

Milestone Award - 1978

Manning Smith

Presented by Jon Jones

Milestone Presentation - Jon Jones to Manning Smith - I cannot begin talking about this caller without him knowing who I'm talking about. He was born on February 18, 1912 in Belton, Texas, he was raised in Belton. He was a High School football star and I'm going to tell you some things about a gentleman that most of you do not know. He was a little All-American quarterback at Centenary College in Shreveport, Louisiana in 1933. He was assistant football coach at Texas A & M college from 1934 until 1946. He began dancing in 1935 or '36. He married in 1939 in Junction, Texas to a lady named Nita. He began teaching social dancing to Boy Scouts shortly after their marriage. He actually began calling during 1946 in College Station, Texas, doing what he knew from dancing and from Herb Greggerson's book "Bluebonnet Calls" such as "Two little sisters form a ring, back to your partner and everybody swing". He became a professional caller in 1948; he became a professional because he finally got paid for his calling. By the end of the 1940's, he was traveling approximately 1,000 miles per week to call dances in the area between College Station and Galveston, Texas, and a thousand miles a week back then was quite different with the roads that we had in Texas.

He had a once a week radio program, teaching square dancing over the air for more than two years. The program was pre-empted one Sunday afternoon by a World Series baseball game and the radio station received a letter from a town 100 miles away with 87 signatures on it, complaining because they didn't get to square dance that day.

Most of his calling in the early days was with live bands playing the music. He and Nita attended Dr. Lloyd "Pappy" Shaw's school in 1947 as an auditor which means that there was not enough room for them on the floor to dance but they could sit in the audience and observe. They attended Pappy's school several years thereafter.

He began traveling full time as a square dance caller and doing rounds as well in about 1951. He kept his home program going also along with teaching some 500 children to dance each week during the day. He has called at most of the major festivals across the country. He was one of the first callers to begin "hashing" or changing some of the more popular traditional sequences. Some long time dancers said "Hey you can't do that", and his comeback was - "Why not - just listen to the calls". He and Nita drifted into the round dance field full time along about 1964 and we all know their accomplishments in this regard.

He currently has a program on the campus of Texas A & M University teaching Square dancing, Round dancing and social dancing two nights a week to more than 300 college students and they have a waiting list of men and women waiting to get in.

Would you please join me in presenting this Milestone Award to Manning Smith.