

Miriam Lidster

by Larry Getchell, Past President
Folk Dance Federation of CA, 1948-49

If you have been a reader of Let's Dance these past several years, you may have noticed and read several profiles of outstanding folk dance leaders, under the by-line, MIRIAM LIDSTER. These profiles were the result of considerable research on the part of Miriam, and serve as a valuable source of information on contributions to the folk dance movement, made by some very dedicated people. Most of these articles that appeared in Let's Dance magazine referred to people who started folk dancing during its early California development. Naturally, many present day folk dancers are not aware of these contributions. To this end, Miriam has done folk dancing a valuable service.

But, what about the author of these fine profiles, Miriam Lidster herself? Seems to us, recognition of her many contributions to the dance arts, is long overdue. With apologies for the unintentional missing of some of the deserving honors, we will, with the material at hand, attempt to do, if you will, a "This is your life" story on Miriam Lidster, one whose friendship we have always considered something special.

HIGHLIGHTS

Born in Waukesha, Wisconsin, Miriam Lidster lived a short time in Alma, Michigan before the family moved to Moscow, Idaho in 1916. Here her father was a professor in physical education at the University of Idaho. Miriam says, she herself has been associated with dance and the theater since her junior year in high school.

Moving to Corvallis, Oregon, she developed an association with Oregon State University where she received her BS degree. Later she received her Masters at New York University. During the early years, Miriam was in modern dance and choreography before becoming involved in folk dancing. Her first introduction to folk dancing happened in 1936 at La Crosse University in Wisconsin. Here she was asked to teach folk dancing which, up to that time, she knew little, if anything, about. With the help of a friend, another teacher, she taught mostly English dances along with such basics as the schottische, polka, and waltz. Her three year stay with La Crosse ended when she returned to the West Coast. Here the dust had hardly settled when on the second day she received a telephone call from C.M. McClatchy, inviting her to Sacramento for an interview. Miriam had planned on taking her parents on a trip to Mexico and she did, interviewing for the Sacramento on her way back. She landed the job. They kept a promise to build her a dance studio and while here she began teaching some folk dance.

While still in Sacramento, Miriam received a telephone call from a Corvallis, Oregon friend, Margaret Mullen, who wanted her to come and be interviewed for a modern dance position at Stanford University. Margaret's brother and Miriam had been classmates in several business administration classes at Oregon State University, and she might have chosen a career as a private secretary, so she admits. However, as later events would prove, dance was the driving force in Miriam's future. In 1942, Modern Dance was "the thing". Together with her friend, Margaret Muller, she had the benefit of training with an Oregon State University teacher who had received her training under Margaret Doubler of the University of Wisconsin. The latter had been the guiding light for many students of dance during the Forties. Accepted at Stanford University as an Associate Professor in 1942, Miriam Lidster taught Elementary Education. Dance and rhythms being a part of Elementary Education, students from various walks of life participated in her classes, which as time went on included more and more folk dancing. Many Stanford men, associated with athletics, including football players, were required in their education courses to take Elementary Education. According to Miriam, she enjoyed every minute of it and says some of the men became very good folk dancers. One of these men, who was a member of her folk dance and exhibition group, now resides in Leisure World, her present home.

In 1948, Miriam attended the first folk dance camp at the College of the Pacific in Stockton. Here she busied herself writing dance descriptions for dances being taught by teachers who had no prepared descriptions. Having enjoyed a wonderful time, she continued her attendance at the Stockton Camp through 1979, teaching and being part of the staff many of those years. Her rhythms class was very popular and following a tour of Israel, she specialized in Israeli dances. Later and for several years she followed up with English Country Dance.

Despite her busy schedule at Stanford and other activities, Miriam found time to serve as a member of the Folk Dance Federation of California's Research Committee. She continued to serve as a regular member for three years following her retirement from Stanford University and moving to Arizona. According to the present Research Committee Chairperson, Ruth Ruling, Miriam still remained as a consultant to the Research Committee.

Miriam feels that a major contribution to international folk dancing, resulting from her activities at Stockton Camp, was the bringing and sponsoring of outstanding folk dance leaders and teachers to Stanford University. This enabled Stanford students, as well as the public, the opportunity to know and gain knowledge of folk dances from many countries.

In addition to her duties as a teacher of dance at Stanford University, Miriam taught a course in "Methods of Teaching".

This concludes the "thumb nail" sketch of "Miriam Lidster, This Is Your Life." Now let's review this talented person's honors.

ACHIEVEMENTS

In 1948 Miriam received the Heritage Award from the American Association of Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance. The Heritage Award is the highest award one can receive from AAHPERD.

In 1966 she was recognized as an outstanding contributor to dance by the Santa Clara County American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance.

In 1976 she received the Verne Landreth Award, given by the California Association of Health, Physical Education, and Recreation. This was California's highest award at the time.

In 1976 Miriam became a life member of CAMPER and received the Director's Award, a dance and movement award for California educators.

Miriam was a National President and a Southwest District President in the American Association of Health, Physical Education, and Dance (AAHPERD).

Miriam believes that perhaps one of her major achievements was, as previously mentioned, the bringing of and sponsoring of outstanding folk dance leaders and teachers to Stanford University. Thus, she provided an opportunity for Stanford students as well as the public from San Francisco to San Jose to know and gain the knowledge of folk dance from many countries.