



## The Caller's Wife

Behind every good man there is a good woman. I can't speak for other caller's families but it certainly held true for the Roaches. Jack and Mabel worked as a team, each bringing to the game the particular skills they each had. Fortunately the skills were complimentary. Where Jack was the performer, the teacher, the visionary and the leader and public person, Mabel was the organization person that supported all of that. She preferred it that way.

In addition to moral supporter and confidant, Mabel was perfectly suited to her roll. As a young woman in the 1920s and 30s Mabel had been a nurse at Minneapolis General Hospital. Not only was she trained in the domestic aspects of nursing, but, had administrative talent that soon found her in the roll of Head Nurse and Assistant Superintendent of Nurses for the Women's Medical Floor. Mabel had also been a County Nurse in McLeod County in the days when the whole county public health nursing service was one woman and a raft of volunteer committees. Mabel would be first to admit though, that she was not a public person. She much preferred to work in the back-ground.



Mabel as a student nurse in 1927.

Mabel was the keeper of the calendar. She was the book keeper and kept a tight reign on the money. Jack was rarely "allowed" to carry more than five dollars in his billfold. A new amplifier required a conference with and approval of Mabel. When the bills came for records or equipment Mabel took care of the payments. With Jack's daily schedule as a teacher and coach and the limited time he had, Mabel would have to have the evening meal on schedule and make sure the bag lunch and thermos of coffee was ready to go so she could slip it under his arm as he sailed out the door on his way to the dance. There were always square dance shirts and pants to wash, and before the days of permanent press, iron.



1981 at Shindig in Duluth, Minnesota.

While her children were in school Mabel would generally stay home, particularly if the dance was more of a class. When she did go to a dance with him, Mabel, by the nature of her cheery personality, would act as unofficial greeter and welcoming committee. She could also keep her ear to the ground and pick up on things that were going on in the club. Jack deliberately kept himself out of the club's internal affairs, acting only as caller and teacher keeping

himself free of the emotional issues and conflicts that are apart of any group of people. If the dance was a party she would use her craft skills and create the mixers and make sure they got passed out to the dancers as they came. She would also be buzzing around the kitchen to make sure the refreshments were covered. She would also have to be up on the latest round dance so that she could be called upon at a moments notice to step to the center of the circle and demonstrate with Jack. Mabel made it all look easy!



July 1981 at Thunder Bay  
Festival in Thunder Bay, Ont.

In 1976 the Glen Goers hosted a Testimonial Dance for Jack at Glencoe High School. One of the speakers that came was John Wald. John was one of the Minnesota square dance pioneers who was very active when Jack got his start in the early 50s, and who, at that time, was the oldest active caller in the state. In talking about the life of a caller he humorously extolled the virtues of the caller's wife by sharing his own experience.

*"I was calling square dances 'til 1974, then I got a heart attack. So I quit calling. For all the other callers I suggest this, that to be sure to take your wife with you so that she can carry that equipment, because it's the equipment that will kill ya! (laughter and applause) By the time you carry that hundred pounds out of the house, put it in the car, take it to the church, take it out of the car, set it up in the church, take it down again, set it in the car, haul it home, take it out of the car and bring it in the house.....that's what ya need a wife for if you're a square dance caller. You need her for that.... If Jack's gonna keep on calling he's gonna have to teach her to carry some of that equipment around!"*

Fortunately, Mabel never had to carry equipment. There were almost always men at the dances waiting to help get the caller in and set up. But, Mabel's work behind the scenes meant that Jack could concentrate entirely on his dance program knowing everything else that made for a successful evening would be taken care of.



Mabel and Jack at Roufs home on Lake  
Mary near Winsted, Minnesota 1971