

The History Of Circle Eight Club

Much of the history of the Circle Eight Square Dance Club has been compiled from the memories of the "oldtimers" and much of it has been lost with the passing of time and the passing of dancers. It is with pride we share these memories with all who believe in family, fellowship and fun.

In the beginning, there were several area clubs other than Circle Eight. "Shirts and Skirts" in Halstead, "Buttons and Bows", "Do-Si-Do's", and "20th Century", all of Newton.

W. M. Okerberg was the first caller of Circle Eight. He took lessons from "Pappy" Shaw in Colorado. It is believed he started Circle Eight in 1946, on his return to Newton. Jack Cronk soon joined him as a caller, followed by Erwin Stark, Tommy Gorden and Howard Schmidt.

Two couples, Hank and Madge Phillips and Brad and Clara Conner share the honor of being the first members of Circle Eight. Before joining Circle Eight, the Phillips danced with Shirts and Skirts and the Conners danced with Buttons and Bows.

Without the help of today's sophisticated amplifiers, the caller had to strain his voice to be heard over the live band he worked with. Often the caller would join the dancers while he called. The area square dancers were visited by their first National Caller in 1949. Though his name has been long forgotten, the man has not. He has been described as "a Texan who wore a long-tailed coat and a high top hat."

The first League dance was held in 1956 with Erwin Stark calling. Circle Eight is a Charter Member of the League. On January 31, 1959 the first 5th Saturday dance (which became known as Festival) was held in the Armory in Wichita. These dances were hosted by Newton, Hutchinson and Wichita in turn. Hank and Madge Phillips were Vice-Presidents of the League that year. Some early dances were held at the old Forum in Wichita. The building was too small for everyone to dance at the same time, so each couple was given a colored ribbon. The caller would call for red, and all those with red ribbons danced that tip. The next tip would be a different color.

Circle Eight has danced at the old YMCA, Lincoln School, the Episcopal Church, Bethel College, Cooper School, the Newton Armory, Walton School, Methodist Youthville, Suncrest School and Chisholm Middle School.

Circle Eight began lessons in the 1950's with Don Burkholder calling. Lessons have been given in a variety of places including the 4-H Building, the basement of the telephone company, the Elks Club, the Newton Community Center, the Newton Senior Center and the Newton Recreation Center. Lessons have been taught by callers and from tapes on occasion.

In 1976, it was agreed by all that a permanent record of the club should be kept, giving the club its first recorded records of officers, callers, activities and members. An anniversary committee was formed in 1986 and a search of the club history began. There were no membership lists prior to 1971. A 40th anniversary dance was held April 12, 1986.

Over the years, Circle Eight has hosted a wide array of holiday dances with the New Year's Eve and the Halloween dances proving to be the most popular with decorations, skirts,

costumes and contests, but mostly, lots of fun for all.

Every member of Circle Eight has special memories of dances, club campouts, banner chasing, laughter, festivals, conventions, graduation, that first dance after graduation, parade floats, street dances, new members becoming new friends, the sadness of old members moving or passing on. But above all, every member shares the special bond of a "square dance family."

Circle Eight holds out the welcoming hand of friendship to guests and members alike, and we invite you to visit us, make new friends, and join the square dance family that reaches around the world.

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