



Sally and Lawton Harris

Photo by A. C. S.

LAWTON HARRIS

BY WALTER GROTHE

For further information write to Lawton D. Harris, or, send your \$5.00 deposit to Lawton Harris, director. Thousands of folk dancers all over the United States and abroad have read these 2 sentences during the last 10 years on the Folk Dance Camp publicity and thousands who have attended camp at Stockton on the College of the Pacific campus have had the pleasure of meeting Lawton Harris and, of course thousands of dancers who have been his pupils or have attended festivals, meetings etc. have gotten to know him. Lawton Harris is today one of the best known figures in the folk dance world but not many people realize exactly how much we owe him and that perhaps we would not be dancing today and that we would not have a co-ordinated folk dance movement and a Federation had it not been for Lawton Harris.

Lawton is one of the real pioneers of the movement. He started out with play party games in 1934. Then gradually he added more and more folk-dances. He used these as part of a social recreation program in Church. His wife Sally, who is so much a part of his folk dance career that we always take of Sally and Lawton, at first used to play for all their classes and Lawton, who claims that in the early days he had no feeling for rythm and had 3 left feet, had to teach. Then in 1937 after some experimentation Sally was graduated to teach likewise and they used phonograph records. At that time Lawton started the first Folk

Dance club the "Square Steppers" of Oakland and he assisted in the organization of the Berkeley Folk Dancers. (He still carries their honorary membership card).

Also in 1937 Lawton made his first contact with the College of the Pacific in Stockton. On the day off from his job in Oakland he went to Stockton and taught a folk dance class there. In 1942 the Harris's moved to Stockton and soon after their arrival organized the "Stockton Polk Y Dots." Today in 1957 Lawton is still the teacher of that club and this is probably the longest continuous such relationships. Then followed the forming of the Folk Dance Federation of California and in 1946 Lawton Harris organized the Pacific area Recreation Lab and brought to California the first outstanding folk dance teacher from the East Coast Mary Ann Herman. Out of this recreation lab grew the folk dance camp idea and in 1948 the Folk Dance Camp on the College of the Pacific was organized with Lawton Harris as director and guiding spirit. Only those who worked with him on the camp committee know how much of his time, how much love, how much thought he has given and still gives every year to camp. It is his one great love in the folk dance movement and he is fully devoted to it. Though camp Lawton has brought to California the outstanding folk dance personalities in the country and through them he has brought to us many interesting dances and has kept our movement alive. And also through camp he has contributed greatly to the cultural side of our hobby and has created an interest in the related fields such as singing and crafts.

There are many more things one could tell about Lawton Harris. Just to name a few: He has served as YMCA secretary, as executive of Church Federation and he is now professor of Religious Education and Physical Education at the College of the Pacific, Stockton. His main work is the training of recreation and group work personnel.

In the folk dance movement Lawton has done a great deal of research. He has worked with the so-called "old timers" and has obtained much valuable information. And he has worked intensively with the Danish groups in the state and has presented to the Federation a number of Danish dances. His record library of folk dances is one of the largest one can find anywhere and the printed source material in several languages which he owns is extensive and goes back 150 years. This material and his knowledge in the field was very useful to Lawton, when he served two years as editor of "Let's Dance." Space does not permit to enumerate the many more things that Lawton has done and accomplished in the field and the many things done quietly in the background for which we are very much indebted to him, but space will permit to say that Lawton Harris is one of the finest personalities in our movement, that you could not meet a more congenial, more considered and a fairer person to work with and that the Folk Dance Movement in California would not be what it is today if Lawton Harris were not one of us.