

# Social Life

Matilda Siegmund Jones<sup>1</sup>

Our social life lacked many of the features which are considered necessary to entertainment today, but our satisfactions were great compared with the small cost of our good times.

On our neighborhood picnics we played group games and did folk dances. On these occasions there was always a picnic lunch which was the treat of the day.

There were fireplaces in many of the homes. Around these our social groups had taffy pulls and corn poppings. Yes, we danced, too, whenever there was a dance to go to. But we had to wait until someone thought it was time to give one, and having that event to look forward to heightened our pleasure.

Neighbors who could clear out one or two rooms, took turns giving parties or dances. If they had an organ, so much the better, for there was usually someone who could "chord" to accompany the fiddle, or, perhaps a guitar. One winter, two brothers, Swiss homesteaders, played the accordions for some of the dances in the homes. One of them danced an old fashioned whirling waltz with Mother. She had danced much in her girlhood days but that was the only time I ever saw her dance.

Everyone knew how to do the quadrilles or square dances as they were commonly called and they were the most popular. For variety, about every third or fourth dance was a waltz, schottische or polka; later on the two-step, fox-trot and three-step became favorites.

Sometimes at these neighborhood dances, there were enough members of our own family to form a quadrille.

Quite frequently whole families attended the neighborhood dances and joined in the fun. The babies were put on one of the beds; wraps on another; older children were allowed to watch the dancing a while -- occasionally being invited to dance to "fill up" a quadrille - that was how I learned to dance.

The musician who played first fiddle for the dances, received perhaps, two dollars for this contribution to the evening's fun; the second fiddle, guitar or accompanist, received less. The floor manager introduced men for dances (with the lady's permission) and called out the figures for the quadrilles. He and the musicians received their compensation from the 25 cents apiece chipped in by the men. The girls took the refreshments, - sandwiches, pickles, pie and cake; the hostess made coffee. These were served "lap" style, - the food was put on a plate and one had to hold the plate or find a place to put it. The coffee cup was always a problem - no one could hold both plate and cup and eat. Lap suppers were unpopular.

We walked to the parties in the neighborhood but in order to attend the dances at a distance we had to ride horseback or in a four-wheeled vehicle from four to twelve miles.

One evening there was to be a party at Finley's, a neighbor who lived a little more than a mile away. Mother walked there with us. It was raining hard and the road was muddy so I wore my "gum" boots,

never thinking to take my shoes with me since "small fry" just watched the fun a while and went home early.

To my surprise, a boy from another neighborhood asked me to dance. I couldn't refuse his invitation, so danced in my gum boots.

Mr. Finley fiddled for some of the dances in the homes. A purse was always made up for him. Mr. Finley was a cripple; one leg was undeveloped and hung helpless, but he managed to go about by using a crutch, - even walking as far as our house frequently. On longer trips he rode horseback - rode sidewise - carrying eggs to market in a basket hung on his arm and bringing back the family grocery supplies and the mail. He always smiled as he talked; and if he wasn't talking, he sang or whistled, and we could always hear that merry whistle as he rode along on the old gray horse.

The Finleys were a happy family. The older three children, Bob, Roy and Della, were about the same age as we, the younger three, in our family, and we played a great deal together.

Father started a petition to have a post office established in our vicinity<sup>2</sup>. The government sent an inspector to look the field over. I recall how very suave he was and cocksure of himself. We got the post office. It was established in the Finley home. Name? Mother's maiden name<sup>3</sup>. Mrs. Finley, the first postmistress, and Mr. Finley carried the mail daily to and from the village where we formerly went for it.

When the Finley's moved away, the post office was moved to our house where it remained many years, until father again took the initiative to have a rural free delivery established. This latter brought us the daily mail much quicker.

In my early teens neighbors began to use the schoolhouse for a social center. There were had spelling bees and a literary club.

Father learned to play the violin in Germany. He played selections from noted composers, such as Johann Strauss' Blue Danube Waltz and others. I have heard the older brothers tell how he played for them and their house guests to dance but I never saw any of that fun. Father taught Fred<sup>4</sup> to play when he was sixteen. Either Olive<sup>5</sup> or I played his accompaniment on the little chapel organ. Elkay<sup>6</sup> and Harry<sup>7</sup> played the cello and guitar. Then a few years later we, with six neighbor boys, organized an orchestra. We practiced in the schoolhouse or went the rounds to the homes where the young people of the neighborhood congregated each time, taking advantage of the opportunity of music being provided, and danced. How keenly we enjoyed this wholesome sport and the association with the group, not to forget to mention the eats served each time.

The orchestra played for public dances for a number of years. Olive continued with them but I did not. A portion of the time a young man played a portable melodeon<sup>8</sup> belonging to his mother. It came around Cape Horn to this coast.

Many times the dances lasted all night and we got home in time to prepare the breakfast.

When the dancing ended after midnight, and it was a moonlight night, well and good, - we could start home immediately; otherwise we would have to wait until day break in order to see to drive. If we went horseback we fared better; didn't have to wait for daylight; the horses could find their way.

Did you ever try riding right into pitch darkness and keeping it up for an hour or two? Nothing to be heard anywhere but the sound of the horses' hoofs. But the feel of the horse's warm body strong beneath one gives a feeling of assurance.

One bright moonlit night as Olive, Fred and I were returning from a dance, we were riding single file because the road was so narrow and muddy. I was in the lead. My mount, Kate, had a nice gait and was comfortable to ride, but she had a most unusual habit of crouching down on occasions, like a cat just before springing for its prey, and take her rider off guard.

I had the violin under my arm; we were riding at a comfortable gait. As I made a right angle turn in the road, the change in direction threw Kate's shadow directly in front of her. It must have frightened her for quick as a flash she "squatted", leaving me in mid-air momentarily; when I came down Kate wasn't there. She made a bolt, but I managed to keep hold of the reins and to hang onto the violin. The commotion brought Olive and Fred to the scene; they salvaged the violin and held Kate while I mounted; so we arrived home without further mishap.

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1. The author was my great aunt Tilly who was born in 1880.
2. The Klumb post office was established January 4, 1893, moved to the Siegmund home on June 10, 1893 and closed February 15, 1910 with the advent of rural free delivery from Stayton. (Lewis A. McArthur, Oregon Geographic Names, 5th Ed., Oregon Historical Society, 1982, p. 422.)
3. Mary Margarethe Klumb (my father's paternal grandmother).
4. Francis Alfred, aka Frank, born 1878. The author used the middle names or nicknames of family members to help protect their privacy should her account be published. In the meantime, all have passed away and this is no longer necessary.
5. Carolina Olivia, born 1871.
6. Louis Klumb, born 1867.
7. Henry August (my grandfather), born 1876.
8. A melodeon is a reed organ popular in the 19th century.