

Walter Grothe - 1901 to 1996

It is with a real heavy heart I report the death of a close friend and former fellow folk dancer, Walter Grothe, who died of natural causes January 25, 1996. He was 94. He is survived by his wife Kathy, four children, four grandchildren and one great grandchild. He was 94.

Those of us who worked and folk danced with Walter during the early years of the folk dance movement appreciate the fact that he, more than any one individual, was responsible for the heavy growth, especially during his two terms as President of the Folk Dance Federation of California, for the years 1946-47, 1947-48.

In 1948, Let's Dance Editor, Henry Koopman, also a close friend of Walter, wrote in his final edition a column headed, "WALTER WAS HERE". The article depicted a map showing where he had visited. At this time the number of folk dance clubs in the Federation was approaching 300 in Northern California. Walter paid them all a visit.

While he has not been officially active in Federation affairs these past years, he has remained active in folk dancing. Starting at the beginning in 1948, he was a staff member of the Stockton Folk Dance Camp for better than 40 years. He also was the folk dance instructor at the University of California International House for almost an equal number of years.

Recently Miriam Lidster featured an article in Let's Dance about the life of Walter Grothe. In view of her article we will just highlight a few of his more notable folk dance achievements, some responsible for titling him "Mr. Folk Dancer".

It was about five years ago that I took the ferry to Tiberon to interview Walter for the History of the Folk Dance Movement in California I was then researching. He met me at boatside in his car and then lunched me in one of those picturesque little Tiberon restaurants. The cornbeef sandwich and beer were excellent. Those of you who purchased or have access to the now-published history will find a lengthy account of Walter's life before and during his folk dance activity years, the result of the interview.

To paraphrase a few of Walter's contributions to the folk dance movement, it was he who suggested to Lawton Harris of the then College of the Pacific, they start a folk dance camp.

Together with Henry Koopman, Walter journeyed South to assist the Southern folk dance clubs with their bylaws. There followed the first Statewide in Ojai and the subsequent forming of a Southern section of the Folk Dance Federation of California

It was during entertainment time at one of the Berkeley Folk Dance club's famous birthday parties titled "Sinner's Ball", that Henry Koopman said it best during his take-off of Walter as he

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sang the following first verse of a two verse song. Henry, dressed in Tyrolean costume, Walter's favorite, sang to the melody of "The Biggest Aspidistra in the World", these special lyrics.

"My name is Walter Grothe, I am President you know
Of the biggest Federation in the world,
This is about the only place that's left for me to go
From the biggest Federation in the world.
When I became the President the number of clubs were small
So I put on my traveling clothes and visited them all
And to get the Southern Section in I even learned to drawl,
you all
It's the biggest Federation in the World.

The overall significance of the theme title, "Sinner's Ball", of course, had reference to the place "Down Under". That explains the line, "This is the only place left for me to go", meaning Hades.

We could go on and on in our praise of Walter but will close by saying, "For those of us who knew him well there will always be a special memory in our hearts. Rest well good friend, you deserve it.

LARRY GETCHELL