

ASCH RECORD ALBUM #344

AMERICAN COUNTRY DANCES

SQUARES, REELS

MR. & MRS. SILLER - TINY CLARK, Caller

Assisted by Wallace House



Country dancing is lots of fun. They knew it way back in 1800 when inkeepers offered country dancing as a come on to customers.

Then as now country dances took place in the taverns and town halls, and in some pioneer homes the dancing took place in the kitchen with the orchestra sometimes sitting on the kitchen sink. On holidays the dancing began in the early afternoon and kept going until the next morning.

The American country dance made its first written appearance about 1690 in a book called 'The Dancing Master' written by one John Playford. At that time a dance figure was chosen to fit a song. Then certain melodies were combined with certain figures to establish the different dances we know as Contra or Reel-Circle-Square.

The round (circle) or couple dances which complete an evening of varied entertainment are the waltz, troika, jig, hornpipe, polka, schottische, two step, varsovienne, (polka with foot pointing 3 times), galop, mazurka, march, popular dance number and so on.

There are certain steps and calls more typical to one part of the country than another. The music differs also. But there are no rigid rules that you must follow. Outside of a few formations you can be as free in your choice of dance steps, especially in the breakdown, as you want to be.

Mr. and Mrs. Siller have played at country dances for more than 40 years. They both come from upstate New York and have been together since they were little children.

Mrs. Siller started playing country music on an old organ in the county church—the music she learned from her mother and father, while Mr. Siller began his career under the watchful eye of a friendly German band leader.

Presenting Mrs. Siller on the piano and Mr. Siller on the fiddle.

Tiny Clark, the caller, one of the main attractions at the Village Barn in New York, hails from the West where they really do some fancy stepping. But he makes his calls so simple that even we Easterners can follow them.

THE DANCES

There is a simple combination of figures in all squares and contra (reel) dancing. The Contra is a longways dance. It is a reel danced in line formation with six couples. The square dance is a reel of four couples in a square set (a set is also a group of dances) and there are usually three changes performed by all four couples in rotation; introduction to partners and corners, swinging and great variety of figures, breakdown or jig figure (all dancers working at the same time).