

CLUB HISTORIES

Over the years several members of the Village Squares have recorded their perceptions of the Club, its origins, and its future. Some of these documents have been lost, but at least three have survived and are included on this site. The first of these is the most recent and most comprehensive. It was compiled by Jim and Ovilla Carpenter at the direct request of the 1998 Executive Council. The second of these was authored by the late A. J. Hill. His account covers the greatest span of time. The last is a document of unknown authorship that was discovered in the Club scrapbook. It focuses on the largest beginning class ever held by the Village Squares. These three documents contain an understandable amount of redundancy as well as a number of discrepancies. They are reproduced here exactly as they were found.

HISTORY OF THE VILLAGE SQUARES

Auburn, Alabama

During the summer of 1979, the Lee Campers, a group of friends from Auburn, Opelika and the surrounding Lee County, were enjoying a weekend at Florence Marina. One night, while enjoying a huge campfire, someone mentioned that this would be a great place for a square dance. The only couple in the group with any square dance experience was Bill and Martha Jones. Using a square dance tape they had with them, Bill and Martha attempted to teach the group a few basic steps. Everyone had a lot of fun trying. Out of this group four couples became serious about learning more about square dancing. Other couples were approached regarding taking a square dance class and Lew and Gen Stebbins were obtained as caller.

The first classes were held on Wednesday nights in the Auburn Recreation Center. On November 5, 1980, the following couples were graduated: Bill and Martha Jones, Brewer and Louise Smith, Hugh and Louise Morris, Ernest and Jane Phillips, Dick and Lois Graves, Joe and Betty Faulkner, Ken and Peggy Copeland, A.C. and Pat Ellis, and Jim and Ovilla Carpenter. Another couple, Al and Betty Milner, had dropped from the class due to a job transfer.

The Belles and Beaus was selected as the club name for the group. The following officers were elected: Bill and Martha Jones, President; Dick and Lois Graves, Vice-President; and Jim and Ovilla Carpenter, Secretary-Treasurer. A committee, chaired by Joe Faulkner, with the help of committee members, Lois Graves and Pat Ellis, was appointed to study and formulate by-laws for the club. By this time the club realized a more experienced caller was needed. Interviews began, with Barry Echols and Paul Place being the only candidates. Paul Place, an army captain from Columbus, GA, was chosen to become the second caller for the Belles and Beaus. Later Paul's wife, Carol, an experienced round dance cuer, began lessons for those couples who were interested and round dancing became part of the regular club format.

On March 18, 1981, in appreciation for their help in establishing the Belles and Beaus and fulfilling the desire of those nine original couples to learn to square dance, a letter was sent to Lew and Gen Stebbins offering them an honorary life membership in the club.

Meanwhile, several other couples in the area had become interested in learning to square dance. The present club members felt they would benefit from additional instructions, so Paul's first class consisted of the original members of the Belles and Beaus plus the following couples: Chuck and Mary Gilmer, Coleman and Alice Ward, A.J. and Mildred Hill, Levi and Dot Knapp, Dennis and Frances Hale and Will and Marguerite Freeman. This class met at various places in Auburn including the old skating rink on Opelika Road and Drake School. On June 27, 1981, this class was graduated in the showroom of Dyas Chevrolet. For a while the club danced in several locations all over Auburn and Opelika.

Back in March, 1980, another group of 17 couples from the School of Business at Auburn University had engaged Sidney Brooks to teach them more about square dancing. The group had originally called

themselves The School of Business Square Dance Group, but after obtaining a caller the name Village Squares was formally adopted and others outside the school were invited to join. The organization was simple. Each academic quarter was different. At the beginning of each quarter, the number of second and fourth Wednesdays in the upcoming quarter was determined and interested couples paid a pro-rated amount. Generally, the club did not meet between quarters. No emphasis was placed on completing the mainstream program.

In the summer of 1981 the Belles and Beaus were seeking a more suitable place to dance and were also trying to recruit more members. The two groups met and agreed to merge. The members of the original Village Squares agreed to become the third class of the Belles and Beaus in order to dance at the mainstream level, and the members of the Belles and Beaus agreed to change its name to the Village Squares. The club danced at Indian Pines for the next seven years, continuing to grow by graduating classes each year, thereby increasing membership. Because of the large size of the club it was necessary to find a larger place to dance. Battles Skate Center became the dancers' new home and the club continues to dance there as of this date.

The club is now in its seventeenth year and many classes have been graduated. Since Auburn is a university town with many transient residents, retention of members has fluctuated from 67 couples to much smaller numbers. The largest class to graduate consisted of 47 people. The club has been a member of the Montgomery Area Square and Round Dance Association for many years.

Over the years the club has been privileged to host dances with a varied number of callers, some nationally known. These include Darryl McMillan, Tony Oxendine, Gary Sheffield, Tony DiGeorge, Stan Russell, Dee Dee Dougherty, Hoss Waldorf, Willis Simmons, Sonny Cook, the late Varner Maxey and others. Enjoying these special dances were square dance friends, not only from other area clubs, but also from several surrounding states.

On November 10, 1988, Paul and Carol Place, along with several members, resigned from the Village Squares club and formed another club. That club no longer exists. Larry Belcher was obtained as an interim caller for several months and eventually became the regular caller for the club. Larry is still the caller for the Village Squares. He also calls for several other clubs in the area.

As of this date, only four couples of the original Belles and Beaus remain active in the Village Squares. Compiled by Jim and Ovilla Carpenter 04/15/98

HISTORY OF VILLAGE SQUARES

by A.J. Hill

The name "Village Squares" was first used by square dancers in this area in 1960. Some members of the Auburn University Faculty Club started a square dance class in the early 1950's; then, sometime in 1960, adopted the name "Village Squares." All of the dancers were members of the Faculty Club, and the group operated as an "interest group" of that organization. The dancers met each Friday night in the Faculty Club quarters (the space in the Faculty Club then was about twice as large as the space now occupied by the newly-named University Club). Dues were 25 cents per week.

Square dancing was not nearly so highly structured or as well organized then as it is now. Much of the dancing was done to records, and the Village Squares purchased a large library of records and record-playing equipment. During one six-month period the group employed a "professional" caller-teacher--a Sgt. Bob Miller from Ft. Benning, Georgia. This group bought Village Square badges and stayed together more or less for four or five years, then dissolved. Many of these dancers still live in Auburn, but are not members of a club at the present time: Ben and Thelma Thomas, Dennis and Madge Rouse, Cliff and Lorraine Burnett, Bill and Betty Waters, Leon and Johnnie McGraw, Mike and Mary Evans, Mary Emily Lane, Mildred VandeMark, and others. Another couple, who now live in Atlanta, was Ken and Billie Anne

Rice. Ken was an Auburn University All-American football player at that time, and Billie Anne was a member of the faculty.

One of the original couples, Fred and Catherine Adams, continued their square dancing in a club outside the Auburn-Opelika area, and later helped organize the "Auburn Allemanders." Two couples, A.J. and Mildred Hill and Dennis and Frances Hale were members of the "new" Village Squares.

The black badges of the original Village Squares stayed in top dresser drawers for years; and we now pick up the story in early 1979. The School of Business at Auburn University employed Mr. Sidney Brooks from the Valley to provide entertainment for its Winter quarter party. Mr. Brooks was a big hit and a number of the faculty members engaged him to come to Indian Pines on the second and fourth Wednesday nights in each month to continue the lessons.

This group started in March of 1980 with 17 couples paying \$30.00 each to cover the Spring quarter. At first the group called itself "The School of Business Square Dance Group," but after it showed signs of continuing, the name "Village Squares" was formally adopted, and others outside the School of Business were invited to join. The organization was simple. Each academic quarter was different. At the beginning of each quarter, the number of second and fourth Wednesdays in the upcoming quarter was determined and interested couples paid a pro-rated amount. Generally, the club did not meet between quarters. The members were having fun and learning more about square dancing, but no emphasis was placed on completing the mainstream program. Among the members of this group were Dennis and Frances Hale, Hugh and Mary Guffey, Larry and Jean Roberts, Jim and Dawn Yerkey, Bob and Carol Rogow, Bob and Lou Rowsey, Clarence and Sarah Miley, and A.J. and Mildred Hill.

This second Village Squares group continued meeting at Indian Pines until 1982.

In 1980 another group was getting interested in square dancing: Brewer and Louise Smith, Ken and Peggy Copeland, Ernest and Jane Phillips, Hugh and Louise Morris, and Jim and Ovilla Carpenter. Others joining this group for lessons were: Joe and Betty Faulkner, Dick and Lois Graves, Chuck and Mary Gilmer, Levi and Dot Knapp, A.C. and Pat Ellis, Coleman and Alice Ward, Rob Will and Marguerite Freeman, as well as Bill and Martha Jones, who had square danced before and became the group's first president. These couples started lessons in a City of Auburn recreation class--taught by Lew Stebbins--and continued under the name "Belles & Beaus," using two other callers before deciding on a regular one. This group graduated from basics in June 1980. During the early part of 1981, they looked for the best possible caller, and after considering several applicants, chose Capt. Paul Place from Ft. Benning, Georgia, to lead them. Paul and his wife, Carol, had learned square dancing while he was stationed in Germany. The Belles & Beaus issued an invitation to members of the Village Squares to join in the lessons to be taught by Paul, and A.J. and Mildred Hill accepted. The Classes were held in the old skating rink on Opelika Road, and the first class graduated at the Dyas Chevrolet showroom on June 27, 1981. In the summer of 1981, the newly-graduated Belles & Beaus club was looking for new members, and especially, a more suitable place to meet, while the Village Squares was made up of people who had "played" at square dancing for three years had a lease on Wednesday nights at Indian Pines. Logic dictated that these two groups get together, and that they did. The groups joined, and the members of the Village Squares agreed to become the second class in the Belles & Beaus; and the Belles & Beaus agreed to change its name to--what else--Village Squares.

"History of Beginning Square Dance Class of 85-86"

During August and September 1985, the Village Squares, under the leadership of Presidents Jim and Dawn Yerkey and Vice Presidents Wayne and Dot Mitcham, worked together to enlist new members to square dancing and their efforts were well received by the people in this area. Over 75 couples expressed much interest and over 50 of these were able to adjust their schedules to attend the Open House held in their honor on October 1, 1985, in the Activities Building of First Baptist Church of Auburn. This was the largest number of interested people in beginner square dancing in the history of the Village

Squares Dance Club. During the years of 1983, 1984, and 1985, all over and nationwide, square dancing had been seeing a lack of interest and a decline in membership in most clubs. Not so here in Auburn. With a unified club and a cooperative spirit, the club saw remarkable results in their efforts to further square dancing. The 1985-86 class saw 25 couples come together each Tuesday night, with caller Paul Place explaining the different basic movements to them. This was by far the largest beginner class Paul had ever coached.

They came together at Christmas with the Village Square Club at Indian Pines in a hall that was beautifully decorated and with food lavishly filling the tables. They could begin to see just what the fellowships and fun that accompanies the dancing was all about. They were again invited to join the club at the Valentine Dance in February at which time a fashion show was arranged for the benefit of the new dancers. Alice Ward coordinated the event and acted as Mistress of Ceremonies. Members of the club modeled their different costumes - the simple ones, the colorful and the many diverse styles. This helped the new dancers learn about square dance dress and was a big success. Along with this they were given information on materials, patterns and location of stores that carried square dance apparel. The owners of the square dance shop in nearby LaGrange, Georgia, came over this night and brought clothing and displayed them for the club.

Graduation for these 6 squares was held at Indian Pines in April 1986. The following couples marched down the decorated hall and enthusiastically received their certificates of graduation : Joe and Rowena Boland, Bobby and Jeanne Brown, Al and Joyce Clark, Leo Comeau, Terry and Sandy Counterline, Bill and Peggy Fluker, John and Jeannette Frandsen, Henry and Shirley Helmke, Fred and Marty Hoerr, Jim and Dean Hosey, Rhon and Joyce Jenkins, Bruce and Susie Ledford, Don and Jane Machen, Wayne and Judy Murphy, Dennis and Madge Rouse, Dru McGowen, David Rusk, Gerald and Elaine Rutland, Sue Ruzieka, Don and Linda Seay, Debbie Sipe, Lewis and Marianna Slaten, Frank and Ginger Ware, Cliff and Barbara Webber, Jim and Helga Wilmoth, and Paul and Evie Ziegler.

Accolades from everyone were bestowed on Paul Place who had so successfully trained and instilled the love of square dancing to this the largest graduating class for the Village Squares and possibly larger than most average clubs throughout the nation at this time. A program and presentation of gifts to Paul concluded the program. These 6 squares joined the Village Squares in membership. The summer of 1986 saw the membership of Village Squares reach well over 100.