round,
Ladies dee and gents you know,
Take your lady and gents to low,
Doc-si-doc and gents just so,
Chicken in the bread pan, pickin' out dough,
And promenade when you get straight,
Second couple
Third couple
Fourth couple

This is Pat's version of one of Nebraska's square dances in which the figures follow the encircling, entwining design of the grape vine.
CORNER STRING
(Tune: Old Lady Pickin' Chickens)

First couple balance and swing,
And down the center
And divide the ring.
Lady to right and gent to the left,
And when you come around,
Swing on the corner and promenade the ring.
Down the center and divide the ring,
Lady to right and gent to the left,
And when you come around,
Swing on the corner, corner swing,
And take that lady and promenade the ring.
And roll them again,
And same couple down center,
And divie the ring.
Lady to the right and gent to the left,

CAST OFF SIX
(Fat says this is one of the oldest dances in the State.)

First couple down the center
And divide the ring,
Lady to the right, and gent to the left,
And when you come around, swing,
And all four swing down the center
And cast off four.
Lady to the right, and gent to the left,
And when you come around,
Swing,
And all four swing,
Same couple down the center
And cast off two,
And when you come around,
Balance home and everybody swing.

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

Mr. M. B. Packard, of Lincoln, is both an auctioneer and dance caller.
He adds that the two professions make a happy combination, since they both require a pleasing voice with a great deal of carrying power.

WALTZ QUADRILLE

(Mr. Packard is especially fond of this charming waltz quadrille because of the singing verses that have been interpolated with it.)

First couple down center
And there you divide,
Lady to the right
And gent to the left.

(Then they waltz while the caller sings the following verses)

Peek-a-boo you raise up,
I see you hiding there.
Peek-a-boo you raise up
Come out from behind that chair.

(Repeat first call with first couple while the caller sings)

Oh where, Oh where,
Has my little dog gone.
Oh where, Oh where can he be?
With his ears cut short
And his tail cut long
Oh where, Oh where can he be?

(Repeat first call again, after which the waltz verse is sung)

Bring back, bring back,
Bring my Bonnie to me,
Bring back, bring back,
Bring back my Bonnie to me.

(Repeat again, then)

I wish I had some one to love me,
And some one to call me their own, etc.

(Repeat call for second, third and fourth couple, after which the following singing verse is brought in)

It's come to my ears, Ham darling,
Bid your friend and old sweetheart goodbye,
Before tomorrow morning,
You will leave that joyful home,
To go merrily with your Barney McCoy.

(Repeat call, followed with:

Times have changed since those days,
They would part with all they got
Scaring up in G,
Could they have but one twirl
While others ride a hop train
And have a waltz with their best girl
But they all feel just like me.
On the sidewalks of New York.

(Repeat first call with fourth couple, after which the last singing verse is brought in)

After the ball is over,
After the dancers have gone,
THE GIRL I LEFT BEHIND ME

Balance all and swing, All the men left and all promenade Lead to the first couple and balance there so nicely, Pass right through, And balance two, And swing that girl behind you Pass right back in the same old track And swing that girl behind you, That pretty little girl, That pretty little girl.

HONEST JOHN

(Tune: Honest John)

Balance all and swing All the men left Grand right and left, Meet your partner and promenade eight.
First couple balance and swing, Lead to the right, And balance four Sashay by, And make a bow, And sashay back, Another one now.

Second couple
Third couple Repeat as above.
Fourth couple
(Repeat a second time)

CUT A FIGURE EIGHT

(Tune: Buffalo Gallop)

(This intricate call is only suitable for couples who possess a great deal of physical endurance. Mr. Packard has named it his marathon call.)

Balance all and swing, All the men left, Grand right and left, Meet your partner and promenade all.

First lady swing with the right hand gent, The right hand gent, The right hand gent, Partner by the left.

As you come around, Lady in the center And seven hands around, The lady swing out And the gent swing in Join your paddies And go it again, Balance all and swing partners home, All the men left and promenade eight.
Second couple
Third couple Repeat as above.
Fourth couple
(After second couple)

Balance home, Turn 'em around, With all the men left And a left all the men Right hand your partner, Balance all and swing, All the men left And a left all the men Right hand your partner.

(Repeat same for the fourth couple with the addition of the following concluding lines)

Promenade eight When you get straight You know where And I don't care.

THE SHORTER CALL

(Mr. Packard has arranged the following shorter version of the above call for those who think the original is too long.)

Turn 'em all right, With all the men left, And a left all the men, Right hand your partner And right and left grand, Meet your partner And promenade home.
J. J. Senn, of Lincoln, first danced in square dance sets with his mother when he was ten years old. This was in Wheeler County, fifty years ago. Mr. Senn recalls that they often rode over the sandhill trails for miles to reach the house or barn where the dance was scheduled to take place.

It was not unusual that Mr. Senn should make dance calling his hobby; it is an art to which his temperament and personality are eminently suited. Because he not only likes people (the first requisite for a successful caller) but also has the sense of timing his calls so they fit in with the accompanying music. Mr. Senn’s voice is always clear and pleasing. On the dance floor it becomes especially so, when, with the full force of his 246 pounds behind it, it attains a rich rhythmic tone that electrifies every couple on the floor.

HEAD SWING AND FOOT SWING TOO

Honor your partners right and left
All join hands and circle to the left
Break and swing and promenade home
First couple balance and swing
Down the center and divide the ring
Lady to the right and gent to the left
Head swing and the foot swing too
Down the center and cast off four
Just that many and not any more,
Head swing and the foot swing too.
Down the center and cast off two

Just the same as you used to do.
Big ones swing and little ones too.
All the men left, grand right and left
Meet your partners and promenade home.

Second couple
Third couple
Fourth couple
Repeat as above.

RING AROUND THE ROSIE

Honors right, honors left
Join hands and circle to the left
Break and swing and promenade home
Four ladies lead out to the right of the ring,
When you get there, etc.
(Same until back in original place.)
Swing on the corner
Then swing your girl
All the men left, grand right and left,
Meet your partner and promenade home.

Second couple
Third couple
Fourth couple
Repeat as above.

SAILIN’ BY

Honor your partners, right and left
All join hands and circle to the left
Break and swing and promenade home.
First couple balance and swing
Promenade the outside ring,
Right and left with the couple you meet.
And the side fours the same.
Right and left back, and two ladies change.

Change right back with a half promenade.
Honor right and left to your place
in the set.
Swing them all eight and all the men left.
Grand right and left.
Meet your partner and promenade home.

LIFE ON THE OCEAN WAVES

(Tune: Life on the Ocean Waves)

Honor your partners, right and left
All join hands and circle to the left
Break and swing and promenade home.
Four ladies to the center and pass right through, etc.
(Repeat until back in original place.)
Swing with the opposite partner
Just as you ought to do,
Honor to that partner and the corner the same.
Swing that corner partner and all promenade.

Four ladies to the center and pass right through, etc.
(Repeat until back in original place.)

STING ’EM ALL RIGHT

All jump up and when you come down
Turn that pretty one round and round.
All the men left, grand right and left,
Meet your partner and all promenade.
First couple balance and swing
Lead to the right and four hands half way round
When you get there, etc.
Four hands half through,
Four hands half through,
Four hands half through,
Four hands half through.

Second couple
Third couple
Fourth couple
Repeat as above.
THE GRAPE VINE SWING

All jump up and when you come down
Turn that pretty one round and round.
All the men left, grand right and left,
Meet your partner and all promenade.
First couple lead to the right and four hands round
Four to six and six hands round
Six to eight and eight hands round
The first gent break with the grape vine swing.
All the men left, grand right and left
Meet your partner and all promenade.

Second couple
Third couple Repeat as above.
Fourth couple

BIRDIE IN THE CAGE

(Tune: Buffalo Gals)

Honor your partners, right and left
All join hands and circle to the left
Break and swing and all promenade.
The first lady swing the right-hand gent with the right hand round
Partner by the left as you come around
Birdie in the cage and seven hands round.
The lady hop out and the gent hop in
Join your hands and go it again.
Now the gent swing out with all the men left
Right hand your partners and go right and left
Meet your partner and all promenade.

Second couple
Third couple Repeat as above.
Fourth couple

WALTZ QUADRILLE

First couple down center and there
(First couple repeats three more times.)
you divide
Lady to the right and gent other side
Honor your partner and don't be afraid
And swing corner lady and Waltz promenade.

Second couple
Third couple Repeat as above.
Fourth couple

SWINGING ON THE GATE

Side four forward
And first four divide
all to your places.
And straighten up your faces.
First four forward and sides divide.
All the men left, with your elf

Change in the center
And swing on the side.
Same four forward
And sides divide.
Meet your partner.
And promenade back.

(Repeat for side four.)

YOU SWING MINE AND I'LL SWING YOURS

You swing mine,
While I swing yours,
All balance and swing.
Promenade,
First couple to the right,
You swing mine
While I swing yours.
Mine's as pretty as yours
You swing mine and I'll swing yours,
Four hands half,
And right and left

Second couple
Third couple Repeat as above.
Fourth couple

SASHAY ACROSS

All join hands
And circle to the left,
Break and swing.
And promenade back.
First couple lead,
To the couple on the right
Sashay across,
And honor four.
Sashay back and right and left.
And lead to the next.
Break and swing
Swing on the corner
Alman left,
Grand right and left
Meet your partner
And promenade home.

BALANCE RIGHT

Fremenade—
First couple lead to the couple on the right
Right and left through,
And right and left six,
And in between side couple
And forward six,
Balance home
And balance eight
Swing on the corner
Like swingin' on a gate
All the men left,
With your old left hand,
Second couple
Third couple
Fourth couple
Repeat as above.

SHORT DANCE

Swing your opposite,
And lead to the next.
All alone,
And now the one you call your own
Four hands half
And right and left,
Second couple
Third couple
Fourth couple
Repeat as above.

* * * * * * * * * * *

Jesse A. Pound, of Lincoln, who came to Nebraska in 1870, has been calling dances since 1896, when he was seventeen years old. He, at this period, was also a pony express rider.

The largest dance that Mr. Pound ever called for was in 1896, in Lincoln's old City Auditorium, where there were 33 sets (664 people) on the floor at one time. He says that the liberal use of lemon juice was the only thing that kept his voice from cracking through those twenty dances, which lasted until three o'clock in the morning.

JOHNSON QUADRILLE
(Any 2-4 time)

First four forward and back,
Forward again.
Right and left through,
Right and left back,
Balance on the corner and swing,
Grand right and left.

First couple to the right
Four hands around,
Right and left six,
(Bright bars of music)
Lead to the next,
Four hands round,
Right and left six
Balance home.

(Third Change)
(The music for this third change is best played in the time. Mr. Pound adds that there is enough snappy action in this change to please anyone.)

All forward to center,
And back
All the men left,
Grand right and left,
First couple to the right,
Change partners and swing.

CECILIAN CIRCLE

(Mr. Pound says that the dust from many sand house dirt floors was raised by this dance. He adds that the "Cecilian Circle," which few present day callers are familiar with, is one of the oldest in the State. It was in wide use during the 1870's.)

Everybody in the hall
Join hands,
Balance and swing,
All the men left,
Grand right and left.

Fromenade where you are.
Balance and swing again,
Grand right and left,
Fromenade again.

(The above move is at option of the caller.)

(Repeat as many times as desired.)

VIRGINIA REEL

(Mr. Pound says that this version of the Virginia Reel was very popular among the pioneers who lived in the State during the 1870's and 80's.)

Head lady, foot gent,
Forward and back,
Side the same.
Head lady, foot gent,
Right hand around,
Side the same.
Head lady, foot gent,
Doe-el-doe,
Side the same.

Head couple down the center and back,
Swing once and a half at the head,
And opposites down the line,
And up the center.
Ladies to the right,
Gents to the left,
Form needle's eye,
And balance, pass through.
(This move places head couple at the foot of the reel.)

(Repeat above call for the number of couples there are on the floor.)

SEVEN HANDS AROUND

(Mr. Pound does not think "Seven Hands Around" was used in Nebraska until the early 90's. He first learned it on the Pacific Coast when he worked on a sailing vessel that operated out of San Francisco. The call itself is over a hundred years old.)

Honors right and left,
All the men left,
Grand right and left,
First lady swing right hand gent,
With the right hand,
Rough partner with the left,
And the left hand around.

(Use eight bars of music.)

Lady swing out and gents swing in,
Join your hands and circle again.
All the men left,
Grand right and left,
Pronenade home.

(Repeat three more times.)

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

Pamphlets planned for spring and summer issue include:

Early Nebraska Cooking
Pioneer Schools
Blizzard Stories
Pioneer Customs
Nebraska Festivals
Pioneer Religion (Series II)