



Face of Fillmore

By Sherry Shepard
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A great tradition happens each year in Fillmore as the new year begins. 2018 is no exception. On Saturday, January 6, the annual Utah Statehood Day Dance will be held in the Territorial Statehouses' Legislative Hall. This dance is free and open to the whole family. Dancing will begin at 8 p.m. Wear your finest dress or suit and celebrate Utah's 122 birthday with traditional pioneer dancing.

Dancing has been a part of Fillmore cultural heritage since the very beginning of the settlement in 1851. With the completion of their first meeting house on December 14, 1851, the pioneers to the area used it for many social gatherings, most of which included dancing.

The school room where the dancing took place 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 board placed between blocks of wood and covered with quilts. 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.

No doubt, even as they traveled to Fillmore to settle, they most likely 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.

Dancing has been held at a variety of locations in our little town. At one point in our town's history there was an open-air dance hall built west of the National Guard Armory building. 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. Other halls used for dancing have long since disappeared – the Bartholomew Hall and the Alcazar. Both buildings were destroyed by fire.

Since that time, dances have been held in church cultural halls, the American Legion, the National Guard Armory, the Pahvant Senior Citizens Building, the Pod, the Territorial Statehouse, Millard High school gymnasium, and lunchroom as well as other spots. There has been no shortage of those locations and no shortage of Fillmore's citizens who want to take part.

Dancing created controversy on more than one occasion here in Fillmore. Certainly, many of the residents agreed that a man could only take his partner by one arm and any other contact other than this was inappropriate, just as their earliest settlers had thought. The first waltz in Fillmore in the late 1860's was a monumental event, mainly because of the touching rule. Wise and Leigh Croppers, sons of George and Sebrina Land Cropper, had been to Salt Lake attending school 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.

Dancing must have gone downhill in its content because on December 5, 1913 we read in the Progress: “On Wednesday evening of this week, a special meeting of the city council was held for the purpose of drafting and passing an ordinance prohibiting, “Ragging” or indecent dancing of any kind in Fillmore City. Present Mayor Stevens and Councilmen Brunson, Starley, Carling, and Warner. Absent Robison.”

Councilman Brunson suggested “the appointment of a special officer to be present at all dances held in Fillmore since, as he said, it would be impossible for the Marshal to be everywhere at once.” The ordinance passed with only Councilman Carling voting “no”.

While the styles of dancing have changed over the years, the enjoyment of getting together for a dance continues to be part of our heritage.