

GOIN' DOWN TO CAIRO [KAY-roe] (U.S.A. – Illinois)

This is one version of a well-known singing game from the Illinois Ozarks. The song, according to *Folk Songs and Singing Games of the Illinois Ozarks* by David McIntosh, is from 1858 when a killing frost ravaged the corn and tobacco harvests in southern Illinois. The story goes that farmers from that region went down to Cairo [KAY-roe], located at the tip of Illinois where the Ohio and Mississippi rivers meet, to buy corn and tobacco sold by planters from the south. Arriving early, the farmers would hang out at saloons “and other places,” and began to get friendly with a Liza Jane or two. At home, their wives noticed how they “blacked them boots to make them shine” and that they seemed to be goin’ down to Cairo (KAY-roe) more frequently. So the wives began to accompany their men and the fun and games in Cairo (KAY. . . .) turned into play parties and singing games. “Goin’ Down to Cairo” was first played to poke fun, but became a favorite and was brought back home, where it spread from downstate Illinois in the mid-19th century to all of us today.

Music, DVD: On Sanna’s CD #4 and DVD #7, both Volume 2 in her *Dances of the Seven Continents* two-volume set (blue and white). The song on the CD is arranged and sung by Doug and Bonnie Isaacson Miller, former directors of Folklore Village Farm in Dodgeville, Wisconsin, based on the story above. Their arrangement appears on the next page.

Formation: Partners single-file in a circle, facing counterclockwise (CCW). Down in Cairo, of course, men and women danced together so the woman is to his right, in front of him. In the classroom, it doesn’t matter who is which, but then they must be numbered 1 and 2 (person in front), or otherwise labeled. Join hands down in a V, or not.

Dance Pattern

“Goin’ down to Cairo [KAY-roe]....”

Circle to the right. On 15-16, woman or #2 turns to face man or #1 (16 cts).

“Black them boots and make them shine....” Grand right & left to 7th person (partner is 1st), or back to partner in a small circle. The 7th person should be given a R hand (16 cts). Grand R&L: R hand to partner, pull by; L hand to next, pull by; R to next, pull by; etc.

“I’m a going ‘way to leave you. . . .” Swing with 7th person or partner in ballroom hold (16 cts, a nice long swing) or elbow turns (8cts with R, 8 cts with L), or other kinds of swings.

“Ain’t got time to kiss you now. . . .” Promenade this person, both facing CCW with woman or #2 on the outside. Use crossed-arm skaters’ hold or other positions (16 cts). Finish this figure with woman or #2 in front of partner, all ready to start circling again.

Repeat these four figures in each of the subsequent verses.

(see music on next page)

PRESENTED BY SANNA LONGDEN.

Notes by Sanna Longden ©2007, based on *Handy Play Party Book*, Bob Walser, others.