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Couple country dances

The names for a dance session vary by country, community and time period. You may know it as any of: Country Dancing Contra Dance Square Dance in many different styles English Country Dancing Playford Folk Dance Traditional Dance Ceilidh Barn Dance Jane Austen style dance Community Dance Social Dance Etc. Around 1650, as documented in the Lovelace Manuscript and in John Playford's The English Dancing Master there were all these formations for a dance: Two Couples Three Couples Longways Three Couples in a Circle Three Couples in an Offset Line (the middle couple in front of the others) Four Couples Longways for 5, 6, 7, 8 or 9 Couples Longways for as Many as Will Square (Circle of Four Couples) Circle for as Many as Will Single Line of Four Couples Many more have been added since. Some groups choose to dance a subset of the available dances, but, even so, why do so many evenings consist entirely, or almost entirely, of just "Longways for as Many as Will" dances? Yes, the longways formation has a number of significant benefits: It is an excellent use of the available space. It can handle any number of couples. Tired couples, on reaching the top or bottom of the set, can drop out without affecting anyone else. If longways is all you do then the dancers become familiar with the idiosyncrasies and concepts of that formation and you may be able to teach the next dance more quickly and with more chance of success. But is that enough reason to ignore so many other wonderful dances? Choreographers, next time you are writing a new dance why not try a different formation? Can you come up with a new formation? Callers, why not explore the full breadth of country/contra dancing and produce a more varied programme? Yes, I know it is not easy. Many dancers (who may never have experienced such variety) may be reluctant to try something new. For example, once, when I was calling at an English Country Dance session in America, I said, "The next dance is a square dance." Immediately a number of the dancers sat down and refused to join a set. We were limited in numbers so I had to cajole them to get up and join in so that we could do the dance. The dance was Don & Diana Bell's beautiful waltz-time dance, My Cape Breton Home. It just happens to be in a square formation. The dancers all loved it! I went on to explain that squares were part of English country dancing and had been since at least the early 17th century, including old favourites such as Newcastle. Playford even called some of them "Square Dances"! So, dancers, keep an open mind; don't be afraid to try something new! You might like it! Here are all the formations that I know. Please let me know if you know any others. I have included sample dances in all the formations. Where I can't find the notation on the Web I have included it below. I have not been able to contact all the choreographers. My apologies if you would rather your choreography were not listed here; please contact You must enable JavaScript to see this e-mail address. If you would like it removed or updated, please let me know if you know any other. I have included sample dances in all the formations that you feel should be added below. This is a common "formation" in Morris Dancing which is very closely related to country dancing (same figures, same stepping, but performance dance rather than social dance). There are countless examples of solo Morris Jig. In country dancing the formation makes little sense since country dancing is social dancing and is done on more person with whom you can be sociable! The closest example I can give is the Accredited Reel by Chris Page which for a set of 6 steps, you get 12 dance sides! DANCING ONE COUNTRY This includes couple dances such as the Limerick, polka and the habanera which are often performed at country dances. There are also specific formations such as the Same Direction, which originated as a variation of barn dances, becoming popular at barn dances and other social gatherings with sides of 6. At the middle to late 20th century. You can see it being danced in two very different styles, and with lots of improvisations, here and here. THREE DANCERS Three Dancers in a Little Lark Trio by Alan Winston. The Three Kings by Keith Wood. Tap-delic by John Sweeney, Dorset Four-Hand Reel (Community Dance Manual). There is an excellent example of part of the dance at 3:22 here. There are many dances in this formation, going back to the 17th century. Variations include starting with both couples facing up and with the two couples facing each other. Thanks to Mr. Playford by Loretta Holz, Monica's Delight by Pat Shaw, Domine Five by Derek Haynes, Will-o'-the-Wisp by John Sweeney, Dot by Colin Andrews, Crossroads by Keith Wood, The Lesser Weevil by Alan Winston, Five Weevils by Bill Baritonpa - video, Quintilnear by John Sweeney, Jack Turn Back (Hot Tub Rag) by Steve Schur, Cornish Six-Hand Reel. Variations include: All Proper One Couple Improper Two Couples Improper. This is a very popular formation. There were dances in this formation in the first edition of Playford and countless others devised since. Many of them are derived from 18th and 19th century Triple Minor dances by re-choreographing the ending to make them suitable for three couples. The Black Nag published by John Playford, Fandango (adapted from a Triple Minor), Ted's Triplets #1 - #4! By Ted Sannella (like #3) in Zesty Contras and other publications. An English Air by Pat Shaw, Jemmy Pluck Pears, The Lover's Waltz by John & Karen Sweeney, The Crested Hen from Thy, Indian River Strathspey by George Senyk, Pony Express by Chris Sackett, Gingerbread by Brooke Friendly & Chris Sackett, Whitby Town by Elaine Beckingham - this is very similar to Indian River Strathspey, but with a slightly different formation to represent the piers at Whitby! One Couple Short by Keith Wood, The Odd Trio by Jack Brown. The Sussex Martlets by Wendy Crouch (plus a visual aid from Maureen!), Jack Pudding in the Lovelace Manuscript. The Weevil by similar Mason, also here. The Millennium Bug by Erik Hoffman, The Moon & Seven Stars by Jim McKinney, Six Plus One by ?, Septenary by Keith Wood, H7 Variation by Bill Baritonpa - video. This is the most common formation for four couples and goes back to at least the 17th century. An early example is Hyde Park (Hide Park). This is described in Playford as "A square Dance for eight thus" "Faine I would" in the same edition of Playford, has the ladies on the left of the men. Was this an early formation before the positioning was standardised, or just a printing error? Variations include: All Proper Becket Any combination of Improper Couples (but usually two of the couples) Nonesuch is an early example. There are many variants as the original wording is somewhat obscure! Modern examples include: Terpsicourante by Gary Goodman, with its lovely Serpentine Hey. The Standardised Genetrist by Pat Shaw, if you want more of a challenge try, Tumbling Tom's Tonic by Les Ord has an unusual gender setup - video. Dargason is described as "For as many as will" but usually danced today with four couples. This is an extremely unusual formation as most dancers are nowhere near their partner, when you can be sociable! The Branie's Branie, This is a modern version of the 16th century Branie de la Montarde, set to the tune of the Branie des Chevaux (Horse's Branie). The original was for an even number of men and women. But the modern version is for an odd number of men and women. The Branie's Branie is a modern version with everyone starting at the same time. The Horse's Branie. This is a modern version of the 16th century Branie de la Montarde, set to the tune of the Branie des Chevaux (Horse's Branie). The original was for an even number of men and women. But the modern version is for an odd number of men and women. The Branie's Branie is a modern version with everyone starting at the same time. Eight of Hearts by Shelly (halfway down the page). Wheels Within Wheels by Carmen Giunta, Reely Snakey Eighty by Sue Carter, T for Truro by Beryl Jukes, BOGOF, AKA Buy One Get One Free by Brian Clark. Buy Two Get One Free by Keith Wood. NINE DANCERS Nine Dancers in a 3 x 3 Grid Westward Ho! by Chris Turner - video, New Parliament House Jig by John Colville, Nine-Pins. This is the English Ceilidh version; the dance goes back to at least 1869 and can be virtually anything they like to the dance: the ninepin can innovate to make it even more fun. Ralph Page: "Don't be polite, be quick!" Pride of Dancers (Pride of the Pingle) by Ken Alexander, John Raymond by Pat Shaw, The Curse of Scotland by Keith Wood, Treis Trias by John Sweeney, Throw a Fiver #4 by Inga Morton (and Throw a Fiver #1 - #7), Anna Turns Five by Gary Goodman, The CHOGM Pentrille by Norn Ellis, Ascending Star of Abingworth by Wendy Crouch, Levi Jackson Rag by Pat Shaw, Rubigold by Keith Wood, Hibiscus Honey by Keith Wood, Winter Solstice by Wendy Crouch. (Note: Wendy wrote the dance to be performed for any suitable tune.) Fivepenny Bit by ? Omega by Wendy Crouch. This is a common format. Variations include: All Proper One or more couples Improper Boston Tea Party by Jean Butler, Felton Rag by Charles Bolton, Country Dance by Pat Shaw, Chancellor of the Exchequer by Wendy Crouch, Re-eleven by Phil Preen, Helicopters by Richard Mason Trumpet Vine or Jon Brown's Hornpipe by Pat Shaw Anderson Ferry Reel by Eric Conrad Double Take by Beryl Jukes, Twelve Reel by Pat Shaw, Miss Bedlington's Fancy by Pat Shaw, The Crondall Hundred by Fiona Birchall, Square -- NOT! by Peter Stix, Hextitation by Tom Hinds, Modern Western Square Dance (MWSD) calls can be used in this formation as well. The calls that work are listed here. Something Else by Eggle Hoekstra, Hexagon Dancing is Modern Western Square Dancing done in a hexagon. The Cambridge Hexagon by Colin Hume, Southern Appalachian Thread the Needle, Hexed by Keith Wood, Dorset Twelve-Hand Reel by the Jovial Beggars, Jenny's Jig saw by Ian Whitehead, Double Top by Charles Bolton, Sting in the Tail by Colin Hume, Sturt's Desert Pea by Keith Wood, Iona Cross by John W. Mitchell, Halsway Ruby Square by Ray Goodwin, Merifest Central Square by Kimberley Smith, Has anyone got one? Seven? Bore by ? The Magnificent Seven by Bob Archer, Mediocre Seven by Peter Foster, Val's Heptagon by Chris Turner, Has anyone got one? The Willow Tree by Hugh Rippon, Little Agnes by Pat Shaw, Double Grand Square by Martha Edwards/Seth Tepfer, Clarification, Rod's Quad #2 by Rod Linnell, Tea for Two by Colin Hume, Dutch Crossing by Ernst van Brakel, Escher's Staircase by Keith Wood, Squares and "Longways for As Many As Will" are the two most popular formations. Squares had prominence in the 19th century as Quadrilles, and there were probably more people dancing Modern Western Squares (Club Squares) in the 1950 - 1970 period than any other formation. But Longways has been the most popular many times over the last 500 years, and is probably the most common today. Common variations include: Double Minor Proper Double Minor First Couples Improper Double Minor Second Couples Improper (AKA Indent!) Double Minor Becket Triple Minor Proper These formations are so common that I don't intend to provide examples of all of them here. You can find lots of them at The Caller's Box, Antony's Dance Database and Hugh Stewart's Index. Contrary to popular belief this is not a modern concept. The first one I know of is Old Simon the King from 1679! "First man being on his wo. side". The Rifeman and other dances like it were in this Couple-Facing-Couple formation long before Herbie Gaudreau wrote the Becket Reel (Criss Cross Reel) around 1958; I am told that this formation was known as Rifeman Formation by Hugh Stewart. This is an example of a dance specifically choreographed in this formation. This is also one of the standard setups in Appalachian Big Set/Kentucky Running Set; from a single circle the caller says something like, "Odds to the Centre" and every second couple goes forward, turns to the right, and faces the next couple. An easy progression, after performing a set of figures with this couple, is that all couples slide left to meet a new couple. Pengwern Valley Galop (Carlam Nant Pengwern) or "Welsh Galop" by Pat Shaw, The Dashing White Sergeant, Three Meet/The Swedish Dance, Rayleigh Reel by Pat Shaw, The American Husband or Her Man by Pat Shaw, Danish Double Quadrille, The Fireman's Dance - video, The Mozart by Dudley Laufman, Suicide Square, The Oddball in Charge by Don Veino, On-the-Fly-Circles and On-the-Fly-Stars by Sue Robishaw, A grid of squares where the dancers, either as couples or individuals, move to different squares and may or may not get back to their starting position at the end of the dance. Can of Worms by Bob Isaacs. More examples here. Multiple parallel contra lines where the dancers move between lines. Here are some examples. A square with contra lines radiating from the sides, with dances cleverly devised so that the same call can mean something specific to all dancers whether they are in the square or the lines. The dancers usually move up the line into the square, around the square, then down a different line. There can be multiple squares with contra lines between them as well as out from them. Nooks and Crannies by Bob Isaacs. Here are some more examples. Couples promenade randomly to find another couple to dance with as a foursome. Appalachian Big Set/Kentucky Running Set is great for this. There are lots of examples if you use this search and scroll down to find anything marked Big Set or Appalachian. While finding one other couple to make a circle of four is the most common, there are also dances where you find two or more couples to make bigger circles. The Borrowdale Exchange by Derek Haynes is an example with three couple circles. Some dances defy categorisation as they switch between formations. Four Couple Longways into Square is a common one. This one switches between one big circle and a Sicilian Circle: Hayden's Wheel by Ernest R. Jessup. This is when you and your partner put your arms around each other and become a single dancer. You can see it being used as a break in this video. Barrie Bullimore called one he called Double Trouble. I understand that Eric Hoffman got it from Sets In Order. Wow! That's a lot more formations than when I started this project. Over 100 different formations, and that is not including all the ways that you can set up the genders and partners within the set! If you have any more formations, or dances that you really think should be listed here because of something unique then please let You must enable JavaScript to see this e-mail address. know. But this is a page of examples, not a database of all dances! Comments, suggestions, corrections are all very welcome. More examples at: Scottish Country Dancing Dictionary The Caller's Box Antony's Dance Database Hugh Stewart's Index and lots more places! Have fun!

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