

Square dancer still 'swinging his partner' at 85

By SHAWN HUBLER
Collegian Staff Writer

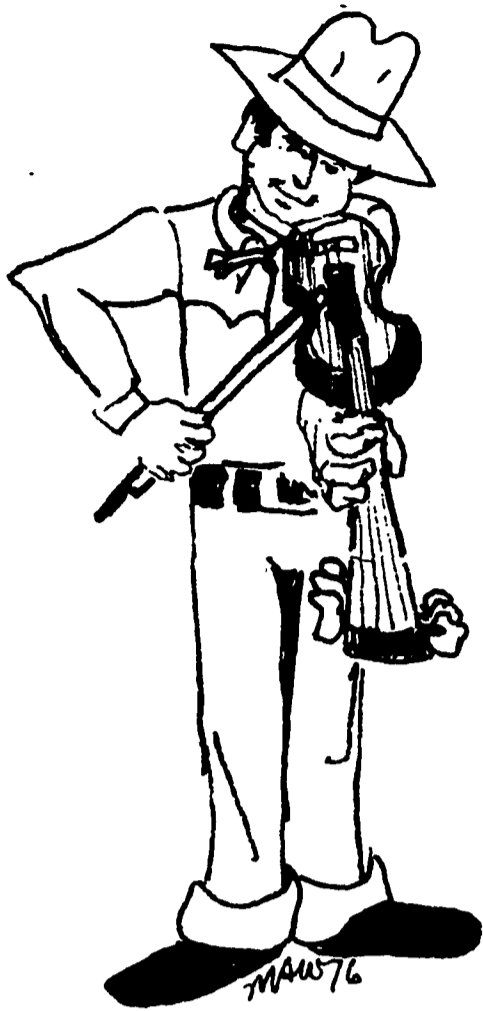
In a downtown bar, students tap their feet to the beat of a bluegrass banjo, while a caller in the HUB Ballroom instructs a room full of breathless, sweaty square dancers: "Ladies to the center and back to the bar, gents to the center and form a star..."

A Free U course advertises clogging and square dance lessons, and weekly folk and square dance roundups are held at White Building.

But if you really want to learn about square dancing, ask a man who's been doing it since 1903 — when square dances were held at the neighbor's house; when the "fella" down the road could fiddle to the beat of his stomping foot and his buddy's guitar; and when five miles over Tussey Mountain wasn't too far to walk to a dance.

Wilbur Oaks "W.O." Lightner, 85, has been dancing since he was 13. He grew up in the billage of Charter Oaks, Huntington County, where square dancing was a way of life.

"We used to have what they called 'Big Meeting' at night," he recalled, "and we held church in the schoolhouse because there was no church in Charter Oaks. About three nights out of a week, we'd have a square dance after Big Meeting."



The dancers were 13 to 20 years old, he said, and their

dances were held at neighboring homes.

These "neighboring homes" were often miles away, in Mooresville or Pine Grove Mills, but the young people would walk, or when they were older, drive a horse and buggy.

Music was supplied by a guitar and fiddle. "W.O."



recalls one man who "could put that violin up back of his neck and play it just as good as he could with it in front of him"

Square dances, he said, had definite rules and patterns.

"We used to always open with a French Four — just two couples dance in a French

Four, and you don't call no figure to that, you just dance to the music," he said. "And that's the way us kids was learnt to dance; if we went on the floor and started to act the fool, we was put off the floor right there. "We had to dance to the music and listen to the caller. We was only allowed to

swing (our partners) twice around — that was all you could do and keep up with the music and the caller."

He continued to square dance even after his youth, although farming and selling work horses took up much of his time.

"I dealt in horses from the time I was 17 years old till draft horses went out, about seven years ago," he said. Many of his sales, he said, were to farmers and lumber camps, and later to the stricter sects of Amish people who wouldn't use machinery.

One incident with a bad-tempered bronco earned him his nickname, "Mike". He bought the horse from a dealer who insisted it was broken in, but after hitching it to a buggy, "W.O." said he learned otherwise. Though the horse ran away with him, it was one of his best driving horses, by the time W.O. had it back to the barn. He so impressed his friends that they began to call him by the horse's name, "Mike".

He also likes to talk about his farm, 70 acres and a house that he had bought for \$900 and sold for \$2000. "I thought I had a good bargain then," he said. "Now you know what they're asking for it?" —\$90,000.

Lightner lives in a trailer outside of Jackson Corner, where he moved a few years ago after his wife died.

Attributing his vigor to hard work, he does his own cooking, cleaning, and gardening as well as carpentry work for the neighbors and, of course, square dancing.

Sometimes he goes dancing with young students who've just discovered the fun of a square dance. His neighbor, Mid Brown, said "There's a group of kids comes up here from State College and they just love to get him dancing. They'll stop for him before they go to the dances and bring him along."

But square dances, he said, aren't what they used to be. "There's nothing I like better than a good square dance," he said, "but they don't have good square dances no more. They've got all this later stuff. They won't listen to the caller any more."

He used to call at square dances for many years, he said. "Golden Slippers" and "The Irish Washerwoman" are his favorite dancing tunes, and he recalls the figure (the steps called in a square dance) for the latter: "First couple lead to the right and a-balance four... Swing yer right-hand corner... Now yer own... Eight hands high, ladies make a bow and gents bow under..."

Lightner, still young at 85, taps his toes to the memory of a fiddle and guitar, reeling out good times across Tussey Mountain.

Budget nearing passage

HARRISBURG (AP) — With their ranks bolstered by six new Democratic legislators, House leaders said they may try today to win passage of a proposed \$4.7 billion general state budget.

The budget proposal now before both the House and Senate is about \$49 million below Gov. Shapp's original request, and the Democrats said it contains no new taxes.

It would be the fifth straight year without a general tax increase, Democrats boasted. "It's my intent, if the new members are sworn in at 1 o'clock, that I may attempt to roll that bill at 3 in the afternoon. If not Monday, then no later than Tuesday," said Rep. Stephen Wojdak, appropriations committee chairman and chief sponsor of the budget.

"We have the votes. It's just a question of attendance

now," added an aide to House Speaker Herbert Fineman.

It will be the fourth time the House has tried to pass the budget, which will finance most state government operations for the fiscal year beginning July 1.

If successful, it will be the first time in recent years that the budget has cleared the House without crowding the June 30 deadline.

The Senate is not expected to have as much trouble, but can take action only after the House votes.

Between March 31 and April 8, the House voted down the budget three times when a

few Democrats joined solid Republican opposition.

On two of those occasions, Democratic leaders managed to come within three or four votes of the 102-vote margin required for passage.

The Senate took the first whack at the budget back on March 23, passing it 28-20. The House made major changes, but was unable to pass it.

The main problem in the House was the defection of Delaware County Democrats, angered because no limit was placed on the Philadelphia city wage tax on suburban commuters.

17 dead, some may be American

Iranian jet crashes near Madrid

MADRID, Spain (UPI) — An Iranian air force Boeing 747 cargo jet crashed in a heavy rainstorm yesterday while approaching Madrid airport, killing all 17 persons aboard, possibly including some Americans, police said.

Witnesses said the plane was flying at low altitude when it appeared to be rocked by an explosion and crashed in the hilly wine and olive country east of Madrid. The control tower of

Madrid's Barajas airport said the cause of the crash was not known.

Three passports were found by paramilitary police searching in charred debris scattered over almost two miles near the small town of Huelte.

Police said two of the passports carried the names of Robert Wilson and Dorothy Wilson. They gave no other details.

The jumbo cargo jet

tumbled from the sky during a rainstorm and crashed 63 miles east of Madrid airport, where it was scheduled to make a refueling stop en route from Teheran, Iran, to the United States.

Police said all 17 persons aboard died in the flaming debris, their bodies charred and mangled.

The crash was the second of a Boeing 747 since the four-engine wide-bodied model was introduced in 1970. A

Lufthansa 747 crashed on takeoff from Nairobi, Kenya, on Nov. 20, 1974, killing 59 persons.

Iranian air force transport planes have been using Madrid as a refueling point on trips between Teheran and the United States.

An Iranian embassy spokesman said he did not know immediately whether the jumbo jet was carrying any cargo.

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