

Call Evolution by Clark Baker, Don Beck CALLERLAB 2011

Burleson's Square Dancer's Encyclopedia lists over 5,000 square dance calls! Who wrote all the calls, and why? Where did our square dance calls come from? Did new calls appear fully formed or did they evolve? What did it take to write and publish a new call? Who came up with the names? Why did a few calls "make it" while most failed? Why aren't there any new calls today?

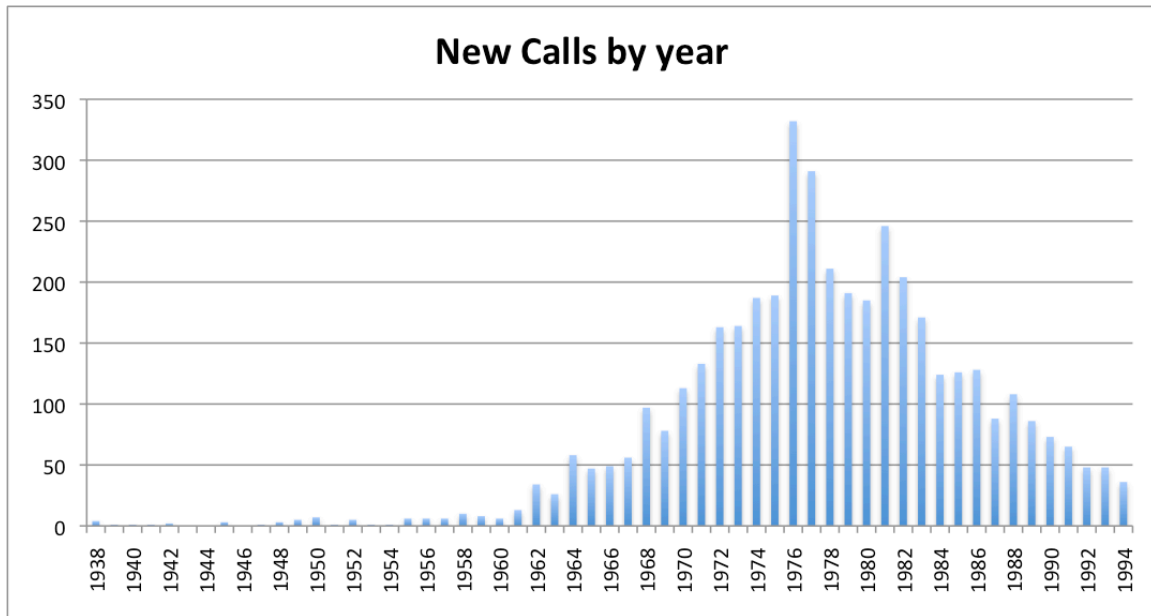
A square dance "call" as used in this talk will be a word or phrase that is associated with a dance action. It has one or more starting positions, and an associated dance action. In the old days these were called "basics". Fortunately for us Bill Burleson, a dancer from Minerva, Ohio, started keeping track of all the square dance calls that were invented and published an encyclopedia that was updated 3 times a year. Bill took the unique approach of giving each call a number, which became known as its "Burleson number" starting with #1, A Set or a Square, #2, Dosado, etc. My oldest copy of his encyclopedia is dated 1970 and it appears to describe 919 calls before its owner started adding updates. The August 1971 update contains calls 1159 (Alter The Yo Yo) to 1226 (Partner 1/2 Tag And Spin). The August 1972 update contains calls 1446 (Single Scoot And Trade) to 1491 (Spin Chain The Zoom).

The calls that were in use in club square dancing in the late 1960's is described by the booklets published by Bob Osgood's Sets In Order organization. The first booklet was called The Basic Program of American Square Dancing and described 50 calls. The next booklet was called The Extended Basics Program of American Square Dancing and described an additional 25 calls. These were called the "Basic 50" and the "Extended 75". At this point you might have two questions:

1. Why does Burleson document about 1000 calls in 1970 when Osgood says we are only dancing 75 of them?
2. How come I have never heard of the calls you mention like Spin Chain The Zoom?

Burleson documented every call he could find. However, he did not tell us the author or when it was written. In 1976 Jay King published The Handbook of Modern Square Dancing, which incorporated everything he had been able to learn about the various calls over his 15 years of thinking and study. He organized the calls into various groups, and told us the author and year written when known. Occasionally there was some history. While this Handbook was to be updated regularly, I only received a few updates before Jay's untimely death died. Using his book, and other research, I can tell you some quick facts.

The oldest calls for which I have a date and author are Allemande Thar, Double Bow Knot, Harlem Rosette, and Grand Harlem Rosette all by Lloyd Shaw in 1938. There are 10 or fewer calls listed per year from 1938 to 1960. From 1960 to 1975 there is a linear increase in new calls each year from 10 to 200. This peaks in 1976 with 332 new calls and is in the 200's for the next 6 years. From 1983 to 1994 we have a linear decline to only 36 new calls per year and I don't have accurate data after that. We do know that in 2003 Burleson lists 5125 calls and that the rate of new calls creation has dropped drastically since then, perhaps to fewer than 10 per year.



Don and I aren't dance historians and can't speak to the history of really old calls like Ladies Chain and Dosado. We only have a little information on certain calls from the 1960's. Jim Mayo, in his book *Step By Step Through Modern Square Dance History*, tells how the choreography changed from that of dance routines in the 1950's to all the calls we had in the 1960's. Each new call, e.g., Dixie Chain (Bill Owen, 1952), Square Thru (Bill Hansen, 1957), and Wheel And Deal (Clarence Watson, 1960) took time to become integrated into the dance routines, and cause a further migration towards our current style of choreography. While the rest of this talk will focus on what Don and I know, and cover the period from 1970 forward I want to leave you with two stories from an earlier time.

In 1958 Ed Gaut wrote Shuffle The Deck which started a series of calls named after gambling terms. We will see later that naming a call is both very important and not so easy. Other calls with these types of names include Shake The Dice (1960), Wheel And Deal (Clarence Watson, 1960), Spin The Wheel (Clarence Watson, 1962), Acey Deucey (Larry Dee, 1963), Fold (Dick Kenyon, 1963), Jokers Wild (Glenn Hinton, 1963), Shoot The Moon, and Cut The Deck. Jay King offers this insight on Circulate:

The term "Circulate" was coined by Chuck Raley of Lakewood, California in late 1963. The *idea* of Circulate was presented in its first useful form by Larry Dee of Rosemont, Pa. in early 1963 with his call Acey Deucey which is still in use today although it can be called directionally (by today's terminology) as "Ends Circulate, Centers Trade" for parallel waves or two-faced lines. I still remember the impact that Acey Deucey had on us when this idea of moving across the set from one wave to another was first workshopped by Les Gotcher. Later in 1963, Glenn Hinton of Stockville, Nebraska conceived the notion of *both ends and centers* "circulating" and he called the move Jokers Wild. The term that has stood the test of time best, however, is Chuck Raley's Circulate. It is descriptive and directional and it has spawned many offshoots of its own.

Bob Osgood offers this information as to how Do Paso got its name:

In Texas, years ago, this was known as the Do Si Do. Only the movement would go on continuously – partner left, corner right, partner left, corner right, etc. – for as long as

the caller wished, certainly long enough for him to recite some of his favorite rhyming patter. In the 1940's Dr. Lloyd Shaw, who had been using a different (Northern style) Do Si Do, saw this version while attending a square dance in El Paso, Texas. Impressed by it, and feeling it had an equal place in the activity, he dubbed it the Do Paso to honor his host city. The name has remained ever since.

Before we get into the evolution of specific calls, we must mention the role of caller note services. These started in the late 1940's as a round robin where 12 leaders each wrote up a page of ideas, favorite calls, and interesting material and sent it to the next person in the circle. When you received it, you got 12 pages of material, and had 2 weeks to read and absorb the ideas, replace your sheet, and send it on. Back then, dances were set pieces with a name, and a defined pattern, and callers wrote their favorite ones in "black books". By 1960 choreography had started to change, and there was a focus on individual calls. Les Gotcher and Willard Orlich offered note services in the 1960's that were a popular way to find out about these new calls, and ways to use them. They were joined by Jay King in 1967, Jack Lasry in 1971, Bill Peters in 1972, Al Brundage, Earl Johnston, and Deuce Williams in 1975, Bill Davis in 1982, and others. Each note service publisher would pick a few calls from all that crossed his desk and feature them. These calls would come with teaching hints, and some sample choreography. In addition to featuring some calls, a few note services published all the calls that came to them, including the author's name and location. This is how we know who wrote most of the calls. However, some call authors did not write up their call. Instead they just called it at dances and it spread by word of mouth. A note service publisher would find out and write it up, but without an author. Ironically, sometimes it was the popular calls that were going to catch on that were written up this way, and sometimes errors were introduced.

We know that many calls were invented in the 1970's. They were propagated by local callers subscribing to note services and trying what they found out on their dancers, and by traveling callers who would come to town and dazzle the dancers with the latest and greatest calls. Those dancers would bring the calls back to their local caller and ask him to reteach and use them. Some groups were formed whose primary focus was to dance all the new, experimental calls. In Massachusetts in 1967 Jay King ran a new calls workshop, perhaps screening calls for his newsletter. Bob Gambell ran a workshop in 1975 themed around learning and dancing new calls. Don Beck had a group, Don's Pawns, which met monthly and allowed Don to test his new ideas.

Jim Mayo explained how choreography changed in the 1960's, and we have documented that new calls were being created, upwards of 200 a year at the peak. What we haven't discussed is why. Why were these calls created? What was in it for the author who created a new call, the local or traveling caller who taught and used it, and the dancers who learned and danced it? Certainly something as it grew like gangbusters in the 1970's. Reasons to write or teach a new call:

- 1) To get your name in print
- 2) Because it was fun
- 3) To get into or out of a new formation (e.g., diamonds, hourglass, galaxy, etc.)
- 4) To give us a new motion or feel
- 5) To have new "workshop" material; floor equalizer
- 6) Outlet for creative juices
- 7) Dancers are in a learning mode, and they want to learn more
- 8) Caller or dancer bored with the same old same old
- 9) Lee Kopman needed material for his challenge groups

Some will ask: Why do we need more calls anyway? Why not just use directional calling?

Acey Deucey, on the Plus dance program, is a great example. We know that it can be directionally called as was mentioned above. However, it is not generally called directionally at Mainstream dances even though it could be. Without a name, the dance action is not used. At Plus, it is sometimes called directionally and sometimes called by name. At Advanced it is generally called by name. In addition we hear the variations Acey Deucey Once and a Half, 6x2 Acey Deucey, and even Acey Deucey from Diamonds. None of these would be practical with directional calling.

We also point out that Mainstream has pairs of calls that mainly differ in the use of hands or not (e.g., California Twirl and Partner Trade, Star Thru and Slide Thru, Dive Thru and Pass To The Center). After many years, we still retain both on the Mainstream program. However, there have been a few "pairs" in which a newcomer comes along and bumps out an older version. For example, in 1974 we were dancing Couples Hinge And Trade (Ron Schneider, 1969) which is done from Two-Faced Lines and has the couples hinge, the center couples trade, and all, as couples, turn to face the center to finish in a Beginning Double Pass Thru formation. Soon a new call with the same effect and a better dance action was created and Ferris Wheel (Don Beck, 1974) bumped out Couples Hinge And Trade. Consider Substitute (Clarence Watson, 1961) and Zoom (Gus Greene, 1972). We added both to the Mainstream list in 1978 but dropped Substitute in 1984. A final example is Curlique (Clarence Watson, 1961) and Touch 1/4 (Deuce Williams, 1976). Curlique was on our initial 1975 Mainstream list and Touch, with all of its fractions, was added in 1980. In 1984 we dropped all fractions except 1/4 with Touch, and in 1988 we dropped Curlique, leaving only Touch 1/4. I also heard the following story about Curlique:

Dave Taylor's wife Angie had her arm injured on a Curlique. At the next Callerlab convention he was chairman of the board and the membership voted to drop Curlique from Mainstream.

Ron Schnider once said: Who needs Pass And Roll? I could just step to a wave, scoot back, and split circulate. Lee Kopman responded, "I do."

Lee was a master at creating calls and was awarded a Milestone for that contribution to square dancing. While he may mostly be known as a challenge caller, and while many of his calls are in current use at challenge, you probably use each of these calls at every Mainstream dance Scoot Back (1969) and Recycle (1975) and each of these at every Plus dance: Roll (1971), Cut The Diamond (1973), Coordinate (1974), and Chase Right (1975).

Earlier we mentioned how new calls spread. In the challenge activity, in the 1970's there were less than 10 challenge callers so most dancers purchased reel-to-reel audiotapes of the few dances that were called. This would mean that a challenge caller like Lee would introduce a new call, it would be recorded, and that tape would be mailed to 30 or more basement tape group leaders. This caused that call to be learned and danced by most challenge dancers and callers. It was only later that a note service would pick it up.

Talk about:

- All 8 Recycle
- Swing Thru
- Ping Pong Circulate
- Ferris Wheel
- Ferris Anything
- Diamonds

- Common words turning into calls
- Common words turning into concepts
- Triple Play
- Ah So
- Sweep 1/4
- Crossfire
- Naming calls
- Same action, different names
- Same name, different actions
- What does it take to be a circulate?
- Why did some calls make it and others not?
- Turn Over
- Chain Down The Line
- Claude Spheres
- George Spelvin
- Do It Nicely and Take Your Time -- You're Looking Good

Our branch of square dancing that split off in the 1950's and evolved in the 1960's was a folk activity. It was growing by leaps and bounds, but without any central controls. Bob Osgood created lists and booklets in the late 1960's that documented the calls in popular use. When CALLERLAB started in 1974, they created their own list that had already changed from Bob's booklets. A tentative Mainstream list was adopted in 1975, and approved in 1976. In each of the next 5 years changes were made to reflect how the activity was changing. The list was frozen for 4 years. More changes in 1988, 1989, 1990, and that was the end of new calls being added to Mainstream.

At a preconvention meeting in 1973 Jack Lasry was appointed to chair the committee preparing the topic of New Movements to be presented at CALLERLAB's first convention. He wrote:

I propose the following: That CALLERLAB select a cross section of callers who represent coast to coast, border to border to border, and interest levels within the total picture, a committee of callers who are active in the picture and are interested in participating in this committee. The committee would select on a quarterly basis, one or two mainstream experimental ideas. And that CALLERLAB would then put a stamp of approval on one or two, and no more ideas, within a quarterly system.

Thus was born the Quarterly Selection system that slowed the onslaught of new calls that dancers had to learn, provided a testing ground for new calls, and a controlled way for calls to be added to our lists. Quarterly selection programs were created for the Mainstream, Plus, and Advanced dance programs. In the 1990's it became harder to find suitable new calls for quarterly selections, and we began to recycle existing calls. Quarterly selections were disbanded in 2001.