

Mr. Henry Ford used to vacation at the Wayside Inn in Sudbury, Massachusetts. There he became interested in the dance program conducted by a dancing master named Benjamin Lovett. The program included the gavotte, mazurkas, the schottische, the minuet, the Virginia reel, and other squares and rounds. Mr. Ford tried to hire Mr. Lovett, who declined, pointing out that he had a firm contract with the Inn. This posed no problem for multi-millionaire Ford, who simply bought the Inn and Mr. Lovett's contract and took Mr. Lovett back to Detroit with him. In the Detroit area, Mr. Ford established a broad program for teaching squares and rounds, including radio broadcasts and programs for schools. He built a beautiful dance hall in Greenfield Village and named it Lovett Hall. It is still in use. In 1926 Mr. Ford and Mr. Lovett published a book which provided inspiration and material for many people who had wanted such a reference. That book was entitled "Good Morning". One of the people who pounced on and devoured the book was a young school superintendent in Colorado Springs, Colorado, named Lloyd Shaw. Lloyd "Pappy" Shaw realized that Ford's book supplied only a part of the information on the American dance, and that the rest of it was under his nose in the small towns and farming and mining communities of his own West. He went to work painstakingly interviewing old-timers, collecting dances and music, researching. In 1939 he published the first really definitive work on western square dancing - "Cowboy Dances". Later he published a round dance book. He trained teams of dancers in his Cheyenne Mountain School and took them around the country exhibiting and teaching. In the summer, he conducted classes for new leaders. And western square dancing began to grow like wildfire. Of course, in those days, one did not ask if there would be rounds. It was taken for granted that one would do the Varsouviana, a schottische, the Black Hawk Waltz, and perhaps, Blue Pacific Waltz. There might be a cue word here and there for the new people, but no cuer. Dancers knew the dances, just as they knew the figures of many of the square dance calls such as Birdie In The Cage, Lady 'Round The Lady and Dive For The Oyster.

Square dancing began its transition from the traditional, visiting couple type of dancing into all-four-couple-working kind of dancing in the 1950's. Callers discovered that they could move everyone at the same time and create more interest. Then Square Thru (which had been danced in contras for hundreds of years) was "invented" and introduced in 1955, and other movements followed quickly. Soon we had 16 basics, and then 20, and then 32, and then -- you know the rest of the story. Similarly, people began to write more couple dances, and the round dance picture changed. At first, the dancers memorized the dances and only an occasional cue was necessary. Then dances became more numerous and complex, new rhythms and terms were added, and a cuer became a must for many dancers who had neither the time nor the interest to memorize large quantities of material.

Meanwhile, the development of the electronic amplifier aided the transition, since it permitted the caller to manage large crowds. It was no longer necessary to shout, use a megaphone, or have a caller in each square. Square dance records, particularly, the small, easy to manage 45 RPM discs, eliminated the need for live music, with all its attendant problems and allowed much greater musical variety and flexibility.

In 1974, an organization named CALLERLAB, The International Association of Square Dance Callers, held its first convention. It has met every year since. CALLERLAB's aim is to promulgate the principles of fun and friendship established by early leaders like "Pappy" Shaw and to standardize square dance terms, timing, and styling. ROUNDALAB, The International Association of Round Dance Teachers, works toward the same goals for round dancing.