‘Les Danses Rondes’ Records History of Acadian Dances

Just off the press this week is “Les Danses Rondes”, a book of Louisiana French folk dances recording, in book form, a part of Louisiana’s French heritage.

Collected, arranged and edited by Miss Marie del Norte Theriot, associate professor of French at Southwestern Louisiana Institute, and Mrs. Catherine Brookshire, Blanchet, Meaux, the nineteen authentic “Danses Rondes” included in the collection are complete with piano arrangements, dance directions and historical background.

“All of America knows the French ‘quadrille’ or square dances,” Miss Theriot said, “but Louisiana has also the circle dance, or ‘danse ronde’, so called from the picture it presents of dancing in the round.” “In France the dance is called simply a ‘ronde’.”

The ‘dance ronde’ was especially popular during the forty days of the holy season of Lent and was danced to singing, rather than to instrumental accompaniment. The leader who sang and called the changes for the ‘rondes’ was known as a ‘chanteur’ or ‘chanteresse’, if a woman.

According to the editors of the book, these folk dances were popular in the Acadian country until about twenty years ago. The traditional words and melodies in this collection are recorded as they were sung to the collectors. The piano arrangements were added to familiarize the learners (and the teachers) with the spirit and swing of a song before attempting to dance the steps.

“Traditionally,” Mrs. Blanchet emphasized, “the ‘danses rondes’ were never performed with an instrumental accompaniment.”

Among those songs included in the collection are La Violette, by Miss Velma Hebert of Meaux, Vermilion Parish, in 1944 and Simeon Touchet also of Meaux, in 1948; Le Joli Rosier, sung in 1948 by Mrs. Antoine Frederick in Abbeville, Vermilion Parish; Papillons, recorded by Mrs. Robert Trahan in Abbeville in 1953 and in similar versions by Mrs. Frederick in 1948 and Cledus Touchet in 1954; Les Oeufs, recorded by Mrs. Lucia Broussard in Abbeville in 1954; La Sainte Catherine, recorded by Mrs. A. C. Bechet of Carencro in 1949; La Petite Boîteuse, sung by Miss Alice Voorhies in Lafayette in 1938; and Aveine, by Miss Josie Mae Hidalgo of Milton, in 1951.

The five songs and dances from this collection which will be used in the annual Camellia pageant at Southwestern Louisiana Institute are: Mon Beau Chateau, Aveine, Raisin, Allons au Bois, and La Violette. In honor of the Acadian Bicentennial celebration this year the Camellia pageant will have an Acadian theme.

Interest in collecting these French folk dances came about when Miss Ada Denis, SLI student from Milton in 1938, told Miss Theriot that such folk songs and dances existed.

The editors of this book have spent years in tracing these folk songs and dances, recording them and finally making them available for the general public.

Mrs. Blanchet, who was Vermilion parish supervisor of music in the public schools, was collecting folk songs independently at the same time that Miss Theriot was also tracking them down. A mutual student friend in 1949 brought the two together. “Les Dames Rondes” is the result of their collaboration.

The book will be distributed through R. E. Blanchet of Abbeville, and will be found in book stores, newstands and tourists courts of the area.