

Table Grove, Ill. 61452
January 31st

Dear Laurel -

Attached, you will find my thoughts on "Morris Dancing" in my grade school experience. I regret for it to not be typed, but trust it can be read! (I am not a fast typist nor without many errors -)

It would be interesting to me to know your current "form" as to this dance. Though no idea of your to a set some thing, we could have had a fix.

Do remember the Jubilee College location outside Springfield, Illinois where Morris Dances perform in the annual "Jubilee Fest". Perhaps, you can attend one of these.

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MORRIS DANCING - COAKESBURG, ILL. SCHOOLS - 1928

The elementary schools in Coakburg, Illinois promoted many activities for young students when I attended three of them as a child. Some of these have carried over into my adult interests (art and museum exhibits) and I consider myself fortunate to have been a part of the pupil group - c. 1920's.

A very memorable event was a May Fete held in 1928 on the playing fields of the Knox College campus. This was a coordinated effort of all of the city's grade schools, of which there were about ten, in a colorful, delightful event. It included games, songs and dancing as planned by the "circulating" teachers of music, art and physical education in the Coakburg School system. These visiting teachers were favorites with the children; their teaching was woven into the schedule of regular studies. In my mind's eye, I can easily bring up the image of Miss Strong in Music or Miss Atwater in Art!

The May Fete idea was revealed to the students in early spring and practice started in the individual schools. Mothers in the P.T.A. units became involved in costume planning and making. Our Home Room teachers told us stories of early May Fetes and the ideas of festivals. We knew that we would meet with other city schools "at Knox" and there was great excitement at our practice times. The

Thought of actually seeing and being a part of a May Pole event was a lovely day dream idea! I was to be one of the Morris Dancers. Dancing partners were matched for size and height. My partner was a boy named Chretien Gould, whose father had a barbershop in our neighborhood (I can still see the tall barber-pole which marked the shop.) Boys were to wear white shirts and dark trousers. The girls were to have full-skirted dresses, over which ~~were~~ ^{would be} the many colored wreaths, made by the mothers, and stylized with black velvet ribbon lacing to close the fronts. In my mind, the costumes were right out of story-books!

As I recall, we practiced the dance in sets of four, with a coming together in a dual line at some point. We would count to glide in steps, and there was also a curtsy and bowing element which created some giggling. Our Western School probably provided eight to ten sets of Morris dancers to the large mix on the day of the Fete. As to the Maypole dancers, I believe they came from the college, as did the pole which was marvelously decorated with the many colored streamers and flowers at the top. Probably the Queen was chosen within the college.

When I think back to my fourth grade days, we would have been dismissed for the afternoon. This special Fete would have been held at a probable 1:30 pm. with

The participants arriving in costume, accompanied by parents (principally, mothers) and met at a designated gate by our teachers who escorted us to our preplanned locations for the various activities; dancers in certain places, singers in others and grouped around the centered row of May Poles. In general, the total assembly would have walked from our homes to the college campus! Knox is centrally located and the school bus concept had not come into focus.

Very likely, the name "Morris Dancing" is one of the reasons this event remains one of my favorite early school memories. It seemed special to have a part in these dances, and I loved the excitement of the many practices together with the May Pole Day which seemed to be a tremendous success even without a dress-rehearsal!

- Emarelda T. Ramsay
 Table Grove, Illinois
 January 31, 1990