

# COUNTRY DANCE AND SONG

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# Country Dance and Song

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Cover: Scene from "Mrs. Perkins's Ball." Dancers from the Flying Cloud Academy of Vintage Dance in a dance reconstruction. *Photo by Steve Beasley.*

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Volume 17

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## Contents

### **The Abbots Bromley Horn Dance**

by Andrew Bullen .....2

### **Guidelines for Dance Research**

by Richard Powers .....16

### **A Collection of Favorite Polkas**

by Richard Powers .....26

### **Sixty Years of Song and Dance:**

#### **The John C. Campbell Folk School in Brasstown, North Carolina, from 1925 to the Present**

by Anne Culbertson .....28

### **Bounced from Church for Dancing**

by George W. Peck .....39

### **Pat Shaw: An Afterword**

by Nibs Mathews .....40

# The Abbots Bromley Horn Dance

by Andrew Bullen

*At Abbots, or now rather Pagets Bromley, they had also within memory, a sort of sport, which they celebrated at Christmas (on New-Year, and Twelfth-Day) call'd the hobby-horse dance, from a person that carryed the image of a horse between his leggs, made of thin boards, and in his hand a bow and arrow, which passing through a hole in the bow, and stopping upon a shoulder it had in it, he made a snapping noise as he drew it to and fro, keeping time with the music: with this man danced six others, carrying on their shoulders as many rein deers heads, three of them painted white, and three red, with the armes of the cheif families (viz. of Pagot, Bagot, and Wells) to whom the revenews of the town cheifly belonged, depicted on the palms of them, with which they danced the hays and other country dances. To this Hobby-Horse dance there also belong'd a pot, which was kept by turnes, by four or five of the cheif of the town, whom they call'd Reeves, who provided cakes and ale to put in this pot; all people who had any kindness for the good intent of the institution of the sport, giving pence apiece for themselves and families; and so forraigners too, that came to see it: with which mony (the charge of the cakes and ale being defrayed) they not only repaired their church but kept their poore too: which charges are not now perhaps so cheerfully boarn.*

Dr. Robert Plot, *A Natural History of Staffordshire*, 1686, Chap. X, p. 434.

*This custome was continued till the warre and I haue seen it oft practised they had something of this kind likewise for getting money to repair their church at Stafford, every common counsellman collecting the free guifts of his freinds and he that could bring in the most money to the hobby horse upon as a man in best credit soe y they stroue who should improue his intrest most and as I remember it was accomplished for at Christmas.*

Penciled into the margin of Simon Degge's copy of *A Natural History of Staffordshire*, circa 1700.

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*Andrew Bullen is a musician and the current squire of the Ravenswood Morris Team of Chicago.*



# History and Costume

In the small English town of Abbots Bromley, a ritual dance processional takes place every year during Wakes Week (the Monday following the first Sunday following September 4th) and at other days of the year, including midwinter, Christmas, and Easter. The performers use six pairs of reindeer horns mounted on ancient wooden heads. The dance is extremely old, and it is known as the Abbots Bromley horn dance.

No other event in the world of folklore inspires more debate than the Abbots Bromley horn dance. As with most ritual folk performances, historical records reveal little of the history, music, or customs of the dance, leaving unanswered many fundamental questions: How old is the dance? Why are horns used? How did the dance originate? To this debate, I bring my own opinions and speculations about the dance.

Abbots Bromley lies in the county of Staffordshire, east of Stafford and north of Lichfield. An old markettown situated on what was once the main road from Birmingham to Manchester, Abbots Bromley was settled in the year 1004, on land willed to the Benedictine abbey founded by the extremely wealthy Wulfric Spot, Earl of Mercia (also known as Wulfric the Black). Wulfric was counselor to King Ethelred, as well as a great soldier; he established the monastery as a place to retire from his public life. Called out of his retirement after six years to fight the Norse invaders, he and his Mercian retainers fought in a battle near Ipswich against the Norse forces under the command of Thurkill. There he received the wounds that ultimately led to his death. The battle was fought on May 18, 1010; Wulfric died on October 22nd of that same year. The story of the horns, at least, begins here. When the Norse raiders invaded England, they brought with them herds of reindeer. Might this not be where the horns came from, if not as a war prize seized from the Norse by Wulfric's Mercian troops, then as trophies taken from the stray herds that local hunters encountered from time to time? Theresa Buckland tells us that the Great Horns, the horns carried by the leader, were radiocarbon dated as being from around A.D. 1065, plus or minus eighty years. There is a strong circumstantial link between the age of the horns, the invasion of the Vikings, and the fact that the people of Abbots Bromley and the surrounding areas were called upon to fight the northern invaders.

The creation of a dance with horns, I believe, lies in an important development that occurred in the twelfth century. At that time, the village of Abbots Bromley, as well as much of the region, was surrounded by a vast forest known as Needwood Forest. Part of this forest was owned by St. Modwenna abbey. The abbey, a particularly powerful and influential institution, had tutelage over the nearby village. In 1125, the abbot decreed that by petition the five families who farmed the rents of the manor could have grazing rights in the forest itself. The decree must have been

a great relief to these families, since the granting of grazing rights was a considerable boon to the farmers concerned. Not only could their cattle have grazing room, but the farmers could also collect wood and an occasional deer and rabbit.

It seems likely that the horns were introduced in some form of dance some three centuries after the decree of 1125. Pageants of the type where the horn dance was likely to begin flourished around the time of King Henry the VIII. The horn dance has all the characteristics of being associated with a pageant: the Robin Hood and Maid Marian figures were popular characters in pageants, and the hobbyhorse was a frequent money-fetching device, just as it is in morris dances today. Why the people chose the horns as a dancing device is a mystery that may never be solved. Perhaps the horns were given to the dancers to raise money for the poor and for the church. Only 200 years after King Henry the VII's time, Dr. Plot spoke of the horns as being used for the sake of charity (until the Poor Laws were enacted in 1834, the local parishes bore the responsibilities for the poor). The horns, after their acquisition from the Norse, were probably kept at the abbey, or at the manor of a wealthy lord. The abbey may have given the horns to the village as a vehicle for raising money for the poor. It is also possible that the dance began as a reminder to the rulers of Abbots Bromley that the people had grazing rights in Needwood Forest, or as a celebration of the acquisition of these rights.

The horn dance has in all likelihood continued uninterrupted since the mid-fifteenth century, except for brief periods during times of war. It ceased altogether during the English Civil War, 1642-51, which was particularly devastating in Staffordshire.

The traditional dancers have always belonged to one family, the Bentleys. The tradition passed to another family name, the Fowells, by way of William Bentley. He was born William Fowell in 1857, but his mother was widowed and remarried into the Bentley family. He was always known as William Bentley, but when his five sons entered the service in 1914, they had to take up their legal name of Fowell. Thus, the horns have passed from the Bentleys to the Fowells through William Bentley. A photograph in M.A. Rice's book (p. 75) shows the Fowell-Bentley dancers in Khaki uniform, on leave from the Lincoln regiment, carrying the horns, ready to perform the dance. They danced that year in uniform. This was the last time the dance was performed during the First World War and the last time that two of the Fowells would dance out: Arthur was killed at the battle of Loos, David at the battle of Arras.

M.A. Rice recounts an anecdote about the horns which comes from William Bentley's step-grandfather, who died at the age of 93. It was his right during that time to dance carrying the Great Horns, the largest set and the set that dancer number one uses. One night before the horns were danced out, he was taken ill. Kate Bentley, the mother of William Bentley, seeing her father's obvious distress, dressed up in his clothing, and led the horns the next day. No one was ever the wiser and she returned to her father in triumph.

The other story concerns the kidnapping of the horns. It is a longstanding rule

that the horns must never leave the parish of Abbots Bromley. On one occasion, however, the team was bribed to take the horns to the nearby village of Burton-Upon-Trent, east of Abbots Bromley on the Trent river. The Burton men made the dancers drunk on particularly potent rum and stole the horns. Somehow, the horns got back to Abbots Bromley; to this day, the horns are forbidden by custom to leave the parish.

The horns used in the Abbots Bromley dance are from reindeer of the species *Rangifer Farandus*. There are six pairs of these antlers, each one carried by a specific dancer. Three sets of the horns (those carried by dancers one, two and three) are painted white; the others are brown, though according to Buckland at various stages in their history they have been red, a dark vitreous color, dark blue, and light blue. The horns are asymmetrical, further proof that the horns were from tamed herds since reindeer living in the wild have more symmetrical antlers. Each set of horns is placed in a small wood head in the shape of a reindeer skull. The wood in these heads is estimated to be from the sixteenth century. Each assembly—horns and skull—is set upon a wood shaft some forty centimeters in length. In addition, the horns are supported by an iron bar placed between the antlers.

When researching her book, Miss Alford requested that the horns be weighed. She reports: "The vicar of Abbots Bromley has kindly had the weights and measurements taken for the present writer. 'The weights,' he writes, 'include head iron fittings and stale. Iron is old, heavy, hand-wrought; woodwork 16th century at the latest... Wilson's government tested steel yard was used for weighing—and the numbers painted on the handles for convenience.'" [Ed. Note: The numbers on the handles do not correspond to the number of the dancer who carries the set of horns.]

She gives the weights and measurements as follows:

Number 1 - 16½ lbs.  
31" from tip to tip

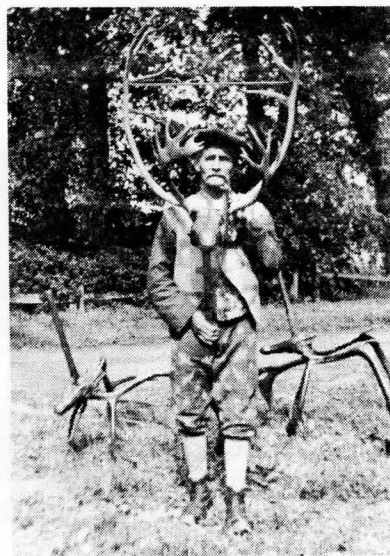
Number 2 - 19 lbs.  
29" from tip to tip

Number 3 - 16¼ lbs.  
35" from tip to tip

Number 4 - 23¼ lbs.  
33" from tip to tip

Number 5 - 20 lbs.  
38" from tip to tip

Number 6 - 25¼ lbs.  
39" from tip to tip



CDSS file photo

Until recently there has been no official set of costumes for the six dancers. Grandfather Bentley recalled that the dancers had, before the 1860s, worn their own clothing, sewn with bits of ribbon dyed to match the color of the horns they were carrying. Alice Lowe also remembered the dancers as being dressed in ordinary clothes, except for Maid Marian, who was a man dressed in women's clothing. It was Alice Lowe's father, the Reverend Mr. Lowe, who introduced a formal costume to the dance in the mid-1880s. Kate Bentley remembers the costumes: "The men wore green tunics with brown spotted sleeves, blue trousers with brown spots" (Rice, p. 73). These costumes were made from a set of old bed curtains. Unfortunately, they did not last very long, for, to put it in Miss Rice's delicate words, "Nights supposed to be spent in other village inns were sometimes, after too great hospitality, spent lying in the open" (p. 74). The current costumes were designed and introduced in 1904 by the Reverend Stuart Berkeley and by the subscription and support of the churchwardens: green tapestry breeches with an oak leaf and acorn pattern (Needwood Forest is famous for its oak trees), green hose, green caps, and sleeveless coats, three green, three red.

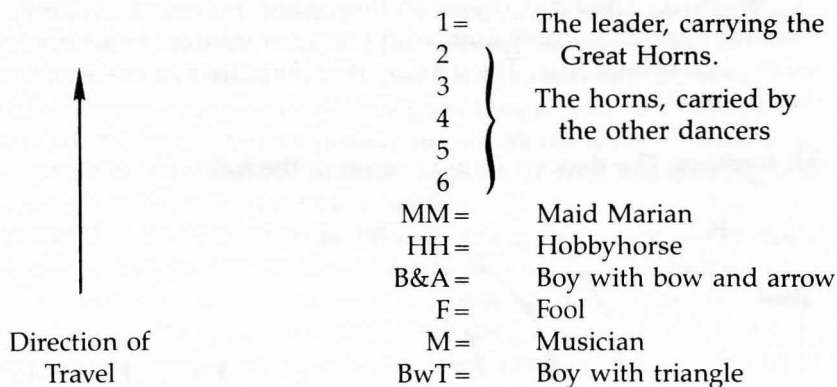
Besides the six numbered dancers, four other characters participate in the dance: a fool, a hobbyhorse, a Maid Marian, and a boy who carries a bow and arrow. In addition there is a musician and a boy who carries a triangle. The Maid Marian character carries a ladle, which she uses to collect money from the audience. The wood of the hobbyhorse, the ladle, and the bow and arrow have all been dated to be of the same age as the wood heads. The hobbyhorse, of the Cotswold's horse-and-rider type, has a hinged jaw, which is used to clap in time to the music. The bow and arrow carried by the boy is shouldered so that the arrow can be drawn and released to make a loud snapping noise.

## The Dance

The dance is made up of six figures. I have given them arbitrary names to identify more easily the discrete parts of the dance. The figures are (in the order) circle up; one leads off; all together; advance, meet and retire (henceforth known as AMR); cross over (CO); and form the line. The dancers use a walking step in the dance, except in the AMR, which has a slight lifting of the foot at the horn clash. Normally the musicians are not active participants in the dance. They follow the procession and remain stationary during the figures. If, however, the musicians are inclined to participate in the dance, the general scheme can easily accommodate both of them.



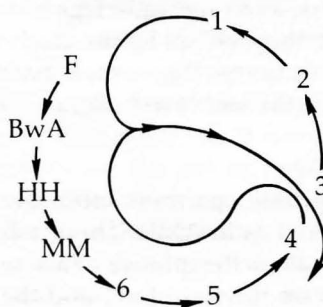
The dance begins with the dancers standing in a line in the following order:



**Diagram 1**

**Circle up.** Following number one, the dancers walk in a procession until they reach the desired dancing location. The leader waits until the A music begins again and then leads everyone in a large circle. The direction of the circle is unimportant; according to Sharp, the dancers began the dance either clockwise or counterclockwise. The dancers circle until the B music begins, and then go into one leads off.

**One leads off.** At the beginning of the B music, number one turns into the set, leading numbers two and three inside the perimeter of the circle. They pass between positions three and four, and lead off in the direction opposite to which the original circle is traveling. Immediately after number one turns into the circle, number four also turns in, leading the rest of the company into the circle along the following track:

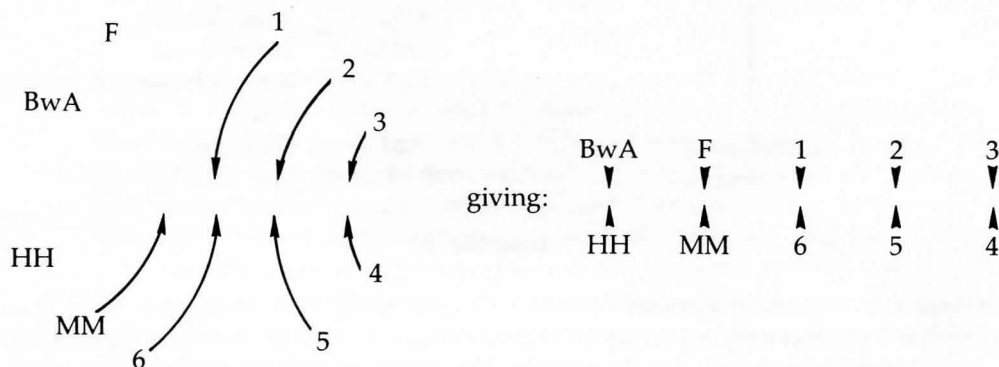


**Diagram 2**

As soon as number three passes through position three-four, number four falls in place behind him, leading the rest of the company into a line again. Everyone should now be in a line going in the opposite direction from the original track. The

success of this figure depends on how smoothly number four falls in place behind number three. Timing is crucial to this figure; number three must clear position three-four just as number four, with the other dancers following him, is ready to fall in place behind him. The dancers then form up in a circle and prepare to form the all together.

**All together.** The dancers form up a set in the following manner:



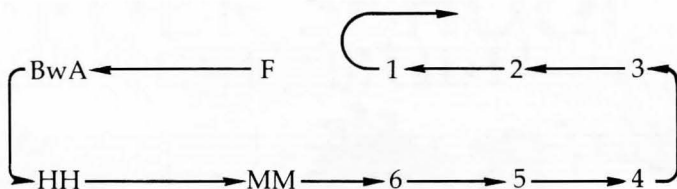
**Diagram 3**

The all together should take one or two bars of music. The dancers then begin the AMR-CO sequence with the C music.

**AMR (advance, meet, and retire).** Dancers move forward in lines to meet in the middle. There is a step peculiar to the figure: the dancers begin on the left foot, take three steps forward toward their partners, and return to place. They then advance toward their partners, and raise right legs forward and up. This is the end of the phrase. Numbers one through six lightly clash horns with their opposites, and the dancers not carrying horns throw their hands forward and up at each other. This figure should have the feel of a challenge. Dancers retire to place, ready to begin the cross over.

**Cross over.** In the second phrase, partners cross over and change sides by the right. Dancers then clash horns as in AMR. This clash, as well as the clash in the AMR, occurs on the last beat of the phrase. This sequence, AMR-CO, is then repeated; the AMR is begun on the right foot, and the dancers cross back to their original sides. At this point, the dance is ready to begin again. The A music repeats and the dancers form the line to move on to a new location.

**Form the line.** Number one dances forward, followed by the rest of the dancers. He then leads the entourage into a line by turning over his outside shoulder:



**Diagram 4**

At the beginning of the B music, number one leads the company off into one leads off. The dance is ready to begin again.

## Music

The horn dance has never had its own tune; the music varied from musician to musician and was never written down or standardized. Unfortunately, many of the melodies probably passed away with their composers. The musician at the time played whatever tune struck his fancy, as long as it fit in with the dance. The absence of a standard tune continues to this day. The current musician, Douglas Fowell, plays modern tunes as well as traditional ones in the daylong procession of the horns, interspersing tunes such as *Yankee Doodle* and *Pop Goes the Weasel*. I have provided the tunes that are mentioned in the various sources that deal with the dance. I would like to thank Mr. Guy Maclean-Eltham for transcribing these tunes for me.

### Robinson's Tune.

This is the tune most often associated with the horn dance and it is probably the oldest (c. 1700). It was sent to Sharp in 1910 by a Mr. Buckley, an Abbots Bromley resident who noted the tune in 1857 or 1858. He learned it from William (or Henry) Robinson, the town's wheelwright and a very good fiddle player. While he never played for the dance, he was the only one in the village who remembered the tune, which he said was still used when he was a young man. We know that Robinson was born in the 1790s, because he sold his shop in 1878 while he was in his late eighties. Robinson indicated that the tune was ancient in his day. However, because of technical aspects of the tune, doubt has been raised as to the authenticity of Robinson's tune as an early horn dance accompaniment (see particularly Cawte, pp. 78-79).

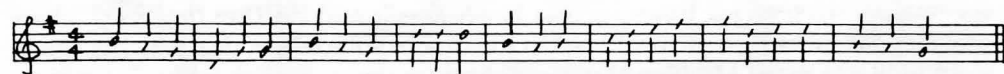
### Robinson's Tune - 1857



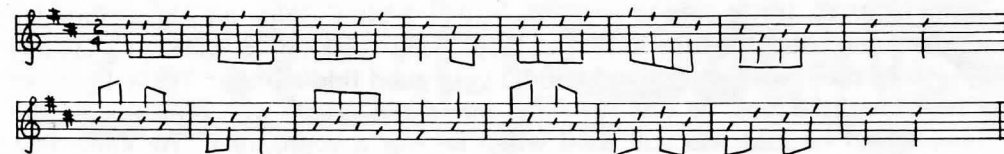
### Sammons' Tune

This tune comes to us via Edie Sammons, the sister of Tom Sammons, who played for the horn dancers in the early 1900s. [As of 1939, there had been only four musicians as far back as anyone could remember. Mrs. Bentley (born in 1869) remembered a fiddler from her early childhood. After him came three concertina players: a Mr. Fenton, an itinerant musician who wandered from village to village occasionally playing for the dancers in the 1880s; Rock Sammons, Mrs. Bentley's brother; and Tom Sammons, who took over when his father Rock died in 1933.] A slight variation of this tune was used in the town's celebration of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1887. It was frequently used with *Yankee Doodle*, Sammons' tune forming the A music, *Yankee Doodle* the B music.

### Edie Sammons' Tune - 1890



### Yankee Doodle

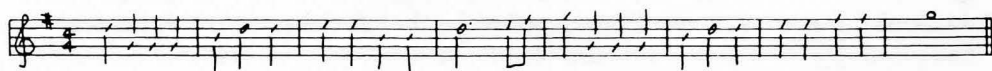




### William Aday's Tune

Born in 1862, William Adey was a bricklayer and a dancer. M.A. Rice collected this tune from him in 1924. Adey remembered it as the horn dance tune used in the 1870s and 1880s.

### William Adey's Tune - 1870



### The Cock of the North

Some evidence suggests that this was the tune traditionally used in the horn dance. This standard version, taken from Pruw Boswell's *Morris Dancing on the Lancashire Plain*, is used in the Wigan St. John's dance.

### The Cock of the North



### St. Anne's Tune

This four-bar melody is the same tune that Edie Sammons recalled (see above), but with a different rhythm. It was first published in 1924 in the *Leaflet* of SS. Mary's and Anne's Guild, St. Mary's and St. Anne's being schools in Abbots Bromley.

### St. Anne's Tune



## Bobby Shaftoe

In an article published in 1933, Violet Alford noted that the dancers used *Bobby Shaftoe* when she first encountered the horn dance. The arrangement given here is used for the Sleights sword dance. Alford also noted that the musician "plays three tunes, *Bobby Shaftoe*, *Her Golden Hair* of music hall memory, and a not unpleasing nondescript tune in 2/4 time" (p. 206). I believe that the "not unpleasing... tune in 2/4 time" is Edie Sammons' tune, which, until Sharp published Mr. Robinson's tune in 1911, was considered to be the official music of the dance.

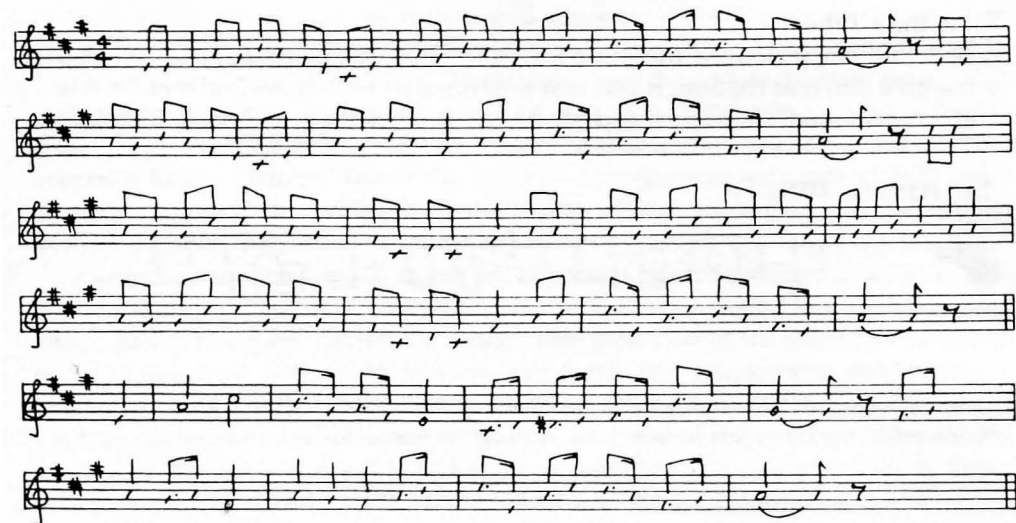
## Bobby Shaftoe



## And Her Golden Hair Was Hanging Down Her Back

This is the only tune of similar title to Ms. Alford's *Her Golden Hair* that I could track down (*Songs of the British Music Hall* by Peter Davison, pp. 84-85). I cannot be certain that this is the tune Alford heard.

## And Her Golden Hair Was Hanging Down Her Back



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Unidentified photograph from CDSS files.

# Guidelines for Dance Research

by Richard Powers

The traditional dance revival is a tradition in itself, dating back to the turn of this century. But lately we have seen a significant change in the sophistication of period dance enthusiasts. The appeal of bygone eras is as strong as ever, but the quaint charm of the "old timey" approximations of traditional dance is being replaced by a growing interest in historic authenticity. Perhaps this is influenced by the greater accuracy of period films, architectural restorations, museum displays, and general historic detailing that has blossomed in the past twenty years. Whatever the reason, traditional dancers today have a greater desire to know original steps, styles, figures and music. Dancers describe a greater satisfaction in authenticity... a feeling of substance. This trend is appearing in most branches of traditional dance, urging dance leaders to come up with increasingly authentic reconstructions. And many leaders are responding with their own explorations into uncharted areas. They are doing their own research, no longer relying solely on pre-1950 recreational dance traditions. The resulting freshness is inspiring to their dancers. Others would like to do their own digging, but don't know where to start. It is for this purpose that I have sketched these guidelines for dance research.

## The Guidelines

**Do your own research, using primary sources.** *Primary sources* are firsthand records from the time of an event or era, recorded by those who witnessed or participated in an event. Primary sources for historic dance include diaries, dance manuals, newspaper accounts, music notations, illustrations, film documents, and sources that I'll mention later. *Secondary sources* pass on secondhand information and hearsay, perhaps conscientiously, but without certain knowledge. Secondary sources include the many histories of dance found in bookstores and libraries; most student theses, restaged films and teleplays, and teachings of dance leaders who did not experience their material firsthand. Secondary sources are often wrong. Sometimes the authors have unconscious biases, or perhaps they have a theme to promote. Dance leaders might be afraid that their favorite dances might not be popular without certain modifications. There are a few esteemed secondary sources that deal intelligently with primary source materials, but most dance histories quote other dance histories, which have quoted previous dance histories.

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Errors mount exponentially in the process. Not only are the fallacies passed on, but the unfortunate student who reads the same “fact” in several printed sources will become convinced of its truth. There is also an in-between area that some scholars enjoy debating: Are interviews based on distant memories primary or secondary sources? How trustworthy are dance descriptions in historic novels? If a primary source in German is translated into English, is it still primary? Personally, I find these fine degrees of categorization less important than a commonsense awareness of the inherent shortcomings of some sources.

Primary sources are increasingly available and fascinating to study. Reading an account written at the very moment of an event offers an immediacy not found in histories. Authors and teachers who work from primary sources speak with a freshness and vividness that can only come from a direct tap to the wellspring.

### *Some Primary Sources*

- Dance manuals. These handbooks were published to transform readers into graceful and accomplished dancers. This *vade mecum* tradition goes back to the hand-written dance descriptions of the fifteenth century.
- Etiquette books, which offer a different perspective, often more cautious on dancing.
- Anti-dance treatises, which sometime describe the more illicit dances (which are hard to find in dance manuals).
- Diaries, letters, journals, and autobiographies, for personal insights and unique details.
- Novels and other literature contemporary to the era, for period ambiance and personal interactions in a dance setting.
- Newspapers and magazines, for the latest breaking dances and regional variations.
- Iconography, illustrations from the era including paintings, drawings, etchings, lithographs, woodcuts, sculptures, tapestries, photographs, etc.
- Music notations. In addition to being an essential component of dance, sheet music often contains dance instructions printed inside the cover.
- Phonograph records from the era solve tempo problems and questions about performance practices, offer an aural glimpse of the character of a dance, and sometimes give vocal dance descriptions.
- Original motion picture documents, the ultimate imagery for a dance scholar, if they can be found. It's too bad films and phonographs weren't invented centuries earlier!
- Interviews, especially important for dances of this century. Don't put this off until next year! A hint: If you find that your questions are not eliciting a response, play original recordings of the music or demonstrate some steps to jog the memory. Follow up for details... you can't ask a book further questions.
- Advertisements and broadsides, sometimes the only surviving record of a dance event. Promotional brochures for dance academies are especially rewarding.

Surviving archives from past dance academies and dance masters, sometimes still intact as a collection. These can include correspondence between dance masters, fee schedules, and travel routes of itinerant preceptors.

Ball programs, souvenirs that list exactly what dances were done, when and where. *Collections* of these dance cards may indicate dance trends, regional variations, partnering patterns, favorite bands, and other details.

Critics reviews and social column gossip, for contemporary opinions on stage and social dance.

Original clothing, regalia, and costumes, in museums and private collections. Clothing influenced dance as much as dance changed fashions.

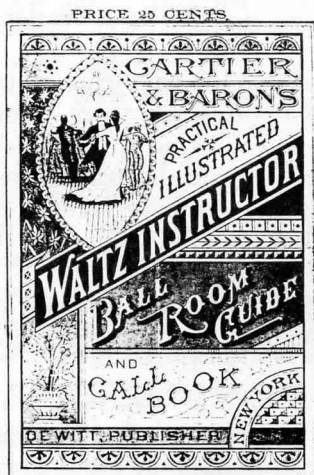
Architecture. A visit to ballrooms or dance academies still standing will show how a space affected the dances that were known to have taken place there.

Receipts and other financial information may indicate the social prestige of an event, or possibly list inventories of musical instruments, dance props, costumes, etc.

Church, town and school records may offer biographical information, ritual inventories, and other details.

City directories list dates and locations of dance academies, cabarets and dance halls, although sometimes only paid announcements are listed.

Et cetera, translated as, "You may find a clue where you least expect it." For example, after some difficulty finding illustrations of the Apache dance, we came across a lavishly illustrated can of Talc Apache (a brand of talcum powder from the era) in an antique store.





## Where To Find Primary Sources

- Public libraries are the best place to start. Check them all, not just the largest libraries. Often dance companies, academies, and private collectors bequeath their collections to a small library. An increasing drawback of larger libraries is that they are changing over to computerized indexes and closed stacks. Some of the best sources are those found on the shelf *next* to the book you were looking for. Computerization, on the other hand, requires prior knowledge of sources. Don't overlook the newspaper stacks, clipping files, phonograph records, and rare-book room. Also, try the interlibrary loan system. Microfilms of rare sources can sometimes be ordered, even from overseas.

The best libraries for dance research are The Dance Collection at The New York Public Library, Lincoln Center, and the Library of Congress. There are some very fine guidelines for using libraries in the CDSS publication *Resources for the Reconstruction of English Country Dances*, by Kate Keller (1983).

- Institutional, school and corporate libraries. These usually require membership or special permission to peruse, but don't be easily daunted.
- Rare book dealers. If they don't have what you are looking for, they can sometimes search for you through advertisements in their trade magazines.
- Antique shops, conventions and flea markets. They are time consuming to search, but enjoyable and eventually rewarding.
- Private collectors and researchers. Most dance scholars collect primary sources, but be aware that you should not ask that they copy their books for you, as this is extremely time consuming for them and damaging to their rare books. The best you can usually hope for is a one-for-one exchange for a source that they don't have.
- Reprints, the easiest start in primary research. For students of nineteenth century and ragtime era dance, Patri J. Pugliese offers a wonderful reprint collection: Time Traveler, 120 Walnut St. Watertown, MA 02172. For earlier eras, try DaCapo Press, 233 Spring St., New York, NY 10013.

## Concerning Secondary Sources

Despite their shortcomings, secondary sources can be helpful if used with caution. They can give others' perspectives and insights and they can direct you to new sources through their bibliographies.

It is sometimes not possible to use primary sources on every project. If this happens, the second best approach is to find out who is doing esteemed primary research in the field and follow their work, or hire them to present a workshop.

**Search out multiple concordances** for each dance, step, and figure before presenting them as a reconstruction. A single source usually contains too many unknowns, with the author assuming that the reader will understand a great number of unstated conventions. (Perhaps the readers did in 1750.) There are so many pitfalls—nonuniform terminology, mistranslations, pirated material, typographical

errors, and so on—that dance scholars consider it essential to compare several descriptions from the same era before arriving at a conclusion.

**Read the entire book** before reconstructing a dance contained in it. Dance descriptions are often incomplete in some important details, which may be found elsewhere in the book. Also read other books by the same author to see what changed and what remained the same over the years.

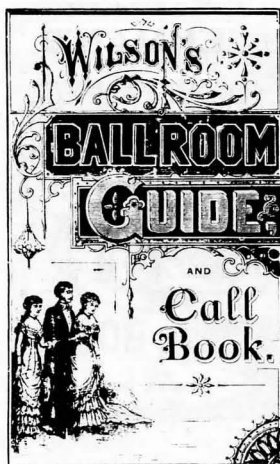
**Read the source in its original language** if you can. Translations are full of errors. If you must use a translation, at least find one from the period, which is more likely to understand now-obsolete colloquialisms. And *never* overlook a source simply because it isn't in English. For example, detailed descriptions of the ragtime "animal dances" were very rare in American sources because of their impropriety. After exhausting the stateside dance manuals without reward, we discovered some Italian and German dance manuals from the period that abounded with illustrated descriptions of the Grizzly Bear and "Il Turkey Trot," which were all quite proper because they had been imported from America.

**Re-read your sources** a few years later. It's amazing how many critical details escape a first reading.

**Investigate the authors.** Were they dance masters, biased or impartial observers, compilers or editors? Did they do the dances themselves? Were they young and idealistic, or weary and bitter? Were they writing their own material? Did they even exist? While dance manual plagiarism was common, it was usually limited to the borrowing of a few paragraphs or chapters from previous books. Occasionally it was more extensive, as in *DeWalden's Ball-Room Companion*. Everything but the title page of Emile DeWalden's book was a verbatim copy of Cellarius' famous manual, including the typographical errors. One line that Emile should have changed in his piracy was in the description of the "Cellarius Waltze-Mazurka," where DeWalden (ostensibly) writes, "My pupils would have this waltze called after me, and have named it the Cellarius."

If you cannot locate biographical information on the author, at least go back and read the entire book for the author's tone. This can greatly affect your interpretation of a dance description. If the source was simply compiled by a publisher, not a dance master, be cautious about the common practice of reprinting obsolete dances, which often sold well to an unsuspecting public. *Dick's Quadrille Call Book* (1878) was still being promoted as "embracing all the modern favorites" in its 1923 reprinting.

**Be aware of what was ideal** in the eyes of the author (what he wished would be done) and what was *actually* done by the public. You will often find a dance master describing his own terpsichorean inventions as "the most popular dance of the season," although you will rarely find his dance mentioned anywhere else. Another bias you will find is lavish praise of high-society dances, and elaborate descriptions of complex steps that can only be learned in the author's own dance

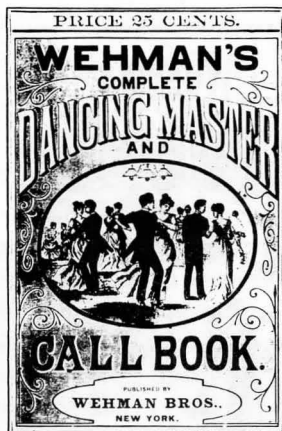


academy, but no mention of the simpler steps danced by the lower classes. This bias has existed since the fifteenth century; always dig deeper for unsanctioned behavior.

**Don't confuse similar terminology and traditions** from different eras and locales. One name does not mean one dance. Terms and styles varied widely from one locale to another and from one year to the next. It's careless to incorporate 1885 German steps in an 1845 Polish figure just because they're both called "mazurka." Although it might be possible for earlier steps to survive into a later era, never insert later steps into an earlier dance. Evolution doesn't work that way.

**Incorporate iconographic evidence.** Search out illustrations of all kinds, for they will often contain a wealth of information that you'll never find in print. Look through costume books, collections of paintings, prints and posters, period novels and social satires, newspapers and magazines, sheet music covers, clipping files, postcard collections, and scrapbooks. I recommend photocopying illustrations or shooting slides for constant reference. There will always be details missed in the first viewing that will jump out with great significance two years later. Collecting illustrations this way will also allow quick side-by-side comparisons of a dance or an era.

There are some cautions, however, in using illustrations as source material. Be aware of the illustrator's conventions and artist's license. The artist's intent was not necessarily to preserve the details of the moment for future historians. Artists exaggerated. They satirized. They most often idealized. Artists underwent years of training in the classic ideals of beauty, symmetry, form, and proportion and they often portrayed these ideals regardless of their subject matter.



Woodcuts and engravings used to be expensive to commission but cheap to copy. As a result, many dance manual illustrations were lifted from other sources, sometimes out-of-date by decades. Publishers didn't seem to mind if an old waltz woodcut was used to illustrate the latest Varsovienne. Even today, you can't always believe the captions of collected illustrations.

**Give a high priority to the research of dance music.** Music is one of the primary reasons for dancing, and one of its greatest joys. Particular tunes and rhythms often led to the creation of new dances. Conversely, music was frequently composed for a particular dance, and in some cases the composer was also the choreographer. Each dance belonged to its own music, and the pairing should be preserved in a reconstruction. It is tempting to substitute music that is easier to locate. This isn't the place to take short-cuts.

Look for references to the original tunes. If they aren't provided or named in the dance sources, then check collections of dance music. If you are studying nineteenth century dance, ball programs often listed the compositions and composers for each dance of the evening. If you cannot find references for original music, then seek out appropriate dance tunes from the same era and region. Research original instrumentations and orchestrations. Further pursuit can enter areas of original instrument design and period performance techniques. Surviving information in each of these areas dates back to the Renaissance. If you feel this is too far from your expertise, then you may wish to collaborate with a musicologist.

Original tempos are especially important in dance music. Scholars often slow down their reconstructions far below the original tempos. Social dances were done primarily by young people as an aspect of courtship. In past centuries, the unmarried dancers were usually teenagers, often dancing at brisk tempos befitting their youth. Conversely, modern tastes sometimes accelerate the tempos of genteel dances. Cast your preconceptions aside and look for empirical evidence of tempos, preferably metronome markings.



For years scholars of nineteenth century dance slowed down their polka reconstructions to a dirge (about 80 beats per minute) because the Parisian dance master Cellarius stated (in a translated edition of his 1847 book) that the polka was to be danced “rather slow.” But “slow” is a relative term: slow compared to what? Twentieth century scholars were simply making their polkas slower than the twentieth century polka, which couldn’t be what Cellarius meant. When I found an original French edition of the Cellarius, this comment (“*un peu lent*”) was accompanied by a metronome marking that had been deleted from the translation: 104 beats per minute, which is somewhat brisk. The slowness that Cellarius was referring to was probably relative to the dances most similar to the polka at that time: the lively Scotch reel or galopade.

**Thoroughly research the entire context** of a dance, beyond the steps, figures and music. This includes the fashions, makeup, social deportment, courtship customs, ballroom etiquette, the age and social standing of participants, period aesthetics as they influenced body carriage, posture and gestures, secular and religious rituals and festivals, the economic and political climate of the time, racial interactions, folklore and superstitions, the influence of concurrent dance traditions, evolutionary patterns in dance and music, and the many other details that surrounded dance.

One of the reasons for this peripheral research is to approach the consciousness of the era. We tend to interpret early dance descriptions with current semantics, just as we tend to perform ancient dance reconstructions with modern body language. Some Renaissance dance scholars with ballet training have on occasion interpreted the descriptions “graceful” and “courtly” with balletic mannerisms, for eras that predated turnout and pointed toes. Definitions and word usage also change over the years. Try to find a dictionary from your era of study, to double-check the original meaning of any word that strikes you as out of place. One researcher recently wrote the amusing footnote that the title of Charles Durang’s *Fashionable Dancer’s Casket* referred to the coffin-like shape of the book (even though it had a normal shape). If he had checked an 1850 dictionary, he would have found that a casket at that time was a small jewel box. The coffin association wasn’t made until decades later.

**Share your findings.** This is an ideal that is sometimes complicated by career development in academia, where scholars feel they must keep their resources and findings to themselves until they publish (or otherwise gain recognition for their work). It is an understandable dilemma. But if you are free from these conflicts, and if your goal is to further the public’s understanding and appreciation of traditional dance, then you will probably share your discoveries enthusiastically. It costs you little (once you pass it on, you haven’t lost it) and your sharing usually results in a reciprocation by fellow researchers. Other scholars are colleagues, assistants, and resources, not competitors.

**Challenge others’ conclusions.** In most cases, a challenge will not be received as an affront, but rather as a helpful suggestion to recheck one’s sources or underly-



ing assumptions. Most of us look forward to these questions, as they result either in a correction of our errors or a clarification of what we already knew. We need the feedback.

**Stay flexible.** In reconstructing a dance or formulating a theory, avoid settling on the first conclusion that occurs to you. Take your time, consider all possible alternatives, and continue to keep an open mind afterward. New information may reverse your current beliefs. If you change your mind, there may be critics who say, "But last year you taught it differently." Don't let their limitations become your own.

One way to stay flexible is to expand one's dance training. Learn modern dance, ballet, morris, Kentucky running sets or any form that will add variety to your present experience. We tend to interpret a written dance description in ways that we are accustomed to moving; the more ways we learn to move, the more possibilities will occur to us in reconstruction. This guideline was first suggested to me by my original mentor and great inspiration, Dr. Ingrid Brainard of Boston.

**Beware of the tendency to generalize.** A foundation of the thinking process, our predisposition to see patterns and order keeps us from being overwhelmed with irrelevant and contradictory information. Sometimes we don't perceive information that doesn't fit our preconceptions, just as we derive gratification from inputs that do. But this aid to sanity can be an enemy of dance research. History wasn't organized for history books. The interaction of social, political, economic, religious, and personal variables, plus random chance, combine to form an exceedingly complex matrix where variations and exceptions seem to outweigh continuity and consistency. *Dance* history is even more problematic because the actual evidence of past dances is so elusive. Dances existed for an intangible moment and then were gone without a trace, unless someone recorded some subjective impressions. Before films and videotape, even the best of records were only fragmentary. The resulting problems begin to multiply: scholars can find the complexities and information gaps difficult to deal with, while their audience demands comprehensive simplicity. Good researchers learn to accept alternatives and contradictions and proceed their findings with "It *may* be concluded that..." or "It is open to speculation whether..." Beginners often say, "This is the only correct way to do this nineteenth century step," or, "He does this ragtime trot incorrectly... It was never done that way." With traditional and historic dance, the more we learn, the more we discover how little we know with certainty.

Most of the audience, however, doesn't want to hear this and will support the historian who makes the most concise statements and sweeping generalities. Just the opposite should be true. The tendency to favor easy generalizations is worth resisting.

**Catalog research findings.** Before you know it, you will accumulate more information than your memory can retain. Some researchers computerize their data while others simply stuff everything into a folder marked "research."

A method that works well for me is creating file folders on subjects within my field. Some subjects are general (such as "The Gentleman's Bow," "The Language

of Flowers," or "The Nineteenth Century Tango"), others are more detailed, "References to the Tilting of the Head in Waltzing," "Suggested Topics for Conversation in Quadrilles," "References to Women Prompting Dances in the Nineteenth Century." I read through each primary source with some 150 categories in mind, photocopy each applicable reference, along with the source title, author and date (it helps to have your own copier), and drop the excerpt into the appropriate file. After cataloging 200 dance manuals this way, I have folders stuffed with references on a single subject, all in chronological order. If I find out at the last minute that the Dickens Fair organizers want me to call "Sir Roger de Coverly" at their dance, I grab the "Sir Roger" file on my way to the airport, compare thirty different versions spanning a 120-year period, and select the one most appropriate to their ball... a task I wouldn't trust to my memory alone.

I would like to conclude by giving humble assurance that my rules, guidelines and mentions of others' errors do not imply my superiority to other scholars. Over the past decade I have learned much through trial and error, and I am not immune to future mistakes. My wish is simply to make this process easier for the reader by passing on some of what I have learned. Although many of my examples are centered on nineteenth-century social dance, the guidelines are applicable to dance research in any area.

These guidelines may seem overwhelming to someone just starting to dig. Don't worry about it. Choose a simple dance and just a few resources. Buy some of Patri's reprints for bedtime reading.

Don't fret about making mistakes at the outset.

This field is still young and there is a vast amount of undiscovered material out there. The secrets still outnumber the answers. One final warning: Once you get started, uncovering these secrets may become an even greater obsession than dancing is.

*Dance reconstruction for the WCET-TV production of "Mrs. Perkins's Ball" with members of the Flying Cloud Academy of Vintage Dance."*





*Coquette, or Love Chase.*

# A Collection of FAVORITE POLKAS

Tempo:  $\text{♩} = 104$



*Allemande attitude*

The Polka spread from its Bohemian birthplace to Paris and then through the western world in 1843-44. American dance master Charles Durang predicted that, "The Polka...will doubtless eclipse the old Cotillion and reign as the ruling star of La belle Assemblée." Nine years later, he confirmed that, "The sedate and the joyous, the learned and the unlearned, the professor and the mechanic, all were taken with its vivid and inspiring music and simple step, and...became lost in the Polka mazes of the ballroom."

The great popularity of the Polka was partly due to its combination of the intimacy of the Waltz with the vivacity of the Scotch Reel. Another attribute of the Polka was its wide range of variations, at a time when variety in dancing was highly valued. The following variations are collected from the early years of the Polka (1844-1860).

**PROMENADE** Polka forward in a side-by-side position, with the gent's R arm around the lady's waist and her L hand on his R shoulder, outside arms akimbo (i.e. hands on hips). Glide the outside foot (gent's L, lady's R) boldly forward; close the rear foot to the fore (to 3rd position); glide the outside foot forward again; hop, closing the inside foot to "6th position" (free heel touching the supporting ankle, with the toe pointed down to the floor, almost touching the floor). Repeat on the opposite feet.

**POLKA VALSE** (the basic Polka) Face partners and take ballroom position. Do the above steps turning clockwise halfway around on counts 3 & 4 (but not before), still closing the feet to 6th position on count 4. Some dancers favored an inclination of the body into each step of the Polka, as opposed to the erect body carriage of the Waltz. The Polka was often preferred to be danced in a dotted (rant) rhythm:  $\text{♩} \text{♩} \text{♩} \text{♩}$ , beginning with a preliminary hop.

**REVERSE** The "Valse à l'Envers" is simply a Polka that turns counterclockwise. The Reverse Polka presents no great difficulties when danced in a straight line, but compounds the counterclockwise turning when the path of travel hooks to the left.

**DEUX TEMPS** The Valse à Deux Temps can be a confusing term. "Waltz" could refer to any turning dance, including the Polka Valse, and "deux temps" meant "two dance motions," the first of which (a glide) had one step, and the second (a chassé) had two. The Deux Temps soon became mistranslated as the "Two-Step" (even though it had 3 steps). The Deux Temps could be danced to either waltz or polka time. Despite the name confusion, the step is the essence of simplicity: a smoothly turning polka without a hop, starting with a side step, keeping the feet close to the floor at all times. By the end of the century, the Two-Step had surpassed the hopping Polka in popularity.

**PURSUIT** One of the dancers Polkas (or Two-Steps) directly backward, as the other advances. Ladies' dresses did not have long trains in the mid-century, so they could dance backwards. They were advised to step back "boldly" on the first step of each bar. Gentlemen should not interpret this term by their own long steps, but should withhold their advances to the strides of their partner. The Pursuit can also be done in an open two-hand hold, sometimes shading (twisting) the body a little.

**POLKA TREMBLANTE** This is an early, bouncy Polka where **each** step has a down-up motion. Since this variation quickly became unfashionable in genteel society, it seems appropriate to combine it with the following partnering position which also became obsolete in the early polking days: The gent takes the lady's L hand with his R. Partners face ("vis à vis") during the first bar, then turn away ("dos à dos") for the second bar, still holding hands. Continue the alternaton.

**COQUETTE** Also known as the "Love Chase." The lady escapes from her partner (possibly by turning to her R under their raised arms) and the gentleman pursues her, with arms akimbo, "attempting to look at his lady." (See the illustration above, from Charles Durang.) Flirtation, not speed, is preferred.

**PAS D'ALLEMANDE** From the Coquette, the lady may choose to raise her right arm, letting her partner take it with his right hand. She then polks, turning under their raised arms, as the gent follows without turning. The man makes sure that his right elbow is also raised (in a graceful curve of the arm) to provide clearance for the lady.

**CROSSED-HAND** If continuing from the Pas d'Allemande, face partners, keeping (lowered) right hands, and offer left hands under the rights. Do a turning Polka in this crossed-hand position, with hands held somewhat close to the heart.

**BOHEMIAN** (Double, or Heel and Toe Polka) Place the straightened free leg to the side (2nd pos.), heel down, toe raised; close the same leg to the supporting foot, toe down (6th pos.); polka 3 steps to the side (possibly turning). Repeat to the other side. Follow with four turning Polkas.

**ZULMA L'ORIENTALE** Start with two turning Polkas. Then place the straightened free foot forward, pointing the toe to the ground (4th pos.); close the same leg to the supporting foot (3rd pos.); and conclude with one more turning Polka, commencing with a preliminary hop. Repeat to the other side.

**4-SLIDE GALOP** Also called a 3-Slide Galop. Taking ballroom positon, do four straight slides of a chassé. Then turn halfway around on the 4th step, with a hop, as in the Polka. Repeat to the other side after turning, still traveling line of direction (looking over your elbows).

**ESMERALDA** This is a variation of the 4-Slide Galop, wherin you execute the four slides and turn, but instead of repeating to the other side, follow with two turning Polkas. Repeat the 4-slide and two polkas to the other side (continuing line of direction).

Other polka variations referred to but not described in detail were the Polka Bremen Step, Butler Trot, Polka Sissone, Inconstante and many others. *"The Polka should be varied as much as possible." -Ferrero*

#### MID-CENTURY SOURCES WITH POLKA DESCRIPTIONS

1844 Eugene Coralli LA POLKA ENSEIGNEE SANS MAITRE. Paris	1858 Hillgrove HILLGROVE'S COMPANION & BALL-ROOM GUIDE.
1844 POLKAN, SADAN DEN DANSAS I SALONGERNA. Stockholm	1858 Elias Howe HOWE'S COMPLETE BALL-ROOM HAND-BOOK.
1847 Cellarius LA DANSE DES SALONS. Paris	1859 Edward Ferrero THE ART OF DANCING. NY
1848 Charles Durang THE BALL-ROOM BIJOU. Philadelphia	1860 "Polkarius" ALMANACH MANUEL DE LA DANSE. Paris
c1850 "A Dancing Master" THE ART OF DANCING. London	c1861 Eugene Coulon COULON'S HAND-BOOK. London
1854 D.L. Carpenter THE AMATUER'S PRECEPTOR. Phila.	1862 Gawlikowski GUIDE COMPLET DE LA DANSE. Paris
1856 C. Durang THE FASHIONABLE DANCER'S CASKET. Phila.	1862 Elias Howe THE AMERICAN DANCING MASTER. Boston
1857 Thos. Hillgrove SCHOLAR'S COMPANION & VADE MECUM.	1863 Thos. Hillgrove THE ...ART OF DANCING. NY

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# Sixty Years of Song and Dance:

The John C. Campbell Folk School in Brasstown, North Carolina,  
from 1925 to the Present

by Anne Culbertson

When Olive Dame Campbell and Marguerite Butler decided to start a new kind of school in the 1920s, they had in mind a place where country people would be "awakened, enlivened, and enlightened" as they worked the land. They felt that only a nontraditional school could make a genuine and lasting improvement in the lives of mountain people. The Campbell Folk School, which they founded in Brasstown, NC, in 1925, is still thriving after more than sixty years—a tribute to their vision and commitment.

Olive Campbell's interest in the region was stimulated by the work of her husband John C. Campbell. In May 1908 he convinced the Russell Sage Foundation to fund a thorough study of Appalachia, which he willingly pursued without pay, receiving only travel and living expenses for himself and his wife (O.D. Campbell, 1968). Living out of a wagon equipped for their purpose, the Campbells traveled a region covering hundreds of miles in the Blue Ridge, Appalachian, and Allegheny Cumberland Mountains between 1908 and 1912. Together they wrote down their impressions of the mountains and the people who lived in them. John Campbell interviewed educators, elected officials, and missionaries to find out the needs of the area and what was being done to meet them (Terrell). Olive Dame Campbell showed particular interest in the music of the area, jotting down at every opportunity the tunes and ballads she heard in the course of their travels. Her work attracted the attention of English scholar and folk song collector Cecil J. Sharp and resulted in their collaboration on the book *English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians*, published by G.P. Putnam's Sons in 1917. In a publication called *The Country Dancer*, she wrote about "folk ways": "An abiding joy in themselves, an open door into the past, a way to an understanding of one's own heritage and that of other peoples. Surely one need never explain or apologize for the use of folk song [and dance]" ("Come Let Us Sing. What Shall We Sing?", p. 9).

After her husband's death in 1919, Ms. Campbell pursued her interest in searching for a means to provide cultural, social, economic, and personal stimulation for Appalachian farmers. In 1922 she and Marguerite Butler spent ten months visiting folk high schools in Denmark and saw how the problems of wasted farmland and

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an uneducated citizenry almost identical to those of Appalachia had been surmounted. Through the *folkehojskole* movement ("people's college" or "folk high school"), Denmark had moved toward political, economic, and religious freedom, as well (O.D. Campbell, 1928). Generally regarded as residential, folk schools provided nonvocational learning centers for people age eighteen and older, with no entrance requirements, exams, or grades. Danish philosopher and clergyman Nicolai Frederik Severin Grundtvig (1783-1872) stimulated their development with his emphasis on "the living word" (Grundtvig, p. 147)—direct interaction between student and teacher—in preference to "book learning" found in the European Latin schools of his day. Johan Wegener and Christen Kold, both admirers of their countryman Grundtvig, started the earliest folk schools in 1844 (O.D. Campbell, 1928, p. 70) and 1851 (Dam, p. 48), respectively. Additionally, Campbell observed that in the Danish folk schools a lecture on geography or agriculture—in other words on a nonmusic subject—usually began and ended with a song: "They sing remarkably well... They are, however, just ordinary normal young folk, no aesthetes. Hardly is lecture or concert over than they are off furiously into singing games, *Sangele* or song-play, as they call it. They do not have to wait for a pianist but furnish their own vigorous accompaniment of singing and clapping. At first we stand aside but they hale us in and we are soon "playing" as zestfully as the rest. The Danish Grand March with which we close must be granted to be an improvement on ours with its serpentine interweavings and the mad skip under arched arms" (O.D. Campbell, 1928, p. 107).

Upon returning home and realizing how difficult it would be to change existing educational structures and philosophies, Campbell and Butler decided to open their own school, and after seven months of visiting communities in Virginia, Kentucky, West Virginia, Tennessee, and North Carolina, they settled upon Brasstown, North Carolina. In 1925 they were greeted with a warm welcome and a pledge card representing gifts of 116 residents (Archives, Director's Office Files): "The Scroggs family gave twenty-five acres of land in the center of the Brasstown Community. Other pledges included more than \$800 in cash, locust posts, telephone poles, building logs, building stone, firewood, native shrubs, and trees. Labor was promised amounting to 1,495 days—397 with team during the first three years of the school and 388 days of labor were promised yearly without time limit (Archives, O.D. Campbell, 1926, Publication 1).

During her first few days in the area, Marguerite Butler wrote: "Fred O. Scroggs and his father 'Uncle Luce,' of Brasstown, came to the hotel to see me. They had learned there was some one [*sic*] there interested in [establishing] a school. The following day they returned with two neighbors. They said they 'wanted a school that would not just make teachers and preachers, but one that would help the country' " (McNelley, p. 7). Thus, the idea of a folk school on the Danish model came to the Appalachians.

The school was incorporated under the laws of North Carolina on November 23, 1925. Building up community social life was a first priority and was accomplished

through meetings, discussions, cultural programs, and the creation of a women's club and a men's club (Archives, Scrapbooks #1 and #2, beginning in 1925 [n.d. included on many items]). In addition to Campbell and Butler, early staff members included Georg Bidstrup, a young Dane who had attended folk schools both as student and teacher in his own country, and Leon Deschamps, a Belgian who served as architect and builder for the school; the four worked together for the first twelve years of the school's existence.

The first official session of the John C. Campbell Folk School was held in the winter of 1927 and lasted one week. Afternoon and evening lectures became so crowded that "young people under sixteen were asked not to come because there was scarcely enough room for the older people" (Terrell, 1969, p. 53). Talks were given on local history, geography, nature, health and childcare, farming, and travel. The travel lectures generally included at least one folk song from the featured country and the evening sessions invariably ended with a "goodnight" song, which was sung in a circle. "The singing of 'Goodnight, Ladies' brought to a close a party which all judged very jolly" ("Community Meet at Brasstown School," *Cherokee Scout*, January 9, 1931).

The first extended session of the folk school took place during the winter of 1927-28 and lasted from December through February. Seven students enrolled, all of whom were local since there were not yet overnight accommodations (Archives, Olive Dame Campbell's and Marguerite Butler's Photograph Album #1). The *Clay County News* ran the following headline on September 30, 1927: "First Session Folk School Opens Dec. 1." The article listed among the "subjects to be given:... daily music, Danish gymnastics, and sports." The offerings also included surveying, cooking and sewing, grammar and literature, "arithmetic of the most practical kind," government, bookkeeping, and forestry (Terrell, p. 57).

The completion of Keith House in 1929 allowed boarding students to attend (Cheek, 1985). There was no tuition and students were able to earn half of the \$17.50 monthly fee for room, board, and laundry by doing work around the school (Archives, Director's Office Files). The balance was paid in cash, farm produce, or additional work. The work-study plan not only provided financial aid for the students; it also helped them learn new ways of doing routine chores and involved everyone in the "family" life of the school—an important principle of folk school education (Campbell, 1921). Even the motto of the school—"I sing behind the plow"—embodied the idea of taking joy in one's work.

The earliest regular weekly social get-togethers were referred to as "games," a colloquialism for playparty or singing games (Interview with Donald Davis, High Point, North Carolina, March 11, 1985). The mainstay of an evening's entertainment at the Folk School, they were put forth as "wholesome recreation" for Brasstown area youth. "Mrs. Campbell gave a little talk explaining the singing games... as means of wholesome recreation, and also of the need for older people, as well as for boys and girls, to have fun together and opportunities to relax" ("Brasstown Clubs Hold Joint Meet: Murphy Lions Club Guest at Special Enter-

# CAMPBELL FOLK SCHOOL



## *I Sing Behind The Plough*

BRASSTOWN, N. C.

tainment Last Saturday Night," from the *Cherokee Scout*, December 18, 1931). Entire families traveled considerable distances to the Folk School in order to take part in an evening of visiting, singing, "games," and fellowship. According to Wayne Holland, former Folk School student: "It was a well planned program, and part of it was work and part play and that even playing was very important... She said the mountain farmer worked too hard because he didn't play hard enough" (Archives, Olive Campbell Memorial Service, June 27, 1954). As long as they were technically not "dances," playparties were acceptable even to loyal churchgoers. The only distinction between the two activities was the presence of musical instruments, such as the fiddle, used to accompany the dancing. Instruments were considered to be worldly and their use was frowned upon. For the singing games the only accompaniment needed was the participants' own voices, and the games have been passed down by oral tradition (Archives, F. Smith, 1962, p. 272). An article entitled "Community Meet at Brasstown School" (*Cherokee Scout*, January 9, 1931) reported, "...All then went to the community room for the Danish Grand March and the singing game, 'A Thief, A Thief.'"

Due to a perceived lack of healthful recreation for mountain young people in the early days, youth workers from YMCAs, churches, missions, and settlement schools up and down the Appalachian mountains flocked to the Folk School for new ideas. The first "short course" in recreation was held in June 1930. It was so designated in order to differentiate between it and the winter session lasting several months. The "short course" lasted for ten days and twenty people from three states—Virginia, Tennessee, and North Carolina—attended (Terrell, p. 77).

As the Folk School began to draw students from a broader geographical base, they brought outside influences to the community. Local people gradually lost their sensitivity to the idea of dancing-as-wickedness; the word "games" gave way to "dance," and folk dances and singing games of Denmark and England were introduced and relished. A 1933 collection of playparties and folk dances compiled by the Folk School was published under the title *Singing Games Old and New* (1933), but a later volume containing similar material was called *Singing Games and Folk Dances* (1941). An article about the Folk School in 1946 claimed, "Dancing is the most popular community activity" ("They Whittle while They Work," *American Magazine* (August 1946), p. 119). Twenty years earlier such a headline would have meant certain doom.

Apart from the School, there was some indigenous mountain dancing. Frank Smith (Archives, 1962), longtime recreation leader at Berea College, attended his first mountain square dance at a home in Peachtree, North Carolina (three miles from Brasstown), about 1932. He described it as follows: "Before the dance the furniture was carried out and stacked on the porch; the musicians took a position



Little Folk School students perform singing games in the Festival Barn July 4, 1986. (Author Culbertson was the music and dance coordinator.)

in a doorway; all who wanted to dance circled up around the room. The caller and his girl then would lead off with each new figure by dancing it with the first couple to their right, and then, in turn, with each remaining couple. Other dancers remained inactive, simply waiting in their places; but presently the second couple and later each of the other couples made the rounds dancing the same figure... It is now customary in the Appalachian square dance for all the couples to dance at the same time" (p. 272). Both within the Folk School and without, dancing had achieved a prominent place in community recreation.

During World War II (1941-1945) life was difficult in Brasstown as it was in many places. The *Folk School Bulletin* No. 27 dated March 1943 says, "Young men—18 to 25 years of age, interested in such a course as we offer, without credits or certificates and adapted especially to country life, were drawn off from the first into armed forces and war industry... We have had at the school this winter, instead of our capacity limit of thirty, a shifting group of six to eight, most of whom were second-year students working as learners and apprentices" (Archives). Nevertheless, the July 1943 *Country Dancer* published excerpts from letters sent to Ms. Campbell by former Folk School students who had joined the armed forces and praised its programs. The author of the following letter wrote from boot camp: "Down here a person meets boys from everywhere. I think that the Short Course at your school taught me quite a lot. In the first place I learned to meet people there and I believe anyone that has ever done the singing games can do better in marching. They seem to give you poise and assurance to go ahead" (Volume 3:3/4, p. 38).

Although the regular winter session had to be suspended for three years beginning in 1943, the school offered two ten-day recreation courses the following year to more than eighty participants. Perhaps to ease the tension and uncertainty of the war years, the Folk School recreation program became valued as never before. Recreation—music and dance—emerged as an important offering in itself (Terrell).

Olive Dame Campbell clarified the school's philosophy of folk music pointedly in "Come Let Us Sing. What Shall We Sing?" in the *Country Dancer's* second year:

People often ask us here at the John C. Campbell Folk School, why we sing folk songs almost exclusively. Some, of course, assume that a *folk* school is primarily to promote arts associated with the word *folk*: song, dance, crafts, plays of a special character. Our name, as it happens, is derived from the Danish "*folkehojskole*" a school for the *folk* or *people*: and the aim of such a school is to arouse new interests, open new horizons, initiate personal and community growth which will make for better living in the country. Toward these ends we do make use of folk songs (singing-games, folk dances, and plays as well) among many other avenues of possible awakening, but for reasons other than similarity of name.

1. Folk songs have lived so long,—shaped by the folk often over centuries, that they may fairly be said to have come out of the people. They express the people, and for that reason would seem to have lasting values of satisfaction for the people.



2. They are the basis of classical music, with which, however, they should not be compared any more than a wild rose should be compared with its garden relative. Folk songs have their own special beauty,—one of melody instead of harmony, and that within, often, the limits of the old modal scales instead of those in use today. They may well lead the singer to an appreciation of good composed music, but in any case they give him enduring joy in something lovely in itself. Incidentally, we are, in our section, nearer to living folk song—we still have folk singers among us—than we are to classical music. The step is easier to take.
3. Experience shows that our young people, even if they do not like the songs at the start, with familiarity come to love them, and carry them from living room to kitchen, field, forge and milking barn. It is true that modal songs with their old-time intervals often have a strange and mournful cadence to the unaccustomed ear. One does not need to be a trained musician, however, to become attuned to modal melodies, and the teacher who truly loves them can go a long way in imparting his own appreciation... Personally, I cannot believe it is worth while to promote group singing unless one is using, or progressing toward the use of good music, and this for reasons practical as much as aesthetic. People tire of singing together over any considerable period of time unless they are working on enduring material—that which calls for larger and larger effort and appreciation. They will not long make effort over the flimsy" (Archives, "Come Let Us Sing. What Shall We Sing?" *The Country Dancer*, 2:1, p. 8).

After the war, short courses in recreation began to attract large numbers of participants. "Folk School Short Course Attracts Many Students" (Archives, Scrapbook #2, 1950) reported that "The John C. Campbell Folk School held its annual 10-day Short Course in creative recreation the latter part of June. Forty-seven attended from twelve states and two from the Department of Education of Ontario, Canada... There were classes in folk dancing—American, English, and Danish taught by Phillip Merrill of New York and George [sic] and Marguerite [Butler] Bidstrup of Brasstown; folk games from the mountains were under the direction of Edna Ritchie... and singing was led by Jeane Ritchie of Kentucky and New York... The puppet group not only made puppets... but dramatized the ballad of the Two Sisters... There were three groups playing recorders." Many who attended were returning for a second or third summer according to the reporter.

Olive Dame Campbell retired from the position of Folk School director in 1946. Her more than twenty years of work and guidance had made a great impact on the Brasstown community. On June 14, 1954, Ms. Campbell died. A series of articles in the Autumn 1954 issue of *Mountain Life and Work Magazine*, an editorial in the *Asheville Citizen* newspaper, and an article in *The Country Dancer* paid tribute to her contributions to the quality of mountain life. The June 17, 1954, edition of the *Cherokee Scout* devoted a half-page to her obituary (Archives, Scrapbook #2, "Mrs.

John C. Campbell, Folk School Founder, Passes"). Even though she had not been active in the day-to-day workings of the school since her retirement and had moved back to Massachusetts, her death was felt as a great loss to the community.

The music and dance programs at the Folk School had become a natural, vital part of community life. There were no prerequisites, and everyone could participate; whether or not a person was "musical" or "graceful" (and therefore "entitled" to play or sing or dance) was not the issue. The school's motto could be taken figuratively or literally:

As a former student at the school I have been asked to talk about what Mrs. Campbell meant to us... You know the motto of the School is, "I Sing Behind the Plow." When I first came it meant just that, but later I realized it meant liking your job, feeling it was important, singing at your work no matter what it was. And it meant helping your neighbor, for you help yourself and the community at the same time (Olive Dame Campbell Memorial Service, speech by Wayne Holland, June 27, 1954, 2:00 p.m.).

In the mid 1950s a new Folk-School clientele emerged: young adults on vacation from work or school, middle-age adults who wanted a change of pace from the pressures of urban life, and retired adults who sought some sort of creative activity for their leisure time. Many of these people were attracted to the short courses. The June Dance Week, as it is now called by all but a few old-timers who still use the term "short course," has gradually attracted fewer recreation leaders and an



*Local residents and Folk School students enjoy an evening of dancing in the Community Room.*

increased number of vacationing adults in search of recreation in their own lives. In recent years an occasional elementary school teacher, daycare center worker, or college instructor of physical education seeking vocational training can be found among the Dance Week students, but most of the participants enroll primarily for their own enjoyment (Archives, Participants' address lists, Dance Weeks, 1976-84).

In the six-year transitional period following Ms. Campbell's retirement, there was a series of new directors: D.F. Folger, director from 1946-49; Georg Bidstrup, acting director from 1949-50; and Howard Kester, director from 1950-51 (Archives, Director's Office Files). On January 1, 1952, Georg Bidstrup assumed the position of director of the Campbell Folk School; his twenty-six years of experience at the School made him an ideal choice. He led the school, with his wife Marguerite, through 1967. Retiring to a 360-acre farm adjoining the school, they continued to play an active role in the community by leading folk singing and by teaching folk dancing at the School (Terrell). The continuity of the school from Ms. Campbell through the Bidstrups was notable. Marguerite Butler Bidstrup died in the spring of 1982. Known for more than fifty years as a leader and moving force in cultural work in the Southern Mountains, she was the last of the original staff members.

A series of directors has followed, each bringing new ideas. Dr. John Ramsay, after a year's experience in administration of the Folk School as assistant director under Georg Bidstrup, brought a vital interest and wealth of experience in recreation, particularly in folk dancing (Terrell). He subsequently moved to Berea, Kentucky, after leading the school from 1967 through 1973. Directors Maggie and Gus Masters (1974-75), former enameling instructors at the school, saw the beginning of the Community Choir, the Folk School Community Players, and the Brasstown Concert Association. Local resident and social worker Esther Hyatt, acting director and director from 1976-82, held the first Winter Dance Week in 1979. The Folk School Association of America recognized Brasstown's importance in the folk school movement when it met in Brasstown during the summer of 1980, attracting a wide variety of people including professional folklorists and directors of other institutions which had been influenced by Grundtvigian philosophy. Director Bob Fink (1983-85), hosted the first Folk School Elderhostel and in 1985 the summer folk-arts program for children was expanded to include junior high school students—the "Little Folk School" added the "Middle Folk School." A local board member, Bob Grove, was interim director in 1985 when a formal search brought the present chief administrator, Ron Hill, to the school late in the year. He is faced with the continuing challenge of developing the role and influence of the school in Appalachia and beyond.

All the people named in these pages have had a hand in shaping the future of the John C. Campbell Folk School. Many names emerge as significant in the musical life and dance history of the school. Outstanding dance musicians and callers not mentioned elsewhere in this article include Phillip Merrill, Otto and Marguerite Wood, Genevieve Shimer, Donald Davis, Steve Hickman, and Bob Dalsemer. The school employed several recreation directors who took particular

interest in dance: Garnett Sloane, Joe Wheeler, Laura Sprung, Laura Sims, Clarissa Howe, and Nancyanna LeFever.

Music and dance activities continue to thrive both as planned and often as spontaneous events. English and American country dancing, Danish folk dancing, morris and sword, garland, playparties, and "vintage" are among the most popular at the school. Passers-by might catch glimpses of "Fandango," "Rory O'More," "Weaving," "Bean Setting," "The Wain," "Lotte Walked," and the tango. Singing can erupt almost anywhere: in the dining room before and after meals, in the living room or on the deck during the evening gathering, and in the dishroom. Among this writer's preferred repertoire learned at the school are "Lark in the Morn," "The Sheep Shearing" (reputed by Phil Merrill to have been one of Marguerite Bidstrup's favorites), "The Cuckoo," "The Tailor and the Mouse," and "Groundhog." Those who have been to Brasstown no doubt have memories of their own.

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# Bounced From Church For Dancing

by George W. Peck

The Presbyterian synod at Erie, Pa., has turned a lawyer named Donaldson out of the church. The charge against him was not that he was a lawyer, as might be supposed, but that he had danced a quadrille. It does not seem to us as though there could be anything more harmless than dancing a cold-blooded quadrille. It is a simple walk around, and is not even exercise. Of course, a man can, if he chooses, get in extra steps enough to keep his feet warm, but we contend that no quadrille, where they only touch hands, go down the middle, and alaman left, can work upon a man's religion enough to cause him to backslide.

If it was this new "waltz quadrille" that Donaldson indulged in, where there is intermittent hugging, and where the head gets to whirling, and a man has to hang on to his partner quite considerable, to keep from falling all over himself, and where she looks up fondly into his eyes and as though telling him to squeeze just as hard as it seemed necessary for his convenience, we should not wonder so much at the synod hauling him over the coals for cruelty to himself, but a cold quadrille has no devilry in it.

We presume the wicked and perverse Mr. Donaldson will join another church that allows dancing judiciously administered, and may get to heaven ahead of the Presbyterian synod, and he may be elected to some high position there, as Arthur was here, after the synod of Hayes and Sherman had bounced him from the Custom House for dancing the great spoils walk around.

It is often the case here, and we do not know why it may not be in heaven, that the ones that are turned over and shook up, and the dust knocked out of them, and their metaphorical coat tail filled with boots, find that the whirligig of time has placed them above the parties who smote them, and we can readily believe that if Donaldson gets a first-class position of power, above the skies, he will make it decidedly warm for his persecutors when they come up to the desk with their grip sacks and register and ask for a room with a bath, and a fire escape. He will be apt to look up at the key rack and tell them everything is full, but they can find pretty fair accommodations at the other house, down at the Hot Springs, on the European plan, by Mr. Devil, formerly of Chicago.

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*George W. Peck of the LaCrosse, Wisconsin, Democrat was a popular comic journalist of the later nineteenth century and author of the Peck's Bad Boy series. This piece appears in Peck's Sunshine (1882/1890, various publishers).*