

Statement from Author Dan Peek

*Author Dan William Peek has written a book, soon to be released by The History Press, on the history of the Ozark Opry. He submitted the following synopsis for the Ozark Opry web site.*

Entertainment in the Ozark Mountains of the 1930's and 1940's often took the form of dances at "music parties", community "picnics" or at dance halls and road houses. Regardless the venue, the dance was invariably a high energy, regional style of square dancing known as the "Ozark Jig".

In the late 1940's a young Ozark Jig dancer, Tolliver Lawson, traveled to Kansas City on a family visit. While there he observed a troupe of western style square dancers who performed with taps on their shoes. Tolliver immediately procured some taps and upon his return to the Ozarks, as the first tap shod Ozark Jig dancer, "tore up" the dance floor at the next community picnic. Soon all his friends had taps on their Jig dancing shoes.

A group of those friends, spearheaded by Lee and Joyce (Williams) Mace, formed a Jig dance troupe and shortly were in demand throughout the Ozarks. Not long after, they came to national attention. The "Lake of the Ozarks Square Dancers" performed at the National Folk Festival and at such high profile events as the Kansas City Centennial and the

Chicago Fair. By the early 1950's they had appeared on national television shows, the "Ted Mack Amateur Hour" and the "Today Show with Dave Garroway" and were performing at major night clubs and entertainment venues across the country.

Nashville's Grand Ole Opry hired the troupe to be "The Grand Ole Opry Square Dancers". The Ozark Jig dancers were a sensation.

In addition to live performances, the Ozark Jig dancers filmed nearly 100 nationally distributed TV shows that would become the historically important "Country Classic" DVD series. As "Stars of the Grand Ole Opry" they met and became friends with their fellow Stars. Mother Maybelle Carter had them over for dinner and poker, Gene Autry invited them to a dinner he hosted at the Andrew Jackson Hotel. The Ozark Jig Dancers and the Mace's had made it in Nashville.

But rather than continuing to pursue their fortunes in Nashville, Lee and Joyce Mace returned to the Lake of the Ozarks and using what they had learned in their travels, founded, in 1953, a musical entertainment that would become the model for an alternative to the Nashville approach to Country Music. The model is now most often referred to as "Branson-style" entertainment after the Missouri town whose entertainers and civic leaders understood what the Mace's had done and built on it to claim the

designation of “The Live Music Capital of America”.

For over 50 years, the “Ozark Opry” played to sold-out audiences, six to ten shows a week in season, in a 1000 seat auditorium near Bagnell Dam and the Lake of the Ozarks and influenced the course of American music in vital ways hitherto untold. This behind-the-scenes story of Lee and Joyce Mace and the Ozark Opry is a vibrant trip through America’s music and entertainment industries. Some of the most fascinating characters of the times – Ernest Tubb, Hank Snow, Roy Acuff, Chuck Foster, the Mabe Brothers, Albert Gannaway, Seymour Weiss, Scott O. Wright, Sarah Gertrude Knott and Cyrus Crane Willmore – interact with the Mace’s along the way.