



The Face of Fillmore

By Sherry Shepard
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With the coming of the New Year and Statehood Day on January 4, a longtime tradition in Fillmore comes to life again. That tradition is dancing!

From the earliest days when the settlers arrived, dancing was a great form of recreation for the settlers of our community. No doubt, even as they traveled to this location, they held Saturday evening dances along the trail in the tradition of the Saints who crossed the prairie headed for Salt Lake City. History books record that on Saturday evenings, the fiddles and any other musical instruments the travelers had with them came out of their cases and the dust and trials of the trail were forgotten for a brief time, as the group enjoyed an evening of music and dance.

The first public building constructed in Fillmore was the schoolhouse. Completed December 14, 1851, it became the site for these dances, as well as weddings which were always followed by dancing. The school room was made of cottonwood logs with a large fireplace in one end. It had a dirt roof and a dirt floor.

Hiram Mace was the first dancing master and taught step dancing to the young people. The musicians in those early days were Horace Russell, Med Stevens, William Stevens, Jacob Huntsman, Isaac Carling, Mel Bartholomew, Joseph Pugmire, Nelson Bartholomew, John King and Gabriel Huntsman. This group played for every dance and wedding. They were paid with potatoes, cabbage, squash and even tallow candles, as money was very scarce.

Light for the dances came from the fire in the fireplace and from homemade candles using hollowed out carrots as the candleholders. On lookers sat on boards placed between blocks of wood and covered with quilts.

Only square dances or other dances which allowed the male to only take one arm of his partner were allowed, as more contact was considered inappropriate.

The first waltz in Fillmore was a monumental event, mainly because of the touching rule. Wise and Leigh Cropper, sons of George and Sebrina Land Cropper, had been to Salt lake attending school (probably in the late 1860's) and were anxious to demonstrate this new dance they had learned while there. Everyone attended this dance held in the statehouse. Each of the Cropper young men chose a partner and the floor was cleared so everyone could watch the demonstration. The Dan Olsen Orchestra was playing that evening - the Blue Danube Waltz. This was the first waltz ever in Millard County. It was the first time a boy had ever been allowed to take a girl in his arms when dancing. Before the evening came to a close, nearly everyone present had tried it.

At one point in our town's history there was an open air dance hall built west of the present day National Guard Armory. Information or pictures of this dance hall would be greatly appreciated to share



with the readers. Older residents of Fillmore will tell you about the great times they had at dances there. One memory of this dance hall was the winter the owner blocked off the entrance to the dance floor and flooded the floor, making an ice skating rink for all to enjoy.

The Territorial State house has long been the site for many dances and will be again on January 4, as the residents of Fillmore will once again be celebrating Statehood Day with the traditional dance on the upper floor of the Territorial Statehouse. Between 7:30 and 8:30 p.m., families and children are welcome to participate. The hours after 8:30 p.m. are reserved for teenagers, young adults and the young at heart. All residents of Fillmore are invited to put on their best formal dancing clothes and join in the fun.