

# Dancing

## With A Ring To It

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The Rural Felicity Garland dancers from Brasstown, N.C., were the only team not doing morris dances.

## Morris dancers have music wherever they go, and they prove it at a festival here

Story by Patricia Rice  
Photos by Gary Bohn  
Of the Post-Dispatch Staff

**L**AST WEEKEND — at the Zoo, Union Station, the Art Museum, Shaw's Garden, along the line of Hands Across America, wherever there were crowds — there seemed to be merry lines of costumed dancers. More than 300 dancers from South Carolina to Colorado converged on St. Louis for the sixth annual Midwest Morris Ale, a dance fest in the streets.

In white pants, colorful ribbons and straw hats, they waved handkerchiefs as they leapfrogged over one another, jostled with sticks and executed plenty of energetic high kicks in prescribed dance steps.

Fiddle, lute, drum, tin whistle and concertina players followed them. But these dancers have music wherever they go; the most important elements of their costume are ribbons of sleigh bells, called bell pads, worn on their shins. The rhythm of every step is echoed in the sound of their bells.

They are morris dancers, Americans who dance traditional English Cotswold morris dances just for the fun of it. The dances originally were performed for successful crops by teams of six male peasants in England's Cotswold region; many scholars believe they date to at least the early Middle Ages.

One team in England seems to have existed in unbroken descent from a group in the 16th century, but all the other teams in Great Britain, the United States, Australia and New Zealand were founded in this century for the fun of dancing.

In the Midwest, some teams are all-women or are mixed teams of men and women. Mixed teams are unknown in England and still are not allowed at the largest American festival, the one in Marlboro, Mass.

"We are looser in the Midwest," said Sarah Gilmour, who was born and reared in England but is now a member of an East

Lansing, Mich., team.

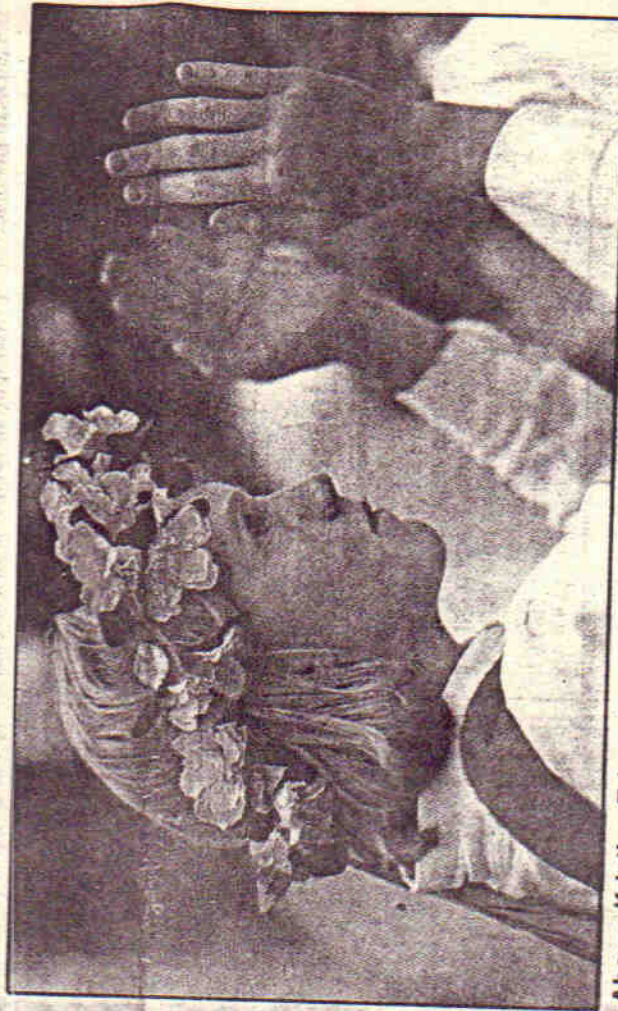
Omaha's Prairie Waves morris dancing team added an additional American twist. It replaced traditional costumes — called kits — of white pants and colored chest ribbons with blue jeans, suede vests and red kerchiefs.

Dancers visiting St. Louis last weekend belong to teams that were founded in the last 15 years or so. Many come from college towns and include university professors. Others are veterinarians, psychiatrists, physicists, lawyers and housewives. A few are in other dance companies, and many are unabashed Anglophiles. The vigorous leaps make it a young people's dance, said St. Louis folk dancer Marget Lippincott, who teaches seminars in morris dancing but gave up regular morris dancing for the sake of her knees.

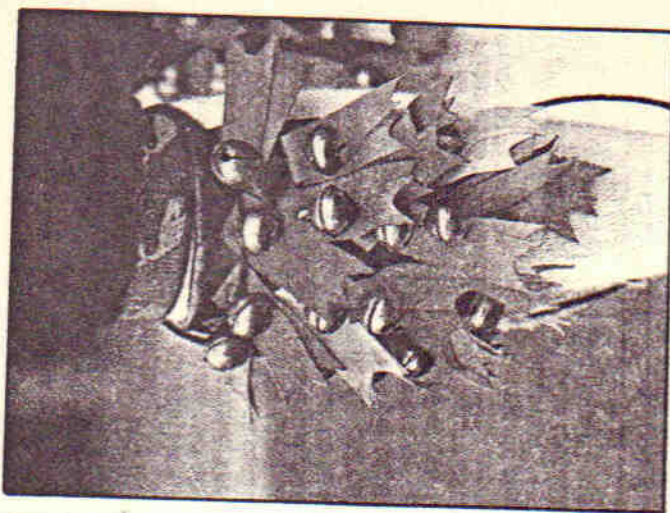
The two St. Louis morris dance teams — the Capering Roisters Morris and the Pierremont Morris — served as hosts. The Roisters, founded by lawyer John Shewmaker, are a spinoff of the St. Louis folk group, the Childgrove Country Dancers. Pierremont Morris was one of two children's teams at the festival. It is a school team from Parkway School District's Pierremont School led by teacher Cora Lippi. There are seven children's morris teams in the country.

The 300 dancers camped three nights at Camp Don Bosco near Hillsboro; four school buses and assorted vans took the belted dancers to delight audiences from Shriner's Hospital in Frontenac to the riverfront.

The performers seem to have song and dance for every occasion. On Sunday, they sang and played "Waltzing Matilda" for participants in the Hands Across America line on Lindell Boulevard. The song was appropriate because it is about a homeless, suicidal man who carries all his belongings in his matilda, a bag on the end of his stick. Since they danced at Washington University, adjacent homeowners will find their tomatoes flourishing, Shewmaker



Above, Kristina Edwards of the Pierremont Morris team applauds other dancers. Right, bells on brightly colored ribbons adorn the legs of most morris dancers.



predicted, because teams danced "Hunt the Squirrel," which is guaranteed to ward off the critters.

Saturday afternoon, all teams converged on a field at the northeast corner of Washington University to dance in a long procession under the trees. Three hundred of them, 600 sets of ringing bells, filled the field and performed many of the most popular dances together. Traffic stopped on nearby Millbrook Boulevard as each team showed off its best dancing. Many did dances learned since last year's festival; one of the purposes of the gatherings is to learn new dances from one another, according to folk dance teacher Marget Lippincott.

A pub crawl is traditional part of any morris gathering. The teams danced along Euclid Avenue Sunday, but members spent more time eating ice cream cones than drinking — clearly a break in tradition.



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# Uncle A Ring To It



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Thurs.

ST LOUIS

JOE B.



# Holiday Inn Hooks Up T

**G**OING UP: "The granite-facade structure is how architect Barry" is how architect Barry, the 17-story office tower he designed at the southwest corner of the Holiday Inn site of the Holiday Inn parking lot, will connect to the city. Construction will be completed by Richard Rothman and Lloyd Abrams, who also designed the outdoor plaza for the new building.