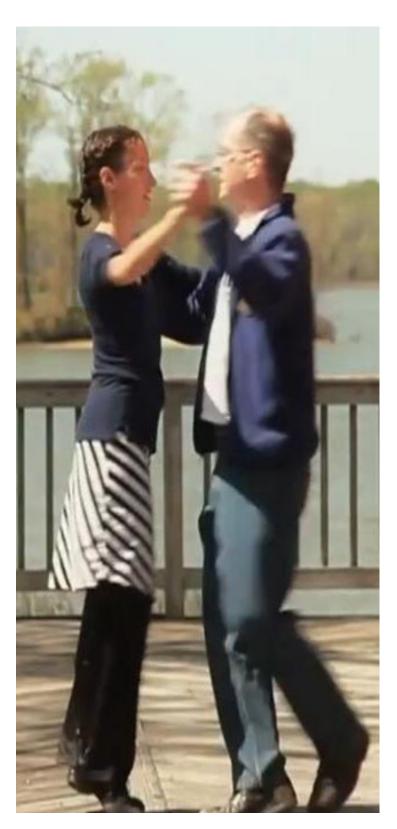
Chesapeake Dance Weekend Celebrates Thirty Years



On April 13-15, 2012 near Annapolis, Maryland, the Folklore Society of Greater Washington will present the thirtieth Chesapeake Dance Weekend (CDW). It may be that CDW is the longest running residential contra dance weekend around, but even if it's not, it's had a great run and continues to be a treasured annual event for many dancers. The first weekend in 1982 featured the structure that has been largely maintained throughout: a New England band and contra dance caller, a Southern band and square dance caller, a teacher of a traditional step dance style, some other kind of traditional dance form.

Like any volunteer-run event, the organizing committee has gone through many changes over the last thirty years, but much of the original vision has remained. The original organizers set a goal of not having the same band or caller more than twice, in order to force themselves to avoid having the same staff over and over, no matter how good they were! While the rule has been broken some over thirty years, the weekend has hosted an amazing list of legendary dance leaders and musicians (see box). Another early goal was to include older traditionbearers among the staff and we have had the opportunity to hear and hang out with some of the real originals, most of whom are no longer with us. On the other hand, in recent years, the traditionbearers are frequently younger musicians, raised in the tradition, and the weekend has hosted several bands whose members were all born since the weekend started. We've also had several "second generation" bands, whose members are the sons and daughters of musicians who performed in the weekend's earlier years. And with the recent surge of younger dances in the DC area contra and square dance scene, the weekend has welcomed younger dancers as well as musicians.

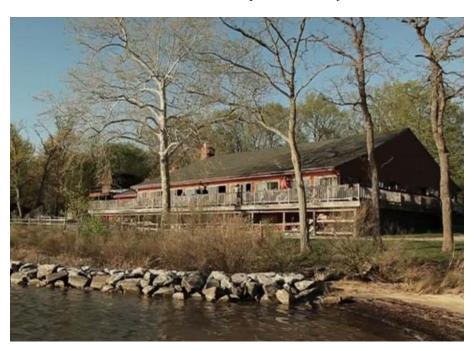
The weekend is held at YMCA Camp Letts at the mouth of two rivers that flow into the Chesapeake Bay, just south of Annapolis, Maryland. The Camp itself has evolved quite a bit over time and for the last twenty years we've enjoyed dancing in the spacious, wood-floored dining hall with large windows and a large deck overlooking the water. The mid-April date means that the weekend happens at the tail end of the Washington cherry blossom season with newly green trees and spring flowers. It's a treat for attendees from farther north

who are still waiting for spring. Although we've had some chilly weekends and snow on at least one occasion, there's usually one afternoon when the urge to sit in the sun on the deck overcomes a good share of the dancers. (You can see this in Doug Plummer's excellent video of the CDW 2010 "Love from Thin Air.") It's also a bit like the opening of the season for a lot of dancers, who are thinking about their summer dance week/festival plans and enjoy the occasion to catch up with dance friends they haven't seen over the winter. Some have been attending for more than twenty years. There have been several marriages that were sparked at camp. We also remember some dancers who are no longer with us and we're happy to see a second generation of dancers (or is it the third) starting to attend.

The program itself is pretty much straight ahead dancing, with a core of contras and squares spiced up with whatever else is featured, ranging from English and waltz to Cajun and French Canadian to African and Sorority Stepping and more. All have been enthusiastically received. Late night jam sessions have been a tradition. More recently, a late night technocontra has snuck in.

Bottom line: if you have great musicians, great callers, and enthusiastic, friendly, great dancers, you can't help but have a great time. This year's CDW will feature Joseph Pimentel, Crowfoot, Cis Hinkle, The Tractor Family (Judy Hyman, Jeff Claus, Richie Sterns, Larry Unger, and Mark Murphy), Matthew Olwell and Emily Oleson (step, tap, and clogging) with Steve Hickman and John Devine. More information: www.chesapeakedanceweekend.org/.

For two special features: the delightful Chesapeake Address (a riff on the Gettysburg Address) is on the next page, and Doug Plummer's lovely video. Info about the weekend is on their website. Article photos courtesy the author.



Joel Bluestein is a Washington, DC area dancer, fiddler, member of the musical Bluestein Family of California, and is one of the originators of the weekend.

Partial Listing of Past CDW Staff (with apologies to those left out for lack of space)

CALLERS: Chip Hendrickson,
Bob Dalsemer, Bridget
Edwards, Jim Morrison, John
Krumm, Brad Foster, Ted
Sannella, Larry Edelman,
Steve Zakon-Anderson, Kathy
Anderson, Sue Elberger,
George Marshall, Frank Hall,
Tony Parkes, Ron Buchanan,
Cis Hinkle, Mary DesRosiers,
Beverly Smith, Robert
Cromartie, Joseph Pimentel,
Beth Molaro, Lisa Greenleaf,
Nils Fredland

MUSICIANS: Double Decker Stringband, Michael Kline and Jerry Milnes, Rodney Miller, Steve Hickman, The Horse Flies, Mary Lea, Peter Barnes and Ruthie Dornfeld, Billie McComiskey and Brendan Mulvihill, Laurie Andres, Critton Hollow Stringband, Wild Asparagus, Bob McQuillen and Greengate. The Hellbenders, The Hillbillies from Mars, Lotus Dickey, The Bominators, Fresh Fish, The Poodles, Red Mule Stringband, Ralph Blizard, Grand Picnic, Big Hoedown, Nightingale, Airdance Trio, The Groovemongers, Notorious, Flapjack, Great Bear Trio, The Uncle Norms, The Hoover Uprights, Jacqueline Schwab, The Percolators, The Latter Day Lizards, The Moving Violations Trio, Old Sledge,

OTHER STUFF: Clogging. tap and step dance: Donnie Gilchrist, Kate Murphy, Burton Edwards, Sue Truman, Eileen Carson, Chris Belliou, Sandy Silva Judy Ericson Kari Smith, Laura Lewis, Jean Denney, Linane Wick. English: Genny Shimer, Brad Sayler, Joseph Pimentel. Cajun: Dewey Balfa, Balfa Toujours, Squeeze Bayou, Charivari, Josephine, The Pine Leaf Boys. Waltz, tango, vintage: Richard Powers, Matthew Duveneck, Anna Gilbert, Balkan: Zlatne Uste. African: Sankofa. African American Sorority Stepping: Step Afrika. Québécois: Reveillons.

The Chesapeake Address

by Joel Bluestein

(thoughts on the thirtieth year of the Chesapeake Spring Dance Weekend)

One score and ten years ago our friends brought forth on this dancefloor, a new notion, conceived in fun, and dedicated to the proposition that music and dance can be enjoyed equally. Now we are engaged in a great weekend, testing whether that notion, or any notion so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great dancefloor of that weekend. We have come to dedicate a portion of that weekend, as a recognition for those who here gave their time that that notion might live.

It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this. But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate—we can not consecrate—we can not hallow—this dancefloor. The great dancers, living and dead, who danced here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract.

The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget how they danced here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished fun which they who danced here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dancers we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dancers shall not have danced in vain—that this weekend, shall have a new birth of energy—and that dancing of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

The Folklore Society of Greater Washington's annual Chesapeake Dance Weekend, www. chesapeakedanceweekend.org, held each April near Annapolis, MD, will celebrate its thirtieth anniversary in 2012. See their website for Doug Plummer's video of the 2010 weekend: "Love from Thin Air."