

A brief history of the Toronto and District Square and Round Dance Association



The year was 1951, and the world was rebuilding itself after six years of devastating war in Europe and other parts of the globe. In 1951 there was a distinctly Canadian flavour to what was then called square dancing, and what we often now refer to as "OLDE TYME" or "Traditional". In those days, typical dances included round dancing (schottische, polka, waltz, etc.) contra dancing, big circle and square dancing.

Square dance programmes were underway in schools, and the "Y". As part of the activities of the Community Programme Branch, Harold Harton travelled throughout Ontario promoting square dancing and initiating new square dance programmes. His desire to share the wealth of the variety of dancing he encountered around the province was a leading factor in the foundation of the

Toronto and District Square Dance Association. An able assistant was Orphie Orr (now Marcellus).

On October 4 and 5, 1952, Ricky Holden was brought to Toronto to give the local callers and leaders a glimpse of Western Square Dancing. This was perhaps one of the most significant workshops ever held by the organization, since it was no doubt very influential in showing the fork in the road that has led to what we know as Modern Western Square Dancing. It was emphasized strongly, at that time by the USA leader, that there should never be any conflict between the Texas style figures and the "the fine Canadian traditions".

With the year 1960, Audrey VanSickle first introduced couple dances called "Rounds" to the Association and to the Convention. A new list of square dance basics was introduced at the start of the 1961-62 season, containing 20 beginner basics and 10 more intermediate basics. As well, Ends Turn In and Grand Square were bonus additions during the course of the year.

The first International Convention, 1961-62, was under the leadership of a Convention Committee for the first time. In previous years the executive had handled the details of the Canadian Square Dance Convention. On January 12, 1963, the first Freshman Frolic sponsored by T&D was held at Pickering Collegiate with 34 squares in attendance. In 1967, Canada's Centennial year, dancers from T&D enthusiastically joined with other dancers, on a special train filled with square dancers, making many "dancing stops" along the way, for a gigantic coast to coast square dance.

The NINTH INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION, held in 1970 was also the last to be held at the Royal York Hotel in Toronto. The TENTH was the first one in the new location - McMaster University in Hamilton. There were many mixed emotions about the new location - but for most attendees, it was an exciting experience, with great facilities at reasonable cost, and with the marvellous food prepared by the University caterers.

These are only a few of the highlights of our forty-six years as an association, and by no means includes most of the interesting and exciting events that have taken place during those years, nor includes details of the the leadership and guidance so willingly given by countless of its members who had the foresight and inspiration to direct the Association to its place of prominence in Canada, North America and the world today.