

## AL BRUNDAGE TALK ON HISTORY AT CALLERS SCHOOL IN MID 1970'S

Our square dance roots came over with the pilgrim fathers and as the country was settled, they brought many of their dance forms with them. This evening, we are talking about square dancing as it is today. I started calling with what *we* will categorize as "Eastern Style" or a Saturday night "Barn Dance" type of program, and this was mostly visiting couple dances, many singing calls; everything brought to a "Swing your partner" and "Promenade", and we did have a, lot of fun in those days. But alone: about 1947—48 a few other things began to come into the picture and along about '49> I was fortunate enough to go to Colorado, a dance institute conducted by Dr. Lloyd. Shaw. "Pappy" Shaw had made a study - he was an educator by the way - a superintendent of the Cheyenne Mountain Schools up there in Colorado Springs. He had made a study of the American dance, the long ways, the traditional square dances, the square dances that we call western or cowboy dances as they came west or the American round dances — the study of the waltz and all these things. He wrote a, book on some of these things. He was considered not only to be an authority but a great promoter for the American Square Dance. He called it part of our culture. I was fortunate enough to be out there at one of his dance institutes for 5 days when I was very young. I was very impressed.

I think probably I went to Shaw's with a little bit of a chip on my shoulder because I was already a successful square dance caller at home and I was as busy as I wanted to be doing one night stands. I had two orchestras going and I had bookings at 2 different places on Saturday nights. We were running all kinds of square dances and I had built a Square Dance Barn that held 22 squares which was a pretty fair crowd for that time. We were averaging quite a few people. Over the 8 years, about 336 was the nightly average of people coming into that barn. When it was real snowy, we had 100 people in there and when it was really nice, we had up to 450 people dancing in this place. It was tight dancing but with eastern style and the way they danced in those days, it wasn't so bad. So I felt I was a pretty successful caller when I went out to "Pappy's". I didn't expect to be impressed but I was — very impressed. I was impressed with the attitude of all of the other fellows there. I was impressed with "Pappy" Shaw himself — he had a great personality and he had quite an effect on me and my thinking about square dancing as well as my future square dancing life. When I came home from the 5 days at the institute, I had the desire to do a much better job than I was doing. I could see all kinds of things that I was doing wrong. These fellows were talking about things that I hadn't even thought of. I went back the following year and even more things became apparent. The cowboy dances, the early dances, were very interesting to me because I hadn't seen some of them before. The round dancing was there and very beautifully done. I wasn't very good at the round dances so I decided that I would have to learn all] of these things. I am very happy that I did now and I would urge all of you to get in on all the phases of this activity, if you possibly can. Sometimes *we* just don't take the time to do it. Fortunately, at that point in my life I could take the time and I did take the time to fret into it. I do still think that it was a food step. When I came home, I was enthused about teaching people how to dance. A Saturday night Barn Dance at the old Barn was a lot of fun but many times from the stage I would call a "Right & Left Thru" and 2 ladies chained. People didn't care whether they did it or not. Some people

would, do a "Right & Left Thru" and others wouldn't. If I tried to teach it from the stage, I would get a down reaction. "Give us something we know" or "Let us alone" or "Who wants to learn it".

I could see it didn't have to be that way so I came home and started a square dance class. This was an uphill fight because "Why should these people join a, Square Dance class when they have been dancing for 30 years very happily all over the countryside. Who needs a class? I finally convinced. 10 squares of my Saturday night people that I had something else to offer - that I had Western Style I called it - and that I had new figures and new things to do. There was more to learn, about square dancing than just the 8 primary basic fundamentals that they were doing and that our dances were built on at the time. So I did get a class up and the first thing that I did was DoPaso because just that year at Lloyd. Shaw's, a great big thing happened about DoPaso. We discovered then that there were 8 kinds of a do-si—do being done around the country. When I said do—si-do, I meant back-to-back around each other. When Ray Smith said do-si-do, he didn't mean, that at all. He meant you take this lady and move her round and round, like this. That's the do-si-do down in the hill country there. When Herb Gregerson said do-si-do, he didn't mean back-to-back, nor did he mean the loop, he meant you turn your partner "by the left hand and your corner by the right hand and your partner by the left. He meant a, Figure 8 movement, a hand—swing movement. When Lloyd Shaw himself called a do-si—do, it was quite a nice complicated movement and a pretty movement but it was completely different from any of the others and there were 8 of them being used. About this time, people were starting to travel around the country a little bit. Callers were starting to go from one area, to another and it got so that when you called a do-si-do, you got yourself in a lot of trouble because people would not do what you said.

We decided that standardization was almost a must and we standardized, the do-si—do first. There were 3 kinds of a promenade being used and they too were confusing people. So we standardized the one method. I fought that, personally, because I didn't use that method and I thought it was a little ridiculous - unwieldy. Finally I went along with it because I felt that I had to go along with it as everyone was co-operating. We were trying to do a standardization job for the whole country and. I was only a very small part of it. Hand positions and ladies chain, courtesy turn positions, skirt work and. everything like that was brought up and discussed and dancing was a very beautiful thing. Right & left thru I also objected to. When we did a Right & left thru in New England we seldom ever touched hands but in the West they touched hands. It started as a teaching gimmick because they could touch right hands and do the courtesy turns. I went along with the hand idea, because they accepted other things that perhaps they didn't like, but I did... I think it was a tremendous experience in. co—operation.

At that time there were about 30 callers who you might say were the professionals or the top leadership of the nation, who had something to gain or lose by what happened to Square "Dancing because we all had an investment in it. We had in some way or another dedicated our lives to the Square Dance activity. In my own case, I gave UP a College education. I gave up the whole thing to build a Square Dance Barn to produce square dancers and pursue square dancing. Herb Gregerson gave UP his business to go into square dancing. In the case of Carl \_\_\_\_\_ in Houston, Texas, he

gave up a very lucrative dentist practice so he could teach square dancing and do a leadership program in that area. You don't hear about these fellas any more. Many of them are dead and gone. On the other hand; they were the backbone of the movement. Guys like Ed Gilmore and Herb Gregerson to name some names. People who set early choreography. Rick Holden was a very young guy at the time who wrote many dances. One of the first things that enabled me to teach Square Dancing in a different "form" at home was that I did have some tools to work with. I could teach a DoPaso. Fenton Jones came in with a thing called an Allemande Thar. Nobody had ever heard\_ of an Allemande Thar before 1952. Consequently, this started a whole new series of things. Ed Gilmore, about 1952 or '53 came up with an idea of lines, pass thru, arch in the middle, ends turn in and that opened up a whole new phase of choreography. In 1951 or 1952 about, we were doing Quadrilles as we called them then, do a right and left thru, do a right & left back, left allemande, promenade or grand right & left. The Cross Trail thru was not even invented at that time. (I'm talking early 1950's - only 22 years away people). It's not very old. My point is that the Square Dance activity as we know it, and as you know it and as you learned it, is only really about 20 - 22 years old. Before that were 200 years of traditional and eastern style.

Ricky Holden had moved to San Antonio, Texas. He had a very hard time down there because he went in with the recreation department. He was a New Englander and was not accepted. He tried to put some of our do-si-do figures that we were using here in our early dances together and make people buy it. They didn't buy it and the biggest thing he did was to create the movement Alamo style named in honor of the Alamo which happens to be in San Antonio. The people bought Alamo style because it was something that they related to. It was right there. So consequently Alamo Style came along. Through the years all of these movements have come on one at a time. I will say in the early 50's, it was a little better than it is now. We made a whole year's dancing out of Allemande Thar and the Thar combinations, the Allemande A the Allemande Whee and whatnot. This was a whole year's dancing and teaching to our people at the time.

When Square Thru came out, it opened another whole new idea in choreography and square thru is not very old. It hasn't been, with us forever. Who wrote square thru? I don't know who wrote square thru but perhaps some of you do. It is very interesting. We lose track of these people and to me this is tremendous. If you ever lived without it, square thru is one of the most difficult things to understand and get through your noggin. When it first came out, it took me almost 2 years to understand a square thru. I can't believe it now but it really did. We just weren't thinking choreographically. We didn't have the tools; nobody had a system. We were calling what we felt inside or what we had seen or heard someone else do. The callers who went to Show's institutes formed a group. There were many heads in this leadership group and we called ourselves the "Round Robin". Our only communication through the whole year was a round—robin letter which was a mimeographed letter (it wasn't mimeographed at first — at first, we were limited, to 2 sheets of paper per caller out of 11 or 12 callers in this group). If you had any ideas like a new piece of choreography or something that you were working on that seemed really good, you would write it down and send it to the next guy. He would, add to it, try it out, make some comments and send it on. This letter went around about 2 or 3 times a year. It was our only communication with each other outside of getting together once a year to hash it all over.

Those sessions corresponded somewhat to our sessions here at Caller's School. I think this part is of great value. We didn't learn an awful lot about calling. Nobody was telling us that our timing was bad or our phrasing was bad. But somewhere along the line, we did pick up the better habits of the better callers and sort of develop these. Somewhere along the line in the late 50's we'd start to talk about phrasing and timing and "Hey, how come this fella's timing is so terrific and. this guy's isn't". Round dancing came into it and "How come the round dancers look so beautiful and how come they try so hard to get beautiful styling and do such graceful work, and the square dancers only want to stagger through something. What can we do to make square dancing beautiful, to keep it alive and to make it pleasant; to really put the dance into square dancing? We felt that standardization was one way. Limitation, limited use of some *of* the new movements perhaps was another way; we felt that better teaching techniques, better methods of teaching beginners to dance and informing them of the niceties of square dance and the styling points, was a good, way to do it. We set out to do that and I don't know whether we've done a very good job or not. Sometimes I think "I guess we really haven't" because some of the dancers that I teach now are almost the worst that I have taught because they fool around and I don't really know why. But some of those dancers that I taught 20 years ago are still dancing; they are dancing beautifully and they support the square dance activity one hundred per cent. I feel that in some cases I have done a good job. Over the years we have tried to teach other callers to teach and to get the idea across to them that it's more than just being an entertainer. We try to get them to believe that they have some responsibility to the square dance activity. You have a responsibility to all the guys that went before you and helped to make it what it is today. You have an obligation and a responsibility to me and to Herb; guys that have given up professions and opportunities for business to go into this development; to make it what it is. We want to see it prosper; we want to see it as good as can be and no one wants to leave it in worse shape. Let's leave it better than we found it. Think if you look around sometimes you'll discover that maybe we aren't really doing that.

It wasn't too many years ago when there were no 50 basics; nobody ever thought of 50 basics. Somebody had to put it down and it just wasn't one man that did it but a group of people. This group of people is made up of nationally known callers and people in leadership positions. Many of the leaders around, the country were asked what they felt should be the primary 50 basics. It was a combined, effort of maybe 30 or 40 people around the country to compile the 50 basics; then the 75, the extended basics and finally the whole series. How you have these tools to work with; now you have a teaching plan; now you have a program. Now you have a whole activity that has been built for you. The "Club" system also evolved around 1951-52. Until then, there weren't any square dancing clubs as such, although there were some groups that danced and called themselves clubs, but there was no such thing as the Western Square Dance Club. This idea of clubs didn't just spring up. Clubs were planned. Lloyd Shaw, himself, felt that the square dance activity belongs to the people. Let's get people together who have time and interest and form them into clubs and .groups so that we can teach them more in order to sustain activity as a group in their area. The club idea was born.

At that point, in some of the groups, it was pointed, out that a club could be handled, in a couple of ways. It is up to us to make the decision as to how we want it to be handled. Do you.

want the Club to be a dancer activity run by the dancers, organized by the dancers; let them handle the work, the treasury, the dues, the offices, rent the hall and. look after the program? Do you want them to handle all of this or does the caller want to have a caller-run club saying I will do this; I will arrange the whole thing. All you have to do is come, pay me the money and you have a nice little club going here. These ideas were tossed around and I think we decided that the best way to make square dancing grow in this country would be to give it to the people; let the dancers run. the club; let them be responsible for the new people coming in; for the beginners and for many other facets of square dancing. Let the caller be responsible in an advisory capacity; let him be there in the background as a pillar for the club to rely on when a club is troubled, and things get a little out of hand. This is pretty much what happened..

It took nearly 2 years to decide that this is the way it should be done. It didn't just happen; it was planned this way and perhaps we made some mistakes. Maybe it would have been better had we taken another approach. It has been done and I feel that over all, it is a pretty good system. From this you should understand that when we talk about square dance clubs, they aren't very old, This idea isn't very old and we have a few people who are still active today to thank for the club idea. These days the club is a common, thing and you do have some clubs to call for. I doubt whether you would have thought of the idea yourself had it not already been done for you.

There is still a group of people meeting who are concerned about the direction of the square dance activity; about many of the facets of it all and we still get together occasionally. In recent years, we have gotten together more often and with more and more callers. After the 50 basic idea came along, this was a co—operative effort, and the teaching plans and the books, the things that you now have to work with came about. Now a group has been formed to help give leadership and the name given to this group of people is Callerlab. Until 6 months or a year ago, there was no official name Given to all of this. It was just a couple of guys who had a lot at stake getting together to try to direct the square dance activity. Now it's called Callerlab and a lot of names you will recognize in Callerlab; Jim Mayo for one, Earl Johnston for another, myself and Jack Lasry. This started with 14 callers. I can't name them all; they go back to Joe Lewis, Ed Gilmore, Bob Page...a lot of those names I'm sure you'll recognize. They've "been recording artists, people who have written, some of the books, people who have given us some choreography and they've been the backbone for at least 20 years and now Callerlab is a little concerned.

When I say Callerlab now, I'm talking about 14 callers and within the next few years, it will probably be at least 200 or 300 callers. These will be, you might say, the most active in the business. They may not be the best callers but they have proven themselves to be adequate leaders; they are dedicated to the activity; they have sincerity and they want to see square dancing success not just for themselves because a lot of these people have got it made: they don't have to do it for themselves. They are doing it because they love the activity and they are doing it because they want to hand to you something in a better form than what it was handed to them. Not let's just perpetuate this idea again. One of the things that is bugging Callerlab right now is standardization; little styling points; abuse of certain basic movements; and we are trying to find out if many people do this and what can we do to

prevent it. When a caller says do-si-do or do-sa-do; why does some guy grab her and swing her around; why don't they do-si-do; maybe do-sa-do had been a bad thing all along; maybe it shouldn't even, be there. Maybe he should, grab her and swing her around; maybe if that's what the people really want then that's what the standardization should be in do-sa-do. Right now it isn't but maybe we made a mistake. On the other hand, maybe it is just some guy trying to get smart and it's just another one of these little stumbling blocks put in. our way. I personally feel that is what it is. I think do-si-do should remain the same as it has been. The same thing with a ladies chain. When, you do a, ladies chain, some men stand there and turn the ladies under and call it a ladies chain. Why doesn't he dance? One reason is maybe the caller hasn't let him dance; maybe the timing has been, so bad that he does some of these things in self defense. Maybe the caller has been so boring and so repetitive and so monotonous, the man and the other people have found other ways to get some enjoyment. Because after the 5th do-si-do of a tip, some guy figures, "Well, I'm going to do something else". Maybe a lot of these things are a part of it and it may be our fault that we fall into these traps. It is something to think about. However, if we let it get out of hand, square dancing will go back to the problems we had 20 or 30 years ago. I originally started out by saying one of the biggest problems with do-si-do is there are 2 ways of doing it. We brought it down, to one; but now there seems to be two. Somebody doesn't want to do it shoulder to shoulder; they want to swing. Maybe we should let them, get away with a 2nd variation: but in another 2 years, someone will come up with a 3rd variation. Maybe sooner or later we have 8 variations of the do-si-do being done. When that happens, we have very confused dancers, a very confused floor and a very confused caller. We don't, want to see it happen. All good dancing starts with good leadership and good, knowledge of all of your basic movements, how they go together, how to teach them; how many counts they take; what the body mechanics are and how to fit them comfortably into small transition movements going from one to another so that we can form a dance.

Ed Gilmore came out with a phrase "Comfortable dancing in the proper style". This is what we are after. This wraps some of our calls up in a nutshell. We only ask you to co-operate and unfortunately, I think I have seen instances of a few of these small abuses in our own dancing. All callers want to hack around once in awhile but if the dancers see you do it, this gives them license to do it. You may be creating problems for yourself because if you give them license to do it and you do it yourself, you also give them the opportunity to expand it a little bit more. You can develop quite a mess. Now consequently, even though I have given you a bit of history as to how it started and what is happening today, history is still being written and we are all a part of it. When some of you get UP about 20 years from now when Al Brundage.....