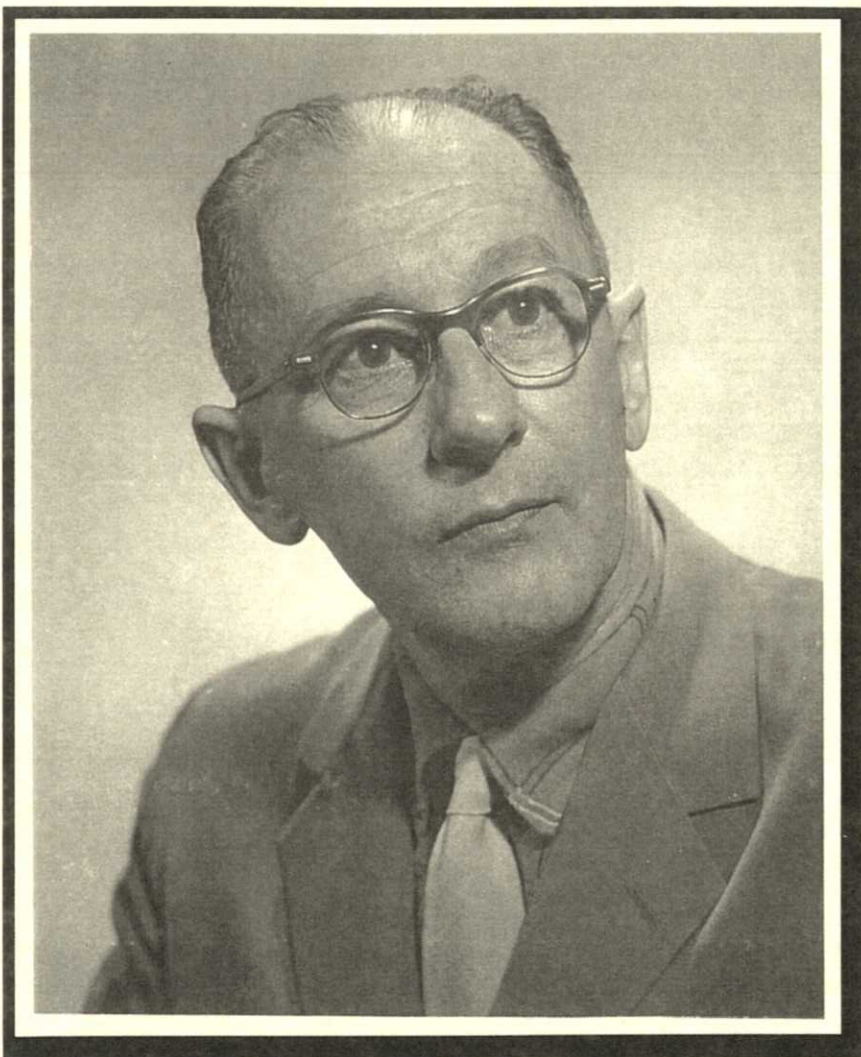




Ralph Piper
Milestone, 1997

It is not an everyday occurrence to find someone who has been a part of the square dance activity for more than seven and a half decades. However, Dr. Ralph Piper, who was born in 1905, started square dancing in 1917 at the age of 12. His first experience was at a school in Manchester, New Hampshire. "The instruction was short on dance," he recalls, "but long on etiquette."

Back in the early 1900s and up to and including WWII, the dancing of squares was not an activity unto itself to the extent that it is today. With few exceptions where neighbors gathered to do the limited number of squares enjoyed at that time, you might find a square or two or a typical American couple dance or circle mixer included in a program of dances from other countries.

In the case of Ralph, whose role in life was to be a leader in the field of athletics, he was dedicated to being an educator, specifically an instructor of physical education. Recognizing that dancing fit ideally as a part of the broad

scope of physical education, he saw to it that this American activity became a part of his education program as well as his recreation.

He ultimately played a part in the development of square dancing from his early years as a student at Springfield College (1924-1928) and into his first teaching position as instructor of physical education at Kansas State College. From there he joined the staff at the University of Minnesota and as a professor of physical education, he started calling in earnest. In the late 1930s Ralph introduced square dancing into the curriculum of Minnesota schools and he called for recreational sessions with as many as 450 students participating.

During WWII Ralph served as Chief of the Army Rehabilitation Programs for all Army hospitals and it was while serving in this capacity that he had the opportunity to visit and call for early square dance groups across the country.

Following the War when contemporary square dancing was just an infant, Ralph presented 48 squares of dancers at the Festival of Nations in St Paul, Minnesota, in a demonstration that caused tremendous interest in the activity.

Ralph's achievements have been many. From 1947 to 1952 he was chairman of the Folk Dance Committee of the Folk Arts Association of America. He represented the National Dance Section of the 1954, '67, and '68 National Conferences of Physical Education. In 1954 he conducted a square dance workshop at the annual convention of the National Recreation Association in Des Moines, Iowa.

In 1947 Ralph was co-founder of the Folk Dance Federation of Minnesota, later to be called the Minnesota Square Dance Federation. From 1948 to 1951 he conducted workshops and short courses in square dancing and called at festivals from Canada to Florida and from New York to California for more than 35 colleges and universities.

In 1949, with Charlie Thomas (originator of American Square Dance Magazine) and Jimmy Clossin (CALLERLAB Milestone recipient), he started the American Squares Summer Camp in Medford, New Jersey. Ralph was co-founder of the International Square Dance Festival in Chicago that sponsored annual festivals from 1950 to 1957. In 1953 he assisted in the formation of "Swingmasters," the Minnesota Callers Association – served as an officer and taught caller clinics.

Between 1956 and 1969 he traveled to more than 80 countries around the world calling and teaching in some and observing the folk dances of the people

whenever possible. During these years he served as Fulbright Lecturer at the University of Rangoon, Burma, at the National Teachers College, Teheran, Iran and at the University of Baghdad, Iraq.

In 1969 he represented the National Association and the Dance Division at the annual Congress of the International Council for Health, Physical Education, and Recreation in Abidjan, Ivory Coast (Africa), where he conducted sessions for delegates from all over the world.

Ralph served on the U.S. Olympic Gymnastics Committee for the games of 1948, '52, and '56. In 1959 he was elected to the Helms Foundation National Hall of Fame. He was named "Coach of the Year" by the National Association of College Gymnastics Coaches in 1962.

Ralph Piper was co-author of two books on square and round dancing and served as associate editor of two national square dance publications. He published more than 20 articles in square dance magazines and in 1950 was co-author of the book "Developing the Creative Square Dance Caller."

He has served as Chairman of Dance for The American Association of Health, Physical Education, and Recreation and is listed in *Who's Who in American Education* and *Who's Who in the Midwest*.