

# Mildred Buhler

Like most readers of the monthly bulletin of "The British Association of American S/D Clubs," I had seen "Founder - Mrs. Mildred Buhler" on page one many times, but until recently I knew nothing about her. Now, since we had the pleasure of hosting her whilst she was in Britain for the 40th Anniversary Dance, I believe I am in a position to tell you a little about this remarkable 83 year old lady, who was teaching dancing before I was born.

In 1928, at the age of 18, Mildred decided not to become a school teacher like her parents and sisters, but started to teach Dance - Ballroom, Ballet, Tap and Spanish - but she had not heard of Square Dancing. Her classes included students of all ages, from tiny tots to senior citizens, and they gave many displays of the different types of Dancing Mildred had taught them.

In 1941 one of her sisters went on a Lloyd Shaw demonstration evening and was taken with Square Dancing, that she insisted that at the earliest opportunity Mildred should attend one of Lloyd Shaw's courses to learn Square Dancing and Square Dance Calling. The first few days of that course seemed to make little sense to Mildred, but she persisted, and very soon she had added this to her repertoire, and incorporated it into her exhibitions.

Within a few weeks she had started a Square Dance group, which, in early 1942 became known as Redwood City Docey Doe. With this group, and her regular students, she was asked to give many displays. She was also invited to appear on local radio, at one time having a scheduled program of her own.

Mildred soon became involved with the Folk Dance Federation of California, later becoming Chairman of the Research Committee. As such, she was



responsible for producing its Annual Journal. Later she became an Associated Editor of "Let's Dance" magazine.

In 1952 her husband, Jake, was offered the Managership of the London Branch of Bank of America, which he agreed to accept providing Mildred was willing and able to relinquish her commitments in California. This she naturally complied with. Her intended departure was reported in "Let's Dance" and when she joined Jake in London, he presented her with a stack of mail about three inches thick. These were letters which had been sent to her, care of the bank by English Club Leaders and Callers asking for her help with Square Dancing. Mildred felt that she did not want to get involved so she ignored them.

However, this decision was reversed in October. One evening, she and Jake went to a Folk Dance Exhibition at the Albert Hall and enjoyed the displays of Folk Dancing from many countries, but cringed with embarrassment at the display of American Square Dancing.

Next day she contacted Jimmy Morris (one of those who had written to her) and offered her help, for the good of Square Dancing in this country. They arranged a meeting for early 1953 (after Mildred's equipment had arrived), expecting 40 or so to turn up, and both were astounded when 152 actually came. This was really the inaugural meeting of the British Association. She supplied them with lists and descriptions of Calls, and future meetings were planned. At one of these, a magazine was proposed, Mildred suggesting that the word "Square" be inserted into the name of her Californian Magazine (so **that's** how we got the name!).

Late that year Mildred was asked to put on an Exhibition at the Albert Hall, and she agreed, providing it was properly planned and rehearsed. In January, 1954, three months of twice-weekly rehearsals began. Far more dancers than expected turned up, and on the 3rd of April a very polished performance was put on at the Albert Hall with 9 sets of dancers. This was followed, on October 23rd and March 1955, by further successful exhibitions at the Albert Hall, each with five sets, dancing to Mildred's high standard.

On January 9, 1955 Mildred was elected to be the first President of the Callers Club of Great Britain, heading a list of names which are now legendary in British Square Dancing.

From April 1-7, 1955 at the likley Conference organized by National Association of Organizers and Lecturers of P.E., Mildred lectured and put on displays with dancers who had driven up from London; and the following year, she put on a display at the Olney Pancake Festival.

Mildred made contact with the English Folk Dance and Song Society at Cecil Sharp House, becoming friendly with Frank and Sybil Clark. She also loved to travel around England, France and Spain to observe displays of traditional dancing in their authentic settings.

By the time Mildred and Jake returned to America in 1959, this energetic and enthusiastic little lady had really put Square Dancing "on the map."

She was delighted to come back to England for our special anniversary this year and was thrilled that over a thousand dancers came to enjoy the celebrations. I now realize, as I'm sure you do, too, that but for her, we might not have the large number of Clubs and Callers in this country, providing enjoyment for so many.

Submitted by Mac McCullar - reprinted from the monthly bulletin of "The British Association of American S/D Clubs." ✓

by Bert Spinney,  
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