

Dancing In Dayton

It has long been the opinion of AMERICAN SQUARES that the future of square and folk dancing is happiest in those areas where some recognized civic group, preferably the City Recreation Department, takes an active leadership. In past issues we have described some such cities and saluted those hard-working professional recreation people responsible for sound and healthy growth of this activity. It is a pleasure to add Dayton, Ohio, to this list of cities.

By Bernie Eilerman

There has always been square dancing in Dayton, found in what are known as "50-50" dances. These are held in commercial halls, usually on weekends, in the outlying area and smaller towns. Squares have always been kept at a simple level, so new people drifting in each week do not have too much trouble. The "50-50" refers to half squares and half ballroom dances. Many groups attending these dances carry their own bottle and the dancing, both square and ballroom, is of the jitterbug variety.

Revived in 1949

Square dancing, as part of the general revival which has swept the country, did not become firmly established in Dayton until 1949, when Mike Solomon of the Division of Recreation conducted a Community Leader's Training Institute at the Y.M.C.A., under the sponsorship of the Council of Social Agencies. Before that time, in 1947, on Mike's initiative, the Division of Recreation began to encourage international folk dancing.

Club Sponsorship

At present there are two square, one round and one folk dance club (with another round and another folk dance club in the process of being formed) operating under the sponsorship of the Division of Recreation. The round dance club started in 1952 when many square dancers began clamoring for more and more instruction in the round dances which flowed in a steady stream from the west coast. In addition to the clubs, the Division of Recreation conducts regular classes in all three forms of dancing. Graduates from these classes go to fill club vacancies or, in many cases, go out to build their own groups and clubs.

Activities Varied

The four clubs presently operating have a total membership of about six hundred. At this writing, there are an additional four hundred students regis-

tered in classes. In addition to Mike, there are a number of callers and leaders in Dayton who help to keep clubs and classes going. These callers and leaders are also kept busy with other groups,—schools, the U. of D., churches, fraternal groups, PTAs, 4-H, etc. They also donate much time to such worthy causes as teaching and exhibiting for veterans, the state hospital, League of Hard of Hearing, patients at Wright-Patterson Air Force, Goodwill, Red Cross and others.

Keeping Interest High

Many nationally-known callers and folk dance leaders are often brought to Dayton to keep interest sparked. Among these have been Rickey Holden, Herb Greggerson, Ed Durlacher, Ralph Page, Earl Gulley, Ed Gilmore, Michael and Mary Ann Herman, Paul and Gretel Dunsing and Jane Farwell,—not to forget Ohio's own Old Timer, Billy Foster, and the very popular Gus Heismann of Cincinnati's TV fame, who is a regular in Dayton. Such guests are an indispensable part of the drive to keep the folk dance movement alive, and will continue to be brought to Dayton as frequently as possible.

Although private clubs and groups are many, with dancers running into the thousands, most of the leaders are members of the City Sponsored Clubs, which are also the largest individual clubs. These are the clubs which sponsor guest callers and leaders. Also, they co-sponsor the Annual City-Wide Festival, a very popular event.

There has been nothing spectacular about the movement in Dayton, rather a slow steady growth, which has proven in the past to be the most healthy situation. For this, the dancers of Dayton owe a great deal to the Division of Recreation, both for its cooperation and the actual leadership of Mike Solomon who, with his wife Margaret, have given all their spare time to the furtherance of this activity.