

## History of the NNJSDA

### 1958-1963

An organizing committee of six square dance couples met early in 1958 and drew up a tentative format for an association based on club (not individual) membership. Eleven of the 14 clubs functioning in northern New Jersey and Staten Island sent representatives to what became the first Delegates Meeting. Committees were organized for classes, finances, administration, publicity, summer dancing, and clearance (for dates and callers).

A month later, representatives of all 14 clubs participated in a meeting where a Constitution was adopted, a president was elected, and the **Northern New Jersey Square Dancers Association** was born. The newly formed committees were extremely busy. Beginners' Planning organized classes; Scheduling began a clearinghouse for dates and callers; Publicity, among other things, started *Grand Square*; Finances arranged a picnic and a special dance, and began scheduling summer dances.

The NNJSDA was officially incorporated. Believing that the Association's continued growth depended on more dancers becoming active in it, the second president set up a program of wider participation and communication. Twenty clubs were members; 55 couples graduated from classes; and the Association successfully ran the 7th Atlantic Convention held in Atlantic City with 2,260 registered dancers.

Noting that "our future depends on the success of the classes each year, with each year adding more members to active clubs who will eventually start others," new member classes were held in three areas. An early event that received much notice was the participation of Jean Kellogg and her staff at the colorful Girl Scout Festival in Metuchen.

With the demise of the New Jersey Callers Association, a Fall Festival (callers' carnival) was added to NNJSDA sponsored events. The first Festival had 100 squares dancing in two halls. Working with local callers, the NNJSDA established a list of square dance basics to be taught in all classes. Concern with the "mortality" rate of graduates prompted a study on dropouts. Late in 1962, acknowledging that square dancing is a "couples" activity, the NNJSDA began to list its officers as couples.

### 1963-1968

As the NNJSDA continued to grow, a second vice president was added; one handled classes, the other programming. The Constitution and Bylaws were updated and provided to every member of the NNJSDA. As more and more clubs preferred to handle classes themselves, the NNJSDA concentrated its efforts on providing member clubs with the necessary promotional materials including diplomas, instructional books, and 100% attendance pins. During this period, the Association began serving punch at the summer dances.

A special issue of *Grand Square* was created to promote the NNJSDA at the 16th National Square Dance Convention in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Miniature NNJSDA banners were made for each member club. "Freeloader" and "Patron" rules were defined and special badges were designed. Two couples earned the first Patron badges by visiting all 26 member clubs within a four-month period. The NNJSDA recognized the Northern New Jersey Round Dance Leaders Council and established a liaison with that group.

### **1968-1973**

As we grew to 30 clubs, the delegates established the 15-mile radius rule to prevent clubs from dancing too close to other member clubs on the same night. Graduates totaled 493 in 1968. During this period, we added a "Graduates Ball" as a sponsored event. A leadership clinic and callers' class were conducted by the NNJSDA, and a survey was conducted among the more than 900 dancers who had graduated over the past five years to determine the reasons for dropouts.

A third vice president was added to handle publicity and public relations. In 1970, the Governors of New Jersey and New York proclaimed a Square Dance Week in September. The NNJSDA sponsored a poster contest for Square Dance Week, distributing copies of the winning poster to all member clubs for class promotion. Square dance instructional booklets were updated and reprinted in 1971. Reflecting the growth of the NNJSDA and the developing interest in square dancing, 674 people graduated from classes.

### **1973-1978**

Leadership seminars or "Mini-Legacies" entitled L.U.S.T. (Let Us Speak Together) were successfully developed with a participation format. The NNJSDA served as a catalyst for the formation of a singles club known as Solitaires. A comprehensive insurance program was established for member clubs. An annual one-day Mini-Festival was added to the NNJSDA sponsored events. The National Square Dance Convention was held in Atlantic City in 1977. The NNJSDA chaired the Floor Hospitality Committee and was highly involved in helping the sponsoring organization, the Federation of Delaware Valley Square and Round Dancers. More than \$1,700 was raised at the Atlantic City Booster Ball. Several squares and one alternate rehearsed all spring for the 1977 Convention Demonstration Dance, which was put on before all attendees at the National Convention in Anaheim, California. Choreographed to the tune of "It's A Grand Old Flag," four squares formed the figure:

**A C**  
**7 7**

As the NNJSDA continued to expand its services to member clubs, the secretarial duties were split between a recording and corresponding secretary. Dancers in the area participated in a half-time show at a Rutgers University football game.

## **1978-1983**

An Emergency Loan Program was established to help clubs in severe financial straits. The Association developed a four-year benefit dance program for the New Jersey Association of Retarded Citizens. For several years, the NNJSDA worked with the Callers Council of New Jersey's Catch All Eights-program, bringing back people who had dropped out of square dancing.

The NNJSDA, through the leadership efforts of Frank and Helen Cavanaugh, spearheaded a campaign to have square dancing designated the Official Folk Dance of New Jersey. Governor Thomas Kean signed SJR-19 and, in May 1983, a "thank you dance" was held in front of the State House in Trenton. The Association became active in the nationwide campaign to have square dancing permanently designated the National Folk Dance of the United States.

The Association supported the New Jersey Council of the Arts by giving many exhibitions at various state parks including Liberty State Park. A Grand Square Booster Ball and a Warm-Up Dance at the end of the summer were added to Association-sponsored events. With the National Convention again nearby (Baltimore in 1984), the Association once again worked hand in hand with the sponsoring committee. A Booster Ball, involving all the major square dance organizations in New Jersey, raised more than \$4,000 which was donated to the Baltimore Convention. The NNJSDA also assisted with Floor Hospitality.

The NNJSDA worked as a catalyst in bringing together the various square dance organizations in New Jersey to help form the "Square Dance Council of New Jersey" (SDCNJ). We also played a key role in the standardization of a New Jersey official state outfit. During this period, as clubs became concerned with the problems of helping new graduates fit in as club dancers, the NNJSDA acted as a forum for discussion. Many clubs decided to lower their dance programs in the spring to encourage graduates to attend club dances.

## **1983-1988**

In the five years following its 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, the NNJSDA continued to promote goodwill and friendship. The Association supported and helped with the success of the National Convention held in Baltimore, Maryland in 1984. Square dancers in the tri-state area were well represented with 1,420 from New Jersey, 1,150 from New York, and 2,428 from Pennsylvania.

When the Statue of Liberty needed repair, the Association was there. Through the leadership and dedication of Frank and Betty Olier, a "Save Our Statue" campaign spread throughout all member clubs. Dancers sold buttons, made contributions, and participated in a grand fundraising dance in Liberty State Park in full view of "The Lady." Dancers from Maryland to Massachusetts took part, and more than \$5,000 was raised and donated for the restoration of the Statue. On July 6, 1986, at the closing ceremonies of the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Statue of Liberty, 26 squares (most of them from NNJSDA clubs) participated in a star-filled program that was viewed by 60,000 spectators who filled

the Meadowlands Giants Stadium as well as millions on national television – a truly memorable event.

The Association continued to grow and lend its support to the expanding network of clubs. A Blood Bank was formed to help all NNJSDA square dancers and their families. The NNJSDA helped in the development of club leaders through L.U.S.T. and by adding educational seminars to the beginning of each Delegates Meeting.

The Association worked hard to support the efforts of the SDCNJ and helped make the first three New Jersey Square and Round Dance Conventions successful.

During this period, the official badge of the Association was redesigned from a red map of New Jersey with our area in white to a white badge with red and black printing. Also during this time, two new awards were created to encourage fellowship and attendance at our dances. The "One Square Is Fair" award was given to clubs having at least one square at each Association dance held the preceding dance season. The "Attendance" award was given to the club with the highest attendance at the summer dances.

The Association has also been supportive of the Northern New Jersey Round Dance Leaders Council (NNJRDLC) and the Callers Council of New Jersey (CCNJ). The NNJSDA has made several contributions to both Councils' scholarship funds.

The fall of 1988 brought another notable event. Through the efforts of the third vice presidents, John and Joan Berg, the three Governors of New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania signed proclamations designating "September as Square Dance Month" in their state.

### **1988-1993**

Many aspects of the NNJSDA remained constant including: Special Dances and the Mini-Festival; Summer Mainstream Dance Program; Midterm and Spring Fling student dances; clearance for dance nights and specials; L.U.S.T. biennial Informational seminars; insurance for member clubs; poster contest; Blood Bank; One Square Is Fair, Freeloader, and Patron awards; instructional books, diplomas, and graduation packets; and contributions to the scholarship funds of both the CCNJ and NNJRDLC. The Association continued to support the SDCNJ and the State Conventions.

Other aspects of the Association changed. Three clubs merged to form a new club, thus preventing the loss of three struggling clubs and giving the Association one strong club. In addition, four new clubs joined the Association. Regrettably, several clubs ceased dancing. The Constitution and Bylaws were revised in 1989 to better reflect changing conditions. The Association badges and banner were redesigned and the colors became red and white. In 1991, the display for State and National Conventions was redesigned, enhanced, and simplified to make it easier to transport and set up.

The official publication, *Grand Square*, underwent major changes. Peg and Doc Tirrell announced their retirement as editors in June 1990. Their "labor of love" over 25 years of devoted and faithful service saw *Grand Square* develop into a 54-page "bible" for dancers in our area. To help ease the massive burden of producing the magazine, the Association purchased a Macintosh computer and new editors, Kathy and Charlie Porter, took over without skipping a beat. The computer has not only proven to be a labor-saving investment, but the appearance and readability of *Grand Square* have been greatly enhanced.

The Attendance award for the summer Mainstream dances was changed. Instead of receiving an award for the largest number of dancers from a club, the summer "One Square Is Fair" concept was adopted. This change provided equal footing for all the clubs to earn this award, regardless of the number of members. The graduation packets underwent revisions to keep the material relevant to current conditions.

With the aid of a matching grant from the SDCNJ, L.U.S.T. was presented free of charge in October 1992. Without this special grant, the Association could not have offered this fine program at no cost.

In September 1992, the Association adopted the "Raid" program, which required clubs to raid seven other member clubs within a nine-month timeframe. Clubs completing those raids would be exempt from paying dues to the NNJSDA for the 1993-1994 season. The idea met with great approval and 27 clubs completed the program. Attendance was boosted at the clubs, raiding horizons were expanded and, most importantly, fun and friendship were enhanced. The program was so popular that the Executive Board voted to continue the program for another year.

While the Association experienced some bumps, it continued to be a strong and vibrant force.

### **1993-1998**

The location of the Executive Board meetings was changed to the homes of members. This not only saved the rental fee for a hall but allowed the members to share a potluck dinner afterward.

Manny Amor returned to *Grand Square* with his popular "Square View" cartoon. In 1998, the *Sewing Circle* column was discontinued.

### **1998-2003**

On August 1, 1998, NNJSDA was very involved in a special event held by the Square Dance Council of New Jersey titled "The Docking Dance." This was a fundraiser to provide seed money for the National Convention to be held in Baltimore, Maryland in 2000. The dance was held in Whiting, New Jersey, and buses transported dancers to the three halls. A check for \$5,000 was presented to the Baltimore committee.

The sad news during this timeframe was the difficulty in finding students for the classes. Six clubs closed. In 2000, two clubs merged to become RocklandRockytops. In 2002, Hi Taw Twirlers became the first Challenge club in the Association by changing its program from Plus.

Due to a number of clubs dissolving, effective January 17, 1999 the Bylaws Section 12 was revised to make the requirement for the Patron award attendance at 65% of the Association's member clubs. Other minor changes were made at the same time to avoid ambiguity.

John Aquino put together the beginning of a website for NNJSDA; Rusty Ball got all of the clubs on the site; and in 2003 Ken Robinson created a new version, NNJSDA.org.

## **2003-2008**

Although the number of entries in the poster contest decreased, the entries began to include photos with wording to catch the eyes of families and more youthful dancers. The winner of the poster contest continued to have the poster featured on the cover of the September-January issue of *Grand Square*.

Although three clubs folded, two new clubs joined the Association. Both were well-established clubs and welcome additions to the NNJSDA.

In 2005, NNJSDA and the Square Dance Council of New Jersey offered their support for the television show *Friendship Set to Music*, which initially aired in the Piscataway, New Jersey area.

New Jersey Performing Arts Center invited members of the NNJSDA clubs to enjoy a performance of *Oklahoma* in June 2005 at a 2-for-1 ticket price with a light supper and an hour of square dancing included. More than 200 square dancers enjoyed this event and danced outside of the theater to the calling of Dan Koft. Each year subsequently, NNJSDA square dancers have enjoyed the continuation of this event.

Also in 2005, *Grand Square* initiated a feature profiling square dancers significant in the NNJSDA community. In 2006, the *Grand Square* editors courageously embarked on the (never-ending) job of learning to use computer word processing software in order to completely digitize the magazine, which had previously been created using paste-ups with hot wax. Computerization enables use of the latest effects and features, including putting the issues up on the NNJSDA.org website for the dancing public to access in full color.

New mileage rules for the NNJSDA Raid program were implemented in 2006. A club needs to total a certain number of miles in order to complete the program, whereas previously points were given for raids to clubs in prescribed sectors of the NNJSDA area.

2007 brought about the return of The Gathering (originally L.U.S.T.), co-sponsored by the SDCNJ. After a 10-year hiatus, the intent was to hold a Gathering in all even-numbered years.

Also in 2007, the Hear2Dance system was implemented at NNJSDA dances to allow people to hear inside the dance hall despite noise level or hearing capability. A transmitter (supplied by the Association) is attached to the caller's amplifier and set to an unused FM band. Dancers who want to have a private PA system at their own ears wear their own FM Walkman-style radio earphones set to the selected frequency.

## **2009-2011**

To be written ...

## **The Future**

The officers and other members of the NNJSDA Executive Board hope that reading this history will help dancers to better understand the role the Association has played since 1958 in making square dancing the wonderful world we enjoy so much.

Over the years, NNJSDA has continued to serve its member clubs as an organizer, administrator, arbitrator, coordinator, and teacher. However, without the support of the clubs and you, the dancer, all of this would not have happened. Together we can keep in mind ...

**Friendship Is Square Dancing's Greatest Reward!**