



(MHS COLLECTIONS)

Sock hop at Hazel Park Junior High School, 1957 (St. Paul Pioneer Press & Dispatch)

Sock Hop



ARE PEOPLE MAKING HISTORY when they dance?

Of course they are. Disagree and I'll argue that you've never really danced.

The Minnesota Historical Society archives contain scads of delightful photos of ordinary people dancing. Some of the captions are so vivid that you can almost close your eyes and conjure an accompanying image from the private scrapbook in your skull: "Couple dancing outdoors to music from phonograph," for instance; or "Elderly man dancing to phonograph music while his wife looks on."

This particular photo was my favorite, though, and for all sorts of reasons. I'd be hard pressed to think of a twentieth-century vernacular contribution that gives me more immediate pleasure than the phrase "sock hop," which surely belongs on any shortlist of the best two-word poems in the English language. I also was drawn to the age of the participants, to their awkward adolescence, and to the idea that the occasion—a relatively desultory and poorly attended sock hop, it appears, although the socks do seem carefully chosen—may well have been the first time any or all of these kids ever danced with

a member of the opposite sex. And of course the photograph—this one as well as all others—is a skipping record, one moment replaying itself over and over for all time. What literal record, I wonder, was spinning—and skipping—in the background while these youngsters began their preliminary negotiations with grace?

It was 1957, a very good year for a sock hop, a very good year to be a teenager learning to dance. The pop charts that year were filled with songs and artists that are still capable of drawing people to the dance floor at wedding receptions all over the Midwest: There was Elvis's "Jailhouse Rock" and "All Shook Up;" Chuck Berry's "Rock and Roll Music;" Fats Domino's "Blueberry Hill;" Sam Cooke's "You Send Me;" the Everly Brothers' "Wake Up Little Susie" and "Bye Bye Love;" and Jerry Lee Lewis's "Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On." Buddy Holly and the Crickets had four hits in 1957, and I like to imagine that these four kids were dancing, and are still dancing, to "Not Fade Away."

—BRAD ZELLAR

*Brad Zellar is a Minneapolis writer who also likes to take photos. He is the author of *Suburban World: The Norling Photos (2008)* and *Conductors of the Moving World (2011)*.*



Copyright of **Minnesota History** is the property of the Minnesota Historical Society and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. Users may print, download, or email articles, however, for individual use.

To request permission for educational or commercial use, [contact us](#).