

History of International Folk Dancing in Manitoba

(Longer Version: July 14, 2020)

What is International Folk Dancing?

International Folk Dancing is recreational dancing in which people get together to learn and dance traditional dances that originate from many different cultures and countries. The purpose of the activity is not mainly to perform, it is to experience and enjoy the collective activity of dancing together. Those who participate may not have any family or ethnic connection to the dances that are done, and there is not a focus on any one culture or tradition. In short, it is a multi-cultural activity that invites people from any background to participate. International folk dance groups can be found around the world, including in Europe, North America, Asia, and Australia.

“Folk dancing” can cover a lot of ground. Typically in international folk dancing as it has evolved in Canada and elsewhere, there is an emphasis on European or Balkan dances, especially on circle and line dances from eastern Europe. As well, dances from the Middle East and North America are enjoyed along with a smattering of dances from other regions. Some of the dances may be actively danced as part of traditional cultures, while others are modified or choreographed versions of traditional dances or newly composed dances. People participate in international folk dancing for multiple reasons, including an appreciation of the music, the joy of physical activity and movement, feeling connected to a community that doesn’t impose too much conformity, celebrating that we live in a multi-cultural world, while also satisfying our need for exercise and socializing.

This article is an attempt to answer the question, where did this form of recreational dancing come from, and how did it evolve in Manitoba?

International folk dancing in Manitoba was influenced by several widespread developments in North America including educational reforms, the playgrounds movement, the settlement movement, large scale immigration of various ethnic groups to Manitoba, and the growing acceptance of those groups within Manitoban society. Many of these movements originated in England or in New York and spread quickly across North America in the early 1900s. Folk dancing evolved as society evolved, shifting from a patriotic and socially approved activity emphasizing British heritage, to a broader activity reflecting a multi-cultural society.

The Playgrounds Movement

Starting in the early 1900s folk dancing performances by groups of children were almost always a feature of public celebrations and events in Winnipeg. At that time folk dancing was taught as part of the programming of the Winnipeg Playgrounds Commission. The urban playground movement began in the late 1800s in England, and in 1906 the Playgrounds Association of America was formed in New York City, quickly expanding to other cities.¹ As described in the Free Press, the Winnipeg Playgrounds Commission was part of “the great wave of popular opinion in favor of playgrounds that swept over the American continent,” reaching Winnipeg in 1908.² The Winnipeg Playgrounds Commission was formed in 1909 and was responsible for providing equipment, facilities and activities for children at playgrounds throughout the city. The equipment and facilities included skating rinks, swings, gymnastics apparatus, basketball courts, baseball diamonds, etc. The program of activities including various games, sports and other activities. Swimming was taught by taking groups to the public baths. Folk dancing was taught to girls and boys both during the summer, outdoors, and during the winter in the schools.

¹ Erica Nielsen, **Folk Dancing**, Greenwood, 2011, p49.

² “Splendid Growth of Playgrounds Movement in Winnipeg,” Manitoba Free Press, June 19, 1915, p24.

Each summer there was a well publicized and well attended Playgrounds Day at Assiniboine Park in Winnipeg, an annual demonstration that included marches, drills and dances. Similar demonstrations were provided on the annual Civic Holiday. In 1912 for example, a large outdoor demonstration was given by members of city playgrounds with 2500 children from 16 playgrounds participating, including 80 minutes given over to folk dances.³



Folk dancing class at Aberdeen School circa 1920. Photo: courtesy of the City of Winnipeg Archives

Although both boys and girls were involved in folk dancing classes, it was thought to be especially appropriate for girls. In June 1914 an article in the Tribune described folk dancing as “probably the most popular activity for girls in public schools of our land today. From a small beginning in 1911 folk dancing has grown to large proportions on playgrounds.” The article also noted that “last year’s folk dancing program at the city park was by far the best ever exhibited in Winnipeg. This year Mrs. Farrell will teach folk dancing on all the grounds. It has no equal as an exercise to promote grace and natural expression of dance...”⁴

Folk dancing was an expression of national pride, emphasizing the British heritage of early settlers, along with a limited range of other familiar traditions. In 1913 a Victoria Day performance in Winnipeg included dances of England (Maypole & Minuet), Scotland (fling & sword dance), Ireland (jigs), New Zealand (shepherdess dance), and Egypt (cymbol dance). In addition, “A new fantastic dance has been invented for Canada and will be presented for the first time...”⁵

Immigration and the Settlement Movement

International folk dancing was also promoted as part of the settlement movement which developed in response to large scale immigration to large cities in the United States and Canada. In 1913 a Miss Neufeld spoke at the Women’s Press Club in Winnipeg, describing the programs at the Central Neighbourhood House in Toronto.⁶ This settlement house had been started two years earlier with minimal funding. In her interview Neufeld emphasized the importance of accepting and facilitating the self-development of new immigrants, as opposed to providing welfare - “Give opportunities not alms” was her motto. At the same time the settlement house had a mission of integrating immigrants

³ “Playgrounds Day at Assiniboine Park,” *Manitoba Free Press*, Aug. 7, 1912, p22.

⁴ “Recreative Pursuits for the Young of Winnipeg,” *Winnipeg Tribune*, June 12, 1914, p28.

⁵ “The Pageant of Empire,” *Manitoba Free Press*, May 3, 1913, p55.

⁶ *Manitoba Free Press*, Sept. 19, 1913, p9.

into Canadian society and provided lectures in citizenship and government, given in Russian, Italian, Yiddish and English. Neufeld said that they were planning to introduce drama and folk dancing that winter. She contrasted “folk dancing” with dancing in public dance halls which was viewed as undesirable. (She described having anonymously visited dance halls in Toronto, which confirmed her in this view.)

The University Settlement was the first settlement house in Toronto, established in 1910 with the involvement of the YMCA and Victoria College, part of the University of Toronto. It provided a wide variety of programs for new immigrants including a music school started in 1920s along with an annual Spring Festival, later known as the Grange Festival. The 1935 festival was described this way:

“The Ukrainians started the day, ribbons flying, feet flying. There were Chinese songs and rich old Chinese costumes were worn. The Danes danced, then the English, more Ukrainian, then Canadian square dances. With fiddling, plucking and percussion the tunes went on, the dancers increasing in spirit, the onlookers humming and beating time.”⁷

In 1948 the University Settlement Folk Dancers were formed, the first international folk dance club in Canada. One of the founders of that dance club was Ivy Krehm (Wittmeyer), originally from Brooklyn, NY who had been part of the folk dancing movement there. In the 1960s she and others from the University Settlement dancers came to Winnipeg to lead international folk dance workshops that helped lead to the formation of MIFDA.⁸



Ukrainian dancers at an outdoor event circa 1920. Photo: courtesy of the City of Winnipeg Archives

Prominence of Ethnic Dancing in Winnipeg

Various types of folk dancing have long been enjoyed in Winnipeg. Strong ethnic roots in a diverse population have helped lead to Folklorama, Winnipeg’s annual two week long celebration of cultural diversity since 1970. But there were precursors to Folklorama. In 1925 the Polish Sokol dancers were founded in Winnipeg and in 1927 Vasyl Avramenko, who started Ukrainian dance schools across Canada in the 1920s, founded the first Ukrainian dance school in Winnipeg.⁹ In July, 1927 the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation celebrations showcased 25 of Winnipeg’s ethnic communities in

⁷ The Toronto Association of Neighbourhood Services, “The Story of University Settlement, 1910-1984,” p16.

⁸ Winnipeg Free Press, Nov. 23, 1963, p16.

⁹ Winnipeg Free Press, May 14, 1927, p7.

song and dance at a “Pageant of All Nations,” in Assiniboine Park, an event attended by 50,000 people.¹⁰ This was followed by the New Canadian Folk Song and Handicraft Festival that took place in Winnipeg in June, 1928, one of a series of festivals that took place across Canada, and part of a larger process which began to incorporate ethnic immigrant groups into the “Canadian Mosaic.”¹¹ The five day festival included folk songs and dances from 15 Scandinavian, central and eastern European countries. Newspapers enthusiastically reviewed the music and dance performances: “The dancing by each group in turn was a source of joy to the beholders...”¹²



Dancers at the Annual Polish-Canadian Ball, Royal Alexandra Hotel, Winnipeg, 1937.

Physical Education and Folk Dancing

In the early 1900s folk dancing was not included within the concept of physical education. This was a time of nationalism and imperialism and physical education often focused on the training of soldiers. Canada followed the 1909 British Board of Education’s “Syllabus of Physical Training for Schools” which emphasized physical drills and gymnastics. The British physical education approach was based on the German and Swedish gymnastic systems, which were “Deeply tinged with the nationalistic purposes of raising the physical standards of the army.”¹³ The development of physical education programs in Canada was supported by the Strathcona Trust, established in 1909 to provide funding for training instructors in formal gymnastics and military drill.

¹⁰ Robert Cupido, “Public Commemoration and Ethnocultural Assertion: Winnipeg Celebrates the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation,” *Urban History Review*, Vol. 38, No. 2, Special Issue (Spring 2010), pp. 64-74.

¹¹ Daniel Stone, “Climbing the Vertical Mosaic; Poles in Winnipeg Between the Two World Wars,” *Manitoba History*, No. 87, Summer 2018, pp 2-11.

¹² Winnipeg Free Press, June 21, 1928, p3.

¹³ David Alexander Downie, “A History of Physical Education in the Public Schools of Manitoba,” Master of Education Thesis, University of Manitoba, 1961, p18.

This was the official approach in Manitoba until 1928 when the Manitoba Department of Education began to revise the curriculum, including the physical education curriculum, putting less emphasis on drills and more on games and rhythmic movement including dancing. The 1933 Manitoba physical education syllabus said that “not less than half the lesson should be devoted to active free movements, including games and dancing.”¹⁴

Robert Jarman was an educator who came to Winnipeg from England to be the Director of Physical Education for both the Winnipeg School Board and the Province of Manitoba. His arrival coincided with the start of revisions to the provincial curriculum in 1928, and he had a major influence on the development of folk dancing in Manitoba schools until his retirement in 1951. In a talk he gave in 1930 he described some of the changes he had introduced and how they were received: “In place of more strenuous games the girls are given folk dancing and how young Canada takes to the dance! I have never anywhere seen more enthusiasm and... such success in so short a time, especially with the girls.” Jarman said... “Manitoba boys and girls are two years ahead of the English children in physical development.” Jarman credited the provision of week long intensive training for teachers in helping spur the rapid development of folk dancing. He supported this by writing a step by step booklet for teachers and by commissioning local production of folk dance recordings that were made available to teachers.¹⁵

PHYSICAL EDUCATION PAMPHLET 1949		
PROGRAM		
Under the direction of Robert Jarman, Director of Physical Education.		
1. Primary Grade Exercises: Champlain School, Gr. 1		Miss F. Miller
2. Elementary Girls' Dancing: Greenway: "If All the World were Paper" Wm. Whyte: "Terschelling Reel"		Miss G. Kavanagh Miss G. Gillis
3. Elementary Boys' Breaks and Stunts: Aberdeen		Miss D. Dutton
4. Primary Grades' Dancing Lord Roberts Grade 2 1. "I See You" 2. "Peasant Lance" 3. "O Dear, What Can the Matter Be"		Miss J. Sinkwich
5. Elementary Boys' Exercises: Alexandra Grades 5 and 6		Mrs. J. Robertson
6. Elementary Girls' Dancing Mulvey: "The Bow" Riverview: "Sir Roger de Coverley"		Miss J. Harrow Miss W. Bawden
7. Primary Grade Games: Victoria Albert		Miss E. Warkentine
8. Junior High Girls' Skipping: Laura Secord		Miss M. Tait
9. Elementary Girls' Relays: Wolseley School Versus Grosvenor School		Miss E. Thomas Miss J. Cameron
10. Junior High Girls' Dancing Faraday: "Oaken Leaves" Hugh John Macdonald: "The Irish Lilt"		Miss N. Robertson Mrs. D. Bebbington
11. Junior High Boys' Mat Work Cecil Rhodes		Mr. W. Madder
12. Junior High Girls' Maypole Dance General Wolfe		Miss M. Crawford
13. Junior High Boys' Sword Dance King Edward: "Flamborough"		Mr. J. Kereluk
14. Junior High Girls' Dancing Brooklands: "Dutch Dance" Robert H. Smith: "Largason"		Mrs. M. Shaw Miss S. Mercer
15. Senior High Mixed Square Dance: "You Swing Your Girl: I'll Swing Mine" "Captain Jinks" Lord Selkirk School		Miss M. Perfect
16. Senior High Girls' Dances Kelvin High School: "The Hornpipe" Isaac Newton: "Greek Ball Dance" Daniel McIntyre: "The Swedish Dal Dance"		Miss R. Duncan Miss C. Griffiths Miss M. Leggatt
17. Senior High Girls' Club Exercises Gordon Bell		Miss H. Robertson

Source: Downie, 1961, Appendix G

Training Physical Education Teachers

As noted, folk dancing was seen in part as an alternative physical activity that was more appropriate for girls than participation in other athletic activities. The implication is that girls did not participate in organized physical education or sports activities in the early 1900s. The Margaret Eton School which operated in Toronto from 1901-1942 was influential in promoting increasing levels of physical activity for girls and women. In the school's early years the image of the “Margaret Eton Girl” emphasized elegance and expression in theatre but it later shifted to an emphasis on training in athletic

¹⁴ Downie, p56.

¹⁵ In the Feb 1950 Manitoba School Journal there was a list of folk dance records that had been produced by Radiolabs Institute in Winnipeg for Robert Jarman that Phys Ed teachers could order.

skill and training to teach physical education.¹⁶ Graduates of the Margaret Eton School became physical education teachers in Manitoba among other places.

Dorothy E. Sangster (Forsyth) was one such teacher. She kept a professional journal throughout her career, and the first page of the journal summarizes the objectives of the Canadian Physical Fitness Act that was proclaimed in October 1943.¹⁷ In 1945 a parallel Manitoba Physical Fitness Act was passed. This Act took a broader view of fitness than had been taken before. At the top of the first page of Dorothy's journal is the question: "What do we mean by fitness?" Through the implementation of the Act the concept of fitness was broadened and the physical was seen as only one aspect of the total concept of fitness.¹⁸ Dorothy notes: "Physical fitness and health are closely related and associated with all those factors which make for good health. The program includes games, athletics, rhythmic, swimming, out-door activities such as camping and hiking – every day activities and skills." She adds this note: "Recreation for all – opportunities in sports and games for all – old and young, both sexes."

Dorothy was born in Winnipeg and graduated from Riverbend School for Girls (now Balmoral Hall) in 1936. She received her university education (Phys Ed) at Margaret Eaton School in Toronto. She had a career that included working with the YWCA in Saskatoon, SK and St. John, NB, teaching at the Manitoba Normal School and at Andrew Mynarski School in Winnipeg. Among other things, her journal includes the program of activities at a Normal School event, possibly end of year graduation ceremonies, for 1942-43. The program was similar to the program outlined in the Robert Jarman pamphlet (above) and included dances from Denmark, Hungary, Portugal and Germany as well as singing games, tap dancing, and a grand march.

Dorothy Sangster moved to Killarney, MB with her family in 1958, opened a dance school there and became a highly sought after folk dance adjudicator at festivals throughout Manitoba. Her career illustrates how a dedicated and enthusiastic teacher was trained in a new philosophy of physical education that incorporated folk dancing among other things, and how she went on to teach folk dancing to students in Manitoba over a period of some 40 years.¹⁹

YM/YWCA and YMHA

The YMCA/YWCA and YMHA were also important to the development of international folk dancing in Manitoba. As early as 1913 the YWCA in Winnipeg announced that their new gymnasium instructor, Olga Ekwurzel, a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania, was able to teach classes in "German, American and Swedish systems, club swinging, folk dancing, personal hygiene and first aid."²⁰ There was a subsequent announcement that the 1914 open house would include folk dancing.²¹ The YMCA in Winnipeg sponsored folk dancing over the years, and in 1961 established the first international folk dancing club meeting regularly in Winnipeg.²² The Winnipeg YMHA also offered folk dancing classes over the years, as shown in occasional newspaper notices of classes and events. In 1966 for example, international folk dancing classes were announced featuring teachers from MIFDA.²³

¹⁶ Anna H. Lathrop, "Elegance and Expression, Sweat and Strength: Body Training, Physical Culture and Female Embodiment in Women's Education at the Margaret Eton Schools, 1901-1941," Doctor of Education Thesis, University of Toronto, 1997 – Abstract.

¹⁷ The following material is based on Dorothy Sangster's journal/notebook provided by her daughter Janice Coates.

¹⁸ Lorne W. Sawula, "The National Physical Fitness Act of Canada, 1943-1954," PhD Thesis, University of Alberta, Graduate Studies and Research, 1977, p. v.

¹⁹ See Dorothy E. Sangster obituary, Winnipeg Free Press, March 18, 2006.

²⁰ Winnipeg Free Press, Sept. 19, 1913, p9.

²¹ Winnipeg Tribune, Sept. 25, 1914, p10.

²² Winnipeg Free Press, Sept. 27, 1961, p53.

²³ Winnipeg Free Press, Dec. 31, 1966, p4.

Manitoba Square and Round Dance Association (aka the Folk Dance Federation of Manitoba)

There are long standing traditions of square dance and old time dancing in Manitoba, which may also be viewed as folk dancing. According to a 1984 history of the Square and Round Dance Association written by Eva Blyth,²⁴ the first square dance clubs in Manitoba were organized in the 1940s. In 1952 the Winnipeg Junior Chamber of Commerce organized the city's first square dance jamboree, involving 21 clubs. The Jamboree resulted in a decision to organize the "Folk Dance Federation of Manitoba (Eastern Division)" with Charlie Ward as the first President. According to the federation's 1953 constitution its purpose was "To further, promote and encourage square, round and folk dancing," among other things, although the focus was clearly on square and round dancing.

By 1957 there was a provincial square dancing organization with five divisions in Manitoba and many member clubs. During the summers from 1955-1961 outdoor square dancing took place in Winnipeg at Rainbow Stage in Kildonan Park, organized and sponsored by the Folk Dance Federation and Winnipeg Parks and Recreation, with the public invited to participate. In 1960 the June dance festival was broadened to include ethnic music and dancing in addition to square dancing. This was dubbed the "Manitoba Mosaic" festival. Two nights of songs and dances of 17 cultural groups were followed by a night of square dancing.²⁵ It doesn't appear that the festival was repeated under that name or in that format. By 1962 the format of the festival had changed enough that the square dance federation decided not to participate. In 1961 the organization began referring to itself as the Manitoba Square and Round Dance Federation.

When was the Manitoba International Folk Dancing Association (MIFDA) First Started?

The promotion of folk dancing in Manitoba schools from 1928 onwards, together with a modern approach to physical fitness and a history of ethnic dance in Winnipeg, led to the creation of MIFDA as an organization. In 1962 and 1963 the Canadian Association for Health, Physical Education, and Recreation (CAHPER), Manitoba Region sponsored three folk dance workshops in Winnipeg. The first two, in November, 1962, and May, 1963 were directed by Jane Evans of the Manitoba Teachers College.²⁶ The third workshop took place in November, 1963 and featured Ivy Krehm (Wittmeyer) of the University Settlement Dancers, as noted above.

In 1964 the Manitoba International Folk Dance Association was first referred to by this name in a newspaper article, when an initial supper and planning session for the group was announced. This may be the beginning of MIFDA as an organization separate from other organizational sponsors. The co-founders of the organization were Jim Belford, Jane Evans and Gale Ryan. The goals as reported in the Tribune were to encourage "Canadians to learn and enjoy the traditional dances of the many nationalities represented by the citizens of Manitoba," and to "preserve the essential difference and qualities of each country's national dance."²⁷ By early 1965 regular folk dance sessions were being announced, taking place at the West End Community Centre and in the fall of 1965 a folk dance club was started at the University of Manitoba.

²⁴ "Square and Round Dancing in Manitoba," Eva Blyth, 1984 – unpublished article from the square dance association web site: <http://squaredancemb.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/history-by-eva-blyth-part-2.pdf>

²⁵ Winnipeg Free Press, June 11, 1960, p62.

²⁶ Winnipeg Free Press, Nov. 23, 1963, p16 and March 6, 1963, p33.

²⁷ Winnipeg Tribune, Sept 22, 1964, p21.

MIFDA in the 1960s and 1970s

In the 1960s and 1970s MIFDA membership was made up primarily of school and university teachers and focused on three types of activities: Public Workshops; Regular Classes for adults; and an annual Children's Folk Dance Festival. Most of the workshops were led by instructors from Toronto, including Ivy Krehm (Wittmeyer) (1963 & 1965), Jack Geddes (1964 & 1966), Jean Sterling (1967) and Frank Morrison (1970 & 1972). All four of these non-Winnipeg instructors danced with the University Settlement Dancers, and were involved in other dance activities in Toronto. In 1965 MIFDA organized a three day dance camp in Gimli with the support of the Manitoba Fitness and Amateur Sport branch, Dept. of Welfare. It was billed as the only camp of its kind in Western Canada and was led by Ivy Krehm.

Several early MIFDA leaders taught in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba, including Jim Belford and Jane Evans. They were interested in educating both children and adults, and as members of the Faculty of Education they were involved in teacher training. In 1966 MIFDA organized the first of an annual series of Children's Folk Dance festivals in Winnipeg which continued through at least 1975.

A brief history of MIFDA in the 1977-78 **Footnote** newsletter reported that MIFDA was initiated in 1961 by "interested people" in order to organize folk dance workshops for school teachers and community leaders, and to put on an annual Children's Folk Dance Festival starting in 1963. It was said that more than 2000 children and adults attended the Children's Dance Festival in 1975. During the 1975-76 school year MIFDA also put on a series of six monthly folk dance evenings held at the Contemporary Dance Studios on Princess Street, and these evenings continued in the following years. From about 1968 - 1977 MIFDA also led mass dancing on the Legislative Grounds as part of Canada Day celebrations. These celebrations grew out of Canada's 1967 Centennial celebrations. In 1977 MIFDA claimed a membership of more than 100 province-wide.

Some Early MIFDA Leaders

Leader	Role	Year
Gale Ryan (Tucker)	Co-founder	1964
Jane Evans	Co-founder	1964
Jim Belford	Co-founder	1964
Harvie Haldorson	Dance Club Leader	1973
Alec Whittam	President	1975-76
Lanny Gregory	President	1976-77
Roy Rodford	President	1977-78
Dave Edwards	President	1979-80

The Gimli Folk Dance "Level" Workshops

As documented in MIFDA **Footnote** newsletters, from 1974/75 through 1979/80, MIFDA organized folk dance training sessions for teachers at the Gimli Leadership training facility, in cooperation with the provincial department of Tourism, Recreation and Cultural Affairs. The training sessions were run as a series of five weekend workshops, referred to as Levels I - V, offered over a period of several months, from fall or winter through spring. The province covered the biggest portion of the cost (room & board at the training centre), and memberships and fees covered the remainder, such as honoraria for instructors. The program led to a certificate for those who completed all five Levels. Participants

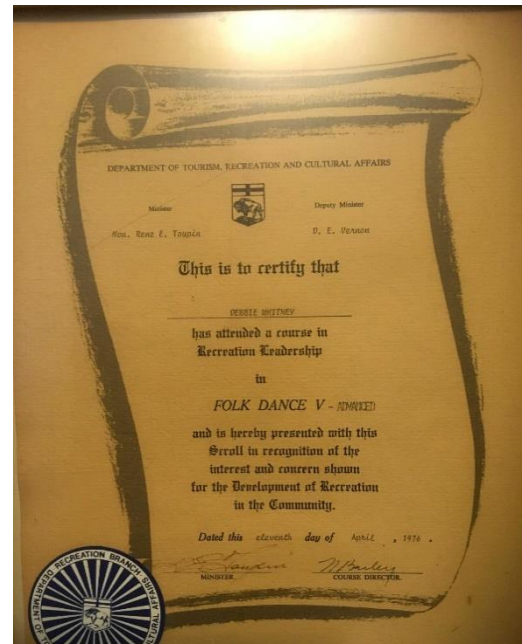
came from various parts of Manitoba and attendance ranged from about 35-80 people with an average attendance of about 50. There were two types of certification – basic and advanced.

Teachers trained at these workshops often became folk dance leaders in their local schools and communities, and some became adjudicators at regional music and dance festivals throughout the province. The May 1976 **Footnote** newsletter lists 14 adjudicators – presumably having completed the MIFDA folk dance courses and having received certificates. Nine of these adjudicators lived in Winnipeg and the remaining five lived in Virden, Swan River, Killarney, Brandon and The Pas.

The Gimli workshops also included parties and with ethnic food, costumes and entertainment. In some years cultural events were organized for the Gimli community as well. The Gimli Level workshops are still remembered fondly by those who participated in them.

In 1976 and 1977 the following activities, among others, were reported in the **Footnote** newsletter:

- a MIFDA member (Jim Belford) adjudicated folk dancing at several regional music and arts festivals;
- a dance night was organized involving folk dance clubs from four Winnipeg area schools; teachers in each school were provided with the evening dance program which they taught to students in advance; each school performed a demonstration dance;
- MIFDA members, who were also teachers in four Winnipeg schools (Morley Campbell, Lawrie Kyle, Tim Proskurnik and Dave Edwards) coordinated their folk dancing programs which involved some 200 children;
- in 1975 a MIFDA member (Norm Calof) taught a six day folk dance program at the International Peace Gardens Music Camp;
- a MIFDA member (Jeannine Dufault) organized and taught the Swan Valley Minifolk Dancers who went on to win a trophy in the Swan River festival;
- a former participant in the Gimli workshops (Florence Widdicomb) formed an adult folk dancing group with members from Russell, Binscarth, Foxwarren and Birtle, that performed at the North Western Marquette Festival;
- a MIFDA member (Norm Calof) organized folk dance clubs in grades 4-6 at Wellington School. He also organized a children's Folk Dance Festival involving four schools, among a number of other events;



*Folk Dance Level V Certificate.
Photo: courtesy of Debbie Whitney*

MIFDA members also organized occasional recreational dancing for adults. Over the years the newspapers mentioned several recreational dance groups with regular classes at several locations, including the YMCA, the YMHA, the West End Community Centre, the Museum of Man and Nature, and the University of Manitoba. During 1975-76 monthly dance evenings were being organized, some of them, at least, taking place at the Contemporary Dancers studio in Winnipeg. Dances continued to take place monthly during the fall-winter-spring season each year through the spring of 1979 (MIFDA AGM Minutes, April 25, 1979).

MIFDA Goals in the 1970s

In 1977 MIFDA membership was about 100 province wide. The 1977-78 edition of **Footnote**, listed the following MIFDA objectives:

- 1) encourage and foster folk dancing representative of Manitoba culture
- 2) encourage folk dancing in schools and increase awareness of various cultures in Manitoba
- 3) improve standard of folk dance performances at festivals
- 4) provide inservice instruction for community groups on request
- 5) sponsor and encourage people to attend workshops outside Manitoba
- 6) provide a place and atmosphere where people can dance
- 7) encourage ethnic dance groups to share their dance knowledge

Transition to Local Recreational Dancing

During the 1960s and 70s MIFDA was largely oriented towards the formal education of children and adults, but this began to change. The Gimli courses and the various events put on by the group were not only about education, they were about children and adults enjoying themselves dancing. In 1979 the Gimli programs were discontinued after government funding cuts in 1979. This forced MIFDA to refocus its activities and led to the organization of weekly recreational dancing in Winnipeg.

A one day mini-workshop was organized and took place in March 1979 in as an alternative to the Gimli workshops. During the 1979-80 monthly dance evenings continued on Sunday evenings. This was followed by a planning meeting in June 1980 at which it was decided to have weekly dancing during the next year, taking place on Sunday evenings at the downtown YMCA. Weekly dancing was to be supplemented by occasional weekend workshops, although it is not clear that these workshops actually happened apart from the March 1979 workshop. This meant that the group shifted from having a province-wide educational scope to being primarily a local recreational dance club in Winnipeg.

MIFDA in the 1980s and beyond

During the 1980s MIFDA continued to have weekly recreational dancing for members, with various members taking turns leading classes. Dance nights were moved from the YMCA on Sundays to the Contemporary Dancers studio in Augustine United Church on Fridays because of poor attendance on Sundays. Attendance at the new time was higher. Overall leadership was provided by Dave Edwards and Peggy Emmond, and after 1988 by Teresa Lobczuk and Moira Graham, supported by other volunteer teachers. Rather than sponsoring its own workshops several MIFDA leaders attended workshops outside Manitoba, especially the annual Ontario Folk Dance Camp held in Waterloo, ON. Some also attended the Mid-America Folk Dance Camp held in Windsor, ON, the Stockton folk dance camp in California, and other dance camps. These leaders would then share some of the dances they learned at dance camps with MIFDA members.

By the early 1990s membership and participation had declined from earlier years, with typical attendance of about 15-20 participants per dance evening. This seems to have been a result of turnover in leadership and membership. During the 1990s there was a gradual increase in activity and participation. MIFDA started organizing weekend workshops with guest teachers more often. Annual open houses, occasional local guest teachers, cooperative events with other dance groups, particularly the Village Green English Country Dancers, and an end of year pot luck party and dance became part of the annual calendar. During the 1990s six weekend workshops took place. Most workshops featured a mixture of east European and other types of dancing. (A list of workshops since 1990 is provided in the appendix.)

Although MIFDA shifted to an adult recreational focus, folk dancing continues to be taught in Manitoba schools, and continues to be included as an option in the provincial curriculum. For many years Dave Edwards, the former MIFDA leader who was also a teacher at Oak Bank Elementary School, organized an annual school dance program for students in grades 3-6 that several schools participated in over the course of the year. The year's program culminated in an annual event known as "One Night in April." At this event students from the various schools would put on a performance for their parents and family, who were also invited to join in the dancing.

In 2011, a new curriculum was published by the Manitoba Department of Education that included folk/ethnic dance as a part of the Arts curriculum under the section titled "Understanding Dance in Context." Folk dance also appears in the current Physical Education curriculum, as a suggested activity. Individual schools and school divisions continue to organize end of the year outdoor dance events. In 2019 the Louis Riel School Division celebrated its 30th annual Folk Dance in the Park event.²⁸

In the years since 2000 MIFDA's profile in the community has increased somewhat through interactions with other groups, stable leadership and participation, occasional participation or dance calling by MIFDA members in non-MIFDA events, increased advertising through print and social media, and the promotion of annual weekend dance workshops. Some of the workshops focused on a single country, such as Bulgaria, Romania, Armenia or Greece, while others offered a broad mix of cultures. In 2006 when the rental space at Augustine Church was no longer available, MIFDA moved to a new location at Churchill Park United Church. Membership and weekly participation increased at about this time, with formal membership of about 50-60 and typical attendance of 25-35 participants per dance night, with larger numbers for parties or special events.



Culture Days Open House, September 2016; Photo by Ian Walsh

Over the years MIFDA has evolved as an organization. In the early years it was structured more formally and for a time, in about 1987-1992, was registered as a non-profit organization in Manitoba. During earlier years teachers were paid an honorarium. As the scope of the organization changed in the 1980s and 1990s, MIFDA shifted to a more informal cooperative structure, with minimal organization and depending on unpaid volunteers. Gradually in more recent years the group has become a bit more structured, with a larger number of members taking on leadership roles to plan and manage dance programming, sound and computer equipment, teachers and teaching schedules, publicity, membership, the newsletter and workshop planning, in addition to administrative and

²⁸ <https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/our-communities/lance/correspondent/Folk-Dance-celebrates-its-30th-year-510773561.html>

treasurer functions. Starting in about 2006 some MIFDA members with an interest in music organized an in-house band that continues to perform occasionally for MIFDA parties or other events.

Other Recreational Folk Dancing in Winnipeg

Although MIFDA is the only recreational dance group in Manitoba that is broadly focused on folk dances from many cultures there are other recreational dance groups that focus on specific dance traditions while encouraging participation by the general public. These include the Manitoba Square and Round Dance Federation, the Village Green English Country Dancers, the Royal Scottish Country Dance Society, the Greek Kefi dancers, and the Israeli recreational dance group. Many other ethnic communities have dance groups mainly organized for participation of members of their own ethnic communities, and these groups occasionally have dance events for the general public, as well as performing at the annual Folklorama festival. Over the years MIFDA has been involved with several of these groups, including jointly sponsoring workshops and dances with Village Green English Country Dancers several times.

There have also been occasional interactions with other recreational dance groups and dancers in Winnipeg, including Croatian, Greek, English, Franco-Manitoban, Hungarian, Indian, Irish, Israeli, Portuguese, Romanian, Serbian, Square dancers, Swing dancers, Ukrainian, and West African groups or dancers. Sometimes guest teachers from other groups have taught at MIFDA for an evening or two. In recent years there has been an increased interest in contra dancing, and MIFDA has sometimes hosted contra dancing events.

MIFDA's Ongoing Role

MIFDA is unique in Manitoba in having a broad interest in folk dancing of all kinds. MIFDA continues to provide a recreational activity that many people enjoy and that welcomes people at all levels of dance experience. The nature of the dancing is broad and continually evolving as membership turns over and interests shift. In the end it is a collective activity with many benefits that is likely to continue as long as people enjoy dancing and as long as there are people willing to take on leadership roles.

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Acknowledgements

The article began as an attempt to answer a seemingly simple question, how old is the Manitoba International Folk Dance Association? How and when did MIFDA get started? But this quest evolved into a deeper look at the roots of international folk dancing in Manitoba.

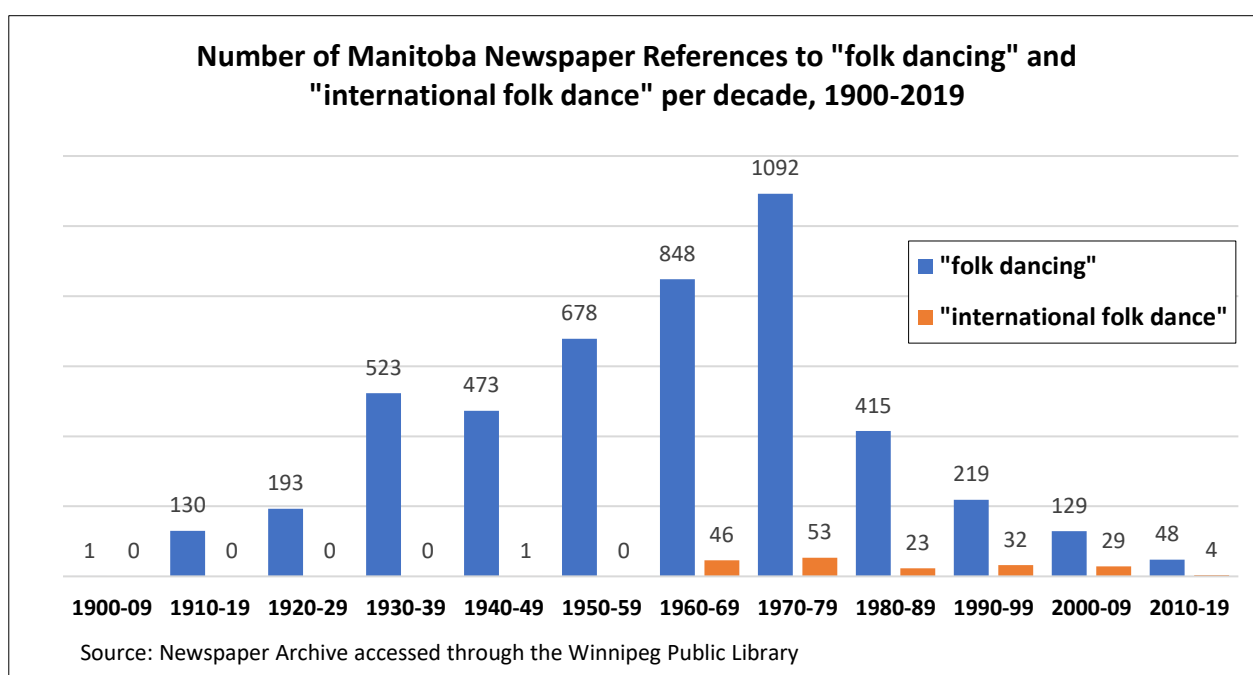
In order to research the evolution of folk dancing in Manitoba I pursued several strategies, including searching the on line Newspaper Archive, contacts with various folk dance organizations and contacts in Manitoba and elsewhere in Canada, contacts with current and former MIFDA members, searches of the Manitoba Archives, FIPPA requests for provincial documents, and other sources. Some of the MIFDA newsletters, minutes and financial records from the 1970s and 1980s had previously been provided to me, and other materials have been occasionally donated to me in my de facto role as MIFDA archivist. Some of those who have been most helpful in providing information include MIFDA members Patti Cohen, Dave Edwards, Peggy Emmond, Moira Graham, Kathleen Mazurka, Steve Meszaros, Debbie Whitney, and others. Special thanks to former MIFDA member and historian Dan Stone who provided links to valuable historical research, his own and that of others. Thanks to Jan Coates and the family of Dorothy Sangster for providing Dorothy's professional journal and other

materials. The Ontario Folk Dance Association was also very helpful and the Folk Dancer Online magazine provided impetus for the project through their historical review of folk dancing in Ontario. I also received help from staff of the Manitoba Archives and from Martin Comeau in helping track down historic photographs. I also depended on my personal knowledge and file of MIFDA documents covering the period since I became a member in 1991. Anyone who notices any errors or who would like to provide additional information may contact me at hull.jeremy@gmail.com.

-- Jeremy Hull

Appendix: Information Sources

A summary of the results of the search of the Newspaper Archive is provided in the following graph:



MIFDA Workshops

Early workshops were identified primarily through the newspaper archives. Workshops since 1990 were identified mainly through personal files and the MIFDA web site. These lists do not include one night guest teachers or special events of other organizations at which MIFDA members participated.

International Folk Dance Workshops and Instructors in Manitoba, 1962-1979 Sponsored by MIFDA and Others

Year	Instructor	Organization	Type of Workshop
1962	Jane Evans, and others	CAHPER	2 day folk dance workshop open to all at student union bldg.
1963	Jane Evans, and others	CAHPER	2 day folk dance workshop Norquay Bldg.
1963	Ivy Krehm	CAHPER	3 day folk dance workshop at Man. Teachers College.
1964	Jane Evans	Man. Fitness and Amateur Sport	3 day Manitoba Folk Dance Camp, simple to advanced dances; teaching techniques; squares, social and recreational dances.
1964	Jack Geddes	MIFDA	Workshop at Man Teachers College.
1965	MIFDA leaders	MIFDA	Workshop in Norquay Bldg Friday (dances of New England) and Saturday (dances of Yugoslavia).
1965	Ivy Krehm	MIFDA & Man. Fitness and Amateur Sport	3 day folk dance camp in Gimli in cooperation.
1966	Jack Geddes	MIFDA	Workshop at St Johns HS.
1967	Jean Stirling	MIFDA	Workshop at Sargeant Park School.
1969	Jane Evans & Gale Ryan	MIFDA	2 day workshop at Tache Hall.
1970	Frank Morrison	MIFDA & Faculty of Education	2 folk dance day workshop.
1972	Frank Morrison	MIFDA & Faculty of Education	2 day folk dance Workshop at Windsor Park Collegiate.
1975	Lanny Gregory	MIFDA & Manitoba Recreation	Folk dancing at 6th annual Arts Week in Gimli.
1976	Jim Belford	MIFDA & Manitoba Recreation	Instructor at Gimli Folk Dance Camp

Sources: MIFDA newsletter, minutes and files; Newspaper articles

MIFDA Workshops and Instructors, 1990-2019

Year	Instructor	Type of Dancing
1990	Andor Czompo	Hungarian
1991	Ian & Gail Tucker	Various
1994	Ian & Gail Tucker	Various
1996	Dan & Mary Garvin	Various
1998	Elizabeth Goossen & Ann Smreciu	English, Scottish, Romanian & others
1999	Fred Park, co-sponsored with Village Green	English, Cajun & others
2000	Yves Moreau	Bulgarian
2001	Steve Weintraub	Klezmer
2002	David Millhouse co-sponsored with Village Green	English & Contras
2004	Tineke van Geel	Armenian
2006	Yvonne Hunt	Greek
2007	Edwidge Munn	Various
2007	Sonia Dion and Cristian Florescu	Romanian
2008	Paul Collins	Balkan & Contras
2009	Ahmet Luleci	Turkish
2009	Steve Jankac	Croatian
2009	Tineke van Geel	Armenian
2010	Dale Hyde	Canadian, Welsh & international
2010	Mary Zaleta	Various
2011	Yuli Yordanov	Bulgarian & others
2012	Kete Ilievski	Macedonian
2012	Yves Moreau	Bulgarian & others
2014	Ann Smreciu, Patti Cohen & Kathleen Mazurek	Roma
2014	Lee Otterholt	Various
2016	Steve Kotansky	Various
2016	Kathleen Mazurek	Various
2017	Nina Kavardjikova	Bulgarian
2017	Rick King	Syrian, Romanian & others
2019	Jaap Leegwater/Mea Nordenfelt	Bulgarian & others

Sources: MIFDA newsletter, minutes and files.