

HISTORICAL NOTES

15 YEARS AGO:

**Fifty Years or More
a letter from Douglas Kennedy,
Director, English Folk Dance and Song Society
(mailed from England on May 27, 1965)**

I can remember when one of our Morris Side of six men-dancers (a chap named Claude Wright) was invited to visit the U.S.A. by a Professor Baker.

This was in 1913 and the rest of us were green with envy at Wright's good fortune. It was not until 1927 that I had a chance to follow on his trail, but by that time, Cecil Sharp himself had crossed on several occasions and had been hailed as a pioneer in the recovery of folk song in North America. He also had established and widened American interest in the English traditions of song and dance.

While this process was going on he felt the need of helpers. Some of these he found among his new American friends whose names began to crop up in his letters to us at home. Notably that of Mrs. J.J. Storrow of Boston who seemed to bear a magic wand that waved away any obstacles in Sharp's path.

But he also called on help from England, first my sister-in-law Maud Karpeles, who shared his song collecting experiences and second, someone who had just become the first folk dance teacher employed by the English Folk Dance Society, a girl named Lily Roberts. Lily came to us in a flurry of excitement to ask our advice about this tremendous advantage involved in leaving England and security for the unknown dangers of life in the United States. It was wartime and, tied down as we were ourselves, we naturally urged Lily to accept this great chance which of course she did.

On arrival she was met by Helen Storrow and this first encounter led to a close friendship that lasted a lifetime, and to a marriage that changed Lily's name to Conant and her home from Yorkshire to Boston and Lincoln.

Until we had the chance to see for ourselves we heard of the enthusiastic way that the Bostonians had taken to English folk dancing and how delighted Lily was with the quality and style of the American dancing. We also began to notice such names as Louise Chapin, Dorothy Bolles, Evelyn Wells, who were to become our dear friends when later they came to England or we met them in the States.

For us at home in England this group of dancers in Boston became as much a part of our Society as the "Branches" in our own country with the added interest that the "Americans" brought a special zest to their performances which soon began to infest our own style.

For much of this injection of total quality and whole-heartedness we must thank our own pioneer, Lily Conant, but also we must thank the Americans themselves.

Our first visit as a family in 1927 gave us the experience of a summer school at Amherst, Massachusetts, and a visit to Mrs. Storrow's camp at Long Pond which was later to develop in the "Pinewoods" of today, and a visit to the house in Lincoln. Later we were to enjoy the excitement of going places which had long been names to marvel at. Winnepesaukee, Chocorua, Crawford Notch, Cape Cod.

While all this interest was developing around Boston we sent Marjorie Barnett to Rochester, May Gadd to New York, and gradually the widely separate groups grew into a Society that after some experiment with names became the Country Dance Society of America.

Throughout the formative period the fledgling organization had the constant support of Helen Storrow, backed by Lily Conant and her colleagues in Boston, with May Gadd and her associates in New York.

New groups sprang up between the two cities and in the States to the South and the West. Now the Country Dance Society has its contacts from Coast to Coast and takes its place as one of the National cultural forces and as an authority in the "folk" field of America.

Douglas N. Kennedy

**Letter from Dr. Maud Karpeles
Hon. President of the International Folk Music Council, London
(dated August 22, 1965; addressed to Ken Crook)**

It was in 1914, soon after the outbreak of the First World War, that Cecil Sharp visited the United States for the first time. The immediate purpose of his visit was to teach the music and dances which he had arranged for Granville Barker's New York Production of "A Midsummer Night's Dream". But his visit was to have consequences of greater importance: his collection of folk songs in the Southern Appalachian Mountains and his initiation of the revival of English folk dance and folk song in America.

As soon as his duties at the theatre had finished, he started on a round of lecturing and teaching in New York, Boston and other cities; and before returning to England he founded a U.S.A. Branch of the English Folk Dance Society of which

one of the centres was in Boston.

For several years Cecil Sharp had been in correspondence with Mrs. James Storrow, who will always be remembered on both sides of the Atlantic as a benefactor of folk dance and folk song. He visited her at her home in Lincoln, Massachusetts, in 1914 soon after his arrival in America. They quickly became firm friends, and she gave him great encouragement in pursuing his pioneer work. It was mainly at her instigation that he made a return visit to America in 1915 to conduct the first summer school of English folk dance and song at Eliot, Maine, and that he arranged for Lily Roberts (Mrs. Richard Conant) to come from England. I followed Cecil Sharp a week or so later and except for six weeks in the early part of 1916 I had the privilege of being with him throughout his stay in America and of helping him in his work.

During the years 1916 to 1918, when not in the Appalachian Mountains, we were busily engaged in arousing interest in the dances and songs, travelling continuously from city to city. The Boston Centre played a big part in those pioneer days. Helen Storrow and Lily Conant were among those who were most active; and one remembers also Emma Gibbs, Dorothy Bolles and, in particular, Louise Chapin who right up to the present time has devotedly carried on the teaching in the Boston Centre.

At a time when his work in England had come to a standstill and no one knew what the outcome of the War would be, Cecil Sharp felt that the only assurance for the perpetuation of the dances was that the tradition should be firmly rooted in America. One may believe that in Boston this wish that lay so close to his heart has been fulfilled and that it may prove to be another instance in which the traditions have been better guarded in America than in their country of origin. Of this the supreme example is to be found in the songs which Cecil Sharp collected in the Appalachian Mountains.

As one who played a small part in its inception, may I offer my congratulations to the Boston Centre and express my admiration of its achievements throughout half a century.

Maud Karpeles

45 YEARS AGO:

TRIBUTE TO PROFESSOR GEORGE P. BAKER
Professor of Dramatic Literature, Harvard
(taken from the *Boston Transcript* of February, 1935)

[Note for the reader: the National Centre and the Boston Centre of CDS were founded in the same year, 1915. – Ed.]

To the Editor of the Transcript:

Mr. George P. Baker had so many vital interests in dramatic and artistic lines in which he was a pioneer that no one has mentioned that he brought to this country the English folk dancing. In 1912 he went to Stratford-on-Avon to see Mr. Cecil Sharp's revival of English folk dancing, and in 1913 he brought one of Mr. Sharp's dancers, an attractive and picturesque young man, Claude Wright, to Chocorua, N.H. Fifty-six children and men and women joined the class held out of doors at Dr. Franklin Balch's and afterwards in Mr. Baker's Theater in the Woods. Mrs. Charles Peabody and Mrs. Robert de Courcy Ward and Mrs. William H. Goodwin were among those who supported the venture, and Mr. Baker himself danced to within a year of his death. Through Mr. Baker, Mrs. James J. Storrow became interested and from the groups arranged by her the English Folk Dance Society of America came into existence.

The group of Chocorua has continued to dance together every summer since 1913 under the voluntary guidance of Mrs. Le Grand Cannon, Jr., and Fifene Peabody, who studied with Mr. Sharp in England.

Mr. Baker was the inspiration of the group, and his enjoyment and kindness were characteristics which were a pleasure to everyone. His Theater in the Woods is a perfect creation and has been a lovely setting for the dances as well as for outdoor plays.

From this small beginning, branches of the English Folk Dance Society have been formed all over the United States and Canada, giving recreation and pleasure to thousands of people of all ages.

At Mr. Baker's suggestion, Mr. Sharp came to this country to collect survivals of English folk songs and dances and was fortunate enough to discover in the Kentucky mountains the Running Set and other songs and dances that had become obsolete in England.

Mr. Baker's keen perception of music and artistic projects, and his enthusiasm and energy in promoting them have been of great value to the country.

Boston, February 19, 1935.

Eleanor Goodwin