WL 180

West Virginia University
EXTENSION SERVICE

Folk Dancing: A Rich Tradition

Shay McNeil, WVU Extension Agent, Jefferson County
Kay Davis, WVU Extension Agent, Greenbrier County

"No matter what nobody can take away the dances you've already had."
– Gabriel Garcia Marquez

"Dance is the hidden language of the soul of the body."
– Martha Graham

Mountain Heritage and Folk Dancing Legacy

The early settlers of Appalachia and the area that is today West Virginia came from a number of European backgrounds. The culture of West Virginia is largely derived from Celtic (Scotch-Irish) culture. Many German and Swiss people came to this country during the Civil War. The opening of large coal mines in the 1880s and 1890s brought an influx of Italian, Greek, Hungarian, Austrian, Polish, and Russian immigrants. This brought about culture, music, and dances.

West Virginia's folk dancing culture is a result of the folk music and oral tradition of these early settlers. Events, such as the Vandalia Gathering, West Virginia State Folk Festival, and West Virginia 4-H Heritage Dance Weekend, celebrate the rich culture of Appalachia and West Virginia.

Dancing Stars of Yesterday and Today

Brookley R. (Rush) and Ruby Butcher were instrumental advocates in spreading the folk dancing legacy throughout West Virginia. Rush first became involved with folk and square dancing when it was part of the 4-H club and camp programs he attended.

The couple started the West Virginia 4-H Heritage Dance Weekend, which is held at WVU Jackson's Mill State 4-H Camp every March. This event hosts more than 400 4-H members and volunteers each year. Throughout the past 35 years, Rush and Ruby have taught thousands of West Virginia 4-H'ers how to love their state and mountain culture through appreciation of folk and square dancing.

Other important leaders in the Mountain Heritage folk dance movement included Frank and Jane George, Dot Brown, and Glenda Webb.

– continued –

In 1994, the first group of 4-H Dance Ambassadors performed for a national gathering of 4-H leaders. The West Virginia 4-H Dance Ambassadors have a love of folk dancing and desire to share their skills with others. The group teaches dance workshops at West Virginia 4-H Heritage Dance Weekend, Volunteer Leaders' Weekend, state 4-H camps, and performs at a variety of venues and events.

Today, there are many opportunities to participate in a variety of dance styles. A list of these fairs and festivals can be found at *WVculture.org* or *WVcommerce.org*.

Folk Dance Steps: A Historical Look into West Virginia Culture

Polka
The polka is a lively couple dance in a moderately fast duple meter. It is still popular, today, throughout Europe and the Americas.

Schottische
One of the oldest dances, schottische is a round dance. It is a combination of a polka and a circular hop. The basic step is side step to the left, then right, followed by a turn in four steps.

Waltz
This smooth pulse partner dance is one of the most popular of all time, being considered a ballroom dance as well as folk dance. The waltz step is known for its three-beat count. As you step, you can count 1-2-3 with two three-count waltz sets creating a box square.

Contra Dance
The contra dance is a folk dance in which couples dance in facing lines. Contra dances have callers that provide instruction.

Jig
Today, we think of the jig in Irish and Scottish dancing. The jig includes hops, as well as skips and toe brushes.

Reel
As the most popular form of Scottish dancing, the reel is a variety of country dances where groups of two or more dancers perform traveling figures combined with steps.

Patty Cake Polka

Formation: Double circle of partners – men with backs to center of circle, facing ladies.

Action:

1. Partners join hands, extend counter-clockwise, foot forward and touch heel to the floor (man left; lady right). Bring same foot back, touching toe to floor beside other foot. Repeat.
2. Four slide steps counter-clockwise around the circle.
3. Repeat 1 and 3 in clockwise direction with clockwise foot (man left; lady right).
4. Partners face and do a patty cake. Clap right hand with partner 3 times, clap left hand with partner 3 times, clap both hands with partner 3 times, clap own thighs 3 times.
5. Link right elbows and skip or polka once around in place.

To make progressive: Man moves from the turn on to the next lady to his left. She now becomes his new partner.

Why Dance?

- Fun and fellowship
- Physical fitness
- Music appreciation
- Social adjustment
- Understanding of cultural backgrounds

2014

Programs and activities offered by the West Virginia University Extension Service are available to all persons without regard to race, color, sex, disability, religion, age, veteran status, political beliefs, sexual orientation, national origin, and marital or family status. Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Director, Cooperative Extension Service, West Virginia University.

The WVU Board of Governors is the governing body of WVU. The Higher Education Policy Commission in West Virginia is responsible for developing, establishing, and overseeing the implementation of a public policy agenda for the state's four-year colleges and universities. FH14-373

Page one photo: *https://www.flickr.com/photos/marcus-ramberg/131756745* by Marcus Ramberg