

SQUARE DANCE TRIVIA

Henry Ford and Square Dancing

Henry Ford

Henry Ford (1863-1947), who once worked for the Edison Illuminating Company (1891), in 1903 started the Ford Motor Company. Henry Ford and his wife Clara Bryant loved to dance. Henry Ford began his search for someone to teach Square Dancing. In 1923, Mr. Ford purchased the Wayside Inn because of its beautiful ballroom. Shortly after purchasing the Wayside Inn, Mr. Ford found Benjamin Lovett (1876-1952) and his wife Charlotte L. Cooke. Henry Ford felt Benjamin Lovett to be the perfect teacher of "old fashion" dances, and in 1924 Benjamin Lovett began teaching classes for Mr. Ford, something that lasted over 20 years.

Mr. Ford decided he wanted a place to dance near his home, so in 1937 Lovett Hall was built as part of a building at the Edison Institute. The floor was made of Burmese teakwood with a spring board floor designed specifically for dancing, along with English Colonial furnishings and chandeliers. Square Dancing, along with quadrilles, two-steps, waltzes, and other old fashion dances, became a part of life for Ford employees and school children across the United States. Ford and Lovett believed Square Dancing taught social training, courtesy, good citizenship, along with rhythm. They felt it should be a part of every school's teaching of physical education.

Around 1928, Boards of Education all over the United States endorsed their Square Dancing program. Almost half the public schools in America began teaching Square Dancing and other old fashion dancing. Not only was this great exercise, but Ford and Lovett felt Square Dancing corrected the missing fun and teamwork that one-on-one dance lacked. Ford and Lovett felt that having Square Dancing in schools would help train children in manners, courtesy, and social training, a quality Henry Ford wanted to see excel in people.

Ford and Lovett also brought Square Dancing to the handicapped (blind, deaf, those with artificial legs, etc). They felt the dancing had great balancing exercises, and taught rhythm, manners, poise, and grace, along with giving self-confidence, over coming timidity, and appreciation of good music.

In 1944, Henry Ford decided he wanted a radio show that would have dances and discussion of the dances. "The Early American Dance Music" radio program was a half-hour show that ran about a year and a half, twice on Saturday night, and featured Benjamin Lovett and others calling squares with the music being played by the Henry Ford Old-Fashion Orchestra.

In the book *Henry Ford and Benjamin B. Lovett* by Eva O'Neal Twork, the following appears: "Mr. Ford and Mr. Lovett regarded the dance as another means of expressing ideas and thoughts. In *Good Morning* the following appears: 'Some have regarded the dance as a part of human speech. From the dance of atoms, through the mating of certain [sic] birds and animals, up to the tribal dances of the various nations, the expression of emotions and ideas in rhythmic movement of the body bears all the indications of a deep natural instinct. No aspect of human interest has escaped interpretation in the dance. From time immemorial marriage has been celebrated by dancing. The coming of spring has inspired several forms of dancing, The war dances of the Indians are well known. Religious dances are found throughout the world. Joy, of course, has been the most moving source of dancing. The lamb skips, the dog leaps, the pleased child dances in ecstasy. . . .'

"...Mr. Ford was a true believer in the benefits and power of music and dancing. In starting the dancing program, he, along with Mr. Lovett, saved a part of the American heritage for the present generation and those to follow.

"To know his crusade to bring dancing had been so successful and enduring would please Mr. Ford. He, however, never believed the dances had ever left. When someone commented about his bringing the old dances, he said, 'They've always been here.'

"...The Early American dancers of today owe Mr. Ford and Mr. and Mrs. Lovett a great sense of gratitude. It is because of their unique partnership, the Lovetts' talent and diligence, and Mr. Ford's great interest in dancing that many people still merrily swing to an allemande left and an allemande right. Early American dancing is not a relic from a crowded attic of nostalgia, but is still a part of the recreational scene. While watching a recent Henry Ford Musical Historical Concert, an Early American

dance program, at beautiful Lovett Hall and seeing the joyful, rhythmical dancers, it was evident Square Dancing is very much alive. You need not be concerned about dancing being asleep, Mr. Ford and Mr. Lovett. It is still 'good morning' with the Early American dances."