City Folk

Campers participate in a procession during the Country Dance and Song Society's Campers' Week at Pinewoods Camp, 2014. Similar activities occur at English Week. Dancers, musicians, and callers join to create a festive mood at camp.

Photo by Jeffrey Bary

The Story of Pinewoods and English Country Dance in America

The film City Folk: The Story of Pinewoods and English Country Dance in America traces the revival of English country dance (ECD) in the early 20th century and its evolution in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. The film was released in 2025, ten years after the 100th anniversary of the Country Dance & Song Society (CDSS), founded in New York City in March 1915 as the American Branch of the English Folk Dance Society (EFDS).

Key

ECD	English country dance
EFDS	English Folk Dance Society
CDSS	Country Dance & Song Society – successor to the English Folk Dance Society, American Branch (1915)
EFDSS	English Folk Dance and Song Society – formed by the merger of the English Folk Dance Society and the Folk Song Society in 1932

Filming City Folk

City Folk originated from a larger video documentation project hosted by the Smithsonian's Centerfor Folklife and Cultural Heritage from 1999 and continues today.

(Right) Dancers circle in a ring at Pinewoods Camp in 1956. Photo © Suzanne Szasz/Figaro

The core members of the film team are Daniel (Danny) Walkowitz, retired social and cultural historian at New York University; Stephanie Smith, retired archives director and folklorist at the Smithsonian's Center; and Charles (Charlie) Weber, a video producer at the Center. Danny and Stephanie are longtime English country dancers. John Paulson contributed additional camera work at the start of the project. Danny's 2010 transatlantic history of ECD, also titled City Folk, forms much of the historical basis for the film.

The film includes interviews with dancers, leaders, musicians, and historians, interwoven with archival and contemporary footage and photographs. While dance groups across the North American continent have long been connected through the CDSS, most of the interview and archival material in the film, comes from New England and New York. In the summer of 1999, the producers filmed at Pinewoods Camp near Plymouth, Massachusetts. The camp emerged as a central theme in our film due to its crucial role in the history of ECD in America and its importance as a major center of learning, dissemination, and community-building since the 1930s.

Many of the interviews and much of the dance footage were filmed at Pinewoods during the end of English & American Dance Week and the beginning of English Dance Week in 1999. The project began two months earlier with interviews of senior leaders, starting with dance leader and reconstructor Christine Helwig from Westchester County, New York. We then headed north to film the Fried-for-All in Lenox, Massachusetts, an event for experienced dancers focusing on the choreography of Fried de Metz Herman. Herman, originally from the Netherlands, emigrated to the United States and settled in Westchester County, New York. We interviewed Herman at that event and filmed the dancing there.

In the following years, we filmed at various locations: Cecil Sharp House, the headquarters of the EFDSS in London; the University of New Hampshire Library, where the CDSS archives are kept; and in Boston and Lincoln, Massachusetts. We also filmed at the annual ECD Balls of New York City and of Washington, D.C., in 2001. In 2006, Charlie and Stephanie traveled to the Pine Mountain Settlement School near Harlan, Kentucky, where Cecil Sharp and Maud Karpeles first observed what they called the "Running Set," a dance that thrilled them on their 1917 visit. Charlie and Stephanie also visited Hot Springs, North Carolina, where Sharp collected songs from singer Jane Gentry, great-grandmother of one of the leading ECD musicians in the United States, Daron Douglas.

What Is English Country Dance?

The English Dancing Maſter:

OR,

Plaine and eaſie Rules for the Dancing of Country Dances, with the Tune to each Dance.

LONDON,

Printed by Thomas Harper, and are to be ſold by John Playford, at his Shop in the Inner Temple neere the Church doore. 1651.

(Left) Dancers take hands with partners in a dance at the New York Ball, 2010. Photo by Jeffrey Bary

(Right) A facsimile of the title page of The English Dancing Master, first published in 1651 by John Playford.

IN MOST MEDIUM-TO-LARGE CITIES IN THE U.S. OR CANADA, you can likely find a group doing ECD or one of its “dance cousins,” such as contra or square dancing. These are social dances designed for people of all ages and abilities to enjoy together, rather than performance dances rehearsed for a show. If you walked into a room where ECD is taking place, you would see dancers standing in lines, facing one another and performing a series of figures or patterns. Each couple repeats the figures, dancing with the next couple in line, until each couple has reached the top or bottom of the set. After waiting out one turn through the dance, they rejoin the dance in the opposite role. In the opening scenes of City Folk, dancers are shown enjoying ECD in a variety of settings.

Much remains unknown about the origins of ECD, but it likely emerged from a blend of rural traditions, courtly influences, and Italian dance. ECD began to flourish in the 17th century after John Playford published the first edition of The Dancing Master in 1651. This first edition, titled The English Dancing Master, contained 105 dances, many of which are still performed today. In later editions, “English” was dropped from the title. Playford’s son Henry and nephew John continued publishing new editions until 1728. In the 18th century, other publishers produced books of ECD. Today, the term “Playford” is commonly used to refer to the repertoire of 30,000 dances issued by Playford and these later publishers.

These dances were extremely popular among the upper and middle classes at the court and assembly halls. In the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, dancing masters taught specific dances during courses of lessons, and the dance manuals they published served as memory aids. As the Jane Austen novels and films demonstrate, these longways dances provided opportunities for socially acceptable interaction between men and women, both with one’s partner and with others one met dancing down the set. At the beginning of the 19th century, as the upper classes gravitated toward other dance forms, a less formal version of ECD— featuring jigs, hornpipes, and reels—flourished in towns and villages of England and Scotland.

English country dances and tunes crossed the Atlantic with early English settlers. ECD was taught and performed in colonial assemblies in places such as New York and Philadelphia as well as Williamsburg, Richmond, and Alexandria, Virginia—danced by notable figures such as George Washington. Contra dancing, which has spread far from its roots in New England, originated from ECD and shares its predominantly longways form and partner interaction. However, contra dancing emphasizes faster sequences set to a mix of New England, Irish, and French-Canadian tunes. English country dances in square formation became popular in France during the early 18th century, first as contre-danse (performed in squares) and later as cotillions, the ancestors of American square dance. ECD, contra, and square dance have several figures in common.

The film opens by exploring the 20th-century revival of ECD, examining the historical contributions of Cecil Sharp, an Englishman instrumental in rediscovering and reviving the dance form in both England and the United States.

The film also highlights the role of Pinewoods Camp and key dance leaders in nurturing ECD and fostering a vibrant community of dancers across North America.

As City Folk shows, today's English country dancing is far more than historical reconstruction or nostalgia; it is a lively and evolving contemporary dance form.

New choreographies, shifts in dance styling, and evolving cultural norms reflect the modern urban and suburban lives of ECD dancers. These dancers form communities not only across North America and the United Kingdom, but also in Australia, Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands, and New Zealand.

Dancers enjoy an evening dance at the CDSS's English Week at Pinewoods Camp.

Photo by Stewart Dean

The Dance Form

Most modern English country dances share the following characteristics:

1. **Couples in set formations:** Dancers typically pair up (often in male/female roles, though not always) and form longways sets, usually divided into groups of four—first and second couples. Square, circle, and 3 or 4-couple longways set formations are also common.

This dance uses a three-couple set formation. Here in each set the dancers circle with a "slipping step." Multiple sets of six people can be seen. Photo by Rachel Winslow

2. **Figures:** Each dance involves a series of geometric patterns or "figures." The focus is on interactions between dancers, rather than specific postures or footwork. Choreography is often symmetrical, with dancers moving in mirror image or parallel. Two dancers may lead a figure during one phrase, while the other two lead the same figure in the next. The figures include traditional ones from the 17th century, such as "hey for three" or "set and turn single," as well as figures borrowed from more recent dances, including contra and square dances.

Dancers progress in groups of two couples in a "longways set." Here dancers at the Lenox Assembly perform the traditional dance "Morpeth Rant." Each group of four people dances the same figure.
Photo by Stephanie Smith

3. **Progression:** English country dances are typically "progressive" in longways sets of dancers and some other formations. In a "duple longways set," there is a lead (or first) couple, and a second couple, often referred to as "ones" and "twos." The ones perform a sequence of figures with their twos, and then at the end of one round, they progress to the next set of twos and repeat the same figures. When the ones reach the bottom of the set, they wait out one turn before rejoining as twos. Similarly, when the twos reach the top of the set, they wait out one turn before rejoining as ones. This progression usually gives everyone a chance to dance both roles, assuming the dance lasts long enough.

The Dance Form

4. **Smooth movement and variation of style:** In the United States, contemporary dancers generally prefer smooth movement, flowing from one figure to the next with only subtle transitions between them. However, there is often wide variation in style and tempo during a dance event, as well as between different dance communities.

5. **Emphasis on community rather than partner or gender:** Compared to other dance forms, ECD has few gender markers in its patterns and body movements. Contact between partners is usually limited to handholds, making it less intimate and less overtly romantic than ballroom or American contra dancing. In the United States, dancers typically change partners after each dance, allowing individuals to choose how they wish to relate to their partner in the moment.

In perfect symmetry, women dancers sweep forward for a back-to-back with partner at the Lenox Assembly. Photo by Rachel Winslow

Dancers lead up in lines of four at an English dance event, illustrating how symmetry and community is created in the dance space. Photo by Rachel Winslow

(Top) Belgian caller and choreographer Philippe Callens comes down to the floor to teach and demonstrate figures and movement for a dance at the Lenox Assembly. Photo by Jeffrey Bary

(Bottom) The woman on the far left of the photo dances the man's role with a female partner. Photo by Stewart Dean

Learning English Country Dance

AT AN ECD EVENT, A CALLER OR LEADER TYPICALLY teaches each dance**.** Many groups have a scheduled rotation of callers. Like many other forms of folk dance, ECD is a social activity designed to be relatively accessible, meaning that anyone can join in and quickly learn the figures. (For special events, more complex dances may be taught in advance.) The caller will have dancers walk through the dance pattern, sometimes demonstrating new or challenging figures. Once the music starts, the caller prompts the figures until most dancers have memorized the sequence. The more experienced dancers can help and support newcomers with nonverbal cues.

Partnering

Like many social dance forms, ECD does not require bringing a partner to an event, which helps remove a social barrier for many. While traditionally men asked women to dance, in the past 25 to 40 years, it has become more common for women to ask men. (In the 17th through mid-20th centuries, it was not socially acceptable for women to ask men to dance.)

In the U.S., dancers typically change partners after each dance, and some dances are "mixers," where partner changes are built into the choreography. When there is a shortage of men—or even if there isn't—women frequently dance together. If men outnumber women, some men may pair up to dance, though others may feel uncomfortable and sit out. In contrast, in the United Kingdom, particularly in English dance clubs, it is not uncommon for dancers to remain with their spouse or partner for the entire evening.

The Music for ECD

ECD tunes come from various sources: traditional English, Scottish, Irish, and American melodies; a rich collection of European classical music by composers such as Handel, Purcell, and Susato; and newly composed pieces in folk or classical styles. Musicians can interpret these tunes with a range of moods and feelings—whether flowing, lively, stately, or mournful. They may also incorporate other ethnic influences, such as klezmer or reggae. The music often cues dancers to strut, glide gracefully, or perform a sprightly skip. The dancers' movements may, in turn, inspire musicians to adjust their playing to create a different mood.

In the ECD repertoire in America, whether from the Playford era of the 17th and 18th centuries or more recent decades, nearly all choreographies are paired with specific tunes. The tight fit of tune and dance instills "muscle memory" for dancers over time, with a particular musical phrase often prompting the corresponding movement or figure. While there are exceptions, the prevailing rule is one dance, one tune. As a result, when musicians begin playing an ECD tune, a particular musical phrase will suggest the appropriate movement and figure. There are some exceptions, but the predominant rule is one dance, one tune. When musicians begin to play an ECD tune, many dancers will immediately know what dance it is.

The music for an English country dance usually consists of a 32-bar tune with two parts, or occasionally three or four parts, and the tune is repeated for each round of the dance. If the formation of the dance is the common longways set composed of two-couple units in a long line, the music for one round of the dance is repeated however many times the caller chooses to run the dance, for example, nine times. For a three-couple longways set dance, the musicians will play the tune three times through to get through the entire dance once. Similarly, in a square or longways set of four couples, the tune is played four times to complete one full round of the dance.

Today, the unique blend of European classical, traditional, and contemporary music distinguishes ECD from other dance forms inspired by the folk revival. It is an interesting paradox that while some ECD music draws from the elite world of classical music, it serves a subculture rooted in the non-elite folk arts. Interviews with dancers from 1999 to the present reveal that one of the strongest draws to ECD is the music—whether classical, traditional, or newly composed. Many of the dancers who enjoy ECD are middle-class, highly educated individuals who grew up listening to classical music and taking piano or violin lessons. Given this, the strong appeal of ECD's music is unsurprising.

Jonathan Jensen, Emily O'Brien, and Paul Oorts play for an evening dance during English Dance Week at Pinewoods Camp, 2014. Joanna Reiner Wilkinson is the caller. Many of Jensen's own tunes have been used for new English country dances. Photo by Stewart Dean

What Happens at an English Country Dance?

MANY DANCE COMMUNITIES ARE FORTUNATE TO HAVE live musicians rather than relying on recorded music. The most common instruments used for English country dance are piano, violin, and flute. However, there are exceptions. For example, a Washington D.C.–area dance includes a concertina and bassoon player, a cellist, a guitarist who also plays accordion and mandolin, and a pianist who additionally plays the Swedish nyckelharpa (keyed fiddle). For communities without live musicians, there are many excellent recordings of ECD music available, performed by groups such as Bare Necessities, A Joyful Noise, MGM, Goldcrest, Foxfire, Hold the Mustard, Childgrove, Persons of Quality, Roguery, Alchemy, and others.

At a dance event, the caller asks the dancers to form sets, most often longways, and instructs them to take "hands four" to define the number one and number two couples. The caller teaches the dance first, deciding whether the musicians should play the tune once before instruction begins to help participants get a feel for the music. Alternatively, the musicians may accompany the "walk-through" or wait until the dance starts. Because English dances vary widely in tempo, the caller should give dancers a sense of timing, either by counting, "doodling" the tune, or allowing the musicians to play during the walk-through.

While the caller teaches the dance, the musicians often review their music, work out chords, and decide who will take the melody for each round. The caller directs the musicians when to begin, sometimes dancing a few steps to demonstrate the desired tempo. If the tempo isn't right, the caller may ask the musicians to speed up or slow down. It is common for the caller to cue the musicians near the end of the dance, signaling how many more times the tune should be played before ending.

For the dancers, the goal of the event is an enjoyable experience for everyone participating and a good fit between the music and the dance. The dancers may initially struggle with the geography of the dance, but when they "get it" through repetition, the dancing becomes more pleasurable. "Flow" or the peak experience of moving smoothly through the figures and arriving at each place in the dance at exactly the right time is another goal for experienced dancers, though it is not always reached; the tempo may not be correct, or the dance may challenge and confuse the dancers, or the musicians may not play in a manner that provides enough energy for the dancers. It is peak experiences or glimpses of "flow" that keep dancers coming back.

(Top Left) Caller Scott Higgs teaches a class during English Dance Week at Pinewoods Camp, 2014. Photo by Stewart Dean

(Top Right) Dancers in Philadelphia enjoy an evening ECD. Photo by Rachel Winslow

- (Top) Dancers “lead up a double” at the Philadelphia Predominantly Playford Ball.Photo by Rachel Winslow
- (Bottom) ECD under a tent in St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands. Photo by Stephanie Smith

Where Is ECD Done?

English country dancing occurs in many of the larger metropolitan areas of the United States and Canada, notably Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Louisville, New York, Portland (Oregon), San Diego, San Francisco and the Bay Area, Seattle, Vancouver, and Toronto. It is also found in smaller communities such as Amherst, Massachusetts; Ashland, Oregon; Berea, Kentucky; and Asheville and Durham, North Carolina. Dances are usually held on a weekly or monthly basis. Some people who attend these community events first experienced ECD through international folk dance groups, contra dance events, science fiction conventions, or re-enactment groups (e.g., the Society for Creative Anachronism). Regency and other historical dance groups also feature ECD.

Dance camps, weekend events, ECD balls, and workshops all help improve the skills and knowledge of dancers, teachers, and musicians. The Country Dance & Song Society (CDSS) offers programs and publications that support the practice of ECD for individuals and groups. CDSS currently holds dance and music camps in several locations annually, but Pinewoods Camp has long been its main venue for summer programs. First used by CDSS's predecessor organization in 1933, Pinewoods Camp has remained the premier CDSS dance camp for ECD, English ritual or display dance, and American contra and square dance, apart from a three-year hiatus during World War II

Special weekend events, organized by local groups or committees, often focus on or include ECD, sometimes catering to more experienced dancers. One such event was the Fried-for-All in Lenox, Massachusetts, which ran from 1987 to 2007 and focused on the choreography of Dutch-born Fried Herman. Herman passed away in 2010, and beginning in 2009, the Lenox Assembly continued the spirit and legacy of the Fried-for-All until 2022. City Folk includes footage from the 1999 Fried-for-All.

A dancer adjusts a period costume that he made for the woman wearing it, prior to the start of the New York Playford Ball. Photo by Jeffrey Bary

In the past 30 years, special ECD weeks have been offered in distant locations, from Florence, Italy, to a boat on the Nile in Egypt, to St. Croix in the U.S. Virgin Islands. This niche tourism gives dancers the opportunity to enjoy one of their favorite activities with friends in exotic settings.

Many dance groups host ECD balls, with organizers typically publishing the dance program in advance. Dancers are often expected to learn the dances beforehand, though they can also pick them up quickly during pre-ball review sessions. Attendees usually dress in either contemporary formal wear or period costumes, such as Regency-era gowns, like those worn by women in Jane Austen's time. Footage from the 2001 New York Playford Ball is featured in City Folk.

Some Background History: Helen Storrow, Pinewoods Camp, and the EFDS American Branch and its successor organizations

What is now known as Pinewoods Camp was originally purchased by philanthropist Helen Storrow of Boston, who, as noted later, was a strong supporter and friend of Cecil Sharp and his former students and assistants, Maud Karpeles and Lily Roberts.

(More information on Roberts appears in Chapter 3.) Storrow hosted Sharp and Karpeles during their stays in the Boston area and financially supported song-collecting trips to the Appalachian Mountains. Storrow founded the National Girl Scout Leadership Training School in Boston in 1917, and in 1919, she moved the School to her property on Long Pond near Plymouth, naming it Pine Tree Camp. The camp was renamed Pinewoods Camp in 1935.

(pg. 12) Signs on a tree direct campers to Pinewoods Camp, near Plymouth, Massachusetts.
Photo by Stephanie Smith

(Left) Portrait of philanthropist Helen Storrow of Boston, dates unknown. Pinewoods Camp Collection, 1907-2008, MC 288, Milne Special Collections & Archives, Dimond Library, University of New Hampshire Library, Durham, N.H.

IN 1915, CECIL SHARP FOUNDED THE ENGLISH FOLK Dance Society American Branch in New York City, with Helen Storrow as its Secretary. City branches soon formed in Boston, New York, Chicago, and Pittsburgh, followed by centers in Asheville, North Carolina; Cincinnati and Cleveland, Ohio; Detroit and Kalamazoo, Michigan; and St. Louis, Missouri, where Sharp and Karpeles lectured and taught. That same year, the first EFDS American Branch summer school was held in Eliot, Maine, with subsequent sessions in Amherst, Massachusetts in 1916 and 1917. Storrow participated in these summer schools as a dancer and was very involved in the governance of the new EFDS American Branch and its successor organizations. She was also very active in the EFDS Boston Centre. Lily Roberts married Richard Conant at the end of 1917.

As Walkowitz notes, the American involvement in the war in Europe led to the cancelation of the 1918 Amherst summer school. Instead, Sharp and Karpeles taught ECD and ritual dance at Storrow's Girl Scout Leadership Training School held at Winsor School in Boston instead, which as their diaries note was not satisfactory because of the apparent lack of aptitude in their students. In the following years, the number of EFDS city branches dwindled to two, New York and Boston. (See https://www.cds-boston.org/history/organization-history .) Organizers from the EFDS Boston Centre held ECD summer schools at Storrow's Pine Tree Camp in 1925 and 1926 (See Pinewoods Camp History at https://www.pinewoods.org/about/history/).

(Top) Dancers at the first EFDS American Branch summer school in Eliot, Maine, 1915. The dance is "Gathering Peascods." Helen Storrow is at the far left, Maud Karpeles has her back to the camera, Norah Jervis is on the right, and Lily Roberts is left of Jervis, facing Karpeles. Photo from the Country Dance and Song Society Collection, MC 140, Special Collections and Archives, Dimond Library, University of New Hampshire Library, Durham,N.H.

(Below) From left to right, Norah Jervis, Cecil Sharp, Maud Karpeles, and Lily Roberts pose for a photograph at the 1916 English Folk Dance Society American Branch Summer School in Amherst, Massachusetts. Pinewoods Camp Collection, 1907-2008, MC 288, Milne Special Collections & Archives, Dimond Library, University of New Hampshire Library, Durham, N.H.

In 1927, the EFDS summer school returned to Amherst, organized by the Boston Centre and New York Branch, and remained there until 1932. May Gadd, a former pupil of Sharp's, came to the United States to assist with teaching at the summer school and to work for the New York Branch of the EFDS. She was appointed the national director of The English Folk Dance Society of America based in New York in 1933. She organized the dance camp weeks at Pinewoods during the following decades. Storrow invited the EFDS American Branch organizers to use the camp for summer schools from 1933 onward, but it did not formally become a public dance and music camp until later. (The Girl Scout leadership training function of the camp, dating from 1919, was moved to a nearby property on Long Pond in 1935, and Pine Tree Camp was renamed Pinewoods Camp that same year.) No summer schools were held in 1943 and 1944 due to World War II. The early summer schools run by Sharp and his assistants are the direct ancestors of the dance weeks at Pinewoods Camp run today by CDSS.

The main dance pavilion at Pinewoods, C# (named after Cecil Sharp). Photo by Stephanie Smith

Storrow left the camp to Lily and Richard Conant at her death in 1944. Lily Conant died in 1973, and her husband died in 1975. Their son Richard (Rick) Conant inherited the property but did not feel he could take on its management indefinitely. His wife Gerda Conant stepped in to fill the role of camp manager during a transitional period. In 1975, the nonprofit organization Pinewoods Camp, Inc., was formed to purchase and manage the facility, with fundraising complete in 1976. CDSS continues to offer six to seven weeks of dance and music programs including an English dance week at the camp every summer, while other user groups including CDS Boston Centre use the remaining summer weeks and weekends for their programs.

The main dance pavilion at Pinewoods, "C#," celebrated the camp's physical and intellectual lineage, which has passed from Cecil Sharp and his followers down through several generations of dancers and leaders. The earliest version of this dance pavilion was built in 1925, when the Boston Centre held its summer school at the camp.

CITY FOLK FILM CHAPTER COMMENTARY

Chapter 1 Introduction to the City Folk Film

THE FILM BEGINS WITH SHOTS OF DANCERS, LEADERS, and musicians from multiple places, including the Fried-for-All in Lenox, Massachusetts, Pinewoods Camp, the New York Playford Ball, and Cecil Sharp House in London; archival footage; and footage from the 1995 BBC film Pride and Prejudice, which provide a sampling of what ECD is and how it has been portrayed. The late Arthur Cornelius articulates the importance of Pinewoods Camp to ECD: "Over the past five, six decades, all the country dancing and morris dancing you see all over North America radiated out from this place." As he is speaking, we see some footage of morris dancing from the 1960s at Pinewoods. Morris dance, a team-based English ritual or display dance performed at certain times of the calendar year, is not the focus of City Folk, but it is important to this story because seeing morris dance in 1899 for the first time set Cecil Sharp on his course to collect, reinterpret, and revive English traditional, country, and ritual dance.

In interviewing dancers about Pinewoods, we heard deep and eloquent testimonies about its importance as a place. In the opening minutes of City Folk, dancer Tim Radford, originally from England, comments that the quality of ECD in America is very high largely due to Pinewoods. Dance musician Peter Barnes, talking about Pinewoods Camp, says, "If I lived in a small village of people I really liked, that is my village. It's where my sense of community [is]—that's the heart of it, at Pinewoods." The concept of village also brings out another quality of Pinewoods: its isolation from the everyday, urban world. Many urban dwellers come to the "village" of Pinewoods to be in a different space, both physically and mentally. Many campers refer to Pinewoods as being "the real world," and the mainstream world as "unreal."

Linda Tomko, professor emerita of dance, University of California, Riverside, describes some of the mechanics of ECD, and how the tunes and dances fit together. She also provides a brief taste of the history and points to Cecil Sharp as the key figure in the revival of ECD.

Trees frame Pinecones, a former hunting lodge that houses a large number of campers at Pinewoods Camp. Photo by Jeffrey Bary

CITY FOLK FILM CHAPTER COMMENTARY

Chapter 2 Beginnings – The Historical Background

THE FILM PROVIDES A CONDENSED HISTORICAL narrative of the revival of ECD by Cecil Sharp and others in England. In this chapter, Allison Thompson, dance historian; Malcolm Taylor, OBE, former director of the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library at the English Folk Dance and Song Society in London; Anthony (Tony) Barrand, morris dance scholar and professor emeritus of folklore at Boston University; and Linda Tomko, share the telling of this history.

(Above) Dancers at Pinewoods Camp in 1939. Photo by David Morland, Pinewoods Camp Collection, 1907-2008, MC 288, Milne Special Collections & Archives, Dimond Library, University of New Hampshire Library, Durham, N.H.

(Left) Cecil Sharp. Photo courtesy of the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library, EFDSS

Cecil Sharp was born in 1859, the son of a slate merchant. He graduated from Cambridge University in 1882 and emigrated to Australia, where he worked in legal positions, later becoming assistant organist with Adelaide Cathedral. In 1892 he returned to England; in 1893 he married, and he and his wife had a family of three daughters and a son. His career was given over entirely to music from 1889 onward. In England he served as principal of the Hampstead Conservatory. (1896–1905) and music master at Ludgrove Preparatory School (1893–1910).

However, what he is most remembered for is the collection and revival of English folk songs and dance. Seeking to preserve English traditions he thought would disappear forever if action was not taken, he collected almost 5,000 tunes and dances in England and North America. He is usually credited as the main figure in the folk revival in England, a title he both earned and assumed. As historian Allison Thompson comments, he "ran roughshod over competitors" and used the advantages of his class and gender

to win authority in the emerging folk song and dance movement.

William Kimber dancing a morris jig, year unknown. Photo courtesy of the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library, EFDSS

The "seminal moment" in the revival occurred on Boxing Day 1899 at Headington Quarry, a town outside Oxford, when Sharp met William Kimber. That afternoon a group of eight men wearing bells on their shins and waving handkerchiefs or clapping sticks to a tune played by an accompanying accordionist came up the path performing a morris dance. They were the Headington Morris Men, hoping their performance might earn them a few shillings. Kimber was the leader of the "side," or team. Transfixed by the dance, Sharp got Kimber to play music for him the next day and to let him transcribe the music and the dance pattern. In City Folk, we can hear the voice of William Kimber as an old man describing this historical encounter with great excitement.

Sharp moved on to collect folk song but not yet dance. It was Mary Neal, a socialist, suffragette, and social reformer in England, who awakened his interest in the teaching of dance. She sought Sharp's help in finding suitable material to use with her working girls' club, later known as the Esperance Girls' Club. Sharp provided both songs and dances for her to work with, and suggested that she seek out William Kimber, which she did. Kimber taught the girls morris dances, and the club members began performing in various places. Sharp and Neal collaborated in these endeavors, but over time, Sharp grew dissatisfied with Neal's approach.

Simona Pakenham, author of a recent biography of Maud Karpeles, comments: "There was a fundamental difference of outlook between him and Miss Neal. The artistic aspect was all-important to Sharp, whereas Miss Neal regarded the dances primarily as a means of social recreation" (2011, 19). Sharp and Neal went their separate ways, with Sharp himself beginning to teach and present the dances in the way he felt best preserved their traditional qualities. He began teaching morris dance at the Chelsea Physical Training College in London in late 1909. Maud Karpeles and her sister Helen, having seen a morris dancing competition earlier that year in Stratford-Up-on-Avon, began attending the classes.

Mary Neal. Photo courtesy of the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library, EFDSS

Initially, Sharp collected traditional reels and hornpipes still being danced in West Country villages. Later, discovering the editions of The English Dancing Master published by John Playford and his successors between 1651 and 1728, Sharp published a series of his own interpretations between 1909 and 1922 in The Country Dance Book. The Country Dance Book contained both village dances and Playford dances—the dances of the gentry and the court—as well as a notation for the so-called "Running Set," which he had seen in his Appalachian travels. The late Charles Bolton, leader, choreographer, and reconstructor, speaks of the Playford dances and for whom they were intended. In essence, there were two strands that Sharp worked with: the traditional, mainly rural dances, and the Playford dances "from a gentrified past" as Tomko notes.

Sharp's work can be seen contextually as part of the nationalistic surge and nostalgia for the past that swept across Europe in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Particularly interested in introducing English dance and folk songs to English schoolchildren who were "singing German lieder," Sharp formed men's and women's demonstration teams, and developed his role as a teacher.

Equally important, Sharp and those who shared his perspective worried that the immigrant working class of England had lost the values that advanced the Empire, values they imagined to be preserved in an unsullied, idyllic rural past. Taylor notes that Sharp saw traditional culture as based on "rural purity" that was untainted by the "corruptive influences of the towns." To revitalize "the race," Sharp and revivalists like him mobilized ECD as the engine of what Allison Thompson notes was a "larger social mission" to counter the "weakening of the English national spirit." Tomko describes Sharp's work as part of this wider "recovery" and "refreshing" movement that was situated in public schools. He brought the traditional English dances to the schools, which in turn as Tomko notes, established his interpretation and way of teaching as the authoritative one. Dance leader and choreographer Colin Hume points out that, for Sharp's young adult and older pupils, there were classes and exams, and the only way to do ECD was Sharp's way.

In 1911 Sharp assumed the mantle as president of the new English Folk Dance Society (EFDS) he co-founded with others, including his student, Maud Karpeles. Karpeles, who had become one of Sharp's demonstration dancers, would become one of his most important collaborators in both England and the U.S. Sharp and Karpeles frequently met for EFDS-related work, teaching, and dance demonstrations. In 1913, she offered her services to Sharp as his "amanuensis and secretary," a proposal which he heartily accepted (Pakenham, 45). Karpeles commuted daily to his family home daily for six months before being invited to live with the Sharp family in the Uxbridge house. There, she was welcomed by Sharp's wife and children as though she were another daughter (Pakenham, 48).

Sharp's demonstration teams performed country and morris dances. The film includes a short clip obtained from the British Film Institute of one such country dance—remarkably, the only known footage of Sharp and members of his teams performing. The dancers featured are Sharp, Maud and Helen Karpeles, and composer George Butterworth. Tragically, Butterworth and three other members of the men's team would die in combat during World War I.

The role of morris dance in Sharp's later work with country dance is not explicit but rather implicit in City Folk, in part to maintain the focus on ECD. Sharp first began working with morris dance, publishing the first part of The Morris Book in 1907. He also notated sword dances from various villages.

In City Folk, Allison Thompson provides additional historical context about Sharp and describes the education and physical education movements in both England and America during this period. Educators such as Luther Halsey Gulick and Elizabeth Burchenal were instrumental in making folk dance becoming part of the physical education curriculum for girls in the United States. Sharp's arrival in America in late 1914 was fortuitous, as the conditions were ideal for his mission. Reformers such as Gulick viewed folk dance as a means to help assimilate the waves of immigrants arriving from Eastern Europe, Ireland, and elsewhere, as noted by Tomko. The settlement house movement is briefly referenced. Thompson observes that folk dancing was seen to have various benefits: moral, social, hygienic, and a means for Americanizing immigrant children.

Sharp in America

World War I began in July 1914, making employment opportunities scarcer in England, including for Sharp. In December 1914, he arrived in New York for the first time at the invitation of Granville Barker, who had recently produced A Midsummer Night's Dream in London. Barker was asked to stage the production in New York and invited Sharp to direct the choreography and music, just as he had done for the London performances. Sharp made several trips to the U.S. throughout the 1910s, giving lectures and teaching in public schools and summer schools designed for dancers. In 1915, Karpeles and another Sharp student, Lily Roberts, joined him in the U.S. to assist with lectures and teaching.

However, Sharp's travel and song collecting in Appalachia with Karpeles became one of the most significant narratives in the history of folk song and dance. These efforts showcased Sharp's persistence, determination, and risk-taking nature. Sharp, who suffered from asthma and other health issues, documented these travels in his diaries, as did Karpeles. These records are fully digitized and viewable online through the Vaughan Williams Library website [Note 1]. The diaries provide evocative details of their collecting and teaching journeys across the Eastern and Southern U.S.

Pakenham's biography of Karpeles also provides further insights into this period. In the film, Malcolm Taylor mentions one of Karpeles's diary entries in which she writes that she spent the night in Sharp's room because she was so worried that he might expire before morning. In the Introduction to the Pakenham biography, Taylor writes: "There is no doubt from reading her Appalachian diaries and the corresponding parts of her autobiography that her time in America with Cecil Sharp was the most important passage of her life, and that Sharp was her inspiration. What does not stand out from the pages is that Maud's own presence was a key ingredient in the endeavour." (Pakenham 2011, viii) Karpeles's roles as secretary, teacher, and friend to Sharp were highly important to their successful partnership both as collectors in Appalachia, and in their other U.S. work.

Sharp and Karpeles's first "songcatching" expedition into Appalachia began in the summer of 1916, in collaboration with Olive Dame Campbell, the wife of educator and reformer John C. Campbell. Sharp was thrilled to find, during these song-collecting trips, what he considered to be a strong link to England's musical past. He even suggested that this Appalachian song tradition might be more vibrant than England's. Sharp and Campbell first met at Helen Storrow's house while Sharp was recovering from an attack of lumbago. Campbell, aware of Sharp's qualifications, sought his assistance with her project.

Photograph of Olive Dame Campbell by Doris Ulmann. Photo courtesy of the John C. Campbell Folk School, Brasstown, N.C.

In 1908, the Campbells had gone to North Carolina, where John Campbell was conducting a social and economic survey of the southern Appalachian region for the Russell Sage Foundation. Olive Campbell began collecting folk songs at that time, and her work eventually formed the foundation for a joint publication with Sharp in 1917, English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians. Campbell's prior contacts with singers and introductions to local singers were invaluable to Sharp's future efforts. In their correspondence from 1915, Sharp expressed concern about stepping on her toes, to which she responded: "I want the collecting done and done by the person most competent to do it, and if I could have wished for a definite result from my work it would have been to attract to this region just such a person as yourself." (Karpeles, 142)

The film includes an interview with musician Daron Douglas, the great-granddaughter of Jane Gentry of Hot Springs, North Carolina, where Sharp and Karpeles collected more songs than from any other source during their various trips.

Sharp and Karpeles returned to the mountains in 1917. One of the highlights of this trip was a visit to the Pine Mountain Settlement School near Pineville and Harlan, Kentucky. Traveling the twisting road to Pine Mountain remains a challenge even today, making it easy to imagine the difficulties Sharp and Karpeles faced traveling there by wagon. At Pine Mountain, they heard many songs and ballads sung by schoolchildren and witnessed what Sharp called the "Running Set" for the first time. Locals referred to it as "set running." While all the examples Sharp saw were in Kentucky, the dance was and is not confined to Kentucky. Sharp later wrote in The Country Dance Book Part V: "It was danced one evening after dark on the porch of one of the largest houses of the Pine Mountain Settlement School with only one dim lantern to light up the scene. But the moon streamed fitfully in lighting up the

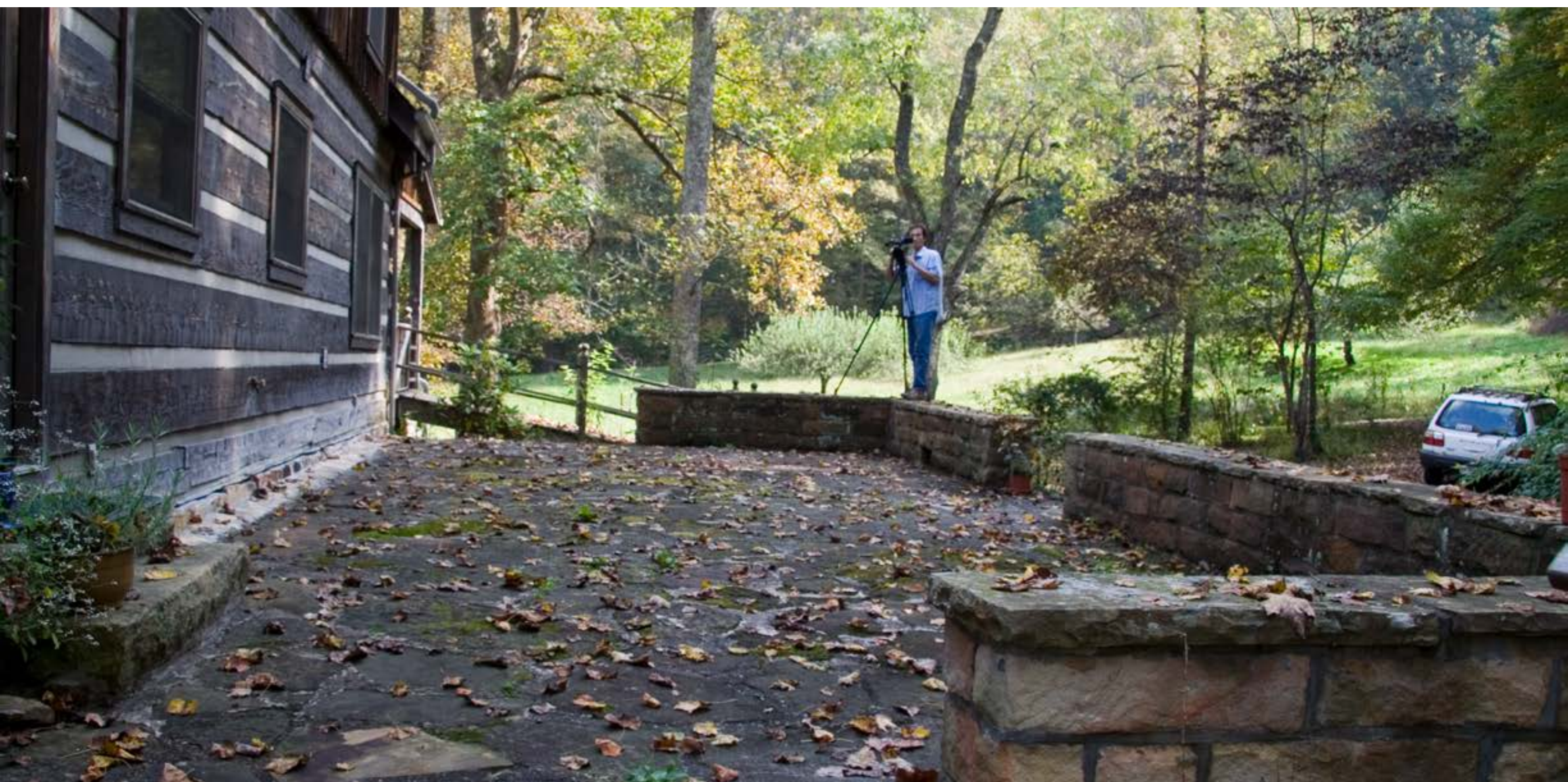
The house where Jane Gentry lived in Hot Springs, N.C., when Cecil Sharp and Maud Karpeles came to visit and collect songs from her in 1916. Photo by Stephanie Smith

mountain peaks in the background and, casting its mysterious light over the proceedings, seemed to exaggerate the wildness and the break-neck speed of the dancers as they whirled through the mazes of the dance." (as quoted in Pakenham, 104).

The late folklorist Tony Barrand points out that Sharp mistakenly believed this dance was an early form of ECD that had survived as a relic preserved by English immigrants who settled in the Appalachians, untouched by other influences. However, dance scholar Phil Jamison suggests that the dance represents "a more recent American hybrid that developed from diverse roots in the American South during the nineteenth century" (2015, 74). [Note 2] Sharp's excitement led him to write a description of the dance later published in Part V of his Country Dance Book series, co-authored with Karpeles as noted earlier. Despite Sharp's error about its ancient origins, his notation and writings helped popularize the "running set," giving it a life beyond the Appalachian region. The stone porch where Sharp and Karpeles first saw the dance remains at Pine Mountain, though the adjacent house is of more recent construction.

As noted earlier, Helen Storrow was one of Sharp's most steadfast supporters in the United States, not only as a financial backer, but as a friend and participant in many of the early activities held by the EFDS American Branch. In the film, Allison Thompson highlights Storrow's involvement with the settlement house movement, the Playground Association of America, and the Girl Scouts—progressive connections that were highly beneficial to Sharp.

Charlie Weber films the stone porch where Cecil Sharp first saw the "running set" at Pine Mountain Settlement School in 1917. Photo by Stephanie Smith



Cecil Sharp and Lily Roberts in 1915, probably at the Eliot, Maine, summer school for the EFDS, American Branch. Photo from the Pinewoods Camp Collection, 1907-2008, MC 288, Milne Special Collections & Archives, Dimond Library, University of New Hampshire Library, Durham, N.H.

Lily Roberts and May Gadd

Sharp was fortunate to have many gifted and dedicated people in his life as he worked to promote and revive ECD. Among these were Lily Roberts and May Gadd, both pupils of Sharp like Karpeles, and they played significant roles in the development and teaching of ECD in the United States.

Born in Bradford, England, Lily Roberts was trained by Sharp at Stratford-Upon-Avon. She became a teacher of ECD in schools and in the Scarborough, Yorkshire branch of the English Folk Dance Society (EFDS). In May 1915, she arrived in the U.S. to assist Sharp as his personal representative, responding to a request from Helen Storrow for an ECD teacher for the Boston area. Roberts taught at the first ECD summer school in Eliot, Maine alongside Sharp and Karpeles. She became the first teacher for the newly formed EFDS Boston Centre in accordance with Storrow's wishes, supporting Sharp's teaching engagements as well. In late 1917, Roberts married Boston dancer Richard Conant, remaining in the U.S. for the rest of her life. The couple managed what became Pinewoods Camp from 1932 until Lily's death in 1973. Two years later, in 1975, the nonprofit Pinewoods Camp, Inc., was established as a nonprofit to purchase (with fundraising assistance) and manage the facility.

May Gadd arrived in the U.S. in 1927, three years after Sharp's death, to take over teaching and administrative duties for the EFDS New York Branch. Gadd assisted with the EFDS summer schools in the U.S. from 1927 onward, though initially she did not have a visa to stay in the U.S. on a permanent basis until some years later. She had been inspired by a 1914 performance of Playford dances and trained under Sharp at the vacation school in Stratford-on-Avon. Before she first came to the U.S., she worked as a physical education and dance instructor at a college in Newcastle, where she directed the Northumberland Branch of EFDS.

Gadd worked for the EFDS New York Branch, which ultimately became the Country Dance and Song Society years later. She played a vital role in managing the dance weeks at Pinewoods and remained a significant figure in the U.S ECD scene until her death in 1980. In the film City Folk, Arthur Cornelius describes Roberts and Gadd as some of the “original transmission people,” referring to their direct connection to Sharp and their role in preserving his style of dance. Choreographer Gary Roodman describes Gadd as a “formidable woman” with “high expectations,” whose personality and strict rules have become part of Pinewoods lore.

Staff photograph for the EFDS summer school in Amherst, Massachusetts, 1927. In the front row from the left are Helen Karpeles Kennedy, Maud Karpeles, and May Gadd, and musician Elsie Avril is at the right end of the row; Douglas Kennedy is at the far left of the top row; and Lily Roberts Conant is at top row center. Photo from the Pinewoods Camp Collection, 1907-2008, MC 140, Special Collections and Archives, Dimond Library, University of New Hampshire Library, Durham, N.H.

Pinewoods as a Reflection of Englishness

Thanks to the influence of Roberts and Gadd, Pinewoods is infused with Sharp's presence. Buildings at the camp are named after both English dances and places in England associated with morris dance. Both women had a role in naming the cabins.

The camp's main dance pavilions, C# and C# minor, were named after Cecil Sharp. These names were retained throughout the camp's history, even as buildings were replaced or repaired, until changes were made in 2022 (see Postscript).

Additionally, the dining hall is named "Knives and Forks" after a 1726 dance, and the bathrooms are wryly named for various English "trip" dances, such as "Trip to Kilburn." Cabin clusters such as "Fieldtown" and "Bampton-in-the-Bush," reference English morris dance, while newer cabins have been given Scottish names. Pinewoods continues to radiate "Englishness" in its traditions and physical spaces.

The cabin "Boatman" is named for a dance in the first and later editions of The Dancing Master (1651). The most recently married couple is often assigned to this cabin during a dance week, following a camp tradition. Photo by Stephanie Smith

A photo of C# minor, the second largest dance pavilion at Pinewoods, named after Cecil Sharp. Photo by Stephanie Smith

The Douglas Kennedy Era at the English Folk Dance and Song Society

Sharp's English dance revival in England increased its popularity between the 1910s and 1930s. Douglas Kennedy, who succeeded Sharp as director of EFDS in 1925, guided the development of ECD in England after Sharp's death. Under his leadership, the society became the English Folk Dance and Song Society (EFDSS) in 1932.

A landmark event during Kennedy's tenure was the International Folk Dance Festival held in London's Hyde Park in 1935, which is featured in City Folk including archival footage. Kennedy was impressed by the energy and physicality of the traditional dances, particularly the Basque dancers from Spain and the călușari dancers from Romania. This experience led him to re-evaluate the ECD repertoire being taught at Cecil Sharp House and other venues. Attendance at English country dances had declined and as Derek Schofield notes, led Kennedy to consider how he could attract new people to the dances, and how "to make the dancing experience enjoyable" (2001, 92).

During their travels in the United States in 1939, Kennedy and his wife Helen, Maud Karpeles's sister, had experienced square dancing with a dance band and a caller, and they brought the form back to England. American square dance made further inroads into English culture when American troops were stationed in Britain during World War II. A photo of Princess Elizabeth and Prince Philip square dancing in Canada in 1951 served to fuel the enthusiasm for square dance at home in England. It also brought more men into the dance, which was encouraging as men were scarce during and after wartime.

By the late 1930s into the postwar years, Kennedy moved away from Sharp's emphasis on the Playford dances, favoring simpler dances that could be easily taught and enjoyed by all. He developed the Community Dance Manuals, which featured lively traditional village and barn dances, as well as some American contras and squares. In another change, to mitigate the gender imbalance at Cecil Sharp House dances, Kennedy instituted a "couples only" policy. It understandably angered many, but the popularity of the dances during the "square dance boom" years made it unnecessary.

In an interview, English dance leader and choreographer Colin Hume notes that Kennedy changed the social infrastructure of English dancing after World War II, with the centers of dance activity moving from classes and teachers to clubs and callers—a move toward a socially oriented recreational activity rather than one that required deep expertise. Kennedy retired from his post as director in 1961, leaving his legacy of the Community Dance Manuals, which are still very popular repertoire sources. [Note 3] Some of these dances continue to be popular in the "barn dance" scene in the United Kingdom.

The Second Folk Revival

City Folk's story of the mid-to-late 20th- and early 21st-century dance ECD community in the United States highlights the shift from Sharp's legacy to a fundamentally American version of ECD. Dancer, musician, and caller Gene Murrow makes a key observation that to make English dance in the U.S. more relevant, it had to connect with American dance in some way. The contra dance boom that began in the late 1960s and early 1970s in New England, led by individuals such as the charismatic Dudley Laufman, energized CDSS and its dance weeks at Pinewoods Camp, bringing new dancers to ECD. The second folk revival of the 20th century, which blossomed mid-century and gained a foothold in both the United States and European countries, acquired momentum in the United States from sociopolitical changes such as the civil rights, women's, back-to-the-land, and gay rights movements in the 1960s and 1970s.

Pat Shaw (Patrick Shuldham-Shaw)

English choreographer, caller, and musician, Patrick Shuldham-Shaw, known to most as Pat Shaw, made a transformative visit to Pinewoods Camp in 1974 to teach as a staff member, which accelerated the shift to an American "version" of ECD. In City Folk, dance historian Kate Van Winkle Keller explains how Shaw's call to take another look at the Playford dances generated appreciation for fresh interpretations that differed from Sharp's. Shaw's approach inspired budding choreographers and dance reconstructors to write new English country dances and reinterpret dances from the original sources. The years following Shaw's untimely death in 1977 produced many fine ECD choreographers and reconstructors in the United States and beyond: Fried Herman, Gary Roodman, Brooke Friendly and Chris Sackett, Philippe Callens, Colin Hume, Andrew Shaw, Jacqueline Schwab, and many others.

Pat Shaw with Genny Shimer at Pinewoods Camp in 1974. Photo courtesy of Helene Cornelius

Pat Shaw had not set out to transform the ECD community, but his arrival at Pinewoods coincided with a period of significant social change and generational conflict, which was felt throughout the camp. Traditional camp customs—such as requiring women to wear skirts or dresses for dancing and prohibiting unmarried couples from sharing housing—reflected the lingering conservative values, many of which began to fade as May Gadd grew older. Shaw's own dances following his trip to Pinewoods, many written for people he met there, blended elements of both English and American figures and styles in exciting and innovative ways, reinvigorating the dance repertoire. Later, these dances were published to raise funds toward the creation of a nonprofit entity to manage Pinewoods Camp. Murrow comments that the impact of Shaw's visit led to the perception that "for the first time, it wasn't as if we were recreating some museum piece or recreating some lost culture. It became our culture; we became the folk."

City Folk also features a segment on Carl Wittman, a gay rights activist, and his adaptation of historical ECD material during the 1970s and early 1980s. Wittman redefined traditional gendered dance terminology into non-gendered language and promoted inclusivity in partnering. His approach involved forming a large circle, which was then flattened into two lines, where dancers paired up with whoever stood across them. This removed the notion of predefined gender roles in partnerships. Wittman's work on "gender-free" dance led to the formation of three significant communities in the United States that still employ this method of calling dances: Ashland, Oregon; Jamaica Plain (Boston), Massachusetts; and Durham, North Carolina.

These changes represent another expression of the loosening of Sharp's dominance over ECD practices in America and reflect an American revitalization and reworking of what had previously been a strongly heterosexual social dance form. This trend continues today, representing a broader pattern in the history of ECD in America—marked by democratization, egalitarianism, and flexibility, with increased focus on a repertoire that spans both old and new dances, and a shift away from gendered calling language.

CITY FOLK FILM CHAPTER COMMENTARY

Chapter 4 Community

Jennifer Beer, a dancer and anthropologist, comments:

For people of May Gadd's generation, Cecil Sharp's generation, the idea of community would not have occurred to them. They had community, but it wasn't what they were aspiring to. It wasn't what they thought they were creating.... Whereas dancing used to be an expression of identity, an expression of "I come from this village," or "I come from this ethnic group," has now become a way to find community and to create it from scratch.

Beer views the ECD community as a form of extended family and observes that contemporary dancers generally have small biological kinship networks, making this extended family concept more attractive. Most dancers we interviewed agreed that community is central to ECD. The majority of ECD participants are urban, white, middle-class, and well-educated.

The ECD community has aged as the members of the generation who began dancing in the 1960s and 1970s have mostly retired from work. Some older community members must stop dancing due to physical limitations, while others continue to dance until the end of their lives, as was the case with the late Helene Cornelius.

The various ECD communities welcome anyone who wants to take part, yet some are troubled by the lack of diversity. This demographic is like that of the contra dance community and groups who focus on other forms of folk dance done in the United States such as Balkan [Note 4] and Scandinavian, although the contra dance community has more young and culturally diverse participants. Among the dancers we nterviewed, there was no sense that one must, in Beer's words, "identify as Anglo or identify as English to feel that the form is theirs." She adds, "It doesn't matter what your ethnicity is or was.... [ECD] still has some social and class markers, there's still people that feel that it's not their group and not their place, very clearly. But there are a lot more people who, if they like the music, and like the dance, feel perfectly comfortable in coming and participating."

Dancing at Pinewoods in 1959. Photo by Gerhard Steinfeld, Country Dance and Song Society Collection, 1915-1994, MC 140, Special Collections and Archives, Dimond Library, University of New Hampshire Library, Durham, N.H.

Beer observes that ECD form is a structure "that allows sexuality, but in a very safe, middle-class sort of way." Eye contact is more accentuated in America than in the UK as a whole and is a means of flirtation without touching. In this way, one could say that American ECD has the potential to define the kinetic character of movements: restrained, "exuberant but not too exuberant," as Beer comments, though infused with an American energy that uses eye contact as a point of connection with one's partner, often when there is no physical connection. In Canada and the U.S., dancers tend to change partners with every dance, although they may dance at the beginning and end of the evening with the person they came with. By contrast, in many English clubs little or no partner changing may occur. It is also accepted to attend an ECD events alone. As Linda Tomko notes, even if you're a beginner or novice, "your skill level is not supposed to prevent you from participating—the community takes the responsibility to usher you in and help you."

The ECD figure called the "gypsy," also appears in American contra dance. The figure involves holding eye contact while walking around one's current partner and is a figure that can be flirtatious. In recent years, both English and contra dancers have been using new names such as "dance around" for this figure because "gypsy" could be perceived as culturally insensitive. Photo by Stewart Dean

Many aspects of ECD draw people in. Gene Murrow observes, "I think different people come to English country dancing for different reasons, some for the social aspect, some for the historical aspect. In my case it was the music, some for the patterns and the problem-solving quality of the pattern dancing." The varied reasons people have for participating in ECD provide some diversity in the community "tastes," and dancing together over time provides a deep community connection. Smith and Beer observe, "Dancers… regain for fleeting moments chosen aspects of themselves and of society that are 'missing' in daily life, reassuring themselves by creating a community where life is ordered, emotion is strong but beautiful, each person has a role to play, and life is privileged enough to allow for the leisured pursuit of pleasure" (2008, 271).

Quite frequently, dancers consider that their closest social friends are fellow dancers. Many dancers who do English dance engage in other related English forms such as longsword, rapper, and morris dance, or they might also do contra, square, or international dance, thus participating in multiple dance communities and contexts. Some dancers are also musicians who enjoy playing for dancing in their home communities or jamming with other musicians. Dancers and musicians who attend weekend events and dance camps have a special opportunity to deepen their community ties through various shared activities such as jamming and trying out new or unfamiliar dances with each other. Playfulness and camaraderie are given open expression at dances, camps, and in other social settings.

Playfulness at camp, especially at the Long Pond dock, has a long history at Pinewoods. A photograph of a "Pond Morris" group from 1989 hangs in the Pinewoods Camp Program Office and appears in the film. Photo by Rosie Donovan

ECD musicians Daron Douglas and Jacqueline Schwab feel strongly that music has the power to change how people move, and to change the mood. In the film, Douglas observes that even slight changes in how one plays the tune during a dance can change the way the dancers move. Similarly, the caller plays a large role in the dance experience. Murrow compares a good caller to an orchestra conductor, "coordinating all the resources, instructing where necessary, inspiring, motivating. It's dissimilar in that the *creation really is the work of the community*. The fun of it, and the art of it is the group of dancers together just dancing with one another."

Dancers evoke different images and inner experiences as they dance (Smith and Beer 2008). Some dancers are drawn to imagine themselves as being in the past, while others are firmly planted in the 21st century. Tomko comments, "Dancing bodies tell the stories of the histories they have lived, or the histories they have succeeded to, or the histories they would like to have lived.

(Top Left) Campers at Pinewoods enjoy jamming at the Long Pond dock while others watch. Photo by Jeffrey Bary

(Top Right) Scott Higgs and Helene Cornelius lead dancers out of Long Pond at Pinewoods Camp in 1990. Photo courtesy of Helene Cornelius

(Bottom Left) Dancers in the rapper sword class perform in the "show and tell" at English week at Pinewoods. Photo by Jeffrey Bary

(Bottom Right) Campers prepare to perform a rapper sword dance at Pinewoods. Photo by Jeffrey Bary

CITY FOLK FILM CHAPTER COMMENTARY

Chapter 5 A Dance Well Made

Philippe Callens teaches a song in French during English Week at Mendocino, 1990s. Photo by Nikki Herbst

Andra (Andy) Horton, courtesy Andra Horton

The film's final chapter explores the creation of new English country dances, often crafted to honor a person or an occasion. One example is "Hortonia," a dance written by the late Belgian ECD choreographer Philippe Callens in honor of American dancer Andra Horton. Interviews with Callens, the late Helene Cornelius (who first taught the dance at Pinewoods in 1999), and Horton piece together the narrative of the creation of the dance. In a clip from a 2006 interview, Callens explains that the seed of the dance "Hortonia" was planted when both he and Horton, a teacher of morris dance, were invited to teach at the ECD week at the rustic camp in Mendocino, California.

Helen Cornelius picks up the story. Callens contacted her prior to the 1999 English and American Dance Week at Pinewoods to ask if she would consider teaching the dance he had written for Horton. Horton was at Pinewoods that week, and when Cornelius told her that she had received the notation for the dance that Callens had written for her, Horton was "floored." We see footage of eight dancers performing "Hortonia" for the first time while Horton films it, and then she is brought into the dance.

Horton expresses surprise that someone would write a dance for her—particularly Callens, who is widely regarded as a highly innovative choreographer. She recalls the discussion that she and Callens had at Mendocino about the qualities that make up a good dance, that work the best: "the flow between figures, being carried by the music, not ever stopping, having supreme moments of connection with your partner." Horton described seeing all these elements in the dance as she watched it, which was clearly a deeply moving experience for her. Documenting this first run-through of the dance was an unusual opportunity to examine the creative process at work in the community.

The film's closing minutes explore the significance and legacy of Pinewoods to ECD in America featuring archival footage,

photographs, and reflections from dancers. Tim Radford observes, “Many people say that Pinewoods is full of ghosts basically because of what happened here in the past. This small patch of ground has been used by nearly every folk dancer of any interest.” Gene Murrow points out that Pinewoods was the national training ground for leaders that would spread ECD to all corners of the country. Peter Barnes comments: “I feel the legacy of people who have gone before.... I do have this great feeling of being immersed in this long-standing tradition.” For former CDSS executive and artistic director Brad Foster, Pinewoods “is a magical place,” made up of many special ingredients.

Looking to the future, it remains to be seen if, according to Beer, this is “the golden age of English country dance, especially the American version of ECD.” In any case, whether it is performed at a regular community dance, a special event, or a camp such as Pinewoods, ECD can be seen as what Murrow describes as “a haven from the hurly-burly and the high speed of American 21st-century culture, where we all have our cell phones and emails and computers...a time to go back to an era of graciousness where people can relate to one another politely with elegance and grace.”

Jennifer Beer comments: “We make our dance. We call it, we choreograph it, we teach it, we dance it, we make the music for our own dance, and I like that we provide our own entertainment. And in that sense, it’s profoundly community based.” City Folk examines the roles of all the participants—the “ghosts” or dancers of the past such as Cecil Sharp, Lily Roberts Conant, May Gadd, and in the present, the dancers, the musicians, the callers, the choreographers, the reconstructors—who coalesce to shape the story of ECD in America, expanding it into a new and ever-changing form and making it their own.

From left to right, Lily Conant, May Gadd, and Helene Cornelius at Pinewoods, 1963. Photo by Stan Levy, Pinewoods Camp Collection, 1907-2008, MC 288, Milne Special Collections and Archives, Dimond Library, University of New Hampshire Library, Durham, N.H.

Fried Herman dancing on the porch at Pinewoods, date unknown. Photo © Suzanne Szasz/Figaro

Postscript

The documentary film City Folk: The Story of Pinewoods and English Country Dance in America offers a snapshot of the English country dance community in the United States between 1999 and the late 2010s. It also examines the history of the dance form in England and its revival by Cecil Sharp in the early 20th century.

(Left) During the pandemic, musicians wear masks to play for dancers at the 2022 English Week at Pinewoods Camp. Photo by Jeffrey Bary. (Right) Most dancers are masked at the 2022 English Week at Pinewoods Camp. Photo by Jeffrey Bary.

In March 2020, live dances in the U.S. were either canceled or transitioned to virtual spaces due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, affecting the ECD community deeply. Some live dancing continued in small, private, or outdoor settings, with public events returning later during the pandemic under varying vaccination and masking policies. Pinewoods Camp closed to campers in 2020 but briefly reopened in 2021 under strict safety protocols, before the Pinewoods Board of Directors canceled the remaining camp sessions out of caution. The camp reopened in 2022, although COVID-19 still posed challenges for some sessions.

The year 2020 was also a period of significant social and political upheaval in the U.S., marked by the Black Lives Matter protests following the killing of George Floyd by police. These events had global repercussions. Dance-related organizations, including CDSS, Pinewoods Camp, EFDSS, and local U.S. dance groups, had already begun promoting inclusiveness and anti-racism in their activities. Cecil Sharp's work came under greater scrutiny, particularly due to racist comments recorded in his Appalachian diaries, written while collecting songs with Maud Karpeles, who also made similar comments in her diaries. These diaries are available in the online collections of the EFDSS, with an advisory notice about these comments.

Non-gendered calling language had been promoted by some dance groups since the 1970s and 1980s, but the late 2010s marked an uptick in the use of "Larks and Ravens" or later "Larks and Robins" in place of gendered labels like "men and women" or "gents and ladies," and

has continued into the 2020s. Other groups prefer to use "positional" language, which directs dancers based on their position when performing a figure. Unsurprisingly, younger generations largely support and sometimes require the non-gendered language, leading to significant tensions within the community. At Pinewoods Camp, many sessions featuring English country and contra dance use non-gendered calling language, particularly Larks and Robins, with some sessions using it exclusively. This has caused some older dancers, who feel inclusivity should also consider their preferences, choose to boycott these sessions.

In March 2022, after two years of evaluating requests by some campers to rename Pinewoods' dance pavilions, C# and C# Minor, the Pinewoods Board had unanimously voted to rename them. (The announcement can be found here.) The Board held two Zoom meetings in October 2021, inviting campers to provide feedback. The final decision sparked debates on social media, revealing what appears to be a largely generational divide, with many older campers preferring the original pavilion names, and the younger participants advocating for the change to promote inclusiveness and cultural equity at camp. The Pinewoods Board announcement states:

> *The community is divided on how to best remember Cecil Sharp's dedication to preserving English folk traditions, his collecting, his teaching, and his connection to the founders of Camp. We are not in agreement with any one interpretation of Cecil Sharp's motivation or his world view. There is agreement that he should be remembered, and his history told.*

The C# pavilion was renamed "Hands Across," and C# Minor was renamed "Pine Hollow." Pinewoods celebrate the centennial of dancing at camp in 2025, marking both the past and the future at the camp. It remains to be seen whether Cecil Sharp will continue to be a central figure in ECD, and how the wider ECD communities in North America and the UK, will evolve, including who participates, what calling language is used, and how the dance form itself develops.

- Musicians at English Week lead dancers from C# (renamed Hands Across in 2022) towards the Camp House. Photo by Jeffrey Bary.

Notes

1. See < https://www.vwml.org/browse/browse-collections-sharp-diaries>. The link to Maud Karpeles's Appalachian diary from 1917 can be found at < https://www.vwml.org/archives-catalogue/MK>, in Box 3, item 226.

2. For more detailed analysis of the origins of the dance Cecil Sharp called the "Running Set" and other forms of Appalachian dance, see Jamison 2015, especially pp. 60-81.

3. For further information on Douglas Kennedy's role in ECD as director of the EFDSS, see Walkowitz (2010, 177–83) and Schofield (2001).

4. The demographics of the ECD community are like that of Balkan dance camp enthusiasts in the United States as reported by Mirjana Laušević in her 2007 study. She conducted a survey of Balkan camp attendees in which "four broad categories of ethnic background emerged from the responses, WASP (39 percent), Central and West European (22 percent), Jewish (21 percent), and East European (16 percent)." Laušević concluded from additional data collected in her survey that people attending Balkan camps "are mostly white, urban, highly educated, professional people, among whom the highest percentage is employed as scientists/engineers/computer specialists or as educators" (25–26). These professions plus librarians make up a large percentage of the ECD community.

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Information on English Country Dance , and Local Dance Groups, Events, and Archival Collections

Country Dance & Song Society https://www.cdss.org/

Country Dance Society Boston Centre https://www.cds-boston.org/

English Folk Dance and Song Society https://www.efdss.org/

New Hampshire Library of Traditional Music and Dance (holds the papers and archives of the Country Dance & Song Society, Pinewoods Camp, and many related organizations and individuals, and provides online access to the dances in all editions of Playford's The English Dancing Master)
https://library.unh.edu/find/special/subject/new-hampshire-library-traditional-music-dance

Pinewoods Camp, Inc. https://www.pinewoods.org/

Vaughan Williams Memorial Library (EFDSS) The digitized Appalachian diaries of Cecil Sharp and Maud Karpeles are available here as well as other significant English dance-related collections
https://www.vwml.org/

Credits

Produced by Stephanie Smith, Daniel J. Walkowitz, Charles Weber

Directed by Charles Weber

Camera: John Paulson, Charles Weber

Additional Camera: Stephanie Smith, Daniel J. Walkowitz

Edited by Charles Weber

Research by Stephanie Smith, Daniel J. Walkowitz

English Country Dance Documentation Project

Notes by Stephanie Smith with Daniel Walkowitz and Jennifer Beer

Design and Layout by Taina Cunion

Film Graphic Design by Aurélie Beatley

Color Correction by Henninger Media Services

Colorist: Dave Markun

Film Transfers by Deluxe 142

Photo Research by Katie Hindmarch-Watson, Rori Smith, and Stephanie Smith

Production Assistance by Aurélie Beatley, Eric Griffis, Kathryn Mitchell, Amy Roberson, and Rori Smith

Featuring: Bob Archer, Kate Barnes, Peter Barnes, Tony Barrand, Jennifer Beer, Barbara Bickerman, Charles Bolton, Nicolas Broadbridge, Philippe Callens, Arthur Cornelius, Helene Cornelius, Emlen Cresson, Ruth Cresson, Dorothy Cummings, Margaret Cummings, Fried de Metz Herman, Daron Douglas, Brad Foster, Beverly Francis, Glenn Fulbright, Christine Helwig, Andra Horton, Colin Hume, Neil Kelley, Robert Morris, Gene Murrow, Tim Radford, Gary Roodman, Jacqueline Schwab, Anne Siess, Tom Siess, Malcolm Taylor OBE, Katherine Terzi, Allison Thompson, Linda Tomko, Kate Van Winkle Keller, Lucy Weinstein, Mark Weinstein, George Whitesides

Archival Footage courtesy of British Broadcasting Corporation; British Film Institute; David Conant; Michael Gowell; David Millstone; Pinewoods Camp, Inc.; T3 Media; Vaughan Williams Memorial Library, English Folk Dance and Song Society;

Image Sources

Peter Barnes, Jeffrey Bary, Jennifer Beer, Jane Bridges, Corbis Images, Clive Carey , Helene Cornelius, Stewart Dean, Emily Ferguson, John C. Campbell Folk School, Nikki Herbst, Andra Horton, Library and Archives Canada, Library of Congress, Gene Murrow, Gary Roodman, Paul Ross, Jacqueline Schwab, Joan Shimer, Tom Siess, Stephanie Smith, Special Collections and Archives Division, University of New Hampshire Library, Linda Swenson/Figaro, Allan Troxler, Jay Ungar, Vaughan Williams Memorial Library, English Folk Dance and Song Society, Victoria and Albert Museum, Carol Werba, Ed Wilfert, Rachel Winslow, Paul Wilson

Choreography

Hortonia – Philippe Callens

The Dance of the Lakes – Fried de Metz Herman, courtesy of Jane Bridges

Edwin's Maggot – Fried de Metz Herman, courtesy of Jane Bridges

The Introduction – Fried de Metz Herman, courtesy of Jane Bridges

Leah's Waltz – Fried de Metz Herman, courtesy of Jane Bridges

The Mavis Sweetly Sings – Fried de Metz Herman, courtesy of Jane Bridges

Michael and All Angels – Fried de Metz Herman, courtesy of Jane Bridges

Opal Circle – Fried de Metz Herman, courtesy of Jane Bridges

Thursday Mixer – Fried de Metz Herman, courtesy of Jane Bridges

Quite Carr-ied Away – Patrick Shuldham-Shaw, courtesy of Pinewoods Camp, Inc.

Fenterlarick – Joyce Walker

Music Sources

The Old Batchelor – The Assembly Players
(Henry Purcell/The Assembly Players)

Another Nancy's Fancy – Bare Necessities
(Patrick Shuldham-Shaw/Country Dance Society, Boston Centre)

Duke of Kent – Bare Necessities
(Traditional/Country Dance Society, Boston Centre)

Michael and All Angels – Bare Necessities
(Henry Purcell/Country Dance Society, Boston Centre)

Prince William – Bare Necessities
(Traditional/Country Dance Society, Boston Centre)

Sun Assembly – Bare Necessities
(Traditional/Country Dance Society, Boston Centre)
Mrs. Pomeroy's Pavane – composed by Charles Bolton
courtesy of Christine Bolton

New England Band Music – Judea – The Colonial Band of Boston
(William Billings/Smithsonian Folkways Recordings/Folkways Records)

New England Band Music- Masonic Procession #1 – The Colonial Band of Boston
(Samuel Holyoke/Smithsonian Folkways Recordings/Folkways Records)

Nancy's Delight – composed by Fred Grimshaw

Bean Setting – William Kimber
(Traditional/English Folk Dance and Song Society)

Laudnum Bunches – William Kimber
(Traditional/English Folk Dance and Song Society)

Old Mother Oxford – William Kimber
(Traditional/English Folk Dance and Song Society)

Talk: Boxing Day – William Kimber
(William Kimber/English Folk Dance and Song Society)
Courtesy of Topic Records Ltd.

Laudnum Bunches – John Kirkpatrick
(Traditional/English Folk Dance and Song Society)
Courtesy of John Kirkpatrick

Morse Telegraph Sounder: Fast Speeding Trains – Harold S. Ludlow
(Harold S. Ludlow/Smithsonian Folkways Recordings/Folkways Records)

Amelia – composed by Bob McQuillen
Courtesy of Great Meadow Music

The Woman Fiddler/Munster Lass/Rock Valley/Hullichan's Jig (medley) – Old New England
(Deanna Stiles/Traditional/Smithsonian Folkways Recordings)

Step Right Back – Piute Pete
(Traditional/Smithsonian Folkways Recordings/Folkways Records)

Leather Britches – Eck Robertson and the New Lost City Ramblers
(Traditional/Smithsonian Folkways Recordings)

Farewell to Whiskey/Silver and Gold Two Step (medley) – Rodney Miller's New England Dance Band
(Nathaniel Gow/Smithsonian Folkways Recordings)

The Braes of Athol – Gilbert Ross
(Traditional/Smithsonian Folkways Recordings/Folkways Records)

The Merry Girls of New York – Gilbert Ross
(P. Utt/Smithsonian Folkways Recordings/Folkways Records)

Miss Eleanor Robertson's Favorite – Gilbert Ross
(Nathaniel Gow/Smithsonian Folkways Recordings/Folkways Records)

Nancy Gill – Gilbert Ross
(Traditional/Smithsonian Folkways Recordings/Folkways Records)

Yankee Hornpipe – Gilbert Ross
(M. Higgins/Smithsonian Folkways Recordings/Folkways Records)

Robert Schumann, Five Pieces in Folk Style, Op. 102 (1849), Nos. 4, 1, and 3 – Maestro Mstislav Rostropovich
(Robert Schumann/Monitor Records)
Courtesy of Elena Rostropovich

Murray River Jig/Roland and Cynthia Taylor/Alistair J. Sim (medley) – Willie Taylor
(Graham Townsend/Smithsonian Folkways Recordings)

Listening through a Sound Microscope to Birds around a Maryland Farmhouse: Two Days of Spring in Maryland, March – Various Artists
(Hudson and Sandra Ansley/Smithsonian Folkways Recordings/Folkways Records)

Eating, Happy Birthday – Various Artists
(Ed Badeaux/Smithsonian Folkways Recordings/Folkway Records)

The Lord Mayor's Procession – Various Artists
(Samuel Charters/Smithsonian Folkways Recordings/Folkways Records)

Harbor and at Sea – Various Artists
(Emory Cook/Smithsonian Folkways Recordings/Cook Records)

Horse and Carriage – Various Artists
(Emory Cook/Smithsonian Folkways Recordings/Cook Records)

Funding generously provided by Friends of Country Dance; the T. Backer Fund; Metropolitan Studies, New York University; Smithsonian Institution Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage; Stephanie Smith; William Strang

Other support provided by David Conant, Judy Grunberg, David Millstone, Doc Rowe

Special Thanks to: Nancy Adams, Awam Ampka, Pat Ballantyne, Daniel Beerbohm, Bob Blondin, British Broadcasting Corporation, British Film Institute, John Carino, Graham Christian, Country Dance New York, Paul Collard, Country Dance and Song Society, Jeff Davis, Folklore Society of Greater Washington, The Fried-for-All, Roland Goodbody, Barbara Greenberg, Judy Grunberg, Elmer Hall, Nancy Hanna, Robin Hayden, Linda Henry, Nikki Herbst, Phil Jamison, Jonathan Jensen, Tom Kruskal, Krystyn MacGregor, Lauren Meschter, Chris Metherill, Metropolitan Studies at New York University, Randy Miller, Charlene Morse, Melva Fager Okun, Frank Perron, Pine Mountain Settlement School, Pinewoods Camp, Inc., Vincent Stephen Piro, William (Bill) Ross, Judy Savage, Derek Schofield, Ken Segal, Betty Smith, George Stoney, Sunnybank Inn, Linda Swenson, Malcolm Taylor OBE, David Townsend, Allan Troxler, University of New Hampshire Library, Vaughan Williams Memorial Library, English Folk Dance and Song Society, Gerret Warner, Jeff Warner, Ed Wilfert

In Memoriam

Anthony (Tony) Barrand, Charles Bolton, Philippe Callens, Arthur Cornelius, Helene Cornelius, Emlen Cresson, Ruth Cresson, Glenn Fulbright, Judy Grunberg, Christine Helwig, Fried de Metz Herman, Kate van Winkle Keller, Tom Siess, Katherine Terzi, and other beloved members of the dance community no longer with us.

Executive producers: Daniel Sheehy and John Smith

Production manager: Mary Monseur

Editorial assistance by Carla Borden and James Deutsch

Design and layout by Taina Cunion