

Thank you,
Jane Kala

Hoolyeh International Folk Dancers

25th Anniversary
SOUVENIR PROGRAM

December 29, 1990

"We're living in one world and we'd better get to know it.
That's what folk dance is about."

"Of all the things I've done in my life, I feel this folk dance experience has been the most gratifying to me because it has reached out to so many people. It's so wonderful to see how many people are enjoying this still. I wish more people could realize the bounties of getting involved in international folk dance."

--Hildred Rice, December 28, 1990

This is just a beginning...send your contributions to:

Karla McMechan, Hoolyeh Folk Dancers
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Corvallis, Oregon 97339-1083

Hoolyeh International Folk Dancing, Corvallis, Oregon...

How did it all begin? We contacted as many "Early Hoolyeh Folk Dancers" as possible and combed the files. Here are the responses received so far. We're still waiting for your favorite story...

Emily Miller: The first contribution came from Emily Miller of Philomath, Oregon. She is 5 and three-quarters years old and has already been dancing with the Hoolyehs for three years. She was the first to respond to my request for stories for this souvenir album. She wanted to tell you all about the "Fox Dance"--Hashual from Israel. It's her favorite dance. She wants to do it every week. Next Halloween she's going to be a fox.

This enthusiasm for dance is what Hoolyeh's is all about:

Hildred Rice: [This is pieced together from several phone conversations with Hildred.] In 1950 I was teaching English at OSU. Irene Butts was also teaching English there. Irma Weir was teaching dancing, but wasn't yet teaching international folk dance. That was something new, spurred by returning veterans from World War II and by Vyts Belius. I was persuaded to go to a summer folk dance class at OSU. I really enjoyed it. The next year and the 1951/52 school year, the same teacher, I don't remember his name, arranged to teach a class for adults on Friday nights at Roosevelt School, sponsored by the Corvallis Parks and Recreation Department.

In May 1952 at the Eugene Festival Pirkko Roeker of the Eugene Folk Dancers asked us to host the February festival for the Oregon Folk Dance Federation. Eugene's was the first folk dance group in Oregon and Pirkko was the "first lady" of folk dance in Oregon. I didn't know what to do, but I didn't want to stop dancing, so I asked people to help and started the Corvallis Folk Dancers. The Parks Department gave us the space at Roosevelt School and a lot of people helped. We owe a lot to Jeannie Courtright Neff who did a lot of the teaching the first few years. She'd been to Stockton [the University of the Pacific Folk Dance Camp, held annually in Stockton, California]. We also had guest teachers come in from time to time. In 1954 I started going to Stockton and inviting the best teachers up here. Dancers came from all over to our festivals. We were the only group in Oregon doing this.

We did a lot of international squares. Caballito blanco got the most people on the floor at the first (1953) Valentine Festival. Makedonka was also popular. The very first 2 dances we learned were At the Inn and To Tur. I remember doing the Spinning Waltz from Finland with a Forestry student from Finland. He said we did it exactly the same way they did at home. I remember how strange the Syrtos seemed when I first learned it. A German student was so excited about the German dances we were doing that he wrote them down, got the music, and returned to Germany to teach them to his students there.

The Kolo didn't come into this area for a few years. We had tried some, but found them too difficult. Irma Weir brought John Filcich up from California. He turned the tide and we were doing kolos from then on. He made them fun. He was called "Kolo John" for a long time.

Irene Butts started the Junior Corvallis Folk Dancers for elementary school children in 1954. She'd been folk dancing somewhere before she came to OSU. Both of us took folk dance classes on campus with different teachers, many of them guests of Irma Weir. About this time, I persuaded the Oregon Folk Dance Federation to offer youth scholarships to Stockton. One of the early scholars was Julie Jirel Reed. She has certainly made a contribution to folk dance.

Until 1966 Corvallis Parks and Recreation provided the rooms in which we danced, but both Irene and I volunteered our time and bought our own players and records. I got local advertisers to support us. After 1966, when the Hoolyeh's were going strong, they began paying regular salaries.

Remember that the Hoolyeh's was a performance group. Irene's junior folk dancers had always performed regularly. I remember seeing Mike Onstad dancing at a Valentine Festival when he was seven years old. I could tell then that he was one to watch. After we started the Hoolyeh's she asked if she could call them the "Junior Hoolyeh" folk dancers. I remember when Dan Eden of the Parks and Recreation Department saw the Hoolyeh Performance Group at BARC [a benefit for the Benton Association of Retarded Citizens] in 1972. He was just thrilled. His mother was an active folk dancer and told him how good the Hoolyeh's were.

Kathryn Newcomb sparked the idea of having the flags. Dancers signed up to make flags from different countries. Jim McCauley made stands and poles. It added a lot to our festival. We had always found a way to send some young dancers to Stockton each year. One year six went. There were a number of different scholarships available then. But, when Jim died so suddenly in 1978 we started the James McCauley Folk Dance Scholarship. Jim had contributed so much to folk dancing.

Phone interview, Albany, Oregon, December 28, 1990

Michael Onstad: "I remember Dad taking all of us to Mrs. Irene Butts' Saturday morning dancing when we moved to Corvallis in 1957. He said it would be a good way to meet people. I called Irene Butts, who is now 94 years old. She said she started dancing when she was 46 years old (about 1948) and started her children's folk dance class in Corvallis in 1954.

"The first dance I learned was Makedonka. It was always the first dance of the day. We also did Teddy Bear's picnic, glow worm, Gherakina, Yovana Yovanke, Road to the Isles, Gustav Skoal, Kanafaska, Elena Mome, Miserlou, Clap and Turn Polka, Doudlebska Polka, and Dashing White Sergeant. At festivals we did Licko Kolo, the "silent" kolo.

"Gradually I led more and more dances and Mrs. Butts would ask me to demonstrate. When I was 15 I got a work permit to help her with the teaching. I helped a bit with Hildred's teen group, but I was devoting more and more time to ballet by then. In 1967, about a year after Mrs. Butts had moved to California, I moved to Utah.

"The core of our record collection, most of the 78's and some 45's, were donated by Mrs. Butts. Mrs. Rice has also donated a lot."

Phone interview, Corvallis, Oregon, December 28, 1990

Betty McCauley: I remember....

.....almost 37 years ago when a friend came to town to attend the annual Valentine Festival that was held in the old Roosevelt School gymnasium. Our family wasn't dancing in a group then, but we did attend as spectators. Hildred Rice organized the annual festivals for the Corvallis Folk Dancers who were sponsored at that time (but not funded much, she says) by City Recreation. The Valentine Festivals were held for 10 years, 1953-1962, and were well attended. They were held on that date to celebrate Oregon's birthday...the Valentine State.

.....over 30 years ago when Mrs. Irene Butts taught the Saturday morning folk dancing classes for children. All three of my children, Jane, Mary and Tom, danced with her. She was barely taller than the oldest children and she was always there dancing with them, the gold-going-on-silver braid in her hair shining like a crown on her head as she took their hands and encouraged them to join the circles. They did many of the dances we still do today....Mayim, Setnja, Les Noto, Korobushka, Ve David. Some of the favorites were Gustav Skol and Teddy Bear's Picnic. Irene didn't tolerate playing around, and everyone was out there dancing and having a good time. Visitors watching the children invariably

noticed one dancer. "Who is that little dark haired boy...he is such a good dancer." That was our own Michael Onsted!

In those years Eugene had an annual festival on a Sunday in April. Each year Irene organized the parents to drive cars so her children could experience a real festival, at least for the afternoon. They even wore costumes. We packed lunches so that we could start in the morning and have a picnic in Benton-Lane Park half way there. Then we would arrive in time for the opening dances. Irene knew which children (and which parents) knew the dances on the program and she made sure we were all out on the floor at the appropriate time for our skills. Many of these children went on to be the teenage Hoolyeh group in later years. When Irene retired and moved to California in 1966 she left her records and her dance directions with Peggy McKimmy and Audrey Varseveld who continued the Saturday morning classes until Hildred Rice took over in 1968.

..... October, 1965, when Hildred Rice organized the Hoolyeh group for high school dancers at the request of several young people. Junior high school dancers joined later. I don't think Janie missed a dance...she was in it before Mary. A book could be written about all their experiences together...it was a wonderful group! They were good dancers and enjoyed out-of-town parties, too. We used to pile the station wagon full of kids (before seat belts!) and head for the St. Patrick's Day festival in Salem, the festival in Eugene, or wherever there was a dance. It wasn't unusual to come back after 4 AM with a car full of sleeping, happy young people. Hildred made sure that each year deserving dancers had a chance to go to Stockton to folk dance camp. The first one to receive a scholarship was Glen Weber in 1970. One year Mary twisted her knee the last night of the camp, but she was so excited about the dancing that she made her Dad go out and rent a crutch the night that she came home and with it she "demonstrated" some of the new steps she learned!

The Hoolyehs started an exhibition group in Mary's senior year. The first performance was a benefit for the Benton Association for Retarded Citizens in 1971. A Seattle group had offered to come here to perform for the benefit but they charged too much. Hildred's Hoolyeh dancers decided that they could do it themselves and formed the performance group. There has been a benefit for BARC ever since, although it has been continued by the university performers and others. In my memory of the performance group there are piles and piles of fabric in our basement as the dancers became costume makers, fellows and girls sewing together. No one knows how much goes on behind the scenes before a performance!

The first Hoolyeh Festival was sponsored by the high school group. It was quite some time before the adult group took over that responsibility.

.....Some time soon after the Hoolyeh for high school was formed there was a request for an adult group. Adults had danced years before in a city group and also with the university group under Irma Weir. But now there was need again for a city sponsored group. I think the parents and friends of the Hoolyehs were envious of their fun. Hildred, again, was the one who arranged for Friday night dances.... monthly at first, and then increasing to weekly as we discovered how much we enjoyed it.

.....In 1978, after Jim died, when the folk dancers in Corvallis decided to give a scholarship to Stockton in his memory. It was a beautiful way to remember him and all the years of dancing we had with the Hoolyeh group...all the weekly dances, all the great festivals, all the friends we made. I'm proud of every one of the recipients of the scholarship as they have come back to share the dances they have learned.

.....1981 when the Sobronia exhibition group was formed and put on some impressive exhibitions. By this time our dancers were parents and my part was baby sitting. One day Kyle, then two, happened to hear some ethnic music on the radio and he immediately perked up, "Mommy Daddy dancing?" he said. Another generation is introduced to international culture! Now I am proudly watching granddaughter, Rhiannon, in the junior Hoolyeh exhibition group. It's been a wonderful family activity and I am grateful to all those wonderful leaders we've had through the years! Thank you, thank you, thank you!

Corvallis, Oregon, December 20, 1990