

History & Highlights of Square Dancing in Oklahoma

Square dancing is truly an American dance. Its history is unrecorded. It had its beginning during the period when young America was moving west. It began, as it is today, a fun dance, intricate enough to be challenging, relaxing enough to be fun. It actually evolved from several sources. The calling and timing probably came from the New England quadrille. The vigorousness and fun came from the Kentucky running set. Some of the steps can be traced to Mexico, some of the figures and movements to various European folk dances.

Through the years, square dancing and square dance calls became more standardized. Many of the calls were handed down from generation to generation without ever being recorded. Practically no written record was kept of early day square dancing. Today's square dancing is much the same as the earliest square dancing. Today's modern sound systems, which allow a single caller to call to hundreds of dancers, have had the largest effect. In the early days, it was necessary to have a caller for nearly every square on the floor. Today's caller has a constant patter, while the early day caller had to shout his command and then wait until it was executed before shouting the next command.

Square dancing started reviving in Oklahoma prior to World War II. It's following was small until after the war, when the participants increased at a rapid rate. By the 1940s, several square dance clubs had been formed in Oklahoma and many more throughout the nation. As square dancers will, they traveled to other cities to gain further fun and fellowship from the activity. Prior to 1947, square dancing was enjoyed in Oklahoma only by the individual groups of clubs who had learned to find the fun in western style dancing.

In 1947, a group from Oklahoma City traveled to Dallas where they became acquainted with a group from Austin. Later the Austin group wrote and advised they were going to St. Louis and planned to stay overnight in Oklahoma City. The late Guy Gentry, who later became the Oklahoma State organizations first president, then called a meeting of the local club presidents for the purpose of having a dance in honor of the Austin group. All other clubs throughout the state were then invited to join in in conducting this festivity. The Oklahoma City municipal auditorium was leased and the resulting dance was a huge success.

Prior to and following this joint effort, several meetings were held by leaders from various points of the state. These meetings lead to the formation of the Oklahoma Square Dance Federation. Bob Lynch and the Tulsa delegates are credited with making the final motion that the state organization be formed. There were originally five districts headed by temporary governors. The OSDF was formed with Guy Gentry as temporary president.

The OSDF grew since its formation in 1947 to include nine district associations. During its heyday there were approximately 200 square dance clubs, and an estimated 10,000 square dancers. Today there are approximately 96 clubs and an estimated 3,000 dancers. Each of the nine districts contain a portion of these clubs. Each district has at least one annual festival. The annual OSDF state festival is the "state fair" of square dancing.