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QUIGLEY, COLIN. *Close to the Floor. Folk Dance in Newfoundland.* Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Publications, Monograph Series No. 3. St John's Newfoundland, Canada: Department of Folklore, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1985. Viii+128 pages. Maps, bibliography, list of sources. Soft cover US\$10.00; ISBN 0-88901-099-4.

If you are a square dancer or a trusting person, you might read this book from front to back without too much trouble. Although the book is short, the first two chapters provide much detailed information about people, places, and types of dances that make you wonder how it will all fit together. Chapter Three on the dances in context and Chapter Four on the dynamics of change use those details admirably to describe the social network and the role of preserving traditions in a changed society.

Hence, it may be good to preview Chapter Four before beginning the book. Then you will realize that the data is mainly about the dances of the first half of the twentieth-century and that the Red Cliff Dancers represent an attempt to keep alive dance forms that are no longer a natural expression of community individuality. Your attention will be focused also more on the numbers of people involved in the dance than upon the various twists and turns of the styles. At least I found myself doubting certain reports (not dated) and, as a square dancer of years ago, trying to visualize the movements of the various styles. The information in the fourth chapter resolved my difficulties.

Though the art is dying out due to the influence of new music and dances brought by radio and television and to the mobility offered by cars, Colin Quigley first learned of these dances through a 1978 Canadian Broadcasting Company television film. Both the music and the style of dancing intrigued him and he set out on a study which involved listening to tapes of the music, interviewing people, and participating in the celebrations when these dances were performed.

Chapter One is a folksy introduction to the famous fiddlers and solo dancers of the region and a general description of the place and the types of people who settled there. The immigrants from southwest England and southeast Ireland brought their music and dances as well as their respective religions. Though the communities were mixed, either Roman Catholicism or Anglicanism would be dominant in a particular community. United Church of Christ members are also reported. The religious tint of the community affected the days and the manner in which the dances were held.

Chapter Two draws on the author's musical background in the investigation of the various dances. Names of dances varied greatly as the fiddlers learned mainly by observation and imitation and not from musical notations preserved in a book. Although there is a chart to show the differences in the square dance figures among the communities, some simple chart using circles and squares to depict the basic movements would have made the reading easier. (See, for example, *The Illustrated Extended and Mainstream Basic Movements of Square Dancing*.) The emphasis, however, is mainly on the numbers of people involved in the dances, the types of movements, and

length of performance. These factors are involved in the use or non-use of the dances at the present time. The Reel, for instance, which takes up a lot of space and involves many repetitions, has lost popularity. Besides the Reel, Square Dance, Lancers, Longway Dances, and Kissing Dance are described as forms of group dances. Outside of group dances, couple dancing was known but not done very often. Solo Step Dancing, with the particular feature of keeping a stiff upper body and even limiting the movement of the legs to below the knees in some areas, was a means of competition as well as setting a standard for other dances.

Chapter Three describes the various kinds of parties with singing and dancing, referred to as a "time." These times allowed the relaxation of regular social norms; they were also fund raisers for churches and schools. In general the parties were classed as either "Hall Times" or "House Times." Hall Times were more public, sponsored by some community group, and held at set dates. House Times were smaller, more spontaneous, and usually involved a more closely-knit group. Particularly in times involving mainly the local communities, the characteristic dance movements of the group could be noted. Thus these dances drew upon and re-enforced community solidarity and identity. The movements came naturally to those raised in the community. The descriptions of the various garden parties, Christmas sprees, bridge dances, etc., give a fascinating picture of life in these communities years ago.

Chapter Four is also interesting as it depicts the present situation concerning dances in these communities. As popular music invaded the area in the 1940s, it brought about a new consciousness of shedding a "rustic" image. Traditional dance forms began to be set aside in the 1950s. Furthermore greater mobility, due to the automobile, meant a greater mixture of community members at the dances. Traditional dances with their community specific movements lost out to the more "universal" modern dances and music.

Recently there has been a revival of the old forms to preserve the region's cultural values. But these dances are no longer the common possession of a community. Rather, a few interested people are passing on the dances which now, since they are "learned," have become fixed in movement and lack the spontaneity of the original forms. Furthermore, the dances are shortened or otherwise modified to make them more appealing and thus help keep the cultural revival alive. Chapter Four is an important chapter, raising questions about commercially promoted revivals. Yet, ironically, this book would never have been written had the dances not been performed especially for television.

Except for some initial difficulty with the first two chapters, I found this to be an interesting book with information about the lives and customs of Newfoundland people even beyond the studied change of dance traditions.

REFERENCE CITED:

- 1979 *The illustrated extended and mainstream basic movements of square dancing.*
Los Angeles: Sets in Order American Square Dance Society.

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