



Face of Fillmore

By Sherry Shepard
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Christmas lights and decorations have adorned the Face of Fillmore for the past month and, as we ring in the New Year, we often think ahead to the rest of a cold, dreary wintertime.

Fortunately, there is another great event right after the New Year to keep the young people in our community in the celebrating spirit and that is the annual Statehood Celebration.

On January 4, 1896 as Utah became the 45th state and the news spread, celebrations began all over the state and Fillmore was no exception. In keeping with that historical enthusiasm, the Territorial Statehouse Museum is hosting the annual Statehood Celebration.

The evening of Saturday, January 3 begins at 8 p.m. with an evening of fun dancing in the Territorial Statehouse. The dance is for the youth of the area (high school, young adults, and the young at heart), as well as many youth from around the state. Many who have attended the youth camps at the statehouse will be back for another evening of fun.

The Statehood Celebration is a formal dance in much the same format as those of years gone by. It is formal dress, although not necessarily from any particular time period. Girls can wear what they wore to the prom or what their parents, grandparents or the pioneers wore to their formal dances. Young



men should wear nice shirts and pants. The dance will begin with the traditional Grand March. Dance cards will then be filled out and the dancers will enjoy waltzes, polkas (the crowd favorite), reels, marches and schottisches. No dance experience is necessary, as there will be instructions given for these old times dances.

This event was begun just eight years ago, but was certainly not the first dance to be held in the Territorial Statehouse.

In days gone by as described by Rhoda Ashman Melville in the Milestones of Millard, dances in the statehouse were a common and well-attended event. Blackboards in front of the old G.R. Huntsman store and Can Melville's barbershop advertised each dance. It took hours for the young ladies to get ready for the dance as their high topped shoes took a long time to lace and their curling irons had to be heated to fix their long hair. Lacing their corsets, putting on layers of petticoats and then their dresses was less time consuming. They wore very little makeup in those days. The dances began at 8:30 p.m. Dancers climbed the north stairs to the upper room. In one corner a tin bucket with a water dipper quenched their thirst after the dancing. Perhaps the favorite dance music was Over the Waves, a lively waltz. In the summer months, after the dances, the young

people would go to the ice cream parlor run by Maggie Melville Kelly across the street and enjoy a five cent bowl of ice cream.

Brigham Young encouraged the early settlers of Utah to dance. “If they wish to exercise themselves in any way, to rest their minds and tire their bodies, go and enjoy themselves in the dance.” It is interesting to note that while he encouraged dancing at the end of a hard day’s work, he would not have approved of some of these dances enjoyed at the Statehouse Celebration. He felt the waltz was improper because the couples held each other in their arms, thus being too familiar. He disapproved of the polka for the same reason and additionally it was a wild type of dancing.

The first waltz ever danced in Fillmore was a big event. Wise and Leigh Cropper who were the sons of George and Sebrina Cropper, had been to Salt Lake City attending school. They were anxious to demonstrate the new dance they had learned while there. The dance floor of the upper room of the statehouse was cleared of other dancers so all could watch the demonstration. Each young man chose a partner and the Dan Olsen orchestra played the Blue Danube Waltz while the young people danced. It was the first time a boy had ever been allowed to take a girl in his arms when dancing in Fillmore.

The earliest settlers of Fillmore often danced in the old school house in the evenings. This was one of the first buildings completed and first used in December, 1851, just a few months after the settlers arrived. A large fire would be built in the fireplace of the school with its dirt floor and dirt roof. The room was lit by candles and the music furnished by fiddles, mouth organs and accordions. The musicians were paid in carrots, potatoes and even candles for their services.

Tradition is an important part of the Face of Fillmore and with help from people like Carl and Christine Camp and family, who organized the Statehood Celebration, the tradition of dancing will remain part of our heritage.