

## GL120 Folk Arts Survey of Waukegan & Zion, Illinois

**Don Adams**

Wadsworth, Illinois

June 16, 1987

PT: Now, what's your name?

DA: Oh, you want me to tell you?

PT: Yea, Yea.

DA: It's Don Adams.

PT: You were born in Waukegan?

DA: Yes.

PT: What year?

DA: 1917.

PT: 17. You're uh,

DA: Seventy-four. I'm 74 now.

PT: Oh!

DA: 1913. (laughs)

PT: 1913. And you uh, you started square dance calling when you were how old?

DA: When I was seventeen.

PT: Tell me how you started.

DA: Well the reason we started was, a group of young people and we never had anyone to uh, call square dances. And, I had gone to Waukegan High School, and uh we had military there. You had a choice, taking military or band. And of course to take band you had to be able to play something, but we didn't play anything at the time so--uh that would qualify down there, anyway--so I took the military, and I just sort of liked to be out in front of a group, moving them around. It just seemed natural. And it's, after I took a three years of military, at high school, it didn't. Looking for entertainment for the evening, why we went to a couple of dances and uh, it was just easy to. Everything came easy to me, to, to. I learned the patter, and I just loved to beat out the time. And I just kept getting a little more, uh, I guess you would say better, and a little more experienced.

And then I met up with. Well, I was just doing a schoolhouse dance, and somebody down in Libertyville heard about me. And they had a regular dance floor, and they invited me down there. And they also had a fellow by the name of Ed Drinkwine, who was a square dance caller's caller in his own right. He was, what I thought, tops. He was the first fellow that I ever heard put all this to music. (PT: Mm-mm.) In other words, uh, it was uh. You know like uh, everything you did, you had a ditty for it. (PT: Mm-mm.) And you had the words for that. And they went always together. And, and you started it at a certain beat in the music, and you stopped at a certain beat. And it didn't take long before I could do those ditties just as well as he could. And I'd go to the dances, and he would have me call, just to get more practice. The fact is, I got (laughs) better than, or just as good anyway. (PT: Mm-mm.) Because I was taking the, after the, I'd go in the regular big barn dances and I would, I would fill in for him. Or he would send me, rather than him; because he had, at that time, oh he must have been forty-five, fifty years old. At that time you didn't have, as I say, the microphone. You had a megaphone,

PT: Mm

DA: that you hollered through, you know. And he, you know, you'd stand there with the megaphone and you'd beat out the time right on the side of megaphone.

And it just to be that it was a natural thing for me to do. And I'd rather dance than eat. (laughs) Of course, the pay was, that was during the Depression, and people were working, you know, for fifty cents a day. And I was getting two dollars a night, which is more than I could make a week by working, almost.

So you'd get up to a, a good week, you'd make, oh, six to ten dollars a week just calling square dances, which is more than uh, you could make working.

Of course, we kept, they kept improving the sound systems; bands got a little better, and the crowds got bigger; and some of the places, um. Probably the biggest dance I ever had was at the,

um, National Guard building in waukegan. And you know they drive trucks in there, you may know how big it is. (PT: Yea.) That thing was crowded. Probably, oh, seven, eight hundred people.

PT: When was this?

DA: Oh, let's see, that would've been, that's in. Gosh, that's when the armory was on Glen Flora, and they built a whole new armory since then. Oh, that must be 20 years ago.

PT: It was after World War II?

DA: Yea, yes, yes, yes, yes; after World War II> Uh, you see, it had been occurring there when uh, we were going pretty good, and then the war broke out and took so many of the younger boys. Then the dances kind of slowed down again. But we would, we had dances during the war to raise money. (PT: Mm-mm.) Uh, barn, regular barn dances. And barn dances to street dances to high school dances. Wherever you could get a, a building that was big enough to uh accomodate say,m oh, it was nothing for the, on a big dance where you'd have maybe thirty, forty sets, on a big dance.

PT: Oh.

DA: And go all the way from -----, you'd go to a private dance. I was talking to my wife the other day at a millionaire's place--we went by it--and uh, they bought the farm and they put uh floor tile in the hay barn floor. And I was down there for two or, they had me down two or three years in a row. And uh, one night they flew the guests in from Texas.

PT: Wow.

DA: (laughs) I was thinking about it, that. The different things you, and people you run into. (PT: Right.) But can you imagine, they flew them in and picked them up at O'Hare, and they brought them out here. And I worked with them until about 2:00, at night. And then they took them someplace. I don't know if some people few back that night or not. (PT: Hmm.) But to think that they flew all the way from Texas just to be entertained, you know. And the lady--that was for a young group--and she wanted me to come back the next day for an older group. (PT: Uh-huh) (laughs) Oh my God. 'Uh, uh, I, I can hardly do it.' I said, 'I'm, my wife is home now kind of, feeling kind of bad because I'm out, you know, entertaining people.' And I certainly couldn't go back on a Sunday (laughs) (PT: Yea.) go back there. (PT: Right.) It was just one of those things that, it just kept multiplying and multiplying (PT: Right.) Umm, we were down to uh; oh, we had a group one time on the Fox River, that once a month on the Fox River, on these sort of well-to-do places? (PT: Yea.) They had us going down, each one would put a party on, which the parties were all alike; (PT: Yea.) you know, there was all, they wanted to learn to do country music (PT: Mm-mm.) and polkas and waltzes and things like that, you know, they just kept going. (PT: Right.) And, and it was really, it was really something.

[BREAK]

DA: ...two-piece band to, well, my son's band was probably the last big band I worked under. He had a regular country and western. (PT: Mm-mm.) And that was...[indecipherable because of microphone adjustment]...pretty near every Saturday night. Just that kind of a dance, every Saturday night.

PT: Well, tell me about, umm, the bands, when you first started calling.

DA: Oh! The first ones was, they had a, uh, the schools they'd have a uh a lady generally playing the piano and an older man playing the fiddle. And, they, they weren't the best, but they were pretty good, I mean they could beat out the music. And it was a 'trump, trump, trump' thing. But, and then after a while those people kind of retired and a new group come in that could read music.

PT: Who were those people? I think your son mentioned them.

DA: Uh. Well, the first ones that I remember was, uh, a Tom Hogan and Mrs. Hogan. (PT: That's right.) Yea.

PT: Yea, he mentioned their names.

DA: Yea, they uh. And there was a

PT: Were they from here?

DA: Yea, they were around the neighbor[hood], everybody was in the neighborhood. (PT: Uh-huh.) ----- nothing anymore. (laughs)

PT: Was that out here in Wadsworth?

DA: Yes, that was in Wadsworth.

PT: You were born in Waukegan, but came out.

DA: Oh, yea, I've lived out here ever since I was, since 1919, we moved up here. (PT: Okay.) And uh, everything was local. (PT: Right.) The square dance, the original square dance callers that I listened to were local, they were neighbors. (PT: Mm-mm.) And everybody at that time--despite the fact you might not believe it--but pretty near everybody had a talent (PT: Mm-mm.) in those days. It might be whistling.

And I remember one time we had a, a party in the, in the big house over there where we used to live, uh, they used to have square dances there. That house, it went around, uh, it had a living room that was sixteen by twenty-two, and a parlor that was about uh, sixteen by sixteen; and then they had a stairway that went up, and alongside the stairway was a, like a corridor, entrance way; (PT: Mm.) and they would dance right around those three rooms that was so big.

And that was uh, all a get, people would get together. They'd have a piano player; and one guy, he was the nicest fellow, but you'd never think he could do anything. (PT: Uh-huh.) But he took two spoons, you know, and he'd rattle those spoons (laughs) and beat out the time, just like a drum. (PT: Yea, yea.) He could do that. Talking to him, you'd never think a. (PT laughs) And his name was Reynolds, Johnny Reynolds. (PT: Mm-mm.) And that, that whole family: there was uh Tom Hogan, uh Lizzie Strand, and um Mrs. Tom Hogan, and Johnny Reynolds in this, right in this area. That was one group.

And down a little ways, by uh, oh McArthur [McAree ?] Road was a family of Harrises. The father played the fiddle; the mother played the piano; and the three boys: one played drum, then one played the saxophone, and then the other boy was younger, but as he grew older well then he could, he played the uh, the accordion. (PT: Uh-huh.) In fact, he could play anything, the youngest boy, he could play anything the rest of them could play.

PT: What was his name?

DA: Carlyle Harris.

PT: Carlyle Harris?

DA: Harris.

PT: Is he still around?

DA: No, but I got a record he played, made.

PT: Oh yea? (DA laughs) How about that.

DA: No, he. They're uh, they're all dead but two boys, (PT: Uh-huh.) and they don't play anymore. But that was a family group (PT: Uh-huh.) that used to go around; (PT: Right.) and they were pretty good.

PT: And you called to their playing.

DA: I called to their playing, yea. Mm-mm. So uh. Oh, I called with, I called with a WLS group for a while.

PT: Which groups was that?

DA: Uh, uh. Well.

PT: It wasn't Tom Owen, or.

DA: Oh, Owen? He, he used to come out here. (PT: Yea.) And uh, that was, they were kind of promoted square dances. Geez, I think that guy's name was Tom Owens, heavy-set fellow. And uh, he called uh, they had down at uh, in Waukegan, on the south side, I don't, I forgot the name of the building, you know. But they would, there was a group of us come, would go. They used to have those WLS square dance groups come up, you know, "Home Talent Shows?" (PT: Yea.) And there was a lady by the name of Maude Adams--no relation--but uh, she would uh get these groups together and you'd put on a "Home Talent Show." (PT: Mm-mm.) And, then they would have, oh, Austin Stables--now, that is down here on Green Bay Road--and those groups that would come out there was like um, Red Foley, uh, Lulu Belle, Scotty, Three Little Maids. I forgot who Red Foley played with, but Arkansas Woodchopper, (PT: Mm-mm.) Pat Butrum, (PT: Mm-mm.) and when they were out here, I would work with, I was square dance caller for them. (PT: Mm-mm.) Not all, all the time, (PT: Yea.) but I, I would pick them up down there, I'd be going to that dance. And uh, then I uh, they had a couple of dances up here when they booked the Russell's Feed Store; and they had a WLS group, and I called the square dances (PT: Mm.) for them.

Uh, the different groups, I'll tell you, (laughs) they, (PT: Yea.) uh, they had uh, when one of the main groups we had, uh, was uh Bob May had uh, he was a fiddler; and uh, Connie Oliver,

Johnny Sahn.

PT: Was that from here?

DA: That, that, they were from (PT: They were,) right in here. (PT: Okay.) They were, they were a square dance group. (PT: Mm-mm.) And, they, it just seemed like one would get playing and one maybe would move off, so another would re[place], would (PT: Right.) come in again. But the Mays, they, that was another family group (PT: Mm-mm.) that played. Now pretty soon, uh, Margaret May got married, and Bill May got married; and then Bob, he picked up with a Joe Keifer and Connie Oliver and Johnny Sahn. And then, that group played quite a bit.

PT: Are any of them still around?

DA: Uh, let me see. No, they're all gone. They're all dead. (PT: Yea.) And uh, Frank Bumgartner had a, that was group that was real good. (PT: Mm-mm.) Now uh, he's uh, he's gone. (PT: Mm-mm.) Uh. Then there was uh, the Golden Tones.

PT: Yea, you're son mentioned them.

DA: Yea, they were very good. Uh, that's when they started getting into sophisticated music, you know. (PT: Yea.) And uh, they were, they were really good: Ed Supergan, and uh Harper, and, I forgot. But they, they used to be nice to work with. Boy, they had a beat that was really good. And, let's see, there was, oh, gee, I can't think. So many came and went. And as I look back now, they're all gone. They just, (PT: Yea.) must have been too hard a life on them, or something. Course you're burning the candle on both ends. (PT: Right.) Everybody's working and everybody goes. I don't know, when we went to dances, boy, we, we put out. (PT: Mm-mm.) Everybody, they put out; there was no 'Do I have to?' or anything like that. You played because you, you really wanted to play.

There, there was several other groups that I can't, I really can't think of them all. You see, I worked two ways: I had my, the group that I always worked with, or they could hire their own music and I would work with them. (PT: Mm-mm.) And it generally worked out all right, because they'd play a couple of pieces, or I'd hum a piece for them and they could pick it up. It wasn't really that difficult. And, then the last one's that I worked with, live music, was uh Johnny's group. And they had a, they had a very good group. And they were -----, but we went from, ----- (laughs) We went up to the Bunnie Club. (laughs) I said.

We went from, oh, from Springfield, Illinois, I did some dances down there as a, uh, at a convention. And that was a, oh man, that was a monstrous crowd. But you know, really, it didn't make any difference whether you had fifty people or seven, eight hundred. It didn't make any difference. You can't see the people. (PT: Yea, yea.) If you've ever call[ed] a square dance, you would know, you don't. I never saw more than the, the first two or three couples. (PT: Mm-mm.) You could, and I know there was people there uh--well my uh, they came down and uh.

We had a lot of dancers at uh, Bonnie Brook Fire Department. For years they put on to raise funds. And one night they uh, oh, they call "National Square Dance Associ[ation]. Anyway, I didn't understand what they were doing when they come down. They wanted to listen to me call, and uh, so they let them in. And, it was the first time anything like that ever happened to me. Generally people would ask me to come, but these people come down and listened to me call; and when I got done they said 'you're, you'll do. Um, we'd like you to come up and call at uh, square da[nce].' I guess they call it a square dance convention, or something like that. (PT: Mm-mm.)

So, I met a lot of people. You know, now they had good music. You could name, uh, any piece you want to, and what key you want it, (PT: Mm-mm.) and this is what we got into at the end. Everything had to be in the right key. (PT: Right.) (laughs) So, this was the whole thing: once you learned what key you were singing in, or calling in, (PT: Mm-mm.) then everything went so, so good with the music. It was really a pleasure to do it.

PT: Yea. So uh, the uh. You did singing calls.

DA: They uh, they. I did quite a few singing calls, but all the calls went to a, a certain piece. (PT: Uh-huh.) Even -----; and I always did that call, you know, but I haven't called; oh, it's a simple little ditty but yet, but you got everybody up. Why uh:

First couple off to the right and lady 'round the lady and the gent around the gent/ And gent around the lady and the lady 'round the gent.

But the, but that's, that's almost the same thing, but this was:

First couple out to the right and chase the squirrel/ The boy aound the girl

around the girl/ And the girl around the boy and the boy around the girl.  
And this ----- went right with "Ragtime Annie." (PT: Mm-mm.) Right with the beat. (PT: Mm-mm.) And "you circle four and on to the next," or "right and left through and on to the next." And everything went just with that, whatever you was calling, you would get one right with that. (PT: Mm-mm.)

Same way with that uh, "Do-ci-do on the Corners All" was always to uh--not "Golden Slippers," not "Little Brown Jug,"--"Buffalo Girls." "Do-ci-do on the Corners All" and "Buffalo girls aren't you coming out tonight, coming out tonight." You'd hit that right with (PT: Right.) -----.

PT: How's that call go?

DA: [long pause, then to himself] I can't think. "First couple."

First couple balance home and swing/ Down the center and divide the ring/

The lady go right and the gent go tau

or left, -----. And uh, then they would come around, "do-ci-do your," you come back to your place but you don't swing.

Do-ci-do on the corners all/ Do-ci-do your own/ Promenade with the girl you left.

And you start all over, you (PT: Mm-mm.)

Same old gent and a brand new girl/ (PT: Right.) Down the center and divide the world.

Something like that. I, I haven't done this in a while I, but that. It all goes right to the, right to the piece.

PT: "Buffalo Gals."

DA: Yea, it goes right with that.

PT: So you, you.

DA: But you have to start it at the right time. (PT: Yea.) (laughs) Sort of like, I think you said it when you come in. Let's see, "Oh Johnny, Oh" is

All join hands and circle the ring/ Stop where you are and give her a swing/

Swing the one in back of you/ Now swing your own when you get through/

All promenade with the girl on the left singing 'Oh Johnny, oh Johnny, oh.'

That one, right?

PT: Right.

DA: ----- Uh, the one, you mentioned it when you came in here.

PT: "Grapevine Twist?"

DA: -----

PT: "Grapevine Twist?"

DA: Oh yea, that, yea, that was a, that's not a singing call. That's just a patter call, (PT: Uh-huh.) the way I use it; where you, where you just keep picking them up, picking them up and winding around. (PT: Right.) Right, that's um, that's a patter call.

PT: How do you, how do you have them do that? Because I've seen that done different ways.

DA: Oh,

First couple out to the right/ And take that couple by the wrist/ Through that couple with a grapevine twist/ Around that couple.

Now wait a minute. Get mixed up. [to himself]

First couple out to the right, circle four/ Now take that couple by the wrist/

Through that couple in a grapevine twist.

[pause] And they're going around. Now I'm ----- I just want to

circle floor in the center of the floor/ Break at the head and take two more.

Anyway they keep coming around, keep picking out. I'd have to look it up; (laughs) I can't remember. But everybody is, is uh, you keep picking up as you go around. (PT: Right, right.) And uh, when you get through you reverse them, and they come back and circle again. (PT: Mm-mm.) I'd have to think about it for a while but, beside [?]. I used to just rattle them off, like you was learning a poem or something. (PT: Right.) Now I would have to think a little bit to -----.