

The Ramblin' Rose

Rosetown Ramblers

Portland Oregon

May 2013

Rosetown Ramblers History

By Dick Burdon, Rick Hawes and Jan Thompson

Gay Square Dancing stirred up a lot of excitement when it began in Portland in the fall of 1982.

Neil Hutchens, a writer and newspaper publisher, had been dancing with a straight square dance club and decided to start a Gay and Lesbian club named **The Rosetown Ramblers (RR)**. He invited a straight lady, **Jan Phipps**, who had recently become a caller, to teach gays square dancing. Notices were posted inviting people to give square dancing a try.

Dick Burdon joined the second class in June of 1983. It was an historic time because there were few social organizations for gay people aside from the baths and bars. The gay community was ready for something new where friendships could be nurtured.

In the early years of our history, gay square dancing was looked upon as an intolerable activity for gays. Straight dancers considered it to be strictly their thing. Detractors from the straight world seemed to think we had trespassed into **their** sacred ground of square dance. Gay dancers were (sort of) tolerated at straight dances as long as they "looked straight" ["real" boy/girl configurations and "proper square dance attire", i.e. men in long pants and women in dresses]. The 1987 IAGDC Convention the Ramblers hosted at the Hilton Hotel - **Explode The Rose** - was picketed by a woman named Priscilla and her associates (Gay Pride = Portland Shame). The gay guests ignored the gauntlet of protesters at the entrance of the hotel and this probably enhanced the intensity of the event: it was quite memorable.

Square dancing quickly became hugely popular with large classes including 13 squares in the third class. As the growth of gay square dancing spread through the world, the first International Gay Square Dance Convention (IAGSDC) - **All Join Hands** - was held in 1984 in Seattle. Visionaries from several clubs set this annual event in motion. **Weave Your Heart in San**



Rosetown Ramblers

1986 Star Thru the Golden Gate - San Francisco

Francisco will be the 30th in an unbroken stream of convention fun, socializing, and great dancing. The first 30 year attendance medallions will be bestowed this year upon the elite group of 7 dancers who have appeared at all the conventions.

The early conventions were outrageous and great fun. There were fashion shows. The Honkytonk Queen contest began. Club performance teams demonstrated high powered complex square dance choreography - in some cases they danced 8 couple squares. At the first conventions chaos was common in a square as dancers tried their "fluff" which did not match another club's moves: the New York club had learned all of their dancing from records and did not have any fluff at all.

National (straight) callers were initially reluctant to call for the gay clubs' events - a few who did lost some of their regular business as a result - but the challenge of calling to non-gender specific squares capable of All Position Dancing (APD) interested an increasing number of high caliber callers. Fortunately for the callers, and LGBT clubs, attitudes have evolved over 30 years, making the hiring of callers and the mixing of the straight and gay square dance worlds nearly non-issues.

In the Rosetown Ramblers infancy, the question of how to teach new dancers came up regularly. Jan taught a couple of classes for the Ramblers, but then ran into some less than gracious

Ramblers' History continued...

attitudes from a few dancers in the club. As a result she ceased teaching and the dancers thought the club would end. A futile search ensued for a new caller, but two Ramblers – **Robert Hodge** and **Paul Kilgore**, joined by **Larry Murchison** and **Clint** or **Cliff?** (ah...memory...) kept it going by “instructing” the classes using a series of teaching records by caller **Jack Lasry**. Later “instructors” included **Cornell Trouw** and **Mike Seyfrit**. And the Ramblers continued on.

The early classes attracted an amazing array of people, including some with serious limitations. There were legally blind dancers, and **Jerry Barton** of the Ramblers created a square dance sign language so that **Hank Stack**, a deaf man who appeared on channel 8 news as an ASL interpreter, could dance.

Class graduations might have been described as “creative” although hazardous fun. One class of graduates danced with grocery bags covering their heads. Another graduation was held at the Oaks Park roller rink where dancers were challenged to execute the calls while wearing only ONE skate. Another time panty hose with a potato in each foot pocket was tied around dancer’s waists - it was comical to watch the flying extensions as the dancers attempted to maneuver without entwining each other. In time the initiation rites were tamed - probably in the interests of safety. Or perhaps it was just that they were often silly and just plain embarrassing.

Another aspect to the newest game in town was that some newly “out” dancers, including people like **Dick Burdon** and **Rick Hawes**, were exposed to cross-dressers, transsexuals, leather, country/western, etc., etc., etc. among other aspects of the gay community in an open, friendly, cooperative learning and social environment. Everyone had to adjust to things that weren’t familiar to them. Most of the early dancers were men and visitations to straight clubs usually weren’t comfortable for any of the people involved. Eventually the women arrived to join the fun. And through the years the gay clubs developed into fast dancing, gregarious groups being inclusive of all who want to dance.

As the expertise of the dancers increased some eager members formed a performance group within the Ramblers called **Heads to the Center** (HTTC). That group entertained the club and visitors with dance skits complete with custom made outfits. After a few years HTTC became a separate but Ramblers-intertwined gay club teaching and dancing the Advance and Challenge programs, enabling the Ramblers to concentrate the club’s time on Basic, Mainstream and Plus.

In the fall of 2013 the Rosetown Ramblers will celebrate 30 years of learning, dancing and enjoying “friendship set to music.” In that time hundreds of dancers have come and gone, and there’s always an empty spot for more.



Ramblers - 1987



Robert
In Drag
1986



Michelle Fusco
Jerry Barton
Hank Stack
1986



Ramblers
Graduation
1987
Mike Desisto
Calling



Rosetown Ramblers, Portland OR

Rosetown Ramblers

Portland's **GLBTQ** Square Dance Club

Come join us for a

Taste of Square Dance

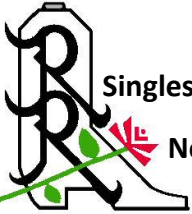
June 19 7:00 PM

Ankeny St Studio

975 SE Sandy Blvd

(entrance & parking on SE Ankeny St—the North side of the building)

Free



Singles Couples Families Welcome

No Dress Code — Casual

www.RosetownRamblers.com

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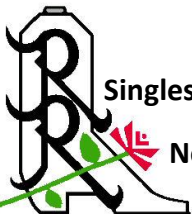
September 4 & 11 @7:00 PM

Ankeny St Studio

975 SE Sandy Blvd

(entrance & parking on SE Ankeny St—the North side of the building)

Free



Singles Couples Families Welcome

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Don Wood



RH

Don Wood and Marie

Despite a radiator failure on the trip to Portland from Olympia and the very warm weather Don called a great afternoon of Advance for Heads To The Center and the evening First Saturday dance for the Ramblers on May 4.

Loaded down with jugs of water the Wood's car got them back home early Sunday morning.

Coming Up....

June 1 First Saturday - Aaron Wells St. Louis MO

June 5, 12, 19, 26 Club Night

July - DARK - IAGSDC Convention San Francisco

August 3 First Saturday - Ian Craig Portland OR

September 7 First Saturday - Mike Desisto Enumclaw WA

October 5 First Saturday - Richard Lane Portland OR

October 25 - 27 Scares & Squares

Who's Dancing Now?

One of our newest dancers, **Jose Almeida**, came to us by way of our MS class instructor, Chuck Garner. While at PCC together, Chuck mentioned he was teaching our MS class and Jose's ears perked up. Back in 2006 while walking through Canby, his stomping grounds at the time, Jose heard music and laughter coming from a building. Peeking in, he had his first exposure to Portland area square dancing. He joined in, took lessons there and is recognized by some long time dancers. He wandered away from square dancing until his fortuitous conversation with Chuck. Now back on the floor, our tall, dark and handsome new dancer happily joins us at Rosetown events and is always ready to head out with some of us as we cruise around town honing our square dance skills.

Jose was born in Tijuana and moved with his large (3 sisters, 6 brothers!) family to San Diego when he was five. He was raised on his mother's homemade chicken tamales that he still misses (nothing beats mom's home cooking). He headed to Portland when his wife (from Banks/Manning) wanted to return north. Some years, a couple of marriages and 5 children later, Jose considers himself a Portlander - and a square dancer, of course. Currently single and with his youngest children in Eugene, he does find time to set his mind to square dancing.

Not only does the music and dance draw him, he finds meeting the congenial melting pot of Rosetown Ramblers one of the best things about the discovering the club. He has no favorite calls yet and he doesn't worry about making mistakes. He knows he's doing better and that is an attitude we love to embrace. When asked when he was going to learn the "girl" part, he laughed. Several times. And said he'd learn Plus first. He'll learn the joys of bi-dansuality eventually! Welcome, Jose, we are pleased to have you as a Rosetown Rambler!



Above and Beyond: A huge shout out to **Brian Arnzen** who designs and creates our greeting cards. His donation of time, energy and materials adds warmth and a lovely touch as we reach out to all of our members. Thank you, Brian, your work is exceptional!

Heading for Convention this year? Let's see if we can get the club in our most recent tee shirts - the pink or red ones. If you need a new shirt, they will be available at club nights through June and at our Saturday Dance (Aaron Wells calling!) on June 1st. If you don't have a club shirt, one of a similar color will help us look like the cohesive, good-looking group that we are.

Yard Sale: Don't forget - we will need your treasures this year for our garage sale and the auction for Scares and Squares. Please start saving them now. Higher ticket donated items that do not lend themselves to these events will be advertised on Craigslist. Help us meet our budget this year!

Would you like to reach all of the dancers in our club? Let us know if you'd like to advertise in the newsletter by contacting Rick at rickh@arcenet.com or Jan at jatuco@comcast.net.

The Ramblin' Rose

On the Web: www.rosetownramblers.com

E-mail: Info@RosetownRamblers.com

Facebook: [Rosetown Ramblers](https://www.facebook.com/RosetownRamblers)

Voice Mail: (503) 610-8154

Photos: DB - Dick Burdon RH - Rick Hawes

Snail Mail:

Rosetown Ramblers

PO Box 5352

Portland OR 97228-5352

