

Northern New Jersey Square Dancers Association



History from 1958-Present

Prepared by Rusty Ball and Lise Greene

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 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. Miniature NNJSDA banners were made for each member club. Freeloader and Patron program 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 held 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. 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. In 1972, the NNJSDA sponsored a poster contest for Square Dance Week, distributing copies of the winning poster to all member clubs for class promotion.

1973-1978

Leadership seminars titled LUST (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 performed before all attendees at the National Convention in Anaheim, California. Choreographed to the tune of "You're 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 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 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 the level of their dance programs in the spring to encourage graduates to attend club dances.

1983-1988

In the five years following its 25th anniversary, the NNJSDA continued to promote goodwill and friendship. The Association supported and helped with the success of the National Convention in Baltimore, 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. The NNJSDA also assisted with Floor Hospitality.

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 100th 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 by 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 aided in the development of club leaders through LUST 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 recognition 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 was also supportive of the Northern New Jersey Round Dance Leaders Council (NNJRDLC) and the Callers' Council of New Jersey (CCNJ). The NNJSDA 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.

1988-1998

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; LUST biennial informational seminars; insurance for member clubs; poster contest; Blood Bank; One Square Is Fair program; 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 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 "bible" of 52+ pages 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 proved to be a labor-saving investment, and the appearance and readability of *Grand Square* were greatly enhanced.

The Attendance award for summer Mainstream dances was changed. Instead of being 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 the 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, LUST 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.

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, Rusty Ball discontinued her informative Sewing Circle ^{Squared} column.

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

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 scheduled for Baltimore 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 the dissolution of a number of clubs, 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. Minor changes were also made at the same time to avoid ambiguity.

In 2000, the Porters stepped down as *Grand Square* editors, and the publication was headed by Barbara and Norman Kanter and Jan and Louis Thompson.

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*.

2003-2009

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*.

Three clubs folded, and 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 the members of NNJSDA clubs to attend a performance of *Oklahoma!* in June 2005 at a two-for-one ticket price, which included a light supper and an hour of square dancing. More than 200 people enjoyed dancing outside the theater to the calling of Dan Koft. This event continued each subsequent year, through 2012, with various callers.

Also in 2005, Lise Greene initiated a feature in *Grand Square* profiling dancers who make significant contributions in the NNJSDA community. In 2006, the magazine's 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 enabled 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 needed 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. The first annual Presidents Dinner, hosted by NNJSDA presidents Donna Poyer and Mike Szekula, was held for member club presidents to share ideas and concerns with the Board and one another.

In 2007, Rusty and Richard Ball became NNJSDA presidents and brought about the return of The Gathering (originally LUST), co-sponsored by the SDCNJ, after a 10-year hiatus. The Association offered "Leading Lady" badges for women who dance in the left position. A demo was held in Trenton at the request of the governor's office to celebrate September as Square Dance Month, followed by another demo at the state's Cultural Celebration.

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

In 2008, another Gathering was held, providing educational sessions followed by a dance. Dancers also participated in an outdoor "hoedown" demo, called by Howard Richman, at the invitation of the Paper Mill Playhouse to publicize its production of *Oklahoma!*

Publicity items were created for dancers to use to generate interest in square dancing: wallet-size cards, bookmarks, square pins, and red tote bags. Several clubs offered "ABC" drop-in dances. The format for Association dances was changed to provide more Mainstream dancing. One member club, Harmony Dancers, folded.

The NNJSDA celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2008 with a gala dance for 17 squares. The following year, 2009, *Grand Square* celebrated its 50th anniversary.

2009-Present

In 2009, presidents Lise Greene and Ken Robinson facilitated dancer involvement in NNJSDA development by instituting regular email newsletters, suggestion boxes at dances, online suggestion box, designated email address for suggestions, and contact information for all officers online. Facebook and Twitter accounts were created. The email list began to be used extensively by clubs and the Association to announce their events. The Executive Board "raided" every member club that completed One Square Is Fair the previous season. Two clubs, Masqueraders and Spinning Wheels, folded.

At the suggestion of caller Joe Landi, the first *Grand Square* Benefit Dance was held in 2010; proceeds enabled the clubs' magazine fee to be reduced. The outgoing editors – Kanters and Thompsons – were honored for producing an informative and excellent magazine for 10 years. Chris Beck Patrick took over as editor for two issues. Another Gathering was held, and a demo was performed at Monmouth Park Racetrack. The format of regular NNJSDA dances was tweaked again to better meet the needs and desires of all dancers. Children through high school age were charged half-price for events. Sadly, Tenakill Twirlers folded.

In 2011, Mary Ann Ryan-Erdek became editor of *Grand Square*. Club maps were compiled into a supplement for use throughout the year. Caller Gardner Patton scanned all issues from the beginning through digitalization in 2007, and webmaster Ken Robinson posted them to the website in fully scannable format. Jan Thompson began a series titled Tips for Your Tips.

Clubs received free publicity road signs. The Association sponsored a Blast Class Weekend under the leadership of callers Barbara Kanter and Howard Richman. The goal was to attract dancers who would not be able to attend traditional classes over a long period of time; the 21 participants learned (or, in some cases, reviewed) most of the Mainstream program from Friday through Sunday.

In 2012, Betsy Gotta was honored at a gala dance for 50 years of calling and teaching in New Jersey and worldwide. The second *Grand Square* Benefit Dance was held.

The Constitution and Bylaws were revised three times (2009, 2010, 2013).

In 2013, Times Squares (a primarily gay club) was welcomed as a new member club. The NNJSDA held a demo at the Meadowlands State Fair and distributed a trifold handout listing intro dances and classes for all clubs. A new series was instituted in *Grand Square: Where in the World Have Our Dancers Been?* Lise Greene became co-editor in 2013 and sole editor in 2014.

Also in 2014, the Raid and One Square Is Fair requirements were changed, permitting clubs to complete each program twice during a single year. NNJSDA presidents Greg Kushla and Donna Poyer headed the Four Seasons Fundraising Dance to benefit the 64th National Convention to be held in Springfield, Massachusetts, in 2015. The daylong event, which attracted approximately 250 dancers, featured 13 callers, five cuers, and dozens of raffle baskets. More than \$3,800 was presented to the Convention planning committee. Mountain Squares, an Advanced club, disbanded.

In 2015, the third *Grand Square* Benefit Dance was held and the NNJSDA's annual poster contest was changed to a *Grand Square* cover contest. New features were introduced: Caller Crowd-Pleasers and Just for Fun. In 2015 and 2016, changes were made to various aspects of NNJSDA programming in response to ongoing suggestions from dancers. Such changes included making summer dances all Mainstream (with rounds) to accommodate new dancers, making one Association dance Advanced/Plus, and reducing the number of events to encourage greater attendance at club events. The Callers' Council of New Jersey urged its member callers to use Callerlab's new Condensed Teaching Order in Mainstream classes; the order of calls was changed to allow students to first learn the calls used most often at dances, enabling them to participate even before graduation.

In 2016, an NNJSDA Meetup site was established for the use of member clubs in promoting intro dances, barn dances, etc. to an active new audience. In 2017, John Hill developed a new website with an updated look, easier navigation, and accessibility from new electronic devices.

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!**

A list of NNJSDA presidents from 1958 to the present is included below.

NNJSDA Presidents, 1958-Present

1958-1959	Al Aderante	1987-1988	Norman/Audrey Bolin	2016-2017	Nancy/Vic Ammons
1959-1960	Al Aderante	1988-1989	Norman/Audrey Bolin	2017-2018	Nancy/Vic Ammons
1960-1961	Bob Keck	1989-1990	Jim/Joyce Kelly	2018-2019	Nancy Ammons/Ralph Serio
1961-1962	Bud Sibbald	1990-1991	Jim/Joyce Kelly	2019-2020	
1962-1963	Bob Kellogg	1991-1992	Dick/Shirley White		
1963-1964	Frank/Hazel Preston	1992-1993	Dick/Shirley White		
1964-1965	Doc/Peg Tirrell	1993-1994	John/Joan Berg		
1965-1966	Gene/Grace Lucarini	1994-1995	John/Joan Berg		
1966-1967	Gene/Grace Lucarini	1995-1996	John/Joan Berg		
1967-1968	Jack/Carol DeCoste	1996-1997	Sal/Mary Alessi		
1968-1969	Ray/Pam Zeliff	1997-1998	Sal/Mary Alessi		
1969-1970	Ray/Pam Zeliff	1998-1999	Jim/Barbara Thoma		
1970-1971	Lyle/Edna Hooper	1999-2000	Frank/Helaine Penn		
1971-1972	George/Phyllis Cowan	2000-2001	Frank/Helaine Penn		
1972-1973	George/Phyllis Cowan	2001-2002	Bob/Mary King		
1973-1974	Frank/Lorraine Mooney	2002-2003	Bob/Mary King		
1974-1975	Frank/Lorraine Mooney	2003-2004	Rich/Georgi Flandera		
1975-1976	Sol/Harriette Koved	2004-2005	Rich/Georgi Flandera		
1976-1977	Sol/Harriette Koved	2005-2006	Donna Poyer/Mike Szekula		
1977-1978	Jim/Fay Bates	2006-2007	Donna Poyer/Mike Szekula		
1978-1979	Jim/Fay Bates	2007-2008	Rusty/Richard Ball		
1979-1980	Frank/Nan Habersberger	2008-2009	Rusty/Richard Ball		
1980-1981	Bob/Liv Carlson	2009-2010	Lise Greene/Ken Robinson		
1981-1982	Gabe/Sila Dell'Angelo	2010-2011	Lise Greene/Ken Robinson		
1982-1983	Gabe/Sila Dell'Angelo	2011-2012	Ken Robinson		
1983-1984	Fred/Kathryn Hill	2012-2013	Greg Kushla/Donna Poyer		
1984-1985	Fred/Kathryn Hill	2013-2014	Greg Kushla/Donna Poyer		
1985-1986	John/Mary Aquino	2014-2015	Mike Szekula		
1986-1987	John/Mary Aquino	2015-2016	Vic Ammons/Mike Szekula		