



How Did Jack Learn To Call?

I had just turned three years old when all of the square dance activity was beginning and my memories are few. We moved to a different house in October of 1949 but I have one memory of the sound equipment he rented being in the old house. When we moved to the new location, where he lived out his square dance career, there are more memories. The main ones were my fascination with the two 78rpm turntables in a suitcase and my reaction to one record in particular.

Square dancing came out of the folk dance movement and was just being defined around that time so not only did Jack have square dance albums but albums of folk dance music. My particular favorite as a little guy was a Scottish folk medley by the Jimmy Shand Folk Dance Band entitled The “Gie” Gordans, pronounced Gay Gordans. Although it had an energetic quality it also had a melancholy that would cause me to cry. Dad had his equipment set up on a table in a corner of the dining room and when he would put that record on I would crawl under the table with the speaker and cry. When I disposed of his 78 collection in 2009 I saved that record and still enjoy a tear sixty some years later.

Since my childhood memory is so unreliable, a look at his early materials will tell us something. He started with albums of music with calls. One album even had records with verbal instruction on one side and the actual dance with the call on the other. The pace of the calls was fairly slow and the calls were very to reasonably elementary. There is one album that has a duplicate. They can be seen in the picture side by side. They have a light brown cover and are entitled “County Fair” One is “with calls” and the other is “without calls.” We can assume that this album represents that moment when Jack realized that “I can do this.” Here are the albums that he began with.





Records Albums used by Jack Roach when he started teaching square dancing in 1949-given to Tim Marriner, Rock Hill, SC

Everybody Swing With Ricky Holden F15

RICKY HOLDEN The Texas Whirlwind, calling Square Dances in Alamo Style

Caller: Ricky Holden, fiddler: Tom Dickey Folkcraft

Sides Divide/Ladies Chain Pot Luck

Arkansas Traveler/Star By The Right

Spinning Wheel/A Little Confusion or Split Ring Hash

Quarter Sashay, or Forward Six, Fall Back Eight/Texas Whirlwind

Texas Square Dances F5

Caller: Carl Journell, Music by Grady Hester and his Texons

Folkcraft Library of International Folk Dances-volume 5

Titles:

Sally Goodin/The Wagon Wheel

Four in Line You Travel/Texas Star

Bird in the Cage and Seven Hands Around/Sashay Partners Halfway Round

Around the Couple and Swing at the Wall/Sashay By and Re-Sashay

Skip To My Lou and other Square Dances P259

Caller: Roy Rogers, Music by Spade Cooley

RCA Victor

Titles:

Skip to My Lou/Ricketts Reel

Sycamore Reel/Old Joe Clark

Oh Dem Golden Slippers/Lucky Leather Breeches

Woodhull's Old Tyme Masters Plays Square Dances Volume 2 DC45

Caller:Floyd C. Woodhull RCA Victor

Titles:

Ann Green/Take Me Out to the Ball Game
Pony Boy/The Irish Washerwoman
Bloom on the Sage/The Bum Song

Square Dances with and without call DC36

Caller: Floyd C. Woodhull, Music by Woodhull's Old Tyme Masters RCA Victor

Titles:

The Girl Behind Me/Triple Right and Left Four
Oh Susanna/Pop Goes the Weasle
Captain Jinks/The Wearin' of the Green
Blackberry Quadrille/Soldiers Joy (without calls)

Square Dances (without calls) P249

Spade Cooley and his band RCA Victor

Titles:

Wagoner/Flop-Eared Mule
The Eighth of January/Wake Up Susan
6/8 to the Barn/Ida Red

Pee Wee King and his orchestra play Square Dances P256

Caller: Lee Bedford Jr. RCA Victor

Titles:

The Battle Hymn of the Republic/Black Eyed Susan
You Call Everybody Darlin'/Shocking Rye Straw
Fire on the Mountain/Cornbread Lassies and Sasafra Tea

Square Dances as called in Al Brundage's Country Barn F10

Caller: Al Brundage Music: The Pioneers Folkraft Library of International Folk Dances
Volume 10

Titles:

Red River Valley/Up Town, Down Town
Shoot the Lady Through to Me/Out to the Right With a Right Hand Cross
Elbow Swing with the Opposite Two/Right and Left Through

County Fair Square Dances F1

Caller: Al Brundage, Music: Folkraft Country Dance Orchestra Pete Seeger, leader Folkraft
Volume 1

Titles:

Danbury Fair Quadrille/Forward Six and Back
Little Old Log Cabin in the Lane/Keep a Steppin'
Indian File/Two Head Gents Cross Over

County Fair Square Dances F2

Without calls same as above

The Folk Dancer Presents Square Dance Music (without calls) Vol 8

Music: Ralph Page and his Boston Boys the Michael Herman Folk Dance Series Folk
Dancer Volume 8

Titles:

Crooked Stove Pipe/Chinese Breakdown
Gold and Silver/Road to Boston
Honest John I /Honest John II

Square Dances (with written and recorded instructions for square dancing) CD4009

Music: Cliffie Stone's Band Capitol

Titles:

Soldiers Joy/Special Instructions for Square Dancing
Bake Them Hoecakes Brown/The Gal I left Behind Me
Ragtime Annie/Oh Dem Golden Slippers

Sally Goodin' / Cripple Creek

Cliffie Stone Waltzes AD 108

Music: Cliffie Stone and his square dance orchestra Capitol

Titles:

When it's Springtime in the Rockies/Beautiful Ohio

There's a Silver Moon on the Golden Gate/Let Me Call You Sweetheart

Missouri Waltz/I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles

The Waltz You Saved For Me/Moonlight on the Colorado

Israeli Folk Dances Israel Album 5

Israel Folk Dance Orchestra featuring Elyakum, Martha Schlamme, Mort Freeman

Israel Music Foundation

Titles:

Mayim, Mayim/Hanoded

Hora Aggadati/Sherele

Im Hoopalnu/Cherkassiya

Bob Hager's Big Ten Square Dance Series Linden

Caller: Bob Hager Music: Hilda Smythe's Orchestra

Little Yaller Gal

Down the Center and Divide the Ring

Right and Left With the Couple You Meet

Gents Walk Around the Outside

Sashay Half Way Around

The Route

Separate Aound the Outside Tack

Jingle Bells

Roger Crandall and his Barn Dance Boys Linden

Wearing of the Green

Little Old Log Cabin in the Lane

Jack Roach was a highly intelligent and articulate individual with a generally quiet and retentive, studious personality, despite the fact that the first half of his life was devoted to athletics, primarily baseball and basketball. His father had been a big league shortstop and played with many prominent teams of his time like the New York Highlanders in 1910 and 11.

When Jack began square dancing in 1949 he had been a public school teacher and coach for 13 years, teaching math, social studies and physical education and had served in the armed forces during WWII in charge of a rehabilitation unit. He was also a natural musician having grown up playing the violin through high school. His grand father was a violin maker and two of his aunts were violinists and one a vocalist at a professional level. An entry in one of his Susquehanna University yearbooks from 1935 states: "Jack is one of the few students on the campus who is musically inclined, as well as athletically. When a piano is near, it is impossible to keep Jack away. He has a certain style all of his own." When our family purchased a home electronic organ about 1958, Jack surprised us all by sitting down and rendering a very credible swing version of "Way Down Upon a Swanee River", even figuring out how to use the peddles.

Jack's timing was superb and his phrasing was always musical. He had a high baritone voice that was in a good register and came through the sound system well with a commanding quality that made him easy to understand and follow. His speaking style while calling was always natural and not affected as though trying to imitate some

national caller or to sound “western.” His sense of timing and the musical nature of his phrasing, not to mention a mind that was wired to memorize easily, helped make him the caller that he became.

A letter that was saved in his materials was dated January 30, 1954 from a Paul Schmidt. “Dear John. I wanted to tell you that I stood fascinated while you called at the Monterey two weeks ago. I have never seen more assurance, heard such clarity, felt such rhythm and timing. Lloyd Meese and I were not dancing but were near you at the time. We looked at each other and agreed you were surely “on”. By this time you know I believe you did some very good calling.”

In addition to listening to the callers on records, Jack had become acquainted with some of the recognized figures in folk and square dancing in the state like Dr. Ralph Piper, instructor in physical education at the University of Minnesota. Undoubtedly, the most influential influence on Jack in the early years was Lynn and Maudie Woodward. The Woodward’s owned a farm place in what is now Eden Prairie, Minnesota on which was a barn they had converted to a square dance barn. The location then was on a county road just to the east of the current location of Eden Prairie Shopping Center on the southwestern edge of the twin cities metro area. The hayloft was close to ground level for easy entry by ramp and had a nice dance floor. The basement, or what would have been the area for the cattle, was fixed up as a banquet hall with kitchen facilities.



Lynn Woodward had been involved with square dancing all his life, even learning to call, with help from his parents, when he was a boy. His work as a caller began when he interested a group of alumni from his alma mater, the University of North Dakota, who were living in the Twin Cities area, to form a square dance group around 1939. Lynn was working as a commercial artist.

In 1944 he and his wife Maudie purchased the barn and remodeled it as a square dance barn hosting square dance groups five and six nights a week. Seventeen hundred to two thousand dancers sashayed across the hayloft floor every week for decades. In addition to operating the barn the



L to R: Lynn and Maudie Woodward, John and Mabel Roach at 1956 Woodward Camp at Mille Lacs Lake, Isle, Minnesota.

Woodward's would run summer square dance camps at a variety of locations around the region and conduct regular classes for callers.

Materials from a 1954 summer camp emphasize the importance of timing and phrasing pointing out that some callers only memorize the figures but call them without any relation to the phrasing of the music or what is happening on the dance floor. His dancers often break down. According to Woodward, timing and phrasing are the most important considerations for a caller in conducting a successful dance. In fact he likens the caller to the conductor of an orchestra. According to Woodward, "...the caller does not either allow the dancers enough time, or the dancers rush and the caller tries to keep up with them. In some sections of the country, the figures are continually shortened. Some callers habitually call to one set, and if that set is rushing, then the whole floor will rush to keep up. Then the caller is not "conducting" the dance, but he is arbitrarily following the timing of one set, good bad or indifferent." He goes on to say, "The caller conducts the dance and keeps the dancers on his floor in time, just as the leader of a symphony orchestra conducts the orchestra and helps the musicians keep time together and give proper interpretation to the music." Woodward presented a method, with charts to fill in, that has the caller break down each call and lay out the words that will be said on each beat of a 16 beat phrase, even recommending changing the original words used in the call to make sure they comfortably fit the phrase.

Among Jack's things were ditto work sheets where he had been learning to adjust the words of the call to the phrasing of the music. He also had worksheets where he would develop filler phrases, which usually had nothing to do with the call, but were needed to fill dead time in the patter while the dancers completed a move.

Stops at the Woodward barn were regular. Every visit to Minneapolis by our family in the early 50s usually included a stop at the Woodward's home, which was right next to the barn, either on the way in or on the way home. Many a Sunday afternoon was also spent at the barn for dances. Because of square dancing's popularity in the early 50s you never knew who you might see, from influential leaders and business types to Twin Cities television personalities, all duded up in the appropriate western gear.

Through the 1950's Jack would attend summer square dance camps put on by prominent



Jack dances with his daughter, Nancy, age 6, at the Woodward Camp at Breezy Point on Gull Lake near Brainerd, Minnesota in June of 1955.

national figures like Frankie Lane or Harold Bausch, sometimes going alone and sometimes with the family. Lane's camps were held in Colorado and Bausch's in Nebraska. By 1954 he was working with the



Woodward Camp Staff 1956-Front: Mabel Roach, Maudie and Lynn Woodward, Susie Golden. Back: John Roach, Dorothy and Kip Hollenbeck, Terry Golden.

Woodward's as a staff member at their camps. In 1954 he worked at a camp at Lake Metigoshe at Bottineau, North Dakota. In 1955 there were two Woodward camps, one at Lake Metigoshe and another at Breezy Point Lodge on Gull Lake near Brainerd, Minnesota. In 1956 the camp moved to Mille Lacs Lake near Isle, Minnesota. During the summer of 1956 and 57 he also worked at the American Squares Summer School at Camp Iduhopi near Loretto, Minnesota.

The year 1956 was his last year working for the Woodward's. In the summer of 1957 Jack took the opportunity to take over the Woodward camp at Mille Lacs Lake.

This was the beginning of the gathering of a group of dancers from both the United States and Canada that would become known as the Knuckleheads and later be incorporated as Knuckleheads International having regular reunions and gatherings in the U.S. and Canada.

The real reason Jack Roach became a fine caller was his natural talent, both his musicality and his ability to lead people, and hard work and discipline. There were few idle moments at home. When he wasn't at school, coaching, working summer recreation or at a square dance, he could be found sprawled out on an easy chair in his corner with the records going, oblivious to what was going on around him. The music would go on all day, fueled by cups of coffee, Camel cigarettes and a cheese sandwich or the occasional box of Cheeze-its. He would come up for air at super time and then it was off to the next square dance. The early 50s also saw the purchase of a Webcor tape recorder that he used for practice and later to tape himself at dances for later study. By 1958 I was old enough to go with him a couple of times a year and act as "recording engineer."

In addition to what he learned of timing and phrasing from others, Jack Roach developed his own style and method of calling. Very often Jack would be observed calling with his eyes closed, particularly when doing "patter calls" or what they called "hot hash calls" in those days. Patter calls were calls that were not singing calls and had figures that could be memorized and recited to the music. Hot hash was literally improvisation, flying by the seat of your pants. Normally Jack would pick out one square that was doing well and watch them during the call. The timing of the figures delivery would be based on how the dancers were moving through them. If a square was getting behind he could watch them instead and adjust until they caught up. Jack's method involved being able to visualize in his head the entire four couples in the square going through the figures so that the caller was totally aware of where the dancers were or should be when they would go into a figure, follow them through it, and where they are when they come out of the figure. Once he would get the pace of the dancers established,

he could shut his eyes and call, knowing exactly where the dancers would be at any time. Of course he would have to take an occasional look once in a while just to make sure nobody was getting lost or behind. This ability to visualize was essential when improvising but also came in handy when creating new dances. Most callers use eight little dolls, appropriately dressed as men and women, as pawns moving through figures on a board to work out new dances and figures. To be sure, Jack had a set of dolls too, but he could also put on a record and lean back in his chair with his eyes closed and do the same thing in his head. This ability to visualize the entire dance, going beyond the mere memorization and regurgitation of words, gave his calling the confidence, assurance and phrasing he was so noted for.

Along with learning to call in the 1950s, Jack was also a part of the movement that became modern square dancing. Going to a square dance in the 40s, 50s or 60s could be very different experiences in terms of the style of dancing, the pace and complexity of the dancing, and the type of music used. The callers that emerged from the early 50s were actually creating the dance style called modern square dancing.

Until the 1950s square dancing was linked to folk dancing and the two often existed together as square dancing was considered the American folk dance. These are just my observations, having lived with square dancing all my young life. In the 40s and into the 50s groups and associations often carried in their title "Square and Folk Dance". A 1956 promotion for a leaders training school that Jack and Mabel gave in Port Arthur, Ontario was billed as a "Square and Folk Dance School" and that Jack and Mabel were "specialists in both square and folk dancing. The records being issued for square dancing, as can be seen in the photos of Jack's first records, were put out by companies like Folkraft. Folk dance groups would do square dancing but right along with Israeli folk dances (in costume). At that time people interested in just square dancing had to deal with all of this.

Square dancing was one of the many social dances that had been popular in days past but had gone out of vogue. A history of square dancing by Dorothy Shaw, wife of Lloyd Shaw, one of the early square dance pioneers, states that Henry Ford tried to popularize square dancing in the 1920s because it was the American dance. However, Shaw claims that what Ford was able to have put together as the square dance was incomplete and that her husband researched the square dances being done by ordinary people in the western U.S. and filled in the other half of the equation.

Another of the dances that survived or was becoming popular again was the contra dance. When square dance groups were able to break away from the general folk dancers, they carried with them the contra dance. A general statement about both square dancing and contra dancing of the day was that tempos were slower and the calls simpler. The pace of the whole thing was much more genteel. As square dancing moved into the 50s many of the younger callers entering the field, as well as the dancers, felt that there was more of a challenge to be had from square dancing. Some of the callers like Jack Roach, began to compose dances that involved more intricate movement and ran at a faster pace. There were those callers and dancers that preferred the newer fast paced square dancing and those that preferred the contra dance. This created friction in the 50s and eventually resulted in groups and callers going their separate ways. The modern square dance continued to evolve and won the day, eventually seeing changes in both the musical style and the tempos of music being recorded. Interest in contra dancing did continue,

however. A program booklet from the 1963 Minnesota State Square Dance Convention in St. Paul devoted a morning and afternoon session to the contra dance. One of the session leaders was Lynn Woodward.

A Dancers Code of Conduct

The following was given to people starting a beginner's square dance class.

Dear Dancer,

You are now in a recreational activity in which you can participate for many years and from which you will receive much enjoyment. However, there are a few important things that must be brought to your attention if you are to receive full benefit from this splendid group fellowship.

As you read through the following suggestions, you will notice that they are just ordinary rules of courtesy in living that make us acceptable and wanted by our fellow men. It is suggested that we concern ourselves with our own individual conduct rather than the way the other person acts.

These attributes are important!

1. "Friendliness"- Be the first to extend your hand in the spirit of friendliness to the visitor and to your square dancing friends.
2. "Smile"- Keep smiling and laughing in square dancing. When the smile is gone, square dancing becomes grim and loses its fun.
3. "Courtesy"- Gents! Thank your partner and everyone in your square at the end of a dance! Ladies! Be your charming selves!
4. "Cleanliness"- A good soap and water bath plus the use of a deodorant (gents as well as ladies) will insure you against offending others in this vigorous form of entertainment.
5. "Willingness"- Accept willingly your turn to help in the activities of the group. Full enjoyment of an activity is reached only by participation in all of the phases – work as well as play.
6. "Helpfulness"- One of the greatest rewards in square dancing comes in seeing the pleasure you have given by being willing to help the beginner. Remember your days as a beginner and the people who were willing to help.
7. "Sociability"- Being a good and willing mixer is important to you personally. You might miss meeting some wonderful people.
8. "Generosity"- Be generous in you thoughts of other people. Brush off the unkind and careless remarks that are commonly made in any group activity. Square dancing is too much fun to waste your time getting your feelings hurt.
9. "Promptness"- An act of courtesy to others is being on time. When you are late, you delay the fun of all the others. An act of courtesy to your caller will be a prompt response to his call for "Set up your squares."
10. "Stewardship"- Be an ambassador of good will. Take pleasure in spreading the fun of square dancing.

Jack had also developed a set of responsibilities for callers, dancers, clubs and associations. The set for dancers reads much like the above but, along with the others, fits into Jack's ideas of how to encourage the growth of square dancing.

Caller's Responsibilities:

- A) Must be a good example- cleanliness of body and mind- courteous, considerate, patient.
- B) Must be on time, ready to go.
- C) Must have good equipment.
- D) Must recognize the level of his dancers and know how fast he can advance.
- E) Must have a sense of humor.
- F) Must make a study of the movement and keep up with the latest things, although he may not be able to use them.
- G) Have a general knowledge of methods of teaching- first things first.
- H) Must keep in mind that square dancing is fun as well as challenging.
- I) Must not dominate groups but act in an advisory capacity. (The caller is hired by the group so the group should set policy.)
- J) Must develop good diction, clear voice. (Some amplifiers can do more for you than others.)
- K) Must develop a good sense of rhythm and timing.
- L) Must know the key that fits his voice.
- M) Change partners often.
- N) Be willing to start beginners.

Dancers Responsibilities:

- A) Be loyal to your group.
- B) Be on time.
- C) Take your turn to hold office and to be on committees.
- D) Keep in mind that square dancing is fun.
- E) Minimize personal appearances.
- F) Have a good soap bath and use deodorants. (Both men and women)
- G) Be a good mixer. (Don't sit out when caller puts on a mixer dance)
- H) Be a committee of one to see that visitors are always dancing and visit them between dances.

Club Responsibilities:

- A) To have "Executive" committee to set policy with the approval of group.
- B) To have a "Greeters" committee to welcome dancers. (Shake everybody's hand)
- C) Have a "Lunch and Cleanup" committee for each session.
- D) Remember, square dancing is fun.
- E) To have place of dance set and to notify club members of any important events.
- F) Belong to your associations.
- G) Keep caller informed as to the desires of the group. He likes to give the dancers a good time so make suggestions through officers.
- H) Seek the advice of your caller on matters of policy. It is courteous.

- I) Change officers at least once a year or every six months.
- J) Give a financial report to the group at least once a month.

Association Responsibilities:

- A) See that member clubs get some attention by mail but better still, by personal visit by the officers.
- B) Do a good job of public relations. Advance square dancing wherever you can.
- C) Get newspaper, radio and television time if possible.
- D) Get a square dance section in the newspaper announcing the place of club meetings and the caller.
- E) Keep up on the latest in square dancing by magazines and by bringing in outstanding people in the field.
- F) See that figures and terms are standardized in your area.
- G) Have Association square dance festivals in different areas of your district.



The “Little Tailfeathers” from the Woodward Camp, Lake Mille Lacs, 1956. The setting is the Dusty Lane Ballroom east of Isle, Minnesota