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TWENTIETH CENTURY--AN OVERVIEW.

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SOCIAL DANCE IN NORTH CAROLINA  
BEFORE THE TWENTIETH CENTURY - AN OVERVIEW

by

Jane R. Jenkins

A Dissertation Submitted to  
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Doctor of Education

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Approved by

  
Dissertation Adviser

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of the Graduate School at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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It was the purpose of this study to examine the existing historical materials available in North Carolina concerning social dance, in order to determine to what extent the early settlers participated in this form of recreation.

Data were collected primarily through perusal of materials found mainly in the Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, North Carolina; the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources in the Department of Archives and History in Raleigh, North Carolina; and archives and special collections at various public libraries throughout North Carolina. A second method of collection of data was to obtain a list of all historical societies in North Carolina and to contact each one about material on the topic of social dance. A third method of collection of data involved formulating a list of the existing preparatory schools and colleges in North Carolina who received their charters before the twentieth century in order to investigate any material they might have had on the topic.

It was found that the inhabitants of North Carolina before the twentieth century vigorously participated in social dance as a recreational pursuit. Data collection revealed that although the lower socio-economic levels of inhabitants danced socially, there were very few recorded works authenticating these dances. Most sources were oral tradition and fiction. It was also revealed that social

dances of the lower income levels were reflections of their work and lifestyles. Data collection also revealed that most information found concerning social dance before the twentieth century pertained to the people of the upper socio-economic levels. Since the elite had the benefit of education at this time, there were recordings of their balls, parties, and holiday events.

Religion influenced the pursuit of social dance by early North Carolinians, and although the clergy came out strongly against social dance and dance education, North Carolinians still pursued this popular pastime.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Deep appreciation is expressed to Dr. Gail Hennis, Dissertation Adviser; and to Committee members Dr. Lois Andreasen, Dr. Elaine Burgess, Dr. Rosemary McGee, and Dr. Elizabeth Umstead. Deep appreciation and gratitude is also expressed to my parents who gave me an initial chance to pursue my education, and to my husband, Michael, for his patience, kindness, and understanding.

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CHAPTER I  
ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY

Introduction

In the seventeenth century the colonists living in America remained essentially English in their attitudes and lifestyles. However, as new generations began to grow up in America, they began to develop a more distinctive character. With the beginning of the eighteenth century they became known as provincial Americans, which became their general title after the seventeenth<sup>1</sup> hundreds.

There appear to be three main reasons for the differences between the culture of the colonies and that of their homeland. First, English society was not totally transplanted as a whole to the new world. The people living in America were not typically English in thought and deed. They were themselves different or they would not have emigrated. Second, they found new challenges by a new environment, and the values and elements of their English heritage that could not survive this new environment died before they could take root. Third,

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<sup>1</sup>Richard N. Current, T. Harry Williams, and Frank Freidel, American History: A Survey (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), p. 55.

some of the early colonists had come from countries other than England; and there was, thus, a mixture of peoples and cultures, although the English continued to dominate. The Dutch, Scotch, Irish, German, and French all had begun to immigrate to the new land seeking freedom, and as new generations began to grow there was an intermingling of all the cultures. This, added to the presence of the Indians and Blacks, made for a melting pot or hodge-podge of customs and mores quite different from the English homeland.<sup>2</sup>

With the developing character of America there began to be variations from colony to colony and from region to region. Each of these regions began to have less in common with the other. The southern colonies were formed into two groups: (a) the tobacco colonies of Maryland, known as the Chesapeake country; Virginia, known as the Tidewater; and North Carolina, which was thought to be primitive and backward; and (b) South Carolina and Georgia, considered by the early colonists for investment purposes and "get rich" schemes.<sup>3</sup>

Colonial society showed early signs of developing a system of social stratification, and this became very evident in the southern colonies. At the top of the social ladder there were the lordly

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 56.

planters and mercantile gentry of the Chesapeake region and the Tidewater. Next on the social scale came the American middle class which was composed of the farmers, craftsmen, artisans who were the main hard working, respectable folk. The third and fourth orders of society were made up of the unskilled but free laborers, and the indentured servants, slaves, and free Negroes.<sup>4</sup>

Each social group had distinguishing traits and characteristics. The wealthy merchants and great planters were characterized by pride in wealth and family. For them, wealth guaranteed status and their status was one of privilege and power.<sup>5</sup>

The great and lordly planters felt themselves to be above the common run. Many of them tried to cultivate the manners of English rural society. They spent their money freely and lavishly, drank and gambled, and were much addicted to hunting and horse racing. They were independent in spirit, proud of their positions as lords, and impatient with outside interference in the affairs of their plantations.<sup>6</sup>

The merchants were more sedentary in their lifestyle, and their demands for business caused them to travel more than the planter, making

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<sup>4</sup>Dexter Perkins and Glyndon G. Van Deusen, The United States of America: A History (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1962), p. 79.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 80.

them more cosmopolitan and worldly than the "lordlings of the South."<sup>7</sup>

The middle class consisted mainly of small farmers and planters who seldom gained more than their own subsistence. They had a narrow outlook and were quick to resent exploitation or any other kind of interference in their affairs.<sup>8</sup>

The small minority of tenants, farm hands, and dock workers worked hard and drank hard. They had very little interest in the accumulation of property or entanglements and made little constructive contribution to colonial society.<sup>9</sup>

The Negro slave was on the very bottom rung of the social ladder. Slavery stimulated the proneness to force and mastery which characterized the planter class and steadily widened the gulf between the planter and small freeholder. Slavery also kept the plantation aristocracy from attaining its cherished desire to become a replica of English rural society and also helped to influence speech, customs and legal codes of the South. It strongly affected southern views of natural rights and the equality of man.<sup>10</sup>

The conditions of colonial life made for a stratified social structure; a structure composed of restless human elements that were

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 81.

quick to defend their rights and privileges against oppression. The predominantly rural and dispersed character of colonial society made it inevitable that the family should be the most important single feature of the social organization. Individual families were usually large, having twenty to thirty people housed together under one roof.<sup>11</sup>

The family was created through marriage, which came at an early age in the colonies. The majority of young people were married before they were twenty, and marriages at sixteen or even earlier were common. Unmarried men were looked upon with disfavor, and "spinster" was a term of reproach.<sup>12</sup>

In the early colonial days women were, indeed, at a premium, for more men than women migrated to America, and the need for a helpmate in a pioneer land was great. Women played other roles besides that of wife and mother. They participated in their husband's business affairs; some managed plantations, and others were successful newspaper editors. The status of women in America, despite the hardships of childbearing and frontier life, was considerably superior to the status of women in Europe.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 85.

The colonials not only worked hard, but played hard as well. Drinking was one of their favorite pastimes, providing relaxation at all social gatherings. Training for the Militia gave opportunities for holidays, when the training was followed by much eating, drinking, and outdoor sports. The raising of a home or barn, the launching of a ship, weddings, births, or other forms of communal effort provided a chance for revelry as well as hard work.<sup>14</sup>

Hunting and fishing were universal outdoor sports in all of the colonies. In the south, horse-racing and cock-fighting also provided amusements for the wealthy who pursued them enthusiastically. Indoor amusements such as drinking, smoking and gambling were also enjoyed. Tobacco was sometimes chewed, but usually was taken as snuff or smoked in a pipe.<sup>15</sup>

Colonial amusements were generally harmless enough. Of all the forms of amusement, the most common and popular was dancing:

'Dancing,' says one traveler of the people of the Carolinas, 'they are fond of, especially when they can Fiddle, or Bag-Pipe; at this they will

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<sup>14</sup>Harold Underwood Faulkner, American Political and Social History (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1957), p. 72.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 73.



continue Hours together, nay, so attached are they to this darling, Amusement, that if they can't procure music, they will sing for themselves.' This was true of all the colonies in the eighteenth century. The more formal dances were long-drawn-out affairs, and it was not unusual to have the same partner for the entire evening. One author tells of a wedding dance at Norwich, Connecticut, at which there were recorded ninety-two jigs, fifty-two country dances, forty-five minuets, and seventeen hornpipes.<sup>16</sup>

Throughout the early development of the southern colonies dancing was one of the most popular of the social amusements, and not to know how to dance was to display ill manners and lack of good breeding. To music furnished by servants who fiddled, ladies and gentlemen would dance the nights away.<sup>17</sup>

## I. THE PROBLEM

Statement of the Problem. There have been attempts to collect and record works done on dancing in the colonies of early America, but very little has been done on seeking information on social dance in North Carolina at this period of history. The large plantations held lavish parties and balls, and most certainly the slaves and

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>17</sup>Louis B. Wright, The First Gentlemen of Virginia (California: The Huntington Library, 1940), p. 82.

freeholders danced in their spare time. It was the purpose of this study to examine all possible historical sources available in order to determine to what extent the early settlers of North Carolina participated in social dance as a form of recreation.

Importance of the Study. There has been no attempt so far by anyone known to this writer to accumulate all of the material on this particular subject into one work of research. There have been attempts to include dance into other works, but no one has, thus far, examined social dance and the role it played in the life of early North Carolinians.

## II. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

Social Dance -- the form of dancing that has as its purpose recreation and enjoyment.

Assembly -- a formal occasion so named because of the General Assembly which was the seat of government.

Balls -- formal social events in which dancing is the main pursuit by all participants.

Cotillion -- a brisk, lively dance characterized by many intricate figures and variations and the continual changing of partners.

German -- a term used to denote balls and social occasions in which the waltz was the predominant dance. The waltz was one of the most popular social dances of the nineteenth century, and because of its' germanic background the term german was given to the social occasion.

## III. SOURCES OF DATA

The materials collected for use in this work were primarily gathered from the Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, North Carolina; the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources in the Department of Archives and History in Raleigh; North Carolina and archives and special collections at various public libraries throughout North Carolina. The system of perusal of materials was organized on the basis of the following system of words: (1) dance -- any information relating to the topic of social dance in North Carolina; (2) social life of North Carolinians -- a topical heading which proved

to be another heading useful in collecting materials; (3) amusements -- a term used in early historical writing which included the topic of dance; (4) education of early North Carolinians -- another topical heading beneficial in finding materials because of the education of the upper classes; and (5) religion and religious objection to amusements -- terms which provided materials for one of the chapters in the paper.

A second method of collection of data was to obtain a list of all historical societies in the state of North Carolina. Letters (Appendix A) inquiring about knowledge on the topic of social dance were mailed to fifty-two historical societies representing the various sections of the state. A sixty-two percent response was received. Of this number, twenty-five percent had information which was readily useful; nineteen percent had information, but which was of no use; and fifty-six percent had no knowledge of any material that would be of help but requested a copy of the work when it was completed.

The third method of collection of data involved formulating a list of the existing private preparatory schools and colleges in North Carolina who received their charters before the twentieth century. Fifteen such institutions were sent letters (Appendix B) inquiring as to the availability of information which might be useful. A ninety-three percent response was received. Of this number, twenty-one percent had information which was useful; and seventy-nine percent had no knowledge of any material that would be beneficial.

Following the collection of data, the next step was organization of the material into categories. The result of this organization process

is seen in the various chapter headings.

#### IV. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study was limited by several factors: (1) the choice of material was limited to happenings before the twentieth century; (2) the materials collected were restricted to the state of North Carolina; and (3) the study was restricted by the lack of recorded historical information available to the researcher.

CHAPTER II  
SOCIAL DANCE AS A PART OF THE LIFESTYLE  
OF RURAL NORTH CAROLINIANS

Recreational pursuits of the early rural North Carolinians were not numerous. Having mainly an agricultural population, with only one or two large city centers, the inhabitants were forced to find their leisure-time pursuits in a few special holidays and the every day life around them. The rural social occasion was less formal than that of the upper class in the city and tended to reflect the lifestyle of the farmer or planter.

Neighbors were always ready to help newcomers and newly married couples build their homes and barns. When a new home or barn was built, men, women and children gathered together...at the housewarming parties, they would often dance until late in the night, with a fiddler calling the dances...the husking bees are said to have been a favorite pastime of Catawbans, serving the utilitarian purpose of preparing food for the long winter months, and at the same time, affording one of the most pleasant socials of the season...Women bided their time by conducting quiltings, cardings and sewing...young people 'carried on' by dancing, giving plays, and attending to matters of the heart.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Charles J. Preslar, Jr., editor, A History of Catawba County (Salisbury, N. C.: Rowan Publishing Company, 1954), pp. 59-60.

According to Johnson, "Dance Frolics" were held in some communities as often as twice a week, on Wednesday and Saturday nights. The young men would "gallant" the young girls to the frolic, and dancing would continue until midnight. The musician would be a fiddler<sup>2</sup> who would call out the steps.

One of the old time fiddlers who attended such dances was George Tin Lowder of Cabarrus County. In his prime, his fame was known across both the Carolinas. When there was little work to do in the winter, he was sometimes gone for weeks calling square dances. He would travel by horse and buggy and stay the night where the dance was held. He would earn one dollar to one and a half dollars a night. He stated that at corn shuckings they would shuck until ten or eleven at night<sup>3</sup> and then dance the rest of the night.

Another popular social event of the rural Carolinians was the box supper:

The boxes were a delight to behold. Every shape, size and color. They were truly works of art. Inside were cookies and cakes in every shape and with many designs on them. There were country cured ham sandwiches, pickles, custards,

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<sup>2</sup>Guion Griffis Johnson, Ante-Bellum North Carolina (Chapel Hill: The UNC Press, 1937), p. 93.

<sup>3</sup>News item in The Charlotte Observer, January 10, 1960.

deviled eggs, and Southern fried chicken. The boxes were sold and the proceeds went to a worthy cause. So everyone tried to find a rival to bid for the box...after the box suppers, the house usually needed a good cleaning. This called for a square dance for at least one floor would be truly cleaned. Before the guests would arrive, the furniture was taken from the living-room and corn meal was thrown upon the floor. The corn meal had a tendency to clean the floor because it was usually brown by the time the square dance was over. The main purpose of the corn meal was to add to the danger of the dance. The floors would become slick as glass. The guests, after a few dances, found it hard to contril their balance. But the fun involved was worth the danger.<sup>4</sup>

Neighbors from miles around would travel by horseback or wagon to attend these occasions.

The expert lady horseback riders with their side saddles and long riding skirts! It was a rare thing in the old days to meet a lady who was not a good rider, and willing to run a race when she came to a nice stretch of road... often they would go to a singing or dancing party riding this way. Dancing until the wee small hours they would go home, the young men staying for breakfast.<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps one of the most descriptive accounts of the early settlers' attitudes toward attending a dance is given in the Weidner

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<sup>4</sup>News item in Hickory Daily Record, 1950.

<sup>5</sup>Mrs. Sam Presson, The Charlotte Observer, July 22, 1933.



family narrative from Catawba County entitled "Your Great Grandmother Goes To A Dance":

John Dellinger's oldest son Henry, was given a good farm by his grandfather, Heinrich Weidner. He married Catherine Setzer, a granddaughter of Captain Matthias Barringer, who was living in the old home, now called the Barringer Muster Ground. It was here the men met to drill on muster days. On these occasions the women came too, and every night there would be a dance in the big room upstairs. Henry Dellinger's wife, Catherine, had been going to these dances ever since she was a little girl. She loved to dance and besides, she enjoyed the visit to her uncle. After she married and moved to their farm beyond Henry River from the muster ground, she did not quit going to dances. It is told that the old grandmothers danced along with their granddaughters. On one occasion Catherine had made all of her preparations as usual when it began to rain. The river became so high that a horse could not wade it. But did she allow a small thing like that to keep her away? She did not! With her new frocks tied in a bundle and fastened on her head and the baby, too young to leave at home, in one arm, she rode to Sand Ford and made her horse swim the swollen stream. Then she rode on to the muster ground as if it were an ordinary occurrence. Tradition fails to record what her husband said<sup>6</sup> about this escapade. Perhaps he was afraid to say it.

An invitation to a dance in the rural areas was an important means of communication. Following is a description of how an invitation might have been issued:

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<sup>6</sup>R. Vance Whitener, Tales of Catawba, 1922.

Often, within a radius of fifteen or twenty miles, there would be only three or four congenial white families. There were no telephones, and the quickest means of communication was by fast horse. When an invitation to a dance...was issued, it was carried by a negro on horseback. The invitation was prepared with great care. It was written on a piece of foolscap and this sheet was tacked, by means of a bow of colored ribbon, to a piece of cardboard. The cardboard was put in a satchel and the satchel was hung over the shoulder of the rider. The same invitation was carried to first one neighbor and then another.

The poor classes and country people did not dance, "la minuet de la cour," or "la minuet ordinaire with pas grave," dances so popular with the gentry. Their dances were jigs and reels, gay and boisterous,<sup>8</sup> the square dances which still exist in rural communities.

These dances were flavored with the immigrations to the colonies from the Old World. In the Southern states there were the old country figure dances and rustic dances done by the mountaineers. These show a direct descent from the Old English yeomanry. The Scotch, the Irish, the Dutch, the German, and Spanish elements all helped to add to the variety of social dances done by the early settlers.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Ella Seawell, "Life on a Southern Plantation Before The Civil War," Voices of Peace, Sigma Phi Kappa Number, Raleigh Institute, 1921.

<sup>8</sup>Foster Rhea Dulles, America Learns to Play (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., 1940), p. 39.

<sup>9</sup>Mari Reuf Hofer, Polite and Social Dances (Chicago: Clayton F. Summy Co., 1917), p. 13.

CHAPTER III  
SOCIAL DANCE AS A PART OF THE LIFESTYLE  
OF ELITE URBAN NORTH CAROLINIANS

Dancing was one of the favorite pastimes of those North Carolinians who lived in villages and towns. Population in these cities was small, and every occasion for celebration was taken advantage of. The gentry of the town were most conscious of the trends and manners of the times, and they spared no expense to be in the mainstream of social consciousness.

In such a period—the first and second decades of the Nineteenth century, and in such a society, it might be expected that public dancing at balls and parties would form the chief source of amusement among society people. And so it was. Every town and village had its ball-room, and its musician, almost always a negro fiddler, and the occasions of the dance were very frequent, sometimes continuing through three consecutive nights, with feasting and drinking on the part of the men.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps one of the most popular types of public dances was known as the "Subscription Ball". These dances were held frequently, financed by subscription of about five dollars per man and any "respectable" man was allowed to subscribe. There were usually from three to ten managers

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<sup>1</sup>Lizzie Wilson Montgomery, Sketches of Old Warrenton North Carolina (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton, 1924), p. 44.

for each ball, who were appointed to introduce strangers and assign  
<sup>2</sup>  
 partners.

AT THE REQUEST OF A NUMBER of  
 Gentlemen,  
 P. CASSO  
 Will Furnish  
 A TICKET BALL ON THURSDAY EVENING  
 Next. Tickets To Be Had of P. Casso and  
 MR. JOSEPH PEACE<sup>3</sup>

Although this type of ball was public, and on the surface it appeared all classes associated with one another, there were class distinctions even at the largest affairs. Very rarely would a "gentleman's daughter dance with a mechanic's son. After the regular sets on the program, dancing was usually confined to those who visited in the same circles."<sup>4</sup> Illustrative of the attitudes displayed at these affairs is a letter to Willie Clarke from his mother, Mary Bayard Clarke concerning her daughter Mary, who was a student at Saint Mary's in Raleigh after the Civil War:

Dear Willie,  
 We were all disappointed at not seeing you yesterday but we got a letter from Father stating Frank was to go to New Berne today so concluded that was the reason you did

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<sup>2</sup>James S. Brawley, The Rowan Story 1753-1953 (Salisbury: Rowan Printing Company, 1953), p. 140.

<sup>3</sup>Advertisement in the Raleigh Register, December 10, 1799.

<sup>4</sup>Johnson, op. cit., p. 157.

not come. Miss Carncross---after writing me that she would sell tickets only through her scholars and letting Sister (Mary) get her dress and every thing ready---not only advertised her tickets for sale at the book store but through the newspaper invented invited all the audience to join in the dance when the exhibition was over. Of course Sister could not dance at such a place where any Yankee soldier had a right to take his lady and dance opposite her, and we were all so mad that not one of us would go but Tom. We have promised Sister a dance of her own soon and you must come for that. She cried and was very much disappointed but did not say once 'please let me go'. Mrs. Brown gave her a whole box of french bon-bons and she is going to wait for her party til Cousin Kate comes...<sup>5</sup>

The large balls were usually held in the largest structure in the town, either the one hotel or the Masonic Lodge. In Asheville, the main center of entertainment for the upper classes was the Battery Park Hotel, which was built in 1886.

If you want to have a good time and see the people who promenade in public places, go to a big dance. You will catch the spirit of the music and also perchance the sparkling eye of some person amidst the music and you will feel as if 'sassiety' were a pleasant arrangement. But if you want to have a real, roaring good time, with the whole world and most of the dancing-floor before you, go to a quiet, elegant german where there is plenty of walking room, talking room and dancing room and you will feel as though the world was a swim and you were in it.

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<sup>5</sup>Letter written about 1867 or 1868, St. Mary's College, Raleigh, N. C.

Such a dance was the first german given at Battery Park last Tuesday night. The program rendered during the evening by the Asheville Orchestra was as follows:

March-----Chariot Race, Ben Hur  
 Waltz-----Kaufman's Casino Tanze  
 Two Step-----Rastus  
 Waltz-----Life in Paris  
 Two Step-----El Capitan, Sousa  
 Waltz-----Visions of a Beautiful Woman  
 Two Step-----Oriental Echoes  
 Waltz-----Espanita, Rosey  
 Two Step-----Honeymoon, Rosey  
 Waltz-----Santiago  
 Two Step-----Pingree, Boston  
 Home, Sweet Home <sup>6</sup> (Figure 1)

Raleigh, as the state capital, boasted of the Yarborough House Hotel and the Capital Club, both scenes of much opulence.

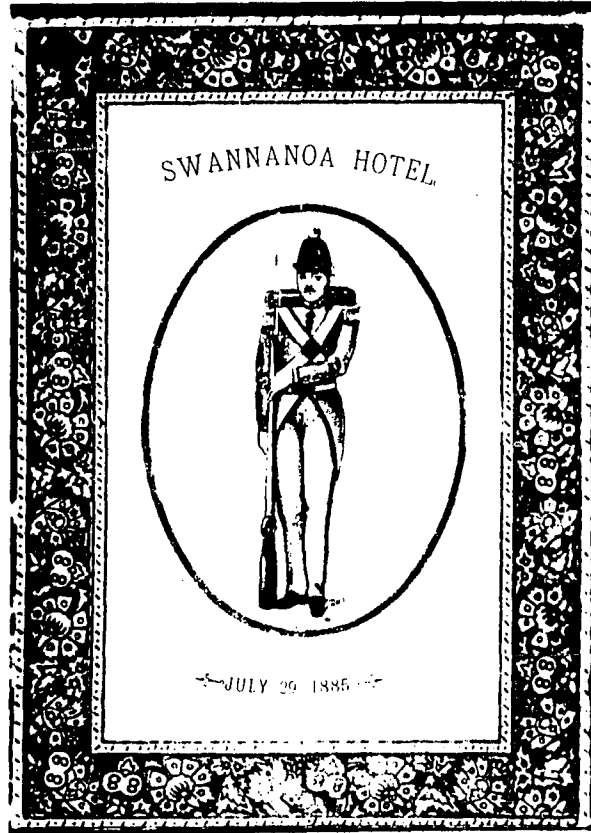
Undoubtedly the outstanding social affair of the 1890-1891 season was the opening of the new Capital Club quarters, celebrated with a ball. With a membership of about one hundred, this club seems to have been the equivalent of a social register for the men of Raleigh and something like the exclusive New York City clubs...These quarters were beautifully decorated with 'costliest frescoing and painting,' carpeted with Brussels carpets and elegantly equipped. There was a parlor for receiving ladies, reading rooms for members, a billiard parlor, a smoking room, cafe, lavatory and bath on the lower floor. Upstairs was the ballroom. The whole was furnished with

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<sup>6</sup>News item in The Asheville News and Hotel Reporter, November 14, 1896.

FIGURE I

DANCE CARD FROM THE SWANNANOA HOTEL IN 1885.



ORDER OF DANCES.

GRAND MARCH.

WALTZ.

LANCERS.

WALTZ.

QUADRILLE.

WALTZ.

POLKA.

LANCERS.

WALTZ.

POLKA.

QUADRILLE.

WALTZ.



steam heat, electric bells, water works, gas jets and an elevator. The opening ball was held December 11, and was indeed a 'brilliant scene' with crimson electric lights glowing on the decorative evergreens.<sup>7</sup>

The elegant balls of the elite usually started around nine o'clock with about eight numbers or sets being played. Then by eleven o'clock there was a break for supper. At a Hunt Ball at the Battery Park Hotel in Asheville, the following supper was served:

Creamed Oysters  
Chicken Croquettes a la Fleck  
Champagne Punch      Chicken Salad  
Neapolitan Ice Cream  
Coffee

8

Lemonade punch was served in the ball room during the evening.

Usually after the supper four more numbers were played. The musical instruments used for these affairs were composed of various instruments and piano.

The bewitching strains of the Battery Park Orchestra, composed of Oscar Negele, violinist, Charles Lohman, Flutist, and Prof. Ferdinana Lust, pianist, came softly stealing through the scented air, enticing those who would to glide out upon the polished floor

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<sup>7</sup>Sarah McCulloh Lemmon, "Entertainment in Raleigh in 1890", The North Carolina Historical Review, Volume XL, No. 3, July, 1963. p. 330-331.

<sup>8</sup>News item in The Asheville News and Hotel Reporter, February 23, 1895.

of the<sup>9</sup> ball room and join in the mazy whirl of the dance.

The custom of giving favors to those who attended was a prominent part of the elegant ball. A german given at the Kenilworth Inn in Asheville in 1895 displayed the following favors:

There were four sets of them. The first being fans, for the ladies, decorated with tasty bouquets of hot-house flowers. The second favor was for both ladies and gentlemen, the ladies receiving cute little hats in which they looked bewitchingly pretty, and gentlemen being decorated with a set of silvery bells strung of many colored ribbons. A bridal veil for the ladies was the third favor, and it was pretty to see the coyness and bashfulness exhibited by some of the young maidens in assuming them. The bridal figure, with which this favor was given, was invented by Mr. DeWolf of New Orleans and introduced in Asheville for the first time at the instance of Mrs. Gazzam. The couples lined up, each lady assuming the bridal veil, and while the orchestra played Mendelssohn's wedding march each gentleman led his partner around the hall. The fourth favor was an exchange favor, the ladies and gentlemen exchanging silver hat pins, cuff buttons and key rings as souvenirs of the occasion.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>News item in The Asheville News and Hotel Reporter, August 17, 1895.

Because of the elegance of these occasions, the dress for the evening was very formal. The ball gowns of the ladies were of ivory satin with rose point lace, pearls, diamonds worn with black satin, velvet brocades, embroideries, and chinese silks. (Figure 2) The gentlemen were their most formal in knee pants and "lace decorated the tips of their claw-hammer coats."<sup>11</sup>

There were no country clubs in Charlotte in the Gay Nineties. Dances and other social events were held in the ballroom of the Central Hotel, or other public places. It was the period of gallant gentlemen and wasp-waisted women. One form of gallantry required a man should protect the wearing apparel of his dancing partner by covering his right hand with a silk handkerchief. For this custom came the favorite bon mot concerning the young lady who, wishing to protect an expensive gown, requested her escort, 'Please use your handkerchief'. Whereupon the novice in social amenities took out his handkerchief, blew his nose in it, and put it away again.

### Dance Clubs

The formation of dance clubs in many of the larger towns illustrated the elite's fondness for dancing as a recreational pursuit. One of the earliest of these clubs was the L'Arioso German Club, which

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<sup>11</sup>Lemmons, op. cit., p. 329.

<sup>12</sup>LeGette Blythe and Charles Raven Brockmann, Hornet's Nest (Charlotte: McNally, 1961), p. 370.

FIGURE II

BALL GOWN WORN BY EARLY NORTH CAROLINIAN  
WOMAN AROUND 1775.



was formed in Wilmington on October 15, 1871.

What those men of Wilmington in the Seventies promoted were social evenings characterized by brisk and lively gayety, cadenced to melody. There was little enough of it then. The nights were haunted by fears generated in the evils of Reconstruction. Federal troops still moved from place to place in the South. The Carpet Baggers were about. In more than a few homes in Wilmington tragic recollections of a recent past prohibited gayety of any kind.<sup>13</sup>

In 1880 The Carolina Cotillion Club was founded in Rocky Mount. The sole purpose of the club was to sponsor local dances of high quality to which Rocky Mount members could invite their out-of-town friends and business associates. Local residents could not attend unless they be-<sup>14</sup> came members, and membership was closely guarded by invitation only.

The big annual dance of the Carolina Cotillion Club, the June German, reflects the economic life of Rocky Mount by being held in a tobacco warehouse which was the only local facility large enough to hold the thousands who came. Mr. T. E. Ricks hypothesizes that the reason the big dance was held in June instead of the Autumn was because the warehouse would not have been available during the tobacco marketing<sup>15</sup> season. The elaborate decorations turned the warehouse into a

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<sup>13</sup>C. Van Leuven, Robert Strange, and Boyden Sparkes, L'Arioso German Club (Wilmington, n.p., 1941), p. 9.

<sup>14</sup>T. E. Ricks, "Carolina Cotillion Club", By Faith Are We Joined: a compilation of Nash County Historical Notes, 1976. p: 117.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

beautiful ballroom, and for years part of the expense of the affair was recouped by subrenting the warehouse to the blacks who held their own german the following Monday night.<sup>16</sup>

Another dance club, the Halcyon Club, was organized in Washington, North Carolina in 1885. It was a very exclusive club; one "black ball" cast against an individual kept him from becoming a member. There were usually six dances a year, being strictly formal card dances. The lady's escort filled out her card, and intricate German figures were featured. During a grand march favors were given. Children were included by having a dance of their own earlier in the evening. Their<sup>17</sup> formal attire was always as well planned as that of the adults.

A man and his lady would arrive at the dance hall on foot, but each had a slipper bag in which their dancing shoes were carried. No one would dance in shoes in which they walked on the street. No man ever appeared on the street in evening clothes, even the hottest night in summer, without a topcoat. It was considered vulgar.

Before the couple went to their respective dressing rooms upon arrival at the dance they stopped and spoke to all the chaperones. The chaperones were invited by the club and consisted of the most dignified, cultured and aristocratic ladies of the town.

The German was a lovely dance and everybody had to keep their minds on dancing. The music was furnished by an Italian Band secured from Norfolk or Richmond consist-

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 118.

<sup>17</sup>Pattie Baugham McMullan, "Reminiscences", Washington and the Pamlico, Ursula Fogleman Loy and Paulene Marion Worthy, editors. Washington-Beaufort County Bicentennial Commission, 1976, p. 115.

ing of violin, flute and harp. First there was the Grand March with your partner. The leader must always have a new figure. Then came the waltz. In the first half of the evening the men asked the ladies to dance. After intermission the ladies asked the men who had 'led them out' to dance. It was called 'returning the lead'. For a girl not to remember to return a man's lead was an insult. When the German was over, no couple left without saying goodnight to the chaperones. After the dance there were late suppers all over town, often lasting until 4:00 a.m. Some of these parties were quite formal and others were quite gay. There never was such food.<sup>18</sup>

#### Dances at Homes and at Teas and Suppers

Not all dancing was done in the large public ball rooms. Homes were often the center of balls and parties. The early planters lived a social life even though a great deal of their time was spent in work. "The planter whose home was near a village was often host at tea, a dinner party, a dance, or a week-end excursion."<sup>19</sup>

Many graceful homes were scenes of balls on the early plantations in North Carolina. One such home in Lincoln County was known as Ingleside. It was built in 1817 by Major Daniel Forney and was designed by Benjamin Latroube, who also designed the capital building in Washington, D. C.

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<sup>18</sup>Rena Harding Davenport, "Early Customs of Washington", Washington and the Pamlico, Ursula Fogleman Loy and Paulene Marion Worthy, editors, Washington-Beaufort County Bicentennial Commission, 1976. p. 78.

<sup>19</sup>Johnson, op. cit., p. 84.



Hallowed by the passing years and sheltered by magnificent trees, which were doubtless there when the house was built, Ingleside invites hospitality on sight. On entering the spacious hall one is almost breathless with admiration. The gorgeous old stairway, the huge, deep windows, the massive doors with double crosses and exquisite panelling, the handsome mantles and large open fireplaces in every room stamp it as the perfect house, nobly planned. Perhaps the chief glory of the place is a replica of the East Room in the White House. The delicately ornamented ceiling and elaborate woodwork were imported from France, the huge granite trimmings were quarried on the place....Memory lingers and one can visualize the resplendent past of unlimited hospitality, illustrious people who gathered there, wandering through the large rooms. What a beautiful sight it must have made with ladies and their escorts winding their way up the handsome stairway to the large ball room on the second floor....<sup>20</sup>

Perhaps one of the best descriptions of social life on the early plantation is found in a narrative by Dr. John Hamden Hill telling of the happenings on the Cape Fear River near Wilmington. Dr. Hill relates these events to his daughters and tells them the story of a most unusual young man, Tom Martin:

Crossing Clayton Creek, we come to the next place, known in olden times as Clayton Hall, the residence of a Scotch gentleman, who died without leaving any descendants, though I believe the Restons, of Wilmington, were his nearest of kin. The property, which was regarded as the finest estate in New Hanover County, was purchased by Colonel Samuel Ashe.

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<sup>20</sup>News item in The Lincoln Times, about 1920.

This gentleman, when I knew him, was about the last surviving relic of the olden times on the Northeast. He had been a soldier in the War of Revolution....It was at the Old Clayton Hall mansion where he located the scene of his Tom Martin story. It seems that the old place was at that time untenanted, and the young gentry folks of the neighborhood were in the habit, occasionally, of holding their dancing assemblies there. The old Colonel related that on a day appointed for one of their assemblies, there arrived at his father's, 'The Neck', two strangers, one of them an elderly man, the other much younger. The older man turned out to be a Methodist preacher, the young man anything else, as he soon proved, and it seemed a strange coincidence that should have brought two such dissimilar characters to be fellow travelers. The Colonel goes on to relate that towards evening he and his cousin, Samuel Mayo Ashe, retired to their room, to dress for the evening party. They had not long been thus engaged, when the Colonel discovered that his hair was sadly in want of a tonsor, and remarked to his Cousin Sam that he wished very much he could have the services of a barber, when just at that moment the young stranger stepped into the room, and, hearing the Colonel's wish, offered his services, protesting that he could dress his hair as well as any barber. The Colonel said he had a very fine suit of hair, which was at that time worn quite full, and was quite reluctant to trust its dressing to an unskilled hand. The young fellow, however persisted so strenuously in his endeavor to make himself useful, that the Colonel no longer objected, and the volunteer barber soon exhibited by his dexterous handling of the scissors and comb that he had not overrated his skill, and in a very short time had performed the task as well as any professional barber...Having finished their toilet, they felt some reluctance that they were not at liberty to invite the young man to the party, but as he was an entire stranger, they concluded not to do so, and each one departed on his way to meet at the dance...on approaching the Clayton Mansion their ears were regaled by some very delightful strains of music, which sounded like the human voice accompanied by some instrument. On reaching the house, they beheld the stranger, who a little

while before had been left at the Neck, promenading up and down the ball room, performing a plaintive air on the violin, accompanying it with his voice, and as the different couples arrived they were highly entertained and wondered who the stranger could be. The Colonel said he had hardly gotten into the room, when his cousin whispered to him, 'Cousin, he is surely a music master.' By this time the party had all assembled and ready to begin the dance. At that time their assemblies were always opened with the old fashioned contra-dance, (which has now, I believe, become obsolete), and each gentleman was expected to take for his partner for the first set the lady whom he had brought with him, and soon the couples were all arranged, occupying two lines, the whole length of the room. The music struck up, (a negro fiddler from one of the neighboring plantations), the first couple led off and, as the figure was not well understood, there was much awkwardness and confusion, when the stranger came forward and said if any young lady would condescend to accept him as a partner, he would take the fiddle and play, at the same time going through with the figure, and then call out and direct the dance, so that there should be no more confusion. The party was glad to accept his services, and one of the ladies consented to dance with him, he immediately struck up a lively air and led off with his partner, going through the volutions of the dance, never missing a step or a note. He then called out the next couple, calling the figure, and so on until the set was completed, much to the gratification of the whole party. About this time, said the Colonel, Mayo Ashe stepped up and remarked: 'Cousin, he is most assuredly a dancing master.' With such an acquisition as this young stranger proved, to direct the dance and furnish music so superior, the dance went on merrily. When the ladies retired, just before supper was announced, the young men, as was the custom, continued the frolic by dancing Scotch jigs and doing various feats of agility, and the stranger entered into the merriment and proved himself equal to any of them, and on being bantered by someone, he proposed, for a small wager, that he would do

a trick that none of them could perform. With that, taking an ordinary sized dining table, which stood on one side, and moving it to the middle of the room, he took the violin, and squatting down, placed a shilling piece under each ham, and, commencing a lively air, he sprang nimbly across the table, first one side and then the other, keeping time with the music and never missing a note, and holding on to the shilling piece where he had placed them.<sup>21</sup>

Small suppers, teas, and visiting parties also helped the gentry to relieve the boredom of their existence. In a letter to her mother Isabella, Anne S. Bryan relates her social activities:

...Mollie had a little dance at her house a few nights since which we all enjoyed very much. I was at a party at Judge Manley ['s] [house] not long since [.] We danced by the piano most of the time. Mr. Waddler play on the violin night before last ; the Hop at Lathrop Hall came off-- I enjoyed it very much the room is very large and quite handsome. Last night I was at a party at Mrs. Guions-- the supper table was very handsome . After supper the table was taken away and we had a dance down in the basement...<sup>22</sup>

#### Social Dance and Courtship

Balls and dances gave courting couples ample opportunities to become better acquainted. In ante-bellum North Carolina the young man

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<sup>21</sup>Dr. John Hamden Hill, Reminiscences of Some Old Cape Fear Families. Bryan Collection, Southern Historical Collection, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

<sup>22</sup>John Heritage Bryan Collection, North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, Department of Archives and History, Raleigh, N. C.

of the upper class would usually meet a young lady at the ball, where she would be accompanied by her parents. However, the young people of the working classes would usually "gallant the girls to the frolic."<sup>23</sup>

Charles Smallwood was a physician and planter in Bertie County. In his diary he gives an account of dancing and courting:

Mr. Wm. Pugh of Ga. with two of his daughters Miss Mary Eliza and Miss Marcia are on a visit to Dr. & Mrs. Milliam--There was a party given this morning 9th June at the academy & of course all the lovers of music and the dance attended. Dr. Clarke and Mr. T. Wilbur both being desperately in love with Miss Ruffin are trying to outdo each other in attention to her. 10th A storming party at Dr. Milliams, fully attended. H. Gilliam and Miss West are also in the country with the party. Was kept up until late at night, every one enjoyed themselves--the misses Norfleet also were present--Clark danced out his best pair of boots.<sup>24</sup> Smallwood did not dance...he only sat about.

Miss Elizabeth Cain was a young coquette of the elite class who was the recipient of letters from three of her suitors. Their fondness for dancing is exemplified by the following letters:

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<sup>23</sup>Johnson, op. cit., p. 195.

<sup>24</sup>Diary of Charles Smallwood, 1843-1865, Southern Historical Collection, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Davidson College

Sept 8th, 69

Dear Miss Bessie,

I would have liked so much to have been at the dance at Mr. Sennauts, hope you had a gay time, my fondness for dancing is as great as ever, and it has been such a long long time since I had the pleasure of dancing with you.

I would have made any sacrifice to have accomplished that end. 25

George Walton

Salisbury, N.C.

Aug. 15th 1872

Dear Bessie,

I left you Monday with more regret than I ever parted from anyone in my life; and my traveling companions accused me of being very dull on the trip...We met a great many friends at Morgantown Depot and they tried very hard to get me to stay over to a dance; but I wished to get home as soon as possible as I had to leave you... 26

Affectionately Charlie O. (Orman)

1872

Miss Bessie

We have at last succeeded in establishing the fact that the long expected dance will come off at 'The Eagle' this evening, and in accordance with our engagement made some time ago, I will call for you about eight o'clock.

I hope you feel in a good humor for dancing and that your eyes are not deceiving you. As a general thing young ladies eyes are made to hurt other people, not themselves.

Your friend, 27

James T. Orr

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<sup>25</sup>Papers of John Lancaster Bailey, Southern Historical Collection, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

One of the highlights of the courting event was Leap Year. The Leap Year Cotillion at the Kenilworth Club in Asheville was acclaimed as a social success, even though no mention was made of the success the young women made in their romantic endeavors.

Oh! What a blessing Leap Year is to the girls and to the boys too, for that matter. Had it not been for Leap Year the Leap Year Cotillion Club would not have held forth at the Kenilworth Inn on Thursday evening and one of the prettiest little dances in Asheville's social calendar would never have occurred. It was the girls' prerogative to act in the place of the men and they took advantage of their opportunity to the fullest extent. The dance program for the early part of the evening was artistically varied and everyone took advantage of the opportunity to take a few turns upon the polished floor of the ball room. Among the odd and tastful figures danced, none was more noticeable than the 'bridal figure' danced while the band played the wedding march from 'Lohengrin'. Joe Felix was captured as the bride, and one of the girls remarked that he looked 'real sweet' in his wreath and veil.<sup>28</sup>

#### Social Dance and Weddings

The wedding ceremony for early North Carolinians was relatively simple and soon over. The festivities accompanying the ceremony were often more impressive than the marriage itself. The length of the

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<sup>28</sup>News item in The Asheville News and Hotel Reporter, January 11, 1896.

feasting and dancing depended upon the economic status of the bride's  
<sup>29</sup>  
 family.

In 1849 Dr. Charles Smallwood described a wedding he attended:

Fashion and foolery reigned supreme with the ladies &  
 liquor with the gents. After the ladies and gents had  
 \_\_\_\_\_ themselves in the dance, they returned home, to  
 rise in the morning with headaches & c-----.<sup>30</sup>

In a letter to her sister on December 9th, 1790 (or 1791)  
 Amaryllis Sitgreaves of New Bern describes in part the wedding of  
 Daniel Cathy to Sarah Haslen. The wedding took place in the home of  
 the bride's father:

The vessel stood at the end of the house, illuminated  
 with a great many candles, and looked very handsome.  
 When the two tea-tables were drawn from the side of  
 the room the guns fired; when the bride was led down  
 stairs to be married the guns began to fire again and  
 continued until they were married. Then we had tea,  
 then danced until supper, then marched up stairs two  
 by two, the drummer and fifer playing at the door; a  
 very elegant set supper...As the Bride did not choose  
 to walk a Minuet, Sister and Mrs. Haslen did. Mrs.  
 Carthy and Dr. Cutting danced together, Mr. Carthy,  
 the Groom, and Miss Backelor danced together...  
 Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday they danced at the  
 Old Lady's, Friday at Mr. Tom Haslen's.<sup>31</sup> (Figure 3)

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<sup>29</sup>Johnson, op. cit., p. 206.

<sup>30</sup>Smallwood, op. cit.

<sup>31</sup>A Tryon Palace Trifle or Eighteenth Century Cookery, & c.  
 (Tryon Palace, New Bern, 1960), p. 74.



FIGURE III

A WEDDING DANCE



A most unusual description of the North Carolinians dancing at weddings is given by John Bernard when describing his travels through North Carolina.

I was present at a wedding-party in North Carolina, which wound up with violent exercise under the title of a ball. The company, on their arrival, had been shown promiscuously into two rooms, well-lighted and divided by a thin partition, both being laid out with tea, coffee, sling, and toddy. The sexes, however, soon separated, and for the space of an hour, the merriment seemed equal on each side of the wainscot. At length the host gave the signal for clearing decks and preparing for action; the tables and partitionboards (sliding in a groove) were instantly removed by the blacks, to form the requisite arena, and the seats were ranged round the walls. The musicians (half a dozen operators on catgut, of the same color...) were then introduced at one end, and the diversion commenced by a gentleman leading a lady to the middle of the room, and, after a formal salutation, bursting into an eccentric movement, which to me had a new and peculiar significance. No regular steps, but a latitude of shuffle was adopted, in a system of alternate pursuit and retreat, now the lady, now her partner gaining the advantage, testing at every turn the respective strength of their sinews. One moment the lady, pressed closely to a corner, appeared on the verge of a surrender, then suddenly recovered spirit, dashing the besieger back and chasing him into the like peril...So these tactics were continued through the evening till every Damon and Delia had partaken of them, and some had displayed their abilities three or four times, when the lines were formed for a country-dance...<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>John Bernard, Retrospections of America 1797-1811 (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1887), pp. 207, 208, 209.

The popularity of dance as a social event could be noted throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Elite North Carolinians were no different from other settlers in America during this period. Wherever there was company there was dancing, and particular attention should be given to the spontaneous nature of many dances which were organized in a short period whenever a fiddle could be found or other music provided.

Social Dance at Public Celebrations  
And on Holidays

National holidays were always welcomed as a gala event by early North Carolinians. The Fourth of July was a civic occasion in the larger towns and county seats, with an occasional celebration at a country church, cross roads store, or tavern in the rural areas. The chief participants of the ceremony would be the "men of respectability", the gentlemen, lawyers, doctors, and military; while the majority of the people were merely "lookers-on".<sup>33</sup>

When the public exercises were concluded, the select of the town would have an "elegant and sumptuous dinner" at a tavern, hotel, or private home. The ladies would retire after dinner and the gentle-

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<sup>33</sup>Fletcher M. Green, "Listen to the Eagle Scream: One Hundred Years of the Fourth of July in North Carolina", The North Carolina Historical Review, 31, No. 3 (July, 1954), 307.

men would drink toasts, one for every state, in the finest wines and imported liquor. In the afternoon the ladies would entertain at tea parties at which there would also be vocal and instrumental music and dancing. The day would end with a subscription ball given to the ladies by the gentlemen.<sup>34</sup>

Christmas was perhaps the most popular time of the year for all classes of people. Everyone celebrated with gay abandonment.

Christmas, what a time of good cheer! The most delightful season of the whole year. The turpentine hands came home then, with plenty of money in their pockets made from extra work. Such getting married, midnight suppers and dances, visiting other plantations and careless happy living, with not a 'thought for the future.'<sup>35</sup>

The types of dances done by the people of the upper classes is described very clearly by Captain Samuel A. Ashe as he tells about Christmas in his home on the Cape Fear River:

No matter how the evening had been spent it was apt to end in dancing. I do not recall having seen any waltzing, although we had the polka and schottish. Most of the dances were square, country or contra dances. Chairs were set back, the floor cleared, and father, mother,

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 308.

<sup>35</sup>Mary Norcott Bryan, "Letter Four", A Grandmother's Recollection of Dixie, 1841-1925, Southern Historical Collection, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

young people, and children danced together. Somebody at the piano or some 'Old Black Joe' with his Banjo furnished the music and called out the figures.<sup>36</sup>

Dancing a hoe-down was one of the mountain people's favorite ways of celebrating the yule-tide. From Clark Medford comes the account of a Christmas season dance near Waynesville, North Carolina:

The Hoe-Down at Medlin's

They were all gathered around the big blazing wood fire in the dining room at Leroy Medlin's house for a Christmas season dance. In the chimney-jam the oak and hickory sticks had been piled high against the chill of night. It was the customary crowd--young men and girls from that and surrounding communities. Sometimes the host and hostess on such occasions would saunter out on the floor when the dance-caller announced, 'Choose your partners!' and go through a few steps. This Mr. and Mrs. Medlin did on this occasion, as the crowd of youngsters all clapped. It was a gesture of welcome and goodwill. Now they are getting ready for the dance to begin. Humphrey Bright and his banjo-pickin' partner, Nelse McElmore, had already tuned up. Bright nodded to McElmore, drew his bow over the strings--and the dance was on.

'All around the Sourwood Mountain--

Hey-day diddle de dum--

It was an old favorite in these mountains, and with the familiar strains came the thump-etty thump of a score of feet keeping time.

'All around sourwood holler--

Hey-day diddle de dum,

She won't come and I won't call'er--

Hey-day diddle de dum--

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<sup>36</sup> Captain Samuel A. Ashe, Old Christmases I Remember 1845-65, North Carolina Collection, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Whirling, whirling 'round and around, the clatter and stomp-stomp of brogan-clad feet pulsating with the music. The Sparkons gal's home-made linsey skirt ballooned inches above what was considered 'decent' length, showing trim, wool-stocked calves. Rufus Talley, one of the spectators standing over by the wall, let out a loud laugh and shouted, 'Boys, look at Hett dance!' The girl only glanced toward Talley and smiled. After a while the music ceased, for a 'breathing spell.' 'I've jist got to have a breath of fresh air an' a drink of water,' said fiddler Bright, getting up. 'Raise a winder over there, somebody,' ordered the host from where he and Bill Gray were sitting near the fire.<sup>37</sup>

Of course the elite had their festivities at Christmas which included the dance. On December 30, 1896, the L'Arioso German Club of Wilmington gave its Christmas German which was described as a most magnificent and fashionable affair. There was a supper at midnight, a "most sumptuous repast," and after supper each lady was given a red silk emery, shaped like a strawberry, with a silver top and red tassel.<sup>38</sup>

Along with the celebration of the Christmas holiday came the welcoming in of the New Year. The excitement and merriment of the ball in Asheville brought the following description from The Asheville Reporter:

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<sup>37</sup>W. Clark Medford, "The Hoe-Down at Medlin's", Mountain People, Mountain Times (Waynesville, N.C.: n.p., 1963), pp. 68-69.

<sup>38</sup>C. Van Leuven, op. cit., p. 17.

### New Year's Eve Ball

Asheville believes in moving. She begins early and she stays up late. Thursday night she danced the Old Year out and the New Year in, and although she doesn't believe in spending all her time in dancing; yet when she gives a ball she makes it an affair to be remembered. Such was the New Year's Eve Ball, given by the Asheville German Club. Many handsome costumes are left undescribed, because our Reporter was so eager to dance he forgot to write, save at rare intervals.<sup>39</sup>

Valentine's day was a holiday which caused a great deal of excitement in Raleigh in 1890. The BAL POUFRE was a costume ball given by the young ladies of Raleigh in the Yarboro Hotel. The costumes were of the Revolutionary era, and the decorations and supper was most effective and superb. The dancing programme included waltzing, the Polka, Lancers, Mazurka, and the Quadrille.<sup>40</sup>

There were other causes for celebration which included dances that were not national in their quality. One of the favorite sporting events pursued by the early North Carolinians was horse racing. Race courses were predominantly in the eastern regions of the state, in towns such as Hillsborough, Warrenton and New Bern. There were fall and spring seasons which brought visitors and money, and at the end of each day there was a ball.

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<sup>39</sup>News item in The Asheville News and Hotel Reporter, January 2, 1897.

<sup>40</sup>The Raleigh News and Observer, Saturday, February 15, 1890.



WARRENTON  
 SPRING RACES  
 Will commence on the second thursday  
 in may next  
 On the Evening of the Days of Racing,  
 Balls will Be Provided for, by  
 M. Duke Johnson  
 Proprietor of the Course<sup>41</sup>

The socially minded North Carolinians of the upper classes did not need too much of an excuse to include dancing in any of their celebrations. A novel event such as a "Trolley" party was described in The Asheville News and Hotel Reporter:

Last night a gay party of young people indulged in the novelty, for Asheville, of a trolley party. One of the new open cars had been chartered for the occasion and gaily trimmed with flags, bunting and Chinese lanterns. The car started from the Square and went out the Montford avenue line as far as Locke Craig's, then returned and went out Charlotte street to the Idlewild greenhouses, came back to the Square and proceeded to Lookout Park, where the party disembarked and engaged in a dance at the pavillon. They made things lively along the route with tooting of horns and gay laughter.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>Raleigh Register, April 11, 1803.

<sup>42</sup>The Asheville News and Hotel Reporter, May 30, 1896.

### The Debutante Ball in Early North Carolina

The young lady of fashionable society was launched into the social whirl by a large ball given in her honor. This was known as her debut into society, and the event was known as the "Debutante" Ball. A description of the early Debutante Balls given for a young lady of high society is given in a record book kept by the late Mrs. Frederick G. Roberts of New Bern:

It was the Fashion of the day for all Society People to give each young Debutante a Big Party--no young lady went to these Parties unless accompanied by her Escort and her Maid & if her Duenna (Chaperon) was not in the Party one met her in the Dressing Room & took her under her wing. Her Maid divested her of her Wraps, put on her white satin slippers, puffed out her many Skirts & saw that she was in order. Then she descended with her married Friend. Her Escort met her at the foot of the Stairs, with her bouquet, she took his Arm & entered the Room in Company with her Friend or elder Sister or Mother. On approaching the Host & Hostess she made a deep Curtesy and her Escort a graceful Bow & then they passed in. These Curtesies required much practice & were a part of her school Training.

The Style of Dress rendered it impossible for one to sit down. There were few if any Seats in the Rooms as the Floors were cleared for dancing. Soon Bob Walker, blind Amos & one other drew the Bos across the Fiddles and blew a Note on the Flute & called out--or Bob did--Take your Partners for a Cotillion. Each young Lady was claimed by her Escort for the first Dance. The Dancing kept up without intermission till 12 oclock when Supper was announced.

After the Ladies were served the Gentlemen enjoyed the substantial (Repast). Then there was dancing again till 3 or 4 o'clock. Round Dances were just creeping in. We had learned them all at School but were told not to dance them with Gentlemen. So the Ladies danced together and the Men looked on.

The young People of my day had greater powers of endurance than at this time. It was a labor of Hours to be dressed for a party. My Hair was so long & thick and the Style of Dressing the Hair was so elaborate that it required at least an hour to arrange it. When I sat down it swept the Floor. This had to be made into a Cushion on top of the Head. Then Grecian Braids were plaited and wound round. The front Hair (was) puffed out to stand far from the Face & then the Flowers were to be placed on it.<sup>43</sup>

Any social occasion which allowed for celebration was a welcomed one. Examples of social dances for special occasions such as the ones mentioned were greeted with great anticipation as a chance to alleviate the hard work and suffering which accompanied the fight for survival.

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<sup>43</sup>A Tryon Palace Trifle, op. cit., p. 72.

## CHAPTER IV

SOCIAL DANCE AS RECREATION AT THE  
FASHIONABLE SPRINGS AND SPAS OF NORTH CAROLINA

One of the favorite seasons of upper class North Carolinians was the summer, in which trips would be made to the numerous springs and summer spas in Western Carolina and Virginia. In order to escape the heat and disease of the cities and towns, the "elite" would travel to Shocco Springs near Warrenton, "Sparkling" Catawba Springs in Lincoln County, or the other popular resorts around the state. The life at the Springs was one of utter idleness and gayety. All came presumably for health's sake, but the greater part spent their time in social enjoyment.<sup>1</sup>

There were those families who made annual trips to the springs in Virginia and Carolina, traveling from one resort to another.

We left the low country in the summer and remained until frost, which generally took place in October...the people of the tidewater section went to Hillsboro, Oxford,

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<sup>1</sup>George A. Foote, Old Watering Places in Warren County A Reminiscence (n.p., n.d.).

Warrenton, Jones and Shocco Springs...The refined and cultivated society which frequented Jones and Shocco Springs cannot be excelled. The large dancing hall was filled nightly with belles and beaux; how well I remember the green lawn, the half dozen swings suspended from the limbs of the oak tree, the band stand from which Frank Johnson's band sent forth its inspiring music...<sup>2</sup>

The arrangement of the buildings at these sites usually consisted of small cottages for the guests and one large building called the main hotel. The building contained the dining room, and upstairs was the ball room which "soon became the center of attraction for the fun loving youths of that era."<sup>3</sup> There might be bowling alleys and billiard tables used especially for the men, while card playing, riding, reading,<sup>4</sup> and strolling to the springs usually occupied the hours of the day.

Visitors traveled to and from the springs in horsedrawn carriages and hacks, (Figure 4)<sup>5</sup> which ran regularly from the stage and train depots to the various resorts.

Each evening was filled with dancing in the upstairs ballroom. Here everyone would meet and learn of the events of the day as well as

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<sup>2</sup>Mary Norcott Bryan, "Letter Five", A Grandmother's Recollection of Dixie, Southern Historical Collection, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

<sup>3</sup>The Hickory Daily Record, September 11, 1965.

<sup>4</sup> Foote, loc. cit.

<sup>5</sup>Hickory Daily Record, loc. cit.

FIGURE IV

BEFORE VICTORIA INN IN THE 1880'S



show off his dancing prowess. People who lived close by the resorts would come for the evening's dancing in order to associate with the people in residence.

DANCING AMUSEMENTS

A BALL AND PARTY will be furnished at Shocco Springs, on the evening of the 4th and 5th September, to which Tickets for Ladies will be distributed in due time.

BY THE MANAGERS  
93ST6

Many families brought their children with them. There were special dining rooms for them, and because of the space at the springs, many considered it ideal for recreation. Benjamin Franklin Little was a planter from Richmond County, North Carolina, who had gone to Rock-bridge Alum Springs, Virginia for his health. In a letter to his wife, "Flax", he described a dance involving children:

August 9th, 1878

I have just come from the ball room, where they had a 'Calico'Maskie Ball. It would have amused the children very much and some parts of it you would have enjoyed. Among them was one set of about eight--no girl as large as Nan, and no boy as large as Lacy. They, too, were masked and draped prettily though fantastically. I thought the whole affair more suitable for their ages than their seniors.

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<sup>6</sup>The Raleigh Register, August 24, 1827.

<sup>7</sup>Papers of B. F. Little, Southern Historical Collection, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.



The elegance of these evening affairs was surpassed by no other social event.

#### SUMMER PLEASURES

Gay Society at the Sparkling Catawba Springs -- A Charlotte Belle Describes The Pleasures of a Fancy Dress Ball.

Sparkling Catawba Springs. August 19 (1887)

Sparkling Catawba Springs presented quite a scene of merriment and gait Tuesday evening, it being the occasion of the fancy dress ball of the season. Though but an impromptu affair, it was quite successful, and the guests who assisted in getting it up, deserve great credit, as the characters were well sustained and the costumes chaste and beautiful.<sup>8</sup>

After supper the guests would have a chance to show off their skill in the Virginia Reel, Waltz, Polka, Schottische, and all of the favorite dances of the day. "Ladies and their gallants seemed the impersonations of beauty, ease and grace, as they lightly danced in and out the intricacies of the fascinating figures."<sup>9</sup> Square dancing was also popular with the younger people. J. Frank Allen described a dance done at Catawba Springs:

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<sup>8</sup>Armistead Burwell Papers, Southern Historical Collection, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

<sup>9</sup>Foote, loc. cit.

Oh! it was a gay place. We used to have great times there. Swing your partner! Cross to the right! All promenade all around! By golley, we'd just swing'em right and left.<sup>10</sup>

Perhaps one of the best descriptions of the attitude which prevailed toward dancing is found in the following excerpts from the journal of Miss Jane Caroline North on a trip from the eastern coast of North Carolina to the various springs in Virginia in 1851.

- Aug. 8th Danced this evening as usual.  
 Aug. 12th Aunt Henrietta has been very much indisposed for two days, came down this evening so that she might see the President & the evenings entertainment, we danced as usual. I the first with Mr. Harvey, he is a person so awkward and uninteresting.  
 Aug. 15th We had a wretched Polka tonight, Mrs. Parker asked me to dance it with a Miss Wamble. Oh! how she careened but was nothing, was tame, to a Miss Jackson who asked me to dance with her, as soon could I have held in with my simple arm a restive colt the girl capered & cavaulted! I soon made an excuse and left the dancing room, never again <sup>11</sup> will I form one of such an exhibition, too dreadful!

Miss North and her family travelled to White Sulphur Springs to spend about ten days. She gave an account of some of the happenings there:

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<sup>10</sup>Hickory Daily Record, loc. cit.

<sup>11</sup>Pettigrew Papers, Southern Historical Collection, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Aug. 29 As usual our N. Carolinians were remarkable for their narrow, absurd conduct, it was proposed to give the President a Ball, the Carolina ladies declared not one of them would attend, and no gentleman from the state would be present at the meeting & not one was introduced.

Every evening there is a dance in the Ball Room we frequently went down & enjoyed it very much.

Aunt Harrie went as our chaperone very often to the Ball room she looked smartly pretty, & enjoyed her evenings. Betty Mason the eldest is such a nice girl! She is a member of the church & does not dance but always attracts attention by her pleasant manners.<sup>12</sup>

The following entry into her diary described her encounter with a Mr. Stuart who was courting the young ladies at the springs. She was annoyed with his grammar:

Mr. Stuart whom I have mentioned was one of the beaux... One speech he made I wont forget. I was enjoyed to walk to the Ball Room with Mr. Stuart consequently for the first dance to him. As we went earlier than usual he was not my escort, & I told Uncle Henry that he must dance with me the first set. Mr. Stuart coming to claim the dance I told him 'no that I was to dance with my uncle, he had not been on his feet.' 'That wasn't my fault', he answered, 'and as for your uncle me and and him will walk in the woods tomorrow & settle the matter.' That me & him had such an ignorant sound.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

Miss North complains of getting all dressed up and having a lack of partners.

Sept. 1st The ball Room was quite full, the dances very pleasant. I wore my pink flounced barege (gauze-like dress) with a spray of a beautiful wild plant in my hair. The effect seemed to meet with the approval of the company.

Sept. 2nd. I dressed & went to the Ball Room first going with Mr. Howell to tell Grace good bye they leave for the Sweet Springs early in the morning. I found a number of persons in the drawing room of the Stone House, some playing cards, others talking, after an affectionate leave taking, I went to the Ball Room, & found Aunt H. & Mrs. Robertson the only ladies. Uncle Henry, Vanderhorst & Howell, the men. Our position was ridiculous, seated all dressed for a party in the empty room. I insisted on Uncle H. waltzing with me, he did so, & I took a turn with Vanderhorst afterwards. We remained about  $\frac{1}{2}$  an hour, as nobody came left. It was altogether a failure. I was provoked to think how nicely I had dressed myself, just to undress again.<sup>14</sup>

It was very much the custom of the time for women to dance with women. Following is an entry and description of how Miss North spent a morning with some of the people of the springs when she is called upon to display her talents in music and dancing:

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

Sept 4th Rolled ten pins this morning, found it stupid enough - Emily Elliott asked me to Polka with her, Mrs. Vanderhorst played for us & a funny morning we had. Mr. Elliott & his daughter Caroline who has been indisposed since their arrival here were at first the only persons present & Mr. E. took lessons in the schottische from me as Mrs. V. played rather irregularly. I played the tune that she might get the time. Mrs. Van. went into ecstasies, pronounced my touch & time perfect. After playing some dances for the Elliots to practice by I tried at her request some of her music. Mrs. Vanderhorst...she brought me a nice hot pound cake for lunch & was so kind & obliging in playing the Schottische & polka that I felt sorry I had ever laughed at her...Mr. Elliott & herself took a waltz together which was a sight to behold.<sup>15</sup>

There were not always enough people at the springs to have balls and dances, as evidenced in a letter from Mary Bryan Speight to her mother while Mary was visiting Buffalo Springs:

July 1849

It is not very gay here now - we shall scarcely have enough ladies to make a cotillion to-night in the ball room only four ladies I believe who dance including ourselves. There are two or three more young ladies and about half dozen elderly looking ladies who do not frequent the ball room - there are also some thirty gentlemen but very few who dance or attend on the ladies.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>John Heritage Bryan Collection. North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, Department of Archives and History, Raleigh, N.C.

Not everyone approved of the dancing. Mr. Benjamin F. Little related to his wife his attitude toward the waltz:

August 15, 1878

Coming up to my room I stopped about 5 minutes in the Ball-room, -- left disgusted at seeing a waltz by a lady from Washington City, & gentleman from New Orleans. 'Oh! Shame where is thy blush.' God grant that a daughter of ours may never be a participant in any thing of the kind. It was far beyond any thing I ever saw of the kind. I regard the dress of the lady itself as indecent. Away with fashion and style when it sacrifices modesty. I feel increased anxiety about the fastness<sup>17</sup> of the times, especially in connection with the females.

The travel and pleasurable life of the elite who frequented the springs was a reflection of the opulent lifestyle of the rich North Carolinians. The popularity of the spas was enhanced by the attitude of the wealthy who were able to impress their friends with the fact that they could pursue this popular pleasure and frequent high society without traveling to the larger cities to do so. An added attraction to the lifestyle at the springs was that many patrons were from the Northern parts of the country and a southerner who entertained and met the gentry from New York and Boston could gain social recognition and help dissolve the idea that North Carolina was an unpopulated "backwater."

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<sup>17</sup>Papers of B. F. Little, loc. cit.

CHAPTER V  
 SOCIAL DANCE AS A PART OF THE GOVERNMENTAL  
 LIFE OF EARLY NORTH CAROLINIANS

James Iredell came to America in 1768 as His Majesty's Comptroller of Customs at Edenton, North Carolina. He was Attorney General of North Carolina, a member of the Council of State, and the first North Carolinian on the United States Supreme Court. He was an accepted member of the high society that existed before the American Revolution. He was married to Hannah Johnston, sister of Samuel Johnston. Dancing was an accepted part of the life Iredell led, both before and after his marriage. In his diary before his marriage, he entered the following:

Tuesday Morning (Aug. 28, 1770)  
 7 O'clock  
 I have to account for yesterday afternoon & Evening...  
 Went in the Evening to hear Mr Hardsen sing & see <sup>1</sup>  
 Godwin Dance, -- I was really very agreeably entertained...

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<sup>1</sup>Don Higginbotham, editor, The Papers of James Iredell (Raleigh: Department of Cultural Resources, 1976), I, 178.

Friday half past one--7 Sept. (1770) --For several days past have been unwell- & obliged to discontinue my Journal, - which I now take up again - This morning have been very idle, I sat up late last night, & am not perfectly well - I went to see Godwin dance - which he did very agreeably - afterwards, the Ladies danced a little with us <sup>2</sup> I was happy in having a Miss Eelbeck for my partner.

Friday (Dec. 4, 1771)

Most of the Morning in my office - the rest with Robt. Smith - went with him in the afternoon to Mr. Johnston's & staid till 10 o'clock at Night - came over to Town & went to the Courthouse & danced with the Children there till one o'clock--<sup>3</sup>

Iredell displays his chagrin at not having Miss Johnson as his dancing partner;

Tuesday 8 Dec. (1772)

...recd. an Express from the Gov., which obliged me to come over to Town for about two hours - Returned & spent a very happy Evening at Mr. Johnston's, where we danced enough to tire me - much less agreeable, as I could not have Miss Hannah for my Partner. - Every day swells my Attachment - till stronger to her than before.<sup>4</sup>

Iredell displays courtesy to a lady without a partner, although he is not happy about it:

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 179.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 191.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 192.



Monday Dec. 28 (1772)

...Went in the evening to Mr. Pollok's where we had a little dance, during the greater part of which my Spirits were greatly depressed, as I thought myself obliged, out of a cursed complaisance which sometimes thwarts our Inclination, to dance with Miss Julius, fearing if I did not she might have been without a Partner; and as all the world know the nature of my Connection with Miss Hannah Johnston, in a private little hop to have taken her to dance, and left a strange Lady without a Partner, would have seemed selfish - I did not then know all the Gentn. in the room would dance - had I done so I would have consulted my wishes--<sup>5</sup>

After his marriage to Hannah Johnston, Iredell's political life frequently kept him away from home. He relates happenings to his wife from various sections of the state. His fondness for dancing is still in evidence in his correspondence.

Halifax, 30th Jan., 1779

...I dine every day abroad somewhere or another, and last Thursday was at a very agreeable ball. I could not, however, though I had an exceeding good partner, be so cheerful as I generally am at such times. Mr. McCulloh's situation, Miss Macartney's death and my uncertainty about poor Gaby, all conspired to make me dull. I bustled through the evening however tolerably well, and could not even help regretting that the ladies went away so soon...<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 202.

<sup>6</sup>Don Higginbotham, editor, The Papers of James Iredell (Raleigh: Department of Cultural Resources, 1976), II, 72.

Newbern 25 Nov. 1779

There has been no time to do any civil business and all I have received on the account (including Savages') has been 390 pounds...But I feind myself most enormously charged, tho' I have scarcely ever either breakfasted at home, and never supped, for except two or three evenings that I have been dancing...<sup>7</sup>

The ball being the chief method of socializing, Iredell relates to his wife his disappointment at not being able to dance all of the dances:

Wilmington June 9th, 1783

I preserve my health perfectly well, tho' the weather is remarkably warm, notwithstanding which there was a very grand Ball here the other night, the Company was remarkably numerous and brilliant, and everything extremely genteel, but the great warmth of the night and the smallness of the room for so large a Company very much abated the pleasure. There were obliged to be three successive sets of Dancers, and I got only two dances the whole evening...<sup>8</sup>

In a letter to his niece Helen "Nelly" Blair, Iredell relates more of his social activities:

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 128.

<sup>8</sup>Papers of James Iredell, North Carolina Department of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina.

...you will expect of me, I suppose some news in return for yours. All I can tell you is, that I was last Thursday at a very agreeable Ball, and danced with a genteel Lady, and an exceeding good Partner, Mrs. Willis, who formerly lived in Virginia, but at present in this County. A high fresh prevented many Ladies from coming. There were however upwards of 20 Dancers, and many awkward Member of Assembly...<sup>9</sup>

Life in North Carolina at the time of the American Revolution was tedious as far as safety was concerned, and balls and large gatherings were frowned upon by the government. Nevertheless, social affairs still occurred, much to the dismay of the government officials. From The Colonial Records of North Carolina comes the resolution of the Safety Committee at Wilmington on March 6th 1775:

...it is the opinion of this Committee, that all dances private as well as public, are contrary to the spirit of the 8th Article in the Association of the Continental Congress, and that as such they ought to be discouraged, and that all persons concerned in any dances for the future should be properly stigmatized.<sup>10</sup>

The warnings of the Safety Committee were not enough to discourage some citizens from pursuing their dancing pleasures. According to the Proceedings of the Safety Committee at Wilmington on Wednesday, March 1st,

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<sup>9</sup>Higginbotham, op. cit., p. 73.

<sup>10</sup>William L. Saunders, editor, The Colonial Records of North Carolina (Raleigh: Josephus Daniels, 1890), IX, 1150.

1775, there was discussion on a public ball about to be given in that town.

The Committee being informed of a Public Ball, to be given by sundry persons under the denomination of the gentlemen of Wilmington, at the house of Mrs. Austin, this evening, and as all Public Balls and dances are contrary to the resolves of the General Continental Congress, and a particular resolve of this committee: Ordered, That the following letter be sent to Mrs. Austin, to forewarn her from suffering such Public Ball and dancing at her house.

Madam: The Committee appointed to see the resolves of this Continental Congress put in execution, in this town, acquaint you, that the Ball intended to be given at your house, this evening, is contrary to the said resolves; we therefore warn you to decline it, and acquaint the parties concerned, that your house cannot be at their service, consistent with the good of your Country.

Signed

By Order of the Committee

Thos. Craike<sup>11</sup>

The ball was apparently held, despite the warning. An account of the event was given by a Miss Schaw, who described it in her journal while she travelled from Scotland to North Carolina. Her description reveals to some extent the attitude the mother country had about colonials at that time.

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 1136.

We have an invitation to a ball in Wilmington, and will go down to it some day soon. This is the last that is to be given, as the congress has forbid every kind of diversion, even card-playing.<sup>12</sup>

I have been in town a few days, and have had an opportunity to make some little observations on the manners of a people so new to me. That ball I mentioned was intended as a civility, therefore I will not criticize it, and tho' I have not the same reason to spare the company, yet I will not fatigue you with a description, which however lively or just, would at best resemble a Dutch picture, where the injudicious choice of the subject destroys the merit of the painting. Let it suffice to say that a ball we had, where [there] were dresses, dancing and ceremonies laughable enough, but there was no object on which my own ridicule fixed equal to myself and the figure I made, dressed out in all my British airs with a high head and a hoop and trudging thro' the unpaved streets in embroidered shoes by the light of a lantern carried by a black wench half naked. No chair, no carriage -- good leather shoes need none. The ridicule was the silk shoes in such a place. I have however gained some most amiable and agreeable acquaintances amongst the Ladies; many of whom would make a figure in any part of the world, and I will not fail to cultivate their esteem, as they appear worthy of mine.<sup>13</sup>

George Washington was immensely popular with the people of early North Carolina. He came to North Carolina in 1791 for a tour around the state. President Washington was well noted for his fondness for

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<sup>12</sup>Evangeline Walker Andrews, editor, Journal Of A Lady of Quality, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1923), p. 149.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

dancing, and from the diary he kept during his Southern Tour, he made the following entry concerning Tryon Palace in New Bern:

Thursday, 21st (April). Dined with the Citizens at a public Dinner given by them; and went to a dancing Assembly in the Evening; both of which was at what they call the Pallace, formerly the Government House and a good brick building but now hastening to Ruins.<sup>14</sup>

The dinner was at four o'clock in the afternoon, and later that evening President Washington attended a gala ball held at the palace in his honor. He was the center of attention, clad in black velvet with gold buckles at the knees and on his shoes. He held a cocked hat with a cockade in his hand, while his hair was heavily powdered and gathered at the back in a black silk bag. He had a long, narrow sword at his left hip and wore yellow gloves.<sup>15</sup>

He shook hands with all the guests presented to him, with Mrs. Richard Dobbs Spaight assisting him in receiving and dancing the first minuet with him. In his diary, he recorded that "abt. 70 Ladies were present at the ball ." He then left the palace at the peak of the festivities, and went to another ball given for him at the home of Colonel Joseph Leech.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>A Tryon Palace Trifle or Eighteenth Century Cookery & c.  
op. cit., p. 67.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

George Washington's birthday was always a popular holiday for the state. There were usually celebrations of various kinds, and the dance was always included. The State Gazette of North Carolina in Edenton printed the following:

In honour of General Washington's birth day the militia of this county assembled here, on the 11th inst. and performed many military evolutions. In the evening a Ball was given at the Court-house, at which attended a numerous and brilliant assembly of ladies and gentlemen.<sup>17</sup>

Not all of the celebrating of Washington's birthday turned out to be an enjoyable experience. William D. Valentine spent the greater part of his life on his father's plantation home "Oaklawn" just outside the village of Bethel, North Carolina. During his thirty-second year, in 1837, Valentine lived in Windsor in Bertie County and taught the grammar school there. The following is an excerpt from his diary describing how he spent the celebration:

Windsor, Thursday Night, February 22, 1838  
 This is the Anniversary of America's great deliverance the greatest and best that ever lived - Washington's birthday. It is about to be celebrated in this town

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<sup>17</sup> News item in The State Gazette of North Carolina, February 19, 1789.

by a public ball to which I am now ready to go. Many balls throughout this great republic, yea and in foreign lands by Americans, balls in Commemoration of this great man will this day be given. Many attractions this day carries along with it. Who will be most attractive this night in honor of the illustrious patriot and first President of the U. States. Past 2 al. p.m. Just returned from the ball - and if all Washington's birthdays are as dull to other people as this to me - may another never be celebrated in this way but in some more approximate way. This ball was no enjoyment to me. There were fine ladies and good music and fine gentlemen but I was a blank and they are blanks to me. I am done. Farewell.<sup>18</sup>

The meeting of the General Assembly, legislative meetings, and other governmental occasions were, in most instances, either begun or concluded with a ball. Sometimes the celebrating of some government occasions lasted more than one day. Sometimes a celebration might last a week. The completion of the Wilmington and Raleigh Railroad was just such an event.

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<sup>18</sup>William D. Valentine Diaries. Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.



The celebration in Wilmington in April, 1840, of the Wilmington and Raleigh Railroad was a joyful occasion. Raleigh delayed its celebration until June so that the new capitol might be ready for inspection. Although the exhibition of a 'steam carriage' was the most spectacular part of the celebration, parades, oration, and subscription balls were a part of the program. After much oratory the second day of the festival closed with a supper ball in which distinguished visitors from Virginia and the aristocracy of the State participated. Dancing began in the Senate Chamber at nine o'clock and lasted until midnight. In the Commons Hall there was conversation and a 'soiree musical which left those who could not squeeze into the Ball room nothing to regret.' The celebration closed the following night with a ball in the Senate Chamber, 'more agreeable than the preceding one,' for 'the company not being so large, the dancers had a better chance, and improved it, too, by indulging in the hilarities of the evening, until a late hour.'<sup>19</sup>

The control of the government in North Carolina was in the hands of the upper classes at this time, and dance was one of the most popular methods of socializing by the government officials. The political lifestyles of early settlers differed very little from each other, and the lavish balls and assemblies which were given were reflections of the power and prestige which politicians deemed so necessary.

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<sup>19</sup>Guion Griffis Johnson, Ante-Bellum North Carolina (Chapel Hill: The UNC Press, 1937), pp. 143-144.

CHAPTER VI  
SOCIAL DANCE INSTRUCTION IN THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS  
OF EARLY NORTH CAROLINIANS

Education in North Carolina before the twentieth century reflected much of the social attitude of the times.

The poor classes themselves frequently opposed public schools on the ground that education led to aristocracy, and many, rich and poor alike, objected because they did not wish their children to be educated at the public expense.<sup>1</sup>

While the controversy over the public school issue continued, the educational needs of the children were being met rather inadequately by private schools. "Subscription Schools" and "Academies" became the rule of the day in forming the private school system in the state. The dancing school was what was termed by Johnson as the "Special School".<sup>2</sup> The dancing master would travel from one village or town to another and establish his school in some structure such as the court-house, town

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<sup>1</sup>Johnson, op. cit., p. 262.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 288.

hall, or hotel ballroom. In most instances the professional dancing master was a man who would stay for several months in the vicinity to give lessons. He would advertise in the local paper concerning his hours and fees. The following is typical of such an advertisement:

#### DANCING SCHOOL

Harry Clay Milburn, respectfully informs the Ladies and Gentlemen of Nixonton, Hertford, Edenton, and its vicinities, that he will attend at the Court-House in Nixonton, on Monday, the 11th of July, in order to open a Dancing School at 10 o'clock in the forenoon, and at Hertford, on Thursday, the 14th of July, at 10 o'clock in the forenoon, and at Edenton, the 21st of the same month, at 10 o'clock in the forenoon; to be continued three days in each month, for six months, at each of the aforesaid places: Those who will please to honor him with the instruction of their children in this polite accomplishment may depend on having the strictest attention paid to their morals, and the utmost care and assiduity to accomplish them with all the graces, not only in ball-room, but in their general deportment. His terms are 4 dollars per quarter, and one third at entrance.<sup>3</sup>

The dancing master was very much respected and especially among the upper classes, was taken into the home as a guest. In a letter to Mr. Wood Jones Hamlin, a planter near Halifax, North Carolina, William Person Little tells of the establishment of a dancing school by a French gentleman:

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<sup>3</sup>Edgar W. Knight, editor, A Documentary History of Education in the South Before 1860 (Chapel Hill: The UNC Press, 1949), p. 662.

Sept. the 7th 1817

Sir/

Mr. Setaste a French gentleman is about to open a dancing school in our neighborhood, should you think proper to send your children he will consider himself under obligation to you for so doing. He Commences tomorrow at my house as you will see by the Subscription, I can only observe that he has taught with great reputation in Norfolk [;] Richmond and Warrenton [;] that he is an elegant dancer and much of a gentleman, he teaches in the most modern style and I think is worthy of Patronage [;] You must not fail to find him scholarly indeed. I wish you to send all your children that are large enough. He has agreed to open a school for ten or twelve scholars which number is already entered and I expect some more, but could wish him to meet with as much encouragement as I think he merits, his mode of teaching is so much approved of at Warrenton that I understand some of the married ladies became pupils to him, he is strongly selected to return to Richmond and open a school there again. I spoke to you some time ago on the subject, and should have given you earlier notice but have been down the country for some time and since I returned have had several places to send to, [;] however [;] there is no necessity for any great preparation on the part of the school [;] as the school will not be large and there will be no company except the scholars and their parents if they think proper to attend. Mr. Setaste does not wish much company at his dancing his sole subject is the improvement of his pupils.

Yours respectfully.

WP Little<sup>4</sup>

The children were not the only ones to benefit from the instruction of dancing. Men and women were also interested in becoming more accomplished in the social grace derived from the lessons. Richard Coleman

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<sup>4</sup>Wood Jones Hamlin Papers, North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, Department of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina.

was a dancing master who advertised in the Fayetteville Advertiser in 1796 that he would be opening a dancing school in Fayetteville and its vicinity, and he was willing to hold an evening school "from candle light until 9 o'clock for the benefit of those young gentlemen whose business will not admit of their attendance in the day."<sup>5</sup>

The early North Carolina gentry still maintained the social consciousness of the mother country in manners and social accomplishments. This attitude is reflected in the publication The State Gazette of North Carolina which, in 1789, published an essay from the London Review:

Sir Thomas Friendly, who lives about two miles distant, is a baronet, with about two thousand pounds a year estate, joining to that I purchased; he has two sons and five daughters, all grown up, and living, with their mother and a maiden sister of Sir Thomas's, at Friendly Hall, dependent on their father. Conscious of my unpolished gait, I have for some time past taken private lessons of a professor who teaches 'grown gentlemen to dance'; and though I at first found wondrous difficulty in the art he taught, my knowledge of the mathematics was of prodigious use in teaching me the equilibrium of my body, and the due adjustment of the center of gravity to the five positions. Having now acquired the art of walking without tottering, and learned to make a bow, I boldly ventured to<sup>6</sup> obey the baronet's invitation to a family dinner...

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<sup>5</sup>Knight, op. cit., p. 663.

<sup>6</sup>The State Gazette of North Carolina, January 22, 1789.

Perhaps the best description of what instruction actually took place in the dancing school is given by Miss Mordecai relating the incidents which occurred in the front room of the tavern in Warrenton. The dancing master was "Uncle" Peter Feggins, a negro man, who was accompanied by his assistant, Hardy Artis, who played the violin.

Which of Peter's pupils will ever forget these technicalities of the movements that followed these words of command. The couple, toe raised, foot arched, and pointed to the floor, but not yet touching it, while the pupil stood in a tottering suspension. A duck can stand on one foot, and so can Uncle Peter with more ease than a child can, but here comes relief in the plain step. Then the sink was complicated again, it bent one knee almost to the ground, while the foot sliding on the floor was at a given signal to appear, as the body was slowly elevated by the gradual straightening of the limb. To this succeeded the "bound," which was a sort of a prance, such as we have seen executed by a yearling calf, while quietly grazing, as if it had been all at once electrified.

Somewhat similar to this was the 'bound' as made by inimitable grace by Peter's bald calf leg and doubled heel toe, both of which were well displayed in shorts and pumps.

When his pupils were proficient in these four movements, the young gentlemen were instructed, hat in hand, how to approach the young lady, and with all due ceremony request honor of a minuet. The favor, according to rule, was conferred with condescension, and with rounded elbows, and finger barely touching at their tips; the little man handed the little lady to the head of the room. Her young partner stepping in measure, hat in hand, barely touched with his the tips of hers when they met in the dance.

But the minuet was not all that Peter Feggins taught, There was the 'Congo', a livelier sort of minuet, danced by two or four. The contra dance was merrier still, particularly 'thump the devil' which was a great favorite; but the merriest of all, and of course the most desired, was the good, but now, the old-fashioned reel, because it was gay and full of life, as were the young creatures, who felt as if they could dance forever and never tire, if Uncle Peter or Harry would continue to play 'Polly put the Kettle on.'

The signal for departure was 'Washington's March,' always an unwelcomed sound, hats and bonnets were now sought, bows and courtesies were made at the door to the bowing Peter, and the grinning Artis, and being Saturday<sup>7</sup> afternoon, the dancing lessons were ended for the month.

Dancing was allowed in some of the private schools, while it was frowned upon in many of the others. The female institutions which allowed dancing included it in their advertised list of courses. In 1822 "grammar and parsing, belles-lettres, geography...botany..., Latin, Greek, music, dancing, drawing, and painting as well as rudiments<sup>8</sup> of learning", were taught in the Oxford Female Seminary.

The dancing master would arrive on the campus of the school or seminary and hold his classes. Often he taught other courses such as music, deportment, and fencing, as noted in the following advertisement:

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<sup>7</sup>Lizzie Wilson Montgomery, Sketches of Old Warrenton North Carolina (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton, 1924), pp. 50-51.

<sup>8</sup>Edgar W. Knight, Public School Education in North Carolina (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1916), p. 56.

'Falkener's Young Ladies' School'  
Dancing Added To The Course, 1805

Mrs. Falkener has the satisfaction of announcing to her Patrons and the Public, that a Gentleman (who has taught with much approbation in several of the most respectable Seminaries on the Continent) has engaged to attend her Academy, for the purpose of giving Instructions in the various Branches of Music, Dancing and the French Language. Such as chuse [choose] their Children or wards to become Pupils therein will be pleased to make application, when they can be acquainted with the Terms.  
Warrenton, March 24th, 1805

Saint Mary's School for Young Ladies has had a long social tradition. It was opened about 1842 by The Reverend Aldert Smedes, and graduated young ladies from "the finest families." Miss Mary Jane Jarrett was a student there before 1860. She gives an idea of what dancing occurred in her day in the following letters to her mother:

April 22, 1854

...some of the girls dressed as boys, some as fine ladies and some in their bloomers and we had a -- dance and frolick. We had fine times.

May Queen - May 6, 1856

Last Sat. 'A real nice party'. It was quite a pretty scene. After the coronation was over we danced a few sets and then went to supper it was elegant. All sorts of nice cakes, ice cream, raisins, candy etc. etc. which girls brought themselves. Danced until 9 p.m. Dr. Smedes had prayer, then to bed.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Charles L. Coon, North Carolina Schools and Academies 1790-1840 (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton, 1915), p. 589.

<sup>10</sup>Jarrett-Puryer Papers, Duke University, Durham, N.C.



The Reverend Smedes appeared to favor dancing for his young ladies because there was a piano in the parlor to provide music for dancing. However, he did not allow his young ladies to go to public balls given in Raleigh. In a letter to her mother on July 5, 1844, Eliza Howerton wrote that "the gentlemen of Raleigh gave a dance last night (4th) and the young ladies of St. Mary's were invited but of course we did not go.<sup>11</sup> Dr. Smedes told his girls that "a lady's name ought to be in the newspaper but twice in her life, when she is married and when she dies. Dance all you like but do not go to public balls --<sup>12</sup> no place for a lady."

The Bingham School was a military school for boys which was established in 1793, originally in Orange County. For many years it remained in the eastern part of the state, and in 1891 after two disastrous fires, was moved to Asheville. Dancing was very much a part of the social scene for the cadets, and a Cotillion Club was one of the campus organizations.

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Mrs. Lena H. Smith's Letter "Interesting Letters of Early Saint Mary's Days", Saint Mary's School Bulletin Series 27, No. 2A (March, 1938), 40.

The Cotillion Club called a meeting last Tuesday night and preparations were begun for the annual Easter Hop with great enthusiasm. No definite decision was reached about the music...The Hop will be given in the Mess Hall in military style and including the Grand March which will add much to the harmony of the dance. The final arrangements will be made next Thursday Night.<sup>13</sup>

### Dancing in Colleges and Universities

Although Guilford College was founded before the Civil War, it did not attain collegiate status until after the antebellum period. It was originally known as New Garden Boarding School, and unlike many of the other schools, it was coeducational from the beginning. Although the Quakers frowned upon dancing, and there was no instruction given at the school, it was found that the students did dance. Found in the history of the college is the following excerpt:

One Christmas Eve in the seventies young Quakers danced the Scotch Rambler in the school room, J. Elwood Cox safely advising them that if his father appeared, they could say they were taking personal exercises. Dancing was forbidden for ninety-six years, but it did exist. In the first session a group of girls was surprised in the act and amazed to discover that the teacher standing in the doorway was not regarding them with stern and angry disapproval, but was struggling to suppress the mirth

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<sup>13</sup>Catalogue of the Bingham School, Asheville, N.C., 1892.

their awkwardness provoked in her. In 1877 boys dancing the Virginia Reel heard their vigilant professor approaching and to quote the ARGONAUT: 'It is said that the way the boys shot under the bed is amazing.'<sup>14</sup>

On January 15, 1795, The University of North Carolina opened for its first session with the Reverend David Ker as "Presiding Professor." By the end of the first year, the student body consisted of about one hundred students, with sixty of those being in the preparatory department. By the time of the Civil War, the enrollment had grown to almost five hundred. Life for the students at the University was rather disciplined and firm. There were, however, instances of open rebellion against the professors:

It is little wonder that professors and tutors frequently complained that the students were impertinent, fond of fighting and playing bandy, and fonder still of bed-eviling the faculty. They had few other diversions.<sup>15</sup>

In 1797, Joseph Caldwell, who was at that time principal professor, received a letter from Governor Richard Spaight introducing Mr. Stephen Perrin, a dancing master of some renown, who had come to the University to open his dancing school.

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<sup>14</sup>Dorothy Lloyd Gilbert, Guilford A Quaker College (Published in the Centennial Year of Guilford College and New Garden Boarding School, 1937), p. 131.

<sup>15</sup>Johnson, op. cit., p. 295.

NewBern 5th July 1797

Sir,

This will be handed you by Mr. Perrin [ ] the french gentleman, whom General Davie requested me to speak to to get him to go up to the University to teach the young gentlemen to dance.

From what General Davie has written to me on the subject [ ], and Judge Sitgreaves has mentioned to Mr. Perrin, he had agreed to go up, and will set off tomorrow: His intentions are to ascertain the number of Scholars he will be able to get, and in What manner he can board himself and his son, a boy of about six years old.

He does not undertake to teach the english dances but, the minuet, and french dances such as Cotillions [ ], Congoes [ ] etc. etc. his terms are two Dollars pr. month for which he teaches three afternoons in each week. General Davie supposes he may get between fifty and sixty Scholars at the University: and Judge Sitgreaves informs him that he thinks it probable he may have a tollerable [tolerable] good school at Hillsborough which he can attend on the other three days as it is only between fifteen and sixteen miles distant.

I hope that you will render Mr. Perrin such services as are in your power, in getting his school put in proper train, and advising him of the best manner of getting himself well accommodated. By doing so you will confer an obligation on me.

I am with Respect

Sir,

Your most Obt. Sevt<sup>16</sup>

Richd DOBBS SPAIGHT

The institution of a dancing school apparently was a favorable experience for the students. There had been disagreement between the

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<sup>16</sup>R.D.W. Connor, Hugh T. Lefler, and Louis R. Wilson, A Documentary History of the University of North Carolina 1776-1799 (Chapel Hill): The UNC Press, 1953), pp. 179-180.

faculty and students concerning student activities, but a dancing school  
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 received permission from the faculty. However favorable the dancing  
 school was, there was lamentable evidence as to the lack of young ladies  
 for partners, as seen in a letter from John Pettigrew, a student,  
 to his father Charles in 1797.

There is a dancing school at this place; it commenced about six weeks ago. I have entered as a scholar, being desirous to become acquainted with so genteel an accomplishment; but I am affraid that there cannot be as much improvement derived from it as at some Schools where there are a genteel company of ladies; and gentlemen, but here there are a number of Students subscribed and not any Ladies so that it (is) certain that there would not be as much order and regularity, as if there were several descent ladies. Brother Ebenezer has not joined it but he will have opportunities enough hereafter and perhaps better than the present when he may be more at leasure. The terms are four dollars for six Months one<sup>18</sup> upon entrance and the rest at the close of the session.

Even though there were ladies who attended the dancing schools later in the century, their appearance seemed to have little effect on the students who misbehaved. In a letter to her mother, Mary H. Bryan describes the relationship between one dancing master and his students:

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<sup>17</sup>Kemp P. Battle, History of the University of North Carolina (Spartanburg: The Reprint Company, 1974), p. 103.

<sup>18</sup>Connor, et. al, op cit., p. 170.

Univ. of N.C.

Chapel Hill Aug. 30th 1841

Rocchietti and his dancing scholars got mad with each other and they all quitted him, after paying his \$3.00 for the time they had been going to him, nearly half the quarter: they fell out because he would not play the fiddle for them, thinking they could not do the steps good enough; and he was right for I have seen them dance often and they do the steps very badly indeed; they would not mind anything he tells them and keep up a constant noise. Some of them have treated him very badly ever since he came; bad looking at him every time he comes thro the Campus and laughing at his mistakes and manner of talking, tho' he speaks better English than any foreigner I ever saw. The waltzing and fencing scholars would not quit him...He invented what he calles the 'North Carolina College Cotillion'; He has only about 12 dancing scholars now, all his others went to DeGrand-Val...<sup>19</sup>

Dancing was allowed on the campus only in the dancing school and at the Commencement Ball. It was frowned upon anywhere else, and the professors frequently caught students dancing where it was not allowed:

Students tried to drive away dull care by engaging in activities within the college buildings. If it was thought that no professor was about a stag dance would be staged in one of the halls of the dormitories. Professor Phillips, of the University, came upon such a party on Friday night, May 3, 1850 -- 'engaged

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<sup>19</sup>John Heritage Bryan Collection, North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, Department of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina.

in a boisterous dance in the passage of the Old South Building,' and told them that such an assemblage and such amusement in study hours was unlawful, and directed them to go to their rooms. These two students defended the proceedings in a disrespectful manner, the candle was blown out, a great yell ensued, and a pitcher of water was thrown upon the professor from the upper story.<sup>20</sup>

The brightest social event for the students at the university was the commencement ball, which also attracted young people from all parts of the state. (Figure 5). In the early 1800's there was no place for a ball except in Steward Hall, which was a student dormitory, with the dining room used as a ball room.

It was in this building that the 'balls' of the old days were given, at which, tradition has it, venerable Trustees and Faculty, together with their pupils, with hair powdered and plaited into 'pig-tails', and legs encased in tight stockings and knees resplendent with buckles, mingled in the dance with the beauteous damsels of the day.<sup>21</sup>

Steward's Hall was not the most satisfactory place for a dance, but it was the largest, most convenient building on the campus. The commencement of 1847 was celebrated by a ball which was "as usual

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<sup>20</sup>William Earle Drake, Higher Education in North Carolina Before 1860 (Thesis, Chapel Hill, 1930), p. 257.

<sup>21</sup>Archibald Henderson, The Campus of the First State University (Chapel Hill: The UNC Press, 1949), p. 274.

FIGURE V

AN INVITATION TO THE COMMENCEMENT BALL  
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT CHAPEL HILL.



PLEASE NOTE:

Some pages have small and  
indistinct print. Filmed  
as received.

UNIVERSITY MICROFILMS.



The pleasure of your Company is respectfully  
Solicited at a party to be given complimentary  
to the Graduating Class at the Eagle Hotel  
Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> June.

**MANAGERS**

Mr. B. Hawkins.

Eugene J. Hinton.

Wm. J. Holmes.

Langdon C. Manly.

Reuben C. Meeker.

Geo. Will C. Moore.

**ATTENDANT MANAGERS.**

Geo. W. D. Clout. Charles Manly, Jr.

Geo. W. D. Clout. Louis D. Henry, Jr.

Geo. W. D. Clout.

Wm. Michael, Jr.

brilliant and well managed, cotillions and reels being more prominent than the waltz and polka."<sup>22</sup> The dancers' pleasure was marred by the bad floor, low ceiling and dirty walls of the dining room, and they complained of the absence of violin strains from the music.<sup>23</sup>

The ball was organized by the Ball Managers. (Figure 6). The Chief Ball Manager was elected by all the students, and he in turn chose his assistants from the Dialectic and Philanthropic Societies. The Managers wore elaborate dress, with a broad band of silk ribbon diagonally from shoulder to waist, or streamers of broad ribbon worn on the left arm. It was the custom to donate the regalias to chosen ladies at the close of the ball.<sup>24</sup>

Commencement Day was on Thursday and the ball was given that evening. It usually began at nine o'clock and ended at three o'clock in the morning.

...notwithstanding cotillions and waltzes and occasional reels were in place of Germans and Lancers, there was... much enjoyment. Pre-engagements for sets, long in advance, were not common. Such a thing as a young lady willing to dance not having an opportunity was never heard of. It was the duty of the managers to supply beauless ladies with partners. Then, as now, however, there was panicky terror at the prospect of being chained to a 'wall-flower'.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 509.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Battle, op. cit., pp. 570-571.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

FIGURE VI

THE BALL MANAGERS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF  
NORTH CAROLINA AT CHAPEL HILL IN 1892.



The band was made up of black men, with someone like the famous Frank Johnston as leader. They did not play as artistically as some larger groups, but they were more "enduring and accomodating."<sup>26</sup> Frank's orders to the dancers came fast and furious, "Ladies to the Center," "Dos-a-dos," and "Turn Corners," and the dancing was of the "pigeon-wing" order with a gravity that was almost severe...."<sup>27</sup>

As well as the ball, there were short dances on Tuesday and Wednesday nights after the exercises in the Chapel. There was no opposition expressed about dancing by the people of the state, probably because it came down from the beginning of the University. Tradition holds that in the early days even President Caldwell, a Presbyterian minister, often attended dances, and a still more astounding tradition has it that, dressed in shorts, silk stockings, and pumps, he actually danced.<sup>28</sup>

It may be well here to explain the attitude of the University towards dancing. On one hand there are people of excellent piety and good intentions who think it wrong, as inciting to licentiousness. They also think that the tenets of their churches, as expounded by their clerical leaders, are against it. On the other hand there are people of equal piety

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>Drake, op. cit., p. 298.

<sup>28</sup>Battle, op. cit., p. 572.

and good intentions who think it a harmless amusement. They point to the undenied fact that young men and women of the highest character and conduct participate in it and are encouraged to do so by godly parents. Moreover, the preachers and leaders of other denominations of Christians countenance it, at any rate they do not object. Under these circumstances the University takes sides with neither. It is a social question about which there is difference of opinion. The authorities can not think it a crime or leads to crime for experience shows that the ball managers and other student participants are and have been among our most hightoned and free from vice, and the wildest malignity dares not to cast suspicions on the conduct and purity of their partners.<sup>29</sup>

The behavior at the dances was good, and the obedience to the Ball Managers was without question. There was one attempt to provide amusement for the large number of nondancers who attended. A lawn party was planned, with chinese lanterns hung in the trees of the campus, with light refreshment and seats distributed where "sweet nothings" could be whispered. But the experiment was not successful. Even those who did not dance preferred the lights of the ball room, where they could watch the radiant costumes and the graceful figures of the evolutions.

There were, of course, notable triumphs among the

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 176.

votaries of Terpsichore. I recall one. Ladies wore lowquarter and heeless slippers. A very vivacious and handsome girl from Warrenton, while waltzing, had one of her slippers to come off. Without stopping, she adroitly, on the next round, inserted her stockined foot into the vacant slipper without losing time in the waltz. The gracefulness with which this feat was accomplished was much admired. 30

On June 5, 1846, the Trustees ordered Steward's Hall to be removed and rebuilt as an addition to President Swain's negro houses. A wail at once went up from the students because of the Hall being the scene of their most jealously guarded privilege, the Commencement Ball. They promptly petitioned the Trustees that an appropriate structure housing a spacious ballroom be built. The petition was referred to the Executive Committee. On January 31, 1849, this body resolved to erect a building on campus "to be used as a ball-room, Alumni and Trustee meeting place and as a place to hold Commencement Exercises." 31

In 1850 Smith Hall was erected for accommodation of the library. But from the beginning it was known as the Ball Room. (Figure 7). It was modeled after a Greek temple and cost \$10,303.63. The architect was Captain John Berry. 32 There was a recitation room in the basement

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 572.

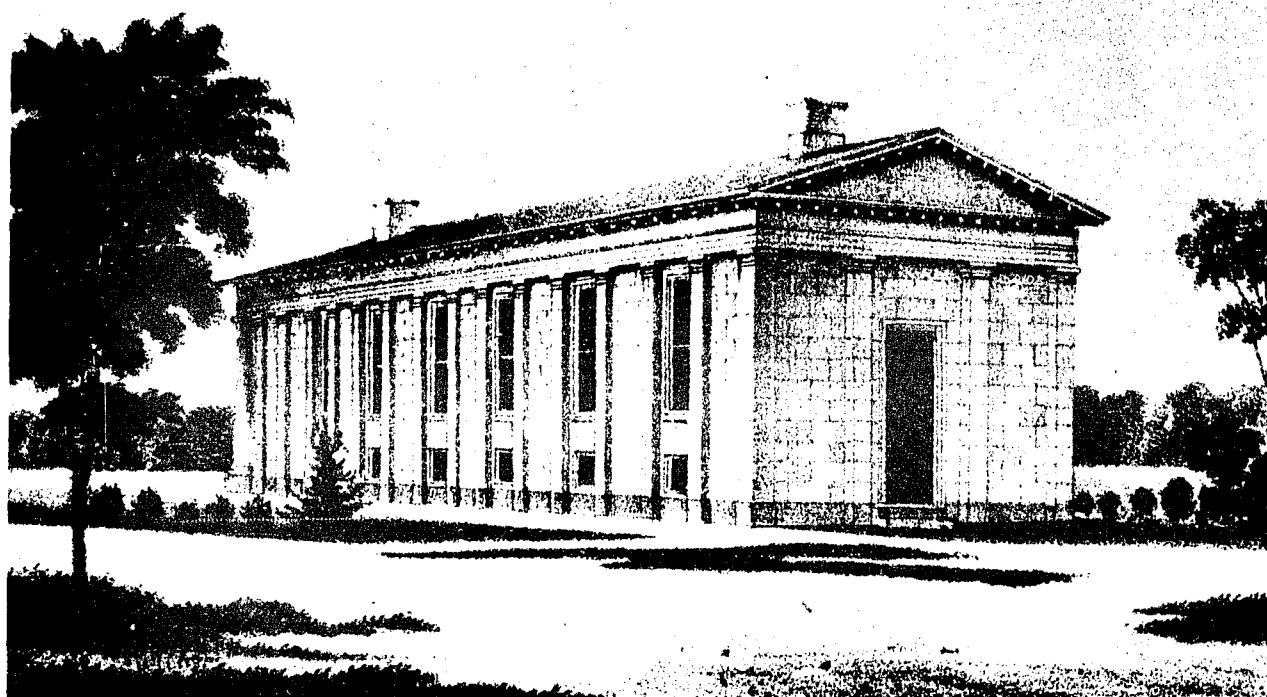
<sup>31</sup>Henderson, op. cit., pp. 137-138.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 144.



FIGURE VII

SMITH HALL, ORIGINALLY BUILT IN 1850  
ON THE CAMPUS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA  
FOR A BALLROOM



and arrangements for books on the first floor, but it was evident that the main object was to furnish a room for the Commencement Ball. Old Shylock remembered the Ball when he graduated:

The Trustees and Faculty were fully represented. President Swain was in his glory with a pleasant word and a joke for all...Many private gentlemen were there, fully equal in culture and attainment to these public dignitaries, never having sought public position they were not so widely known. Honored and dignified mothers were there with their fair and blooming daughters. Some of these daughters danced, some did not, but all were recipients of polite attention. There were comfortable nooks and recesses well provided with seats, where the non-dancers could enjoy themselves. There were two points of honor observed by the students. 1st. No student was to dance every set. 2d. No young lady visitor was to be neglected. It is as much the object of University education to make a polite and courteous gentleman as the profound and accomplished scholar. All went merry as a marriage bell, and at the proper hour, at a given signal by the matrons, the Ball broke up, having been an old-fashioned, enjoyable, happy mingling together of the best people of the old North State.<sup>33</sup>

For some thirty years there was a commencement ball every spring in Smith Hall. It was evidently one of the social gathering places, for

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<sup>33</sup>Old Shylock (pseud.), Dancing at the University (n.p., n.d.) North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Cornelia Phillips Spencer related the many uses of Smith Hall:

I really feel as proud as a peacock every time I go into the University Library these days...that fine hall, what have I not seen in it, lo! these many years? Everything except books. It was THE ballroom for the State. We had theatrical performances in it. We had private dances there -- public entertainments.<sup>34</sup>

However, by the spring of 1885 there had been opposition by some Trustees belonging to churches who were against the "Modern Dance," and they urged the Board to prohibit it on the University grounds. Smith Hall, as a library, had also grown; and it had become impossible to clear the floor and use it as a dance hall and as a library at the same time.<sup>35</sup> "In 1885 the Trustees resolved that dancing should no longer be allowed in Smith Hall."<sup>36</sup>

There was no place large enough to hold the Commencement Ball, and there were differing opinions as to what should be done. The Ball Managers were intent upon securing a building in Raleigh, but this did not meet with University approval. Instead, Kemp Battle went to work and procured from the Secretary of State a charter for a Gymnasium Association, because the University very much needed a room large enough

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<sup>34</sup>Louis R. Wilson, Selected Papers of Cornelia Phillips Spencer (Chapel Hill: The UNC Press, 1953), pp. 714-715.

<sup>35</sup>Battle, op. cit., p. 312.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 409.

for gymnastic exercises and social gatherings, which included dancing.<sup>37</sup>

A corporation was started, and the building was erected on its own land. The alumni subscribed for the stock, and by borrowing a small amount of money, the gymnasium was built. The opponents of dancing were discomfitted when they saw the outcome, but the Gymnasium Association was not a part of the University and its building was not on University land. The students who used it were those who were allowed, by their parents, to dance at home.<sup>38</sup>

Mr. Paul Cameron was one alumnus who took very much to heart the passage of the ordinance banishing dancing from Smith Hall. He refused to aid the building of the new gymnasium in any way, but when he came for commencement and saw that the room was one-third larger and one-third wider than Smith Hall, he was mollified. The floor of the new building was firm and smooth, built with planks of best heart pine, and made especially for dancing, whereas the old hall had a floor which billowed like an ocean.<sup>39</sup>

The first ball held in Gymnasium Hall off of University grounds was described by a reporter:

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., pp. 312-313.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 313.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 314.

The new, large and commodious Gymnasium Hall was a scene of gaiety and beauty. A bewildering mass of red, pink, blue, and white seemed floating around the ballroom, as the couples circled in and out under the delightful influence of Fasnacht's band. On, on went the dance till morning dawned, and then the merry throng began to break up to retire to sweet slumbers or to make ready to begin their journeys homeward.<sup>40</sup>

Dance was often spoken of as useless and a waste of time and money, and although laws were passed against it, people still continued to dance, and those who did not know how wanted to learn. As demands for instruction grew, dancing schools were set up where dance could be taught, and more private schools began to include it in their programs.<sup>41</sup>

Throughout the eighteenth century higher education still remained in the hands of religious organizations, and was always greatly influenced by them. The majority of colleges did not have dance as a part of the program. Some institutions even refused to let students receive instruction away from the campus. But towards the end of the century, commencement balls were finding their way into college life, and despite restriction, students found their way to dancing schools and public or private balls.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 315.

<sup>41</sup>Joseph E. Marks III, America Learns to Dance (New York: Exposition Press, 1957), p. 37.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 56.

Whereas the colleges of the North often passed laws against dancing and did not allow their students to attend dancing schools, the southern colleges encouraged it. Dance was supported and encouraged by such colleges as the College of William and Mary because dance<sup>43</sup> played such a part in the life and education of the South.

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 59.

CHAPTER VII  
RELIGIOUS OBJECTION TO SOCIAL DANCE  
BY EARLY NORTH CAROLINIANS

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the writings and influences of the French Revolution had made the small, educated upper class in North Carolina and the whole nation both indifferent to and skeptical of orthodox religion, and there was only a small fragment of the population actively involved with the churches. However, "Eusebius" writing in the Edenton Gazette on September 29, 1809 affirmed that North Carolina teemed with people, mostly poor, whose religion was their dearest and only heritage.<sup>1</sup>

Before the middle of the nineteenth century, around the 1850's, the various Protestant sects expanded their activities with such flourish that a large segment of the common people was brought into church attendance, and the educated classes ceased to be openly skeptical and became church members. This was due in part to what was known as the Great Revival which passed through North Carolina and

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<sup>1</sup>Hugh T. Lefler and Albert Ray Newsome, North Carolina (Chapel Hill: The UNC Press, 1963), p. 391.



the whole country from about 1800 to 1860. This spirit was brought about mainly through the work of the Methodists, Baptists, and somewhat by the Presbyterians.<sup>2</sup>

The churches in antebellum North Carolina became powerful agencies for conservatism, social control and recreation. The illiteracy and superstition of the rural people and the highly emotional sermons of the revival preachers were factors which accounted for the success of the camp meetings and revivals.<sup>3</sup>

The excitement of the Great Revival, as of the Great Awakening in New England which preceded it, aroused emotions which were in many instances accompanied by peculiar physical manifestations, commonly known as the 'exercises'. The sinner 'under conviction' often trembled violently, suddenly fell prostrate, remained in a state of coma for varying lengths of time, and finally arose shouting praises to God. Those who had already been converted were also similarly affected. Other exercises frequently seen during the Great Revival were involuntary jerking, dancing, wheeling, laughing and barking.<sup>4</sup>

The jerking exercises, along with the barking and dancing exercises did not manifest themselves at the beginning of the Great Revival. "The Jerks" first appeared as an involuntary twitching of the arms; then,

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 391-394.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 394-395.

<sup>4</sup>Johnson, op. cit., p. 396.

later during the Revival, spread over all the body. Involuntary dancing was a phase of the jerks and was often encouraged as a means of fending off a more violent form of bodily agitation:

'At a prayer meeting one Sunday afternoon', says Caruthers, (The Reverend Eli) 'I saw a young lady whom I had seen not very long before at a ball dancing till midnight, dancing over the floor of the large room in which the prayer meeting was held until she became apparently exhausted and sunk down helpless as in a swoon'. This involuntary dancing consisted chiefly of skipping and leaping movements as if the person was in such an ecstasy that he could not keep still. Closely akin to involuntary dancing was the 'Wheeling exercise' in which the victim spun around like a top or rolled over and over or sometimes turned handsprings.<sup>5</sup>

The success of the Great Revival as well as revival movements in general was due in large part to social psychology. Because of rural isolation and few recreational activities coupled with illiteracy and superstition of the people, just having some place to go was an excitement in itself. With all of these factors added together, the results of a revival were almost inevitable. The successful preachers of the Revival were all men of dramatic and power-

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 399-400.

ful voices. They stressed one central idea, such as salvation or hell, and emphasized this idea until the people's superstitious fear of the devil and their aroused emotions became pitched to a fever of excitement. Group psychology did the rest. Once the congregation was in a high emotional pitch it was only necessary for one person to fall down or shout, and hundreds of followers would do likewise. Emotions of fear and joy became muscular exercises.<sup>6</sup>

Along with these revivals, with differing degrees of success, the churches promoted home and foreign missions, Bible societies, the Sunday School movement, temperance, and Sabbath observance. Some churches tried their members for drunkenness, sexual immorality, fighting, and other actions which fell short of the accepted behavior of the church.<sup>7</sup> In Person County the Baptist church at Wheeley's Meeting House tried five hundred and one cases of members' misconduct between 1791 and 1860. Among the listing of cases, there were only four people tried by the church for dancing.<sup>8</sup> However, just prior to 1860 the church courts lost some of their effectiveness and severity.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 403.

<sup>7</sup>Lefler and Newsome, op. cit., pp. 394-395.

<sup>8</sup>Johnson, op. cit., pp. 450-451.

<sup>9</sup>Lefler and Newsome, loc. cit.

Undoubtedly...the lower social classes in the towns came to join with the clergy in considering ball room dancing an evil, just as they considered evil most things from which social status barred their participation and of which consequently they had little knowledge.<sup>10</sup>

The clergy spoke out strongly opposing any amusements that went against their religious doctrine. In sermons, religious publications, and religiously sponsored institutions the evils of dancing and "worldly amusements" were constantly expounded upon. So strongly did ministers feel about participation in dancing amusements by their congregations that they often took drastic measures. In Raleigh on June 18, 1840, Doctor Freeman, rector of Christ Church, resigned his assignment because of the persistence of his communicants in attending public balls and private dancing parties.<sup>11</sup>

Dr. Freeman constantly preached his views on popular amusements and printed sermons and supplementary papers which epitomized his "puritan" upbringing. There was constant debate back and forth from the congregation to the minister, and the minister resigned because the members continued to pursue their dancing. One layman of Christ Church, Judge

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<sup>10</sup>Johnson, op. cit., p. 158.

<sup>11</sup>Centennial Ceremonies Held In Christ Church Parish (Raleigh: Bynum Printing Company, 1922), pp. 26-27.

George E. Badger, later Secretary of the Navy and United States Senator, declared that the forms of amusement of which Doctor Freeman made complaint had always been present in Raleigh:

The writer of these notes was a member of the congregation for several years before Dr. Freeman became its rector, and while we were under the pastoral charge of our late Bishop...Repeatedly during that period were dancing parties held at the houses of communicants, and attended by other communicants. Of these parties, several are remembered. One succeeded a marriage in town celebrated by the Bishop, at which he remained, for some hours after the ceremony, looking upon the dancers. Two country weddings were solemnized by the Bishop where dancing was introduced, after reference to him, and his consent and approbation.<sup>12</sup>

It was with sincere regret that the Christ Church congregation  
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viewed the resignation of Doctor Freeman.

By 1860 religion in North Carolina consisted of ten organized denominations. Of these groups, the Methodists were the strongest, followed by the Baptists, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Episcopalians, Christian Friends, Moravian, German Reformed, and Roman Catholic den-  
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ominations. Virtually every one of these, at their annual conferences, assemblies, and committee meetings condemned social dancing in any form

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 27

<sup>14</sup>Johnson, op. cit., p. 369.

as a sin against the church, going so far as to expel from their congregation members who danced. From the Presbyterian General Assembly the following resolve illustrates the type of action taken:

3. Promiscuous Dancing calls for faithful and judicious Discipline.  
 Resolved, That the fashionable amusement of promiscuous dancing is so entirely unscriptural, and eminently and exclusively that of 'the world which lieth in wickedness,' and so wholly inconsistent with the spirit of Christ, and with that propriety of Christian deportment that purity of heart which his followers are bound to maintain, as to render it not only improper and injurious for professing Christians either to partake in it, by teaching them the art; but also to call for the faithful and judicious exercise of discipline on the part of church Sessions, when any of the members of their churches have been guilty.<sup>15</sup>

Religious groups such as the Moravians whose way of life was involved with their religious practice more so than the other groups, and who, like the Quakers, were considered a little "different" because of their lifestyle experienced problems with their congregation pursuing worldly amusements. The Records of the Moravians in North Carolina revealed that problems with dancing were periodically brought before the religious board:

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<sup>15</sup>Reverend Wm. E. Moore, A New Digest of the Acts and Deliverances of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Publication Committee, 1861), pp. 263-264.

Salem Board Minutes, 1813

Oct. 6 (Aeltesten Conferenz.) It is said that Andreas Werner and Frank Stauber have either arranged or permitted dances to be held in their houses recently, and that some of the young people from Bethania have attended them. Br. Pfohl shall speak with them, and if this is true they shall be notified that they and their families are excluded from the congregation.

Extracts from the Minutes of the Aufseher Collegium, 1836

May 9. The landlord of the tavern is to be very strongly admonished to take all precautions to avoid all drinking, gaming and dancing in the house, especially during the examinations which lie ahead.

A request was presented whether the Aug. Col. would permit the local musicians to give a concert in the concert hall on second examination day. There was no objection, but all STAMPING is to be prohibited on such an occasion, since much damage has been done to the house on former occasions. December 19. The landlord, Br. Sensemann, allowed a ball to be held in the tavern last Saturday night. Since all such events are wholly against the honored and well-known precepts of our Brotherhood, it seemed very strange to Auf. Col. that several Sisters from the Girls Boarding School and a number of their Charges attended. Auf. Col. hopes that events of this kind in the future will be carefully avoided.

Minutes of the Aufseher Collegium, 1845

May 26. The question was raised as to how the dancing customary at the Boarding School examinations and held in our tavern could be stopped. It is doubted whether this could be achieved through any kind of public prohibition. We wish, however, to advise the tavern keeper to stop dancing in the tavern as much as possible.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Adelaide Fries, editor, Records of the Moravians in North Carolina (Raleigh: The North Carolina Historical Commission, 1943).

The rules of conduct in the early religious groups were interpreted literally as they were written. The early Methodists, as did the other denominations, interpreted quite strictly their diversions to the rules. The General Rule, as it is known to Methodists, forbids "taking of such diversions as cannot be used in the name of the Lord Jesus." The interpretation of this rule has varied from time to time according to social conditions. It has appeared at times as though, because of the seriousness of their purpose to give their whole efforts toward achieving salvation, Methodists regarded all amusement and recreation as diversions in the original sense of the word. They often applied this General Rule to those activities, approved by plain people, which were considered "the arts of the fashionable life." Dancing, whether it was in the grand ballrooms of a seaboard resort or in a barn on the frontier evoked condemnation as a popular diversion.<sup>17</sup>

In a sermon preached in the Baptist church in Reidsville, North Carolina on Sunday night, June 20th, 1890, the Reverend W. L. Wright preached on Some Phases of the Modern Dance, giving the following reasons as to why he was speaking on the "Modern Dance":

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<sup>17</sup>The History of American Methodism (New York: Abingdon Press, 1964, I, 260.



- 1st. A conviction of duty that I can't stifle.  
 2nd. This evil grows. We can't have a Fourth of July without a dance. We can't have a commencement at some institution without a dance. We can't have a President inaugurated without a dance, and our Governors, though members of the church, office-bearers even, must be danced into office.  
 3rd. There seems to be a moral cowardice in the pulpit. Ministers are not creatures to be petted and wear soft slippers; they are God's soldiers to fight the devil, and the pulpit is waking up to a sense of its duty.  
 4th. My own members have asked me to preach and members of other churches in town. If any Baptists come here from elsewhere to that dance tell them for me that they are 2nd class Baptists, and 3rd rate Christians if Christians at all...  
 6th. Some of my members may want to dance. I'm putting up the bars. If you aim to dance don't ask for membership here, we don't need you. I don't propose to be pastor of a set of dancers.<sup>18</sup>

The "Modern Dance" referred to was the waltz. As a foreign import, the waltz became an object of attack from the first time it was taught. It appeared that the cotillion and Virginia Reel were less objectionable, but the German waltz was "evil in itself and evil in its tendency."<sup>19</sup>  
 (Figure 8)

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<sup>18</sup>Reverend W. L. Wright, Some Phases of the Modern Dance (Reidsville, N.C.: Review Steam Power Book and Job Presses, 1890), pp. 4-5.

<sup>19</sup>Reverend W. W. Gardner, Modern Dancing: In The Light of Scripture and Facts (Louisville, Ky.: Baptist Book Concern, 1893), p. 78.

FIGURE VIII

GROUP OF WALTZERS



GROFF OF WALTZERS.

*Erweitert für die Belle. London 3. 2. 1871.*

1st. Says one, 'I can see no harm in a square dance in the parlor or private party; it is genteel amusement, and improves the manners of young people.' If dancing could be confined to this, there might be no great harm in it. But the parlor or private dance is the nursery of the public ball or hop, and legitimately and almost invariably leads to promiscuous dancing and the waltz...It is an undeniable fact that the square dance leads to the round dances and waltzing; indeed modern dancers are satisfied with nothing short of the waltz and her more licentious sisters. Modern dancing differs essentially from ancient dancing. The old-fashioned square dances are too slow for this fast age, and would be regarded as a penance rather than a pleasure in a modern ball or hop; the round dances and waltzing are all the fashion of the present day. A ball or a hop would be regarded a failure now without the waltz; a species of dance we have shown to be demoralizing and licentious in its tendency. Yet this is the favorite dance of modern society.<sup>20</sup>

But what specifically displeased the early minister about social dancing? According to Reverend D. D. Heckman:

...I must unhesitatingly declare dancing in its most popular forms an eminently dangerous exercise...with us the dance is generally performed on dusty carpets and floors, in heated, confined, often crowded rooms, whose atmosphere is poisoned by the rapid, increased respiration of the company. The movement is unnatural, violent, especially for women, producing unhealthy nervous excitement, quick inhalation of impure air surcharged with the dust of the floor and fine loosened

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., pp. 77-78.

particles of carpets. The physical effects of dancing, then, are great bodily debility, undue excitement and reactive prostration of the nervous system, poisoning and obstruction of the lungs and throat, often resulting in hemorrhages and consumption, palpitation and other diseases of the heart, frequent headaches, with their train of evils, and internal injuries of various kinds... within six months of the writing of this tract, I became cognizant of six cases of death by dancing.<sup>21</sup>

The dancing school and dancing master also aroused the indignation of the church. Dancing instruction was considered a waste of time and money, and it only increased the young person's taste for that type of amusement. As far as the church was concerned, the evils associated with dancing began in the dancing school. The ministers considered the dancing master to be indolent, dissolute, and "bankrupt in fortune and morals." The schools they conducted provided children and women with partners of various social cultures and positions, and to throw a woman into the hands and arms of a dissipated and licentious strange man was wicked indeed.<sup>22</sup>

Dancing appealed to the vanity of the individual by affording the display of costly dress and personal charms. It induced immodest exposure, cultivated pride in personal beauty and grace, fashionable

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<sup>21</sup>Reverend George C. Heckman, D.D., Dancing as a Christian Amusement (Presbyterian Board of Publication and Sabbath School Work, 1879), pp. 17-18.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., pp. 21-22.

appearance and triumph over others, and envy in the success of others. But perhaps the most objectionable feature of the dance was its tendency to sensuality. The movements, attitudes, and exposures of the body, along with the nervous, passionate excitement and the license allowed, was sure to awaken impure thoughts and feelings in which the "filthy and passionate revel."<sup>23</sup>

Dancing also led to the neglect of religion, according to Reverend Heckman. Revivals rarely occurred where dancing and dancing clubs were very popular, and dancing was considered a worldly amusement. It made the body unfit for prayer, nourished pride, and was hostile to religious conviction and inquiry.<sup>24</sup> Reverend Wright gave more reasons for the condemnation of dancing, such as married people seldom danced unless their marriage was an unhappy one, or "dances belong to the night," and "young men go from such scenes immediately to houses of ill fame."<sup>25</sup>

It was the female, however, who appeared to be under the most pressure socially for participating in the dance. As a reflection of the attitude of the times, young ladies who had fallen into "shame",

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Wright, loc. cit.

admitted, sometimes, that dance was their first step downward. Reverend Wright preached that "men who dance don't as a rule marry dancers. We have a good time with them, but we don't want to marry that sort."<sup>26</sup> Perhaps the following poem reflects best what the religious doctrines tried to get across to the female:

What! the girl I adore by another embraced.  
 What! the balm of her lips shall another man taste.  
 What! touched in a whirl by another man's knee,  
 What! panting recline on another than me,  
 Sir, she is yours, from the grape you've pressed the  
 soft blue.  
 From the rose you've shaken the tremulous dew.  
 What you've TOUCHED you may TAKE,  
 Pretty waltzer, adieu!<sup>27</sup>

In an article from the "Young Lady's Column" of the North Carolina Presbyterian in 1870, Cornelia Phillips Spencer questioned the conduct of the young ladies of her day by asking if girls knew their own value, and that dainty and priceless things should not be handled. She advocated dancing for young boys and girls under twenty, and when a young lady reached twenty or married she should find something else to do and think about things more rational of a worthy creature.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Wright, op. cit., p. 15.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Louis R. Wilson, Selected Papers of Cornelia Phillips Spencer (Chapel Hill: The UNC Press, 1953), p. 608.

Although she was sent to dancing school in order to walk and stand properly, she avowed she was only a spectator at dances and balls. She looked upon grown men and women undulating around a ballroom as a painful experience rather than a joyous one.

Once I remember being stirred in a way that made a lasting impression of the harm that underlay so much that looked -- if not sensible, at least innocent. At one of those annual assemblies, so linked by immemorial custom with the very crown and consummation of College days, that grave and good people belonging to the College were to be found lending them their countenance who elsewhere would have frowned at the thought of a "ball-room" - at one of these, an old friend accosted me. He had graduated some years before with distinction, and among the gayest of the gay, and was now attending Commencement with his young wife. Their little child was at the hotel with its nurse, and the mother was on the floor among the dancers. Never in all my life did I see a more utterly bored and lugubrious expression of countenance than this gentleman presented. He had found his wife in a ball-room, but supposed that she would be as willing as he to give up such amusements, and turn to something higher after marriage. There she was in blue and white silk, waltzing round with the college boys, in a full career of restless excitement, not an atom of intelligence or expression of any sort visible in her face beyond that of eager, unappeased vanity unappeased, for a married woman of twenty-five or thirty had need to be very pretty or very distingue, or very agreeable, when she puts herself in competition with young girls--and she was neither. The poor man looked out of countenance every time she swept round where we stood.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 408.



Religion was the chief center of activity outside the home for a vast majority of women in many areas of North Carolina, and much of the preaching, discussion, and writing was directed at women. In the pamphlet, "Some Reasons why a Christian Girl Will Not Dance", one sees the pressures placed on the predominately uneducated females of the day not to participate in this carnal sin:

1. She is not her own. She has been bought with the precious life blood of Christ, and her life is given in service to Him. The dance can only gratify her animal sensations, and does not help to develop her spiritual life. The dance is not necessary for her physical development, for there are other forms of exercise far more effective and wholesome.
2. The dance is a worldly pleasure, and not a christian exercise. The tendency of the dance to absorb her heart, mind and charms in a gay frivolous life that leads away from God, holiness, purity and nobleness of soul. Once in the current, she is swept along, often against her conscious sense of duty and right, and her conscience is seared.
3. The dance interferes with christian service. All thoughts of christian service is excluded during the time she is making her preparations for, attending and recovering from the fatigue of the dance.
4. While the great majority of those who indulge to some extent in the social dance, do not follow it into great excess, and ultimate ruin; yet many have. Reliable statistics inform us that a large majority of fallen women have testified that the dance was the first step in their fall.

5. When the christian girl looks forward and contemplates the end of this life - it must soon come - how does the dance appear from that solemn view point? As her spirit stands in the presence of God to account for the time, strength, graces and charms He has endowed her with, that she might glorify Him, will it be a joy to say then to God, much of the time, strength, beauty, grace and charm of my life was devoted to the blissful ballroom? Would she want her friends to gather around her casket and her Pastor speak of her love for the ball room, that she would leave her church service for the dance, and that she was an ardent defender of the 'No harm in dancing?'

CONCLUSION: The christian girl refused to dance not because of any prohibition; but because her desire is to honor and serve Jesus, her divine Savior and Lord, and she cannot do this by dancing.<sup>30</sup>

There were attempts to defend the dance and participation in it. Sometimes verbal debates would be held and then again articles and editorials would be published. From The Presbyterian come the following treatise answering some of the many crucial questions raised in the participation of dance:

#### DANCING

The following plea for dancing is plausibly and ingeniously written, and as it expresses the opinions of many, especially in our large cities, who profess religion, we insert

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<sup>30</sup>J. J. Hill, "Some Reasons Why A Christian Girl Will Not Dance", (Red Springs, N. C.: n.p., n.d.)

it for the purpose of expressing our own views on the subject. 'A subscriber will feel thankful to the Editor of the Presbyterian, if he will publish the inclosed--and will be so thankful, if there be heresy contained therein, to see it exposed by the Editor or any other person.'

'There is much value in the science or art of dancing, if it could be separated from the evils which attend it; it seems necessary to a perfect system of education; which should neglect neither the body nor mind. It is so intimately connected with music, that although new, chiefly because of the disapprobation of Christians, we have music without dancing, there never was dancing without music. This connexion is often illustrated by the circumstances of persons finding themselves almost irresistibly inclined to accompany with dancing certain strains of music.

It has been objected to dancing, that it is a desecration of that which was formerly a religious exercise. It was just as much a religious exercise as music--just as music now is--and no more. There were dances expressive of all the different sentiments which are capable of being expressed by music, even those of lofty adoration, as that of David before the ark. There is no doubt that there was once a dance to the tune of Old Hundred, which we may conceive to have been as solemn and majestic as that noble tune, and equally worthy of being employed in the worship of Almighty God. And we have many anthems, and ascriptions of praise from King David's Psalms, which we may imagine the Jewish women to have embodied in their dances with could not read effect.

But because dancing has been used, and may be used again, in religious worship, is that a reason why we may not express by it an innocent or amiable emotion. Then, as music has been, and will be, used in the same manner, it is equally a desecration to express our love of our country in a patriotic song, our rejoicing at a happy marriage, in a nuptial song--or our grief at the burial of our friends in a dirge.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Meredith, editor, "Dancing", The Biblical Recorder II, No. 21 (May 24, 1837), 1.

In all countries there have been patriotic dances, and war dances, and dances commemorate of great events,--as victories in numerous cases mentioned in the dance which Theseus taught to the young men of Athens, and which we are told, represented in its maze, the labyrinth of Crete.

There are almost no emotions which we have not heard expressed in the most forcible and often affecting manner, by music, and which may not be expressed with additional force and effect by dancing to music. It is a beautiful and graceful art, calculated to adorn the body--and if rightly used, to ennoble and refine the mind.

The more domestic emotions are equally capable of being thus embodied. How beautiful would be a dance at the fire-side, which might express the sentiment of 'Home--sweet Home.' Such 'music and dancing' was or might have been that which welcomed home the Prodigal Son, mingled with such as gave the praise to God.

Amorous dances, as well as amorous songs are offensive to good taste, but are no necessary part of the art, and such should be excluded; as well as those used in corrupt or idolatrous worship.

If it be asked to what purpose is all this? What good will it do? We may humbly answer; beside the benefit in various ways, which the rising generation will derive from the essential part of this art,--if it be the truth, however impertinent it may appear to some, the world will be the better for knowing it.

If everything be case aside, which the hands of sin and folly have stained, even the holiest things, the very ark of God, (with reverest be it spoken,) would not escape.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

As the nineteenth century came to a close, much of the religious objection to dancing became less obvious. This objection did not disappear; it remained a strong item of discussion among the clergy and congregations. However, as communication became more sophisticated and people began to travel and have more leisure time, those religious attitudes which were utilized as guilt inducing began to change. There were other more pressing sins which ministers felt were more objectionable, and dancing did not appear to have as much sinful influence as it once had.

CHAPTER VIII  
SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Before the twentieth century North Carolina was a predominantly rural area. Agriculture was the chief occupation of the early people, with very few large towns and cities in evidence.

Social life in North Carolina was largely rural in character for the majority of the inhabitants lived on plantations and farms. For the most part, the people were thrifty and hard-working, warm-hearted and good natured, taking their work or play as they found it.<sup>1</sup>

Social life set the tone for society in North Carolina before the twentieth century. There were two distinct types of social conditions found among the people who lived during this time. One was characterized by the formality and refinement of the large planters, while the other was typified by the simplicity of the small farmers. The planter and the farmer, however, shared certain public social centers. The tavern, church, schoolhouse, country store, and lodge

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<sup>1</sup>Johnson, op. cit., p. 81.

would often find both social groups mingling, even though the small farmers far outnumbered the planters in population. It was the ambition of those who lived in the country to take a trip to town as often as possible. The planter could afford frequent visits to the near-by village and often maintained a house there, while the small farmer had to be content with the monthly trip to sell his produce or to celebrate public holidays.<sup>2</sup>

The social conditions which prevailed at this time had direct influences upon the types of social dancing done by the early settlers. The farmers and their families incorporated their recreational dancing into the work done as a necessity for survival. Quiltings, barn-raising, and cropgatherings were usually celebrated with a hoe-down at the end of the work day. The planters and members of the elite classes were influenced by travel and by meeting people from large cities. The upper classes had the time and money to pursue the most up to date dances and to employ the best teachers in order to learn the newest steps. The opulence of their balls and parties reflected the grand manner in which they sought their pleasure. Religion, education, and occupations all had their influences upon social dance

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

before the twentieth century. Whether these influences were positive or negative, it is evident that North Carolinians of all socio-economic classes frequently participated in social dance.

The collection of material reviewed revealed that there was very little in the way of primary sources available regarding the lower socio-economic classes that could be used to determine the exact nature of their social dances. Oral tradition and fictional writing were the most frequently used methods of describing dances of rural people. The elite classes received more education than the lower classes at this time, which gave access to more primary sources describing the nature of the elite social dances. Therefore, for the most part, this investigation into the social dance of early North Carolinians dealt with the upper classes and their preoccupation with dance.



### Recommendations

Upon completion of this study, the following recommendations are made (1) that more time be given by North Carolinians to the care and collection of their historical artifacts; and (2) that further study be conducted on social dance in North Carolina after the twentieth century.

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## APPENDIX A

March 14, 1977

Dear Sir:

I am a graduate student at UNC-Greensboro, and am completing my research for my doctoral dissertation.

My topic of study is "Social Dance in North Carolina Before the Twentieth Century", and I would like to know if you have knowledge of original family manuscripts, pictures, dance programs, or other artifacts which mention dance or social life and customs which may have dance included in them. I would also be interested in any manuscripts or mention of religious objection to dance. I have found that there are still large homes in the state which have ballrooms and also some old hotels. Perhaps you may have a knowledge of these sites, also.

I would certainly appreciate any help you could give me on this topic. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Jane R. Jenkins (Mrs.)  
Box 273  
Lenoir-Rhyne College  
Hickory, N.C. 28601

## SURVEY OF NORTH CAROLINA HISTORICAL SOCIETIES

Albemarle-Stanley County Historical Society  
 Asheboro-Randolph County Historical Society  
 Asheville-Blue Ridge Parkway  
 Bath-Historic Bath  
 Beaufort Historical Association  
 Carteret Historical Research Association  
 Burgaw-Pender County Historical Society, Inc.  
 Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historical Association  
 Danbury-Stokes County Historical Society  
 East Bend-Northwest North Carolina Historical Association, Inc.  
 Edenton-Historic Edenton, Inc.  
 Elizabeth City-Museum of the Albemarle  
 Elon College-Historical Society of North Carolina  
 Enfield-Halifax County Historical Association  
 Fayetteville-Cumberland County Historical Society  
 Fayetteville-Upper Cape Fear Historical Society  
 Greensboro Historical Museum  
 Greenville-Pitt County Historical Society  
 Halifax-Historic Halifax State Historic Site  
 Hertford-Perquimans County Historical Society  
 High Point Historical Society, Inc.  
 Hillsborough Historical Society  
 Lake Junaluska-Commission on Archives and History of the United Methodist  
 Church

Laurinburg-Scotland County Historical Association, Inc.  
Lexington-Davidson County Historical Association  
Mars Hill-Madison County Historical Society  
Montreat-Historical Foundation of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches  
Mount Airy-Surry County Historical Society  
Murfreesboro-Murfreesboro Historical Association, Inc.  
New Bern Historical Society, Inc.  
New Bern-Tryon Palace Restoration Complex  
Raleigh-North Carolina Folklore Society  
Rocky Mount-Nash County Historical Association  
Rocky Mount-The Littleton College Memorial Association  
Roxboro-Person County Historical Society, Inc.  
Salisbury-Rowan Museum, Inc.  
Sanford-House in the Horseshoe  
Statesville-Fort Dobbs State Historic Site  
Wadesboro-Anson County Historical Society, Inc.  
Wake Forest College Birthplace Society, Inc.  
Wilmington-Historic Wilmington Foundation, Inc.  
Wilmington-Lower Cape Fear Historical Society, Inc.  
Wilson County Historical Society  
Windsor-Bertie County Historical Association  
Windsor-Historic Hope Foundation, Inc.  
Winston-Salem-Historic Bethabara  
Winston-Salem-Moravian Music Foundation  
Winston-Salem-Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts

Winston-Salem-Old Salem, Inc.

Winston-Salem-Reynolda House, Inc.

Yadkinville-Yadkin County Historical Society, Inc.

Yanceyville-Caswell County Historical Association, Inc.

## APPENDIX B

April 8, 1977

Dear Sir:

I am a graduate student at UNC-Greensboro, and am completing my research for my doctoral dissertation.

In my research, I have found that your institution received a charter before the twentieth century. My dissertation topic is "Social Dance in North Carolina Before the Twentieth Century", and I would like to know if you have any knowledge of any artifacts in your archives which may mention dancing as a social event, religious objection to dancing, or any rules of conduct mentioning dance.

I would certainly appreciate any help you could give me on this topic. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Jane R. Jenkins (Mrs.)  
Box 273  
Lenoir-Rhyne College  
Hickory, N.C. 28601

SURVEY OF PRIVATE SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES  
IN NORTH CAROLINA CHARTERED BEFORE 1900

Private Schools

- Oak Ridge Academy - established 1852  
St. Mary's Junior College - established 1842  
Salem Academy - established 1772

Colleges

- Barber-Scotia College - established 1867  
Belmont Abbey College - established 1876  
Bennett College - established 1873  
Campbell College - established 1887  
Catawba College - established 1851  
Davidson College - established 1835  
Duke University - established 1838  
Greensboro College - established 1833  
Guilford College - established 1834  
Queens College - established 1857  
St. Augustine's College - established 1867  
Wake Forest University - established 1833