

## INTRODUCTION

It is nice to know that at a square dance there is something "special" about the way we dress. Now why is this such a big deal? Because SQUARE DANCING IS A BIG DEAL! Folks who see you dressed up know you're a square dancer. It's not a uniform; it is stepping into a role that makes your square dance night something special; it's your individuality that's showing. There are those who say that the way we dress reflects the way we feel about square dancing.

## EVOLUTION OF THE SQUARE DANCE

According to the genealogical chart, the roots of square dancing started back in 1450, with two major ancestors, one English and one French. People from virtually every European country immigrated to the "new Land" during America's first 200 years. They brought with them their customs, languages, skills, fashions and their dances. At first, grouped into ethnic concentrations in different parts of the country, they enjoyed their dances in the pure forms of their homelands. As people spread across the land, migrated west and moved from one city to another, the various forms of dance and the dance costume became more and more integrated and influenced the emergence of the American Square Dance that we enjoy today.

## EVOLUTION OF THE SQUARE DANCE COSTUME

Our square dance dresses of today can trace their history back to the elegant ballrooms of France and the grand manors of England. In those countries the minuet, polka, waltz, and quadrille were danced. It was an era of stately music, stately dances and stately dress.

We go forward in time and the move to open the West is on. Days are long and hard with both men and women working in the fields and tending the livestock. There was not much time for gaiety so every occasion was used for socializing. Often people came from miles around to see their neighbors, catch up on the news and dance the night away. Women's dresses were long; starched petticoats and floor length pantaloons were worn underneath.

As square dancing grew out of the fad stage into a solid, stable activity, fashion, too, came into its own as a recognized costume. Tailored, western-cut trousers and western shirts for the men identify the male square dancer to the world.

Perhaps the ladies, though, deserve the nod for having played such a large part in the change of character or evolution of our costume. Taking advantage of the many choices of material and colors available to hem and calling upon their innate knowledge of styling, the female square dancer has visually lifted square dancing from the red barn scene and placed it in a category of beauty and grace.

A swirling floor of full skirts, bouffant petticoats and modest pettipants have long attracted the photographic eye and resulted in good publicity for our hobby. Many a costumed dancer seen by a non-participant has resulted in his joining a class. Neat and gaily attired club members have been able to open halls for the square dance activity which had been previously denied due to an ugly misconception of the hobby.



## SQUARE DANCE IMAGE

One of the bonuses of the square dance activity is the fun of beautiful costuming - both for the gentleman and the lady. When we ignore proper square dance attire or do not take advantage of looking our very best, we tarnish the square dance image we present to the public. Our "image" could be lost if the dress situation is just allowed to slide away from us. Remember that square dancing is "somewhere special to go" and not just "somewhere else to go." Be proud of the image that traditional square dancing represents, AND DRESS THE PART!!!

## ATTIRE & DRESS CODE

What should a square dance dress be like? Today's square dance clothes are not "authentic covered wagon, hillbilly, or li'l Abner" type of dresses. They are also not our everyday street wear. They are lively and much more frivolous. They are truly a costume appropriate for our square dance hobby.

The basic, casual starting costume for the man would be lightweight, absorbent, long-sleeved shirt, slacks and comfortable leather-soled shoes. The lady's casual starting outfit might be a light weight, full skirt and blouse or a dress with an easy skirt - avoid bare backs or midriffs. Flat, comfortable leather-soled shoes or ones with a sliver of a heel that slide easily fit the bill. Adding a full petticoat will come next. A dress-up costume for the man includes a bit of color in a western shirt or vest, collar tips, western belt, string tie, gambler tie, sparkling bow and flare ties, nylon or silk kerchief knotted and worn with an open collar, pants and boots or boot shoes. Dressing the part adds to the joy of square dancing.

One square dance dress code will not fit all square dance situations. Different dress codes apply to different types of events and facilities -

convention, camping, festival, picnic, theme party, club dance, barn, civic center, gym, church, etc. Dress codes therefore must be flexible and dependent on the rules established by the sponsor of the event. Most of this is common sense. Unfortunately, when common sense is not followed by some, sponsoring organizations need to make and advertise in advance their desired dress code rules.

There is no hard, fast, written, definition of "Proper Square Dance Attire" or "Dress Code" that will fit all occasions and events at the club, area, state, national or international levels. The "Dress Code" is flexible and depends on the event being sponsored. The sponsors set the Dress Code for their individual functions and monitor and enforce the code as they may desire.

The following square and round dance dress code has been developed and enforced at many National Square Dance Conventions and serves as the most recent Convention Dress Code of the Square Dance Activity:

Ladies - Square dance dress, or square dance skirt and blouse, or prairie skirt. Crinoline slips and pettipants are recommended with square dance attire but not with prairie skirts. No pants, shorts or T-shirts permitted on the square and round dance floors.

Men - Long sleeve shirts and long pants a must, bolo or square dance tie recommended. Western-style attire recommended. No short sleeves, T-shirts or shorts allowed on the square and round dance floors.

All dancers will be permitted in any hall, but need to be dressed in proper attire to dance in that hall.

We have a wonderful heritage to look back on in square dance costumes, who can tell what the future will bring. Evolution and changes can be good, but let's not allow change from such a

beautifully exquisite tradition to deteriorate to street, work and business level of sameness. We live for expectation and in pride. We should expect ourselves, and each other, to fulfill this responsibility of tradition. The general public expects it and pride in our activity's customs should stimulate our desire to dress as square dancers - not in clothes showing no relation or respect to the National Folk Dance of America.



Live Lively -



Square Dance!

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# SQUARE DANCE

## ATTIRE



This information sheet was developed by the Education Committee of the UNITED SQUARE DANCERS OF AMERICA, INC. and will provide a brief discussion of the evolution of square dance costume and current dress code. For additional information about Square Dance Attire, see USDA Booklet B018.

Leadership Education material can also be printed directly from USDA web site at [www.usda.org](http://www.usda.org)