

Dance organizers

Leafing thru the old newspapers of yesteryear week after week, year after year, the overwhelming mass of information suggests that Maynard people in their leisure hours loved that greatest of indoor sports- Dancing. If it wasn't an annual ball put on by The Masons, The Cricket Club, The Caledonian Club, The Fire Department, Ancient Order of Hibernians, St. Bridget's Temperance Society, The Finnish Socialist Society, The Imatra Band, The National Band, The Maynard Brass Band, The D.Y.W.Y.K. Club, The Middlesex Club, Twilight Club, The Grange, Royal Arganum, High School Alumni Association, Foresters Of America, The Moose, The Individual Craft Unions in the Mill, Int. Order Of Red Men, Eastern Star, Knights Of Pythias, Ancient Order Of United Workmen, Odd Fellows, Associated Templars, Eagles, High School Seniors, The various town baseball Associations to repeat, if it was not one of these. it was a program and dance at other times by the same clubs. And if this was not enough, groups of individuals would hold public dances in between.

The balls generally were dress-up affairs, grand march, punch and all the associated things to go with it. Large bands from Boston and other large cities vied with local bands for the honors. One such local band which gained New England prominence, for a decade and a half was Frank Sheridans Orchestra. Our Frank who was representative for us in The General Court in the mid thirties and just now retired Postmaster of Maynard.

Another was Hughie Connors Orchestra that covered the New England circuit, also. Lawton's Orchestra was also well known in the area and played for the dances and balls.

The balls were held either in Music Hall, Riverside Co-operative Hall, or The New Colonial Hall after 1914. The Music Hall or the Rink as it was called generally, which burned down in 1912, was the center of so much cultural, social, and sport activities for some 30 odd years that it deserves a separate paper for our Society. Suffice to say 800 to a thousand dancers would fill Music Hall in those grand days. Descriptions of these balls fill the newspapers- year in- year out.

Some of the smaller dances that were held had some quaint sponsors. Names of some of these impromptu groups ran from The Jolly Five, Merry Six, Happy Sixteen to The Shirt Waist Dancers. The dances of that earlier period (from The Gay Nineties), as copied from a dance card of The Caledonian Club are as follows: Schottisch, Polka, Waltz, Two Step, Shades of Gypsy Rose Lee! After that came the Charleston, Hula, Black Bottom, The Shag, Jitter Bug, Jive, Rock and Roll, (all animal dances!)

And now in 1965, to cap it off are still deploring the end of civilization because of all the variations of the Twist! And it started in 1913!

The Shirtwaist dance parties were called such because of the informal dress- shirt and blouses for the ladies and men in suits or in hot weather in shirt sleeves. The animal dances mentioned above were The Turkey Trot and The Bunny Hug is the ~~ew~~ educated guess of Frank Sheridan.

May 6, 1904 Maynard News reports, "The Jolly Five are to have a prize dance on the first Friday night in June." The same issue reports, "The Jolly Five dance in the Music Hall Friday night drew a large crowd and an enjoyable evening was reported. "

The same issue reports, "The Happy Sixteen will have a Dance and sS- Social in Music Hall Tuesday eve, May 10. Cartwrights Orchestra will play and a good time is assured. The Club consists of: Margaret Murphy, Margaret Dineen, Bessie Mahoney, Mae Carpenter, Mamie Dineen, Tessie Owens, Mamie Kelly, Minnie Cullinane, Annie Burke, Hellie Punch, Katie Young, Alice Manoney, Mamie Driscoll, and Inez Scully." Two of the sixteen must have found their man at the previous dance for only fourteen names are listed among these Finnish colleens.!

June 24-04 Maynard News reports, "Collins Orchestra furnished excellent music at the dance given by The Jolly Five in Coop Hall Wednesday night, which was well attended. There is no doubt that with a few engagements the local orchestra can give as good satisfaction as can be desired by the public.

The same issue reports, " A large party was in attendance at The Shirtwaist party given by St. Bridget's Temperance Society in Music Hall Saturday night. The Society will have another of their popular Shirtwaist parties in Music Hall Tommorrow night. Cartwirght's Orchestra will play.

And so on up to November 14, 1913 Maynard News where-in is reported the following: "At the Selectmens' meeting Wednesday eve, it was decided that the objectionable dances which have been involved in the dance halls in this village must be stopped. All parties holding dances in the future will be notified that these objectionable and so-called animal dances are prohibited and must not be permitted in any dance hall in this municipality.

This action is the opening of a vigorous campaign to suppress

these objectionable forms of dance and Rev. Walter J. Browne, Father Sheehan, and other clergymen of the town, as well as a large percentage of the men and women are in sympathy with this movement and will sustain the selectmen in this action for a cleaner and better Maynard." (End of news article.)

Frequently there was a prize Waltz at these dances. One such instance remembered by James Farrell was a dance held by St. Bridget's Temperance Society at Riverside Coop Hall. This has remained vivid in his mind for over half a century for an excellent reason. Two couples tied for first place, Jim Ryan (present sealer of weights) and Clarabelle Warren (his future wife) and Jim Farrell and (guess who?) Mamie Driscoll of "Happy Sixteen" fame!

I am indebted to Miss Mamie Driscoll, James Farrell and Frank Sheridan for additional information for this paper.

I must also add it is absolutely fascinating to read about an individual or event which happened fifty or sixty years ago and then call the same individual up on the telephone today to verify or amplify on those events. In the case of Miss Driscoll, was one of the original members of the "Happy Sixteen" the voice that came over the phone was no more than a Happy Sixteen.

All in all, philosophically stated, the home made enjoyments, be it dances, Minstrel shows, Dramatics, Glee Clubs, what-not, of yesteryear gave much more pleasure than the canned culture of today that is fed to us.