

Dancing in Canterbury

by Dudley Laufman

Canterbury New Hampshire is a small town in central New Hampshire. It is only there four days a week. At the last town meeting there was an article to add another day but we voted it down. There is an abundance of professional people and commuters and their black top driveways, but there are still some characters like me, or Hugh Fifield (logger) Roy Hutchinson, Tim Meeh (maple farmers) Luke Mahoney and the Glines (dairy farmers), and a few aging hippies.

In April of 1943 the town burned to the ground. Grange hall, store, church, a few houses, all gone. There was no fire department. Mud season. Folks living on the west side of town came to get mail few days later... no town. To raise money to rebuild the church and store, and establish a fire department, they decided to have dances. Canterbury was a Baptist community so this was a challenge. They called them marches rather than dances, and this got them off the hook. The town hall had been spared. A band, The Bucket Brigade, was put together. Paul Ambeau played banjo, Ruth Rogers on piano, Charley Waldron, drums, and the minister played clarinet. They did the Virginia Reel (the Henry Ford corner version,) twice, a Portland Fancy (a two couple version) twice, a Paul Jones, (grand right and left and waltz) and a grand march. Foxtrots, waltzes and polkas spliced in between. There was no caller. Didn't need one.

These dances were run weekly, then monthly (from 1943 til about 1957), and finally faded out. But they raised



The Canterbury Morris Dance Team (photo © Lindsay Holden)



The Canterbury Morris Dance Team (photo © Lindsay Holden)

enough money to rebuild the church, store, and set up a fire house with one engine.

In the early 1960s, I started a loosely-formed group of musicians that played for dances in and around New England. In 1972, this group was named the Canterbury Country Dance Orchestra (CCDO) by Newt Tolman. I told Newt that we should call ourselves the Nelson Band, as that is where we played mostly. I was the only one from Canterbury, but Newt said "How many people in the Budapest String Quartet are from Budapest?"

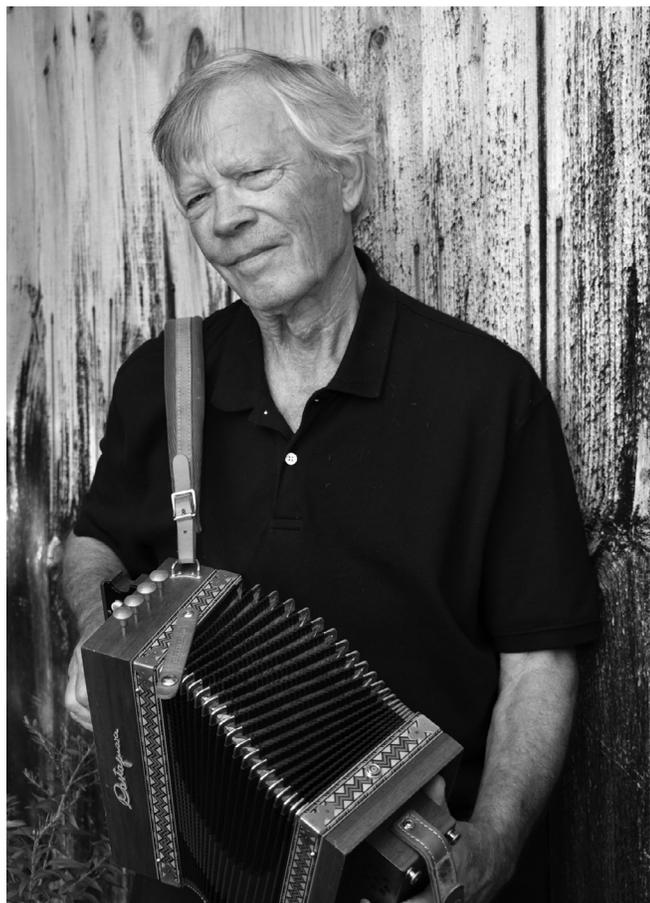
Christopher Booth, a resident of Canterbury, started running contra dances in Canterbury at the Parish House sometime around 1980, arranging for different callers with some of my musicians. Chris dropped the ball so I took it over for two years. By this time (late 1980s) the greater dance community had grown. Folks were traveling some distances to go to dance events. Only a few folks from Canterbury attended our dance, so I closed it, giving it to David Harris who moved it to being every third Saturday in East Concord. Before I did that, we held one dance in the Parish House, music by the CCDO, Mary DesRosier calling. It was the only time the CCDO has played in the town that carries their name.

We have an active morris side. We are the largest oldest mixed side in the world, all of us from Canterbury. Four men and boys, twelve women, and five musicians, plus three fiddles, a melodeon and a drum.

So here's the way it is now: Whenever there is a fifth Saturday in the month, we host a dance at Wind In The Timothy (my home) where we have a little dance hall in the house. Otherwise we hold the dances in the town hall or parish house or some other venue in town.

On New Year's Day we have The Ride, taking all the musicians in town, eight fiddles, one melodeon, two drummers, one banjo, one flute, and descend on four different homes. They ply us with beer and good food. For this generous feast we sing a wassail song, play some tunes, the morris dancers do the Heathbroom Stick Dance, do a short mummer's play, get the company of the house to dance the Ribbon Dance, winding it up with singing Drive Dull Cares Away. On to the next place and two more after that, then wearily stumble home saying "That's it."

Near the end of January, we host a Burns Night in our home. This is a celebration of the birthday of Robert Burns, Scottish poet. We have a haggis made in a crock pot, sing some of Burns' lesser known songs like Corn



Dudley Laufman (photo © Lindsay Holden)

Rigs, Rantin' Rovin' Robin, Whistle And I'll Come To Ye My Lad, and dance Strip The Willow, Foula Reel, or Haymakers Jig to such musics as Corn Rigs, Highland Laddie, and Cock Of The North.

In March we do a Wearing Of The Green dance where we dance the Siege Of Ennis three times, the Siege of Carrick, Bridge of Athlone, and The Haymakers, using Irish tunes. On the last Sunday we play in Brian Hutchinson's (Roy's son) sugar house. He has enough room for dancing and we do the family version of Virginia Reel several times and sing Maple Sweet. We get two gallons of maple syrup for our pay

In May we have the Sweets of May Dance (an English dance set to an Irish tune) and we do that dance several times and sing the Padstow song and Hal-an-tow.

In June we put on a mid-summer dance.

In July comes the Canterbury Fair and the morris team takes over. They get the crowd involved several times doing the Winster Galop.

October finds us at the Dido Bendigo dance (which celebrates the hunt) and December the Boxing Day Doo where we dance Christmas Hornpipe, the dreaded Ribbon Dance, and the Holly Berry.

As well as the above listed dances, we usually do Brandy Sherbrooke, Over the Top, Low Backed Car, Portland Fancy, Paul Jones, the Polka Contry, The Rye Waltz, Gay Gordons, and The Roberts. No duple minor improper contras and no squares except when we travel to western Connecticut or Vermont. No newly composed whole sets or circles. Don't need them. Folks are content with the program as it is. To many of them, it is the first (and maybe only) time they will dance these old time dances. New dancers, rather than new dances. The old dancing masters in Scotland had new students each year, so they didn't have to be writing new dances.

That's it for dancing in my village.

Dudley Laufman is a renowned contra and barn dance caller and musician. He attended his first dance as a boy while working at the Mistwold Farm in Fremont, New Hampshire in 1948. He was a founding member of the Canterbury Country Dance Orchestra. At age 87, Dudley is still fully engaged as a dance caller for local country dances throughout New England.