

# PEOPLE WORTH KNOWING

THE RESEARCH COMMITTEE  
by Miriam Lidster

What is the Research Committee? What does it do?

"Head woman and head man, W 1 M 2, move back a step and chasse (slide) down the outside of their respective lines and return the same way . . . . ."

And so the description of the first dance printed in Volume I, "Folk Dances From Near and Far" began a history of dance writing and research that even those who worked so diligently on this first volume had not anticipated.

But stop right here -- this was August 1945 and much had happened prior to this date. In 1942 Henry Glass, better known as "Buzz" had the idea of starting the Folk Dance Federation of California, and the need and desire for a Research Committee grew from the very beginning of the Federation. From the basic principles of the scientific aspect of the International Folk Dance Congress, which explored folklore -- music, costumes, pictures, dance descriptions -- Lucile Czarnowski and "Buzz" thought it would be a good idea to organize a committee that could help the many new folk dance groups that were being formed.

In order to have many groups meet and dance together there was a definite need for some "order" in the dance steps and patterns. At this time many were dancing certain dances in "their own way" . . . many still do. We, in California, were comparatively new to the European folk dance movement although many of us had done the traditional two-step, polka, schottische, waltz and Paul Jones at Grange dances since we were "knee high to a grasshopper." We needed help and we needed clarification of steps. Michael Herman of Folk Dance House, New York, noted that we made many mistakes in our dances. This fact, and the need to be able to dance together as a group led, as did many other factors, to the writing of definite dance descriptions. During the next sixteen years a sincere and honest effort was to be made in order to clarify the steps and patterns of many dances, to give as much background material as possible, and to try to write into the dance some of the necessary styling and color that makes a dance specifically a dance of Greece, Mexico, or the Ukraine.

One of the very first dances to be written was "Bleking," which is, indeed, a far cry from "Baile Da Camacha, Parado De Valdemosa," or Czardas Z Kosickyh Hamrov." In 1942, as in 1958, the Committee worked and worked to write an accurate description. At first the descriptions were mimeographed on sheets and distributed to the dancers

who attended the festivals. Soon people began to write asking for special copies of this material. Requests came from Canada, India, the Near East and many other places. In the beginning the Research Committee also wrote other material. Among this material was "Helpful Hints for Planning a Festival," and a bibliography of available folk dance books. Out of these requests for material and the developments of a bibliography grew Volume I, "Folk Dances From Near and Far."

Mr. Harmer Davis, Professor of Civil Engineering, University of California, was a member of the first committee, and being scientific in his work, wanted a definite form as clean, concise and brief a scientific description as possible. It was learned in these early stages that sometimes a description can be too brief and the style and the flavor of a dance be completely lost. Also, on the first committee were Alice Jameyson, Henry "Buzz" Glass and Chairman, Lucile Czarnowski. Mrs. Jameyson had been a folk dance teacher when she lived in the eastern part of the United States and had written a book on "Old Time Dances." As her source of information for her book she would go to Danville and dance with a group of people who had danced "old time dances" for years and years. They had their own orchestra and their own style of dance.

"Buzz" Glass, I am sure, many of you know. He was the first President of the Folk Dance Federation, and is one of our most capable leaders and teachers. "Buzz" is a real enthusiast in Mexican dance and folklore. Miss Czarnowski, as Lawton Harris has so often said, "is our grand lady of folk dance." She had been more aware, more keenly observant, and more understanding of our problems, our inaccuracies, and our blunders than anyone in our California folk dance movement. Lucile is Director of Dance at the University of California, at Berkeley, and one of our strongest boosters of folk dance. Her book, "Dances of Early California Days," is an outstanding piece of research. All of the members of this first committee were extremely interested in folk dance, in dance form and pattern, and the accuracy and source of dance descriptions. To this group we owe a great deal of appreciation and thanks, for the years to come were to be hard ones with many satisfied and many dissatisfied customers.

Today you still have an interested, hard-working group, but the character and the organization of the committee has changed. Miss Czarnowski left her role as Chairman in May, 1946, and became co-ordinator of Research with Mrs. Mildred Buhler, as Chairman. Mildred worked as Chairman of the Research Committee until 1952 when she left with her husband "Jake" for London, England. "Milly" or "Teach", as she was known to many young people in her classes and to the dancers of the Redwood City Docey Do group, was not only mother, teacher, chairman of the Research Committee, but a "darn good" square dance caller and known throughout California.

Until 1952 there was but one Research Committee with the following members functioning to write the dances for Volume VI: Lucy Cheney, Carol Gove, who did the wonderful illustrations, Lawton Harris, Vernon Kellogg, Miriam Lidster, Adrienne Murton, Heidi

Schmitz, Annemarie Steinbiss and Dorothy Tamburini. In 1952, in order to save time and travel, two committees were appointed to work on given dances and then to meet for final completion of dance descriptions. These committees were the Sacramento committee: Helen Perry, Chairman, Carol Squires and Vernon Kellogg; and the Bay Area committee: Mildred Buhler, Chairman, Carol Gove, Miriam Lidster and Dorothy Tamburini.

In August, 1952, Mrs. Dorothy Tamburini was appointed Research Chairman and during the following year it became advisable to expand the Research Committee to four groups, with Dorothy as Research Coordinator. The Sacramento committee was active under Carol Squires, Chairman, and Omega Graham; the Bay Area Committee, with Reva Ward and Sue Lemmon, Co-chairman, and Bev Wilder; the Fresno committee, with Wilma Graesch (Andersen), Chairman, and the Peninsula committee with Miriam Lidster, Chairman, Pearl Preston and Larry Miller. In 1955 Virginia Wilder replaced her husband on the Bay Area Committee. The Fresno committee developed with Vera Jones, Frances Peters, Helen Saunders and Mary Spring. The Sacramento committee added Donald Benedict and Florence Griffith, and the Peninsula committee added Millie von Konsky and Ruth Ruling. This year the North and the South also began to work actively together on Research, and with Edith Stevenson, Chairman, Marian Wilson, Gordon Engler, Albert Pill, Leilani Papadol, Ruby Pritchard, Paul Pritchard and Catherine Cary, many more dance descriptions were written and a great deal more communication between the Research groups of the North and the South and the Teacher Institutes was possible.



The question is so often asked of the Research Committee: "How do you choose your dances, and how are they written up?" The choosing of dances is one of the most difficult jobs of the Research Committee. At present our greatest sources of dance are the folk dance camps, Idyllwild, College of the Pacific and the University of California, at Santa Barbara. There are members of the Research Committee at each camp. They dance the dance; make many notes on the written dance descriptions; question the teacher as to source, styling and music; and finally, they try to decide if the dance will be enjoyed by our folk dancers. All of these dances are finally pooled and at a combined meeting of the Research Committees each dance is discussed and either placed upon a list to be written or held for future reference. There is a genuine attempt to choose all kinds of dances and to represent all countries -- couple or round dances that need no definite formation in order to be danced, dances with specific patterns, such as square, longways, and circle, dances for "Three," mixers, and single line dances. During the past five years there seems to have been, according to many, a predominance or over-abundance of line or single circle dances. This is quite possible because of an awakened interest in Balkan and Israeli dance. In choosing these dances the committee must also be aware of the many types of groups that are dancing. All groups do not like the same kind of dances. This is indeed fortunate, or some of our very lovely dances would soon be lost. Every now and then we must also go back and rewrite some of the old favorites -- ones that have not been published in "Let's Dance" or in "Folk Dances From Near and Far".

It takes hours and hours of work to write a single dance. A member of the committee first writes the dance to the best of his or her ability. It is then presented to a small group, members of his committee or members of another committee. It is always hoped that in this group will be someone who has never had the opportunity to learn the dance. In this way the description can really be "taken apart." The dance is then rewritten, checked with the committee chairman, and finally checked with Dorothy Tamburini. With all of this, errors, discrepancies and misunderstandings creep into our dance descriptions. As an example, one of the loveliest dances of the last few years, "La Faira Da Strada" has been completely dropped by some groups because of a slight misunderstanding: "Do we begin on the upbeat, or on count one of the music"? There is no great harm one way or the other. However, it was written beginning on "count one" by the Research Committee. The music might be misunderstood, however, as there are four and a half measures of introduction. The usual number of measures is a straight two, four or eight measures. Also the dance was written as it was originally taught in 1954 by Jane Farwell, and in "Let's Dance" it was published with Figure IV being repeated with the men turning counterclockwise and moving on a reverse line of direction. After another research job and much correspondence with Jane Farwell, who had married and moved to Germany, it was confirmed that the Swiss directions for this dance gave Figure IV being repeated with

the men turning counterclockwise but progressing forward in line of direction or CCW around the room. In order to clarify this point Jane went directly to the source of the dance, Louise Witzig, who had been the teacher of Louise Huggler and instructor for Jane. So the manner of transmitting dances from group to group, person to person, can be very much like a telephone conversation that is repeated many times, each time with a new little twist. As a member of the Research Committee, there are times when I think that "we ought to go mad."

In spite of all of the stones that come hurtling in the direction of the Research Committee, they manage to smile now and then and continue to plod through the directions. If it were not for the capable, strong helping hand of Dorothy Tamburini, many of the neophytes would have stumbled along the way. We as members of the Research Committee and dancers of the Folk Dance Federation of California can never thank Dorothy enough. Oh, yes, in case any of you are wondering, it takes about four years to get the "hang" of writing a dance description.