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1994



24

Country Dance and Song

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Cover: Springen durch das Schwertertor (Wolfram, 1935, p. 532), accompanying "Sword Dancing in Bohemia in the Late 19th Century, 'In Step I, with Sword and Dagger'."

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Sword Dancing in Bohemia in the Late 19th Century: "In Step I, with Sword and Dagger"

by Stephen D. Corrsin'

Linked sword dancing has been, for at least five centuries, well known and widespread in western and central Europe. Many references to it exist in present day Belgium, the Netherlands, France, Italy, Switzerland, Spain, Germany, Austria, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia, as well as, of course, Britain. References also come from Portugal, Sweden, Poland, Romania, and Denmark. In the late Middle Ages and the early modern period (15th-17th centuries), sword dancing was chiefly practiced at city and town festivals (Carnival, Corpus Christi, patron saints' days, royal visits, and comparable occasions). In the 18th to early 20th centuries, it could be found more often in villages and rural areas.

In central Europe in this later period, sword dancing was well known in several regions of the Habsburg (Austro-Hungarian) Empire: Upper Austria and the Salzkammergut in "core Austria," southern Bohemia, southeastern Moravia, and (in the eastern, Hungarian part of the Empire) the central and western Slovak lands.¹

In this article, I will translate from the German and comment on a detailed account of sword dancing in southern Bohemia in the 1880s. The article, entitled "The Sword Dance in Southern Bohemia," was

'Stephen Corrsin has a doctorate in eastern European history from the University of Michigan and is a member of New World Sword, which performs versions of central European (and other) sword dances. He is completing a book entitled Sword Dancing in Europe and Britain: A Comprehensive History.

published by Bohemian scholar J. J. Ammann in 1888. It describes dancing in the village of Rűkendorf, or Rűckendorf, near Rožmberk (Rosenberg) in the Kaplice (Kaplitz) district, not far from the sizable town of České Budějovice (Budweis in German, whence the name "Budweiser," incidentally). Ammann's report represents a significant milestone in German-language research in the field.



Drawing by Ellen Szot

Serious German-language research in this field began in 1871 with an article by historian and philologist Karl Müllenhoff entitled "On the Sword Dance." It reviewed a great deal of historical evidence, chiefly from German-speaking areas in late medieval times. A flood of publications on the topic (relatively speaking) appeared in the next several decades. Most covered only historical material, using financial and legal records and chronicles of the late Middle Ages, and were thus the results of library and archival research. But Ammann seems to have been the first to interview actual dancers in a Bohemian village. This was an important step in German-language research in the field, although it did not have the fruitful results of Cecil Sharp's travels in northeastern England a

generation later. Not much is known about Johann Josef Ammann's life or career. He was born in 1852 and published several monographs about German-Bohemian lore and literature, between 1892 and 1902. He wrote three articles about sword dancing published in 1886-90, the other two being historical studies.² He seems to have been an unlikely candidate to interview village performers, but perhaps so was Sharp before he began his involvement with English folk music and dance. A brief survey of the earlier history of sword dancing in Bohemia will set the stage for the translation of Ammann's article.

Sword dancing came early to Bohemia. References to it begin in the 15th century in the town of Cheb (then called Eger), west of Prague. The last report from Cheb comes from 1566. Little is known about the fate of sword dancing in the 17th and 18th centuries, when Bohemia was repeatedly fought over and devastated (especially in the Thirty Years' War of 1618-48). In fact, there is almost no information from Bohemia until the second half of the 19th century, when sword dancing was mentioned as a popular custom in the Kaplice district of southern Bohemia, in the mountainous country of the Bohemian Forest (Böhmerwald in German, Český les in Czech).

It seems most probable that sword dancing came to the villages of southern Bohemia from Austria at some point in the 18th or 19th centuries. The documentary history of sword dancing is continuous in several Austrian provinces, particularly Upper Austria and Salzburg, from the 16th century on, and the Austrian and Bohemian styles are in some cases very similar. But no documentation to prove or disprove the idea that the dancing came to Bohemia from Austria--or any other theory--has been found. It could also have survived in Bohemian villages after it disappeared from the towns two or three centuries earlier. But this notion seems less likely, and no evidence has been found to support it.

Ammann begins his article by noting that the dance had once been performed in practically all the villages around Rožmberk and Kaplice at Shrovetide. Typically, dance groups in the region went from village to village. The Rűkendorf dancers had last performed in 1881.

The group consists of seven dancers. The performers are called by special names: the Captain, Junggesell ("Young Fellow"), Schellnerfriedl,

Grünerwald ("Green Wood"), Landsdrommet, Ronwai, and Rurmdunst. Some of these are obviously "corrected" by Ammann to standard German forms, rather than the local dialect forms that later authors cite.

Two fools accompany the dancers; Foschai (the name comes from a word for Shrovetide, *Fasching*) or Edles Blut ("Noble Blood"), and the "flour wife," or Mehlweib. Ammann notes that his informants told him that the Mehlweib had once been a woman, though the part was now played by a man. The dancers and Foschai wear ordinary clothes, with a white sash around their waists, and a strap attached to serve as a sword belt. The captain has a wide brimmed hat with artificial flowers. The Mehlweib wears a clown's outfit with bells.



Drawing by Ellen Szot from photograph, Wolfram, p. 355

Ammann says that no music is played until after the sword dance, when social dancing begins. He does not describe the swords used, but later photographs from the region show dancers using actual metal

swords. These were probably souvenirs from military service, or booty after armies had tramped across the region.

After they get permission to dance at a home or farm, the

performers begin with a verse introduction by the captain:

In step I with sword and dagger, I greet the master and his guests; If I did one thing but not the other, You'd think I was no true speaker. I met the German Kaiser in his land, With drums and fifes and ringing song. Come in! Come in! Sir Junggesell!

Ammann prints the verses in standard German, rather than the heavy dialect that local people would actually have used. There follows a dialog between the captain and Junggesell:

Junggesell: Why am I called Junggesell? I've just come from hell!

Captain: What did you do in hell? J: I gambled away all that I had.

C: Who watched you?

J: The master in the bearskin, who brought the dice and cards to the table.

And so on. Each dancer is called on by the captain, and introduces himself in a short speech or a piece of doggerel. Ammann's account continues:

While the dancers enter in this order and with this prologue, the captain continues walking in a circle around the room, always left to right, and the others join him as they enter, one after another. When all are in the room, they move around in a circle three or four times.... Foschai is the last. The captain draws his sword and the others

follow his example.

All hold their swords pointed back over their shoulders, and each takes the point of the man ahead in his left hand. But Foschai has no sword, so he steps a little way out of the circle. This circling now changes into jumping or dancing in the style of peasants' dances, along with striking the swords together. The striking is as follows. The dancers moving in the circle hold their own swords in their right hands... and with their left take the point of the man ahead. During the dance they hold the swords by hilt and point; but each takes his sword from off his shoulder and brings the point of the sword in his left hand close to the hilt of the sword in his right.... The point of the sword of the man in front is always held underneath the hilt of one's own sword, and then in this position the upper blade is struck against the lower five or six times.... During this striking the sword dancers naturally have to come somewhat closer to one another.... When they have danced around once in this way and have struck the swords five or six times, they come to a halt, and Ronwai steps into the middle of the circle, after giving his sword to Foschai. Ronwai gets down on all fours in the middle, and the six dancers place their swords on Ronwai's back, the points crossed over one another. The captain steps onto his back and the crossed sword points and makes the following speech.

"I've stepped on top with sword and dagger;
It'd be better if I'd stayed under.

It might not displease the master, if he slipped us a couple of dollars;

A couple of dollars would be too much,

A couple of silver coins would be all right.

Whoever would win my game

Must jump over the swords."

The captain jumps down from Ronwai's back (who is a rugged, strong fellow). and all are again in the original circle, with swords sheathed. Now the captain turns back to Junggesell and offers him the point of his sword: he is the only one who has drawn. With his right hand the captain holds his own



Drawing by Ellen Szot from photograph, Wolfram, p. 539.

sword, the point of which Junggesell holds with his left. The captain takes with his left hand the right hand of the man behind him, Junggesell with his right hand the left hand of the man behind him, and so on around the circle, until all have taken hands. Now the sword jump begins, in this way. The man behind the captain jumps first over the blade, then the man behind Junggesell, and so on, but without anyone letting go of one another's hands, until all except the captain and Junggesell have jumped. Then all jump back in the same order, without letting go of hands. The first circle thus turns inside out over the horizontal sword, into a new circle and back again. The sword jump is carried

out with true folk humor, in that the sword is held higher or lower depending on the jumping ability of the individual. In general, the captain and Junggesell hold the sword high enough so that the others can get over it only with great difficulty...

This is an especially suitable moment for Foschai's fooling. He also jumps over the sword, and usually has to be helped, to general merriment. After the sword jump, Junggesell lets go of the captain's sword; the captain places his sword on his shoulder as before, and the others follow his example. The circle is formed as before, as each takes the point of the sword of the man ahead in his left hand. Foschai again leaves the circle, and the sword dancers go around once more in a circle. The last figure follows. The captain takes his sword from his shoulder and holds it with outstretched arm, and the others do likewise. All step in an enlarged circle, facing into the middle, so that their outstretched arms and swords form the circle. In this circle, they go around once more. Then the music, which had been silent during the sword dance, starts up. The swords are sheathed and... given to the host for safekeeping until departure. The captain begins the dance with the daughter of the house, while Foschai plays the fool. The whole company joins in the dance. The dancers get, for their efforts and the merry making, grain and oats from the farmer for whom they have performed. Out of the proceeds, they later pay the musicians first; then the dancers are paid. The musicians, after popular custom, are paid by the dancers for each dance. Meanwhile, the Mehlweib has the task of collecting all sorts of donations.

Sometimes two groups ran into each other while going from village to village. If neither would yield, they might resolve the conflict with a riddling contest. The two groups might then perform together, in friendly fashion, but it could also degenerate into a brawl, with men swinging

swords and musical instruments. Local people described one such incident in the 1860s for Ammann, when a number of people were killed or injured. In the light of this sort of report, one can easily understand the concerns of police and officials in the Habsburg Empire, who are known to have confiscated swords and banned dancing in some places.

Little is known about sword dancing in southern Bohemia over the next several decades. The First World War had a devastating effect on central Europe. Human and material losses were enormous, and economic hard times followed the war. The Habsburg Empire had been shattered into half a dozen separate countries, with Bohemia becoming part of the new republic of Czechoslovakia.

Nonetheless, there is some information on sword dancing from the 1920s. In at least one southern Bohemian town, Oberhaid, the local dancers started performing again in 1924 in order to earn some money. Among the added customs reflecting the bitter realities of the 20th century were two that honored the war dead of the area. The dancers would stop their processions to salute war memorials, or would perform a "silent" dance, without music, verses, or fooling of any sort.

An important group of reports comes from the 1930s. An Austrian scholar, Richard Wolfram, made the dances of the ethnic German communities of Czechoslovakia into one of his special areas of expertise.³ During his research trips in the 1930s, he concentrated on sword dances as well as on other Shrovetide and related customs. He found that while sword dances were performed much less often than before, they could still be found in about twenty villages in the Kaplice area. Wolfram's findings match well with Ammann's account from fifty years earlier and put it into a wider context.

Wolfram writes that once there had hardly been a German village in the area without a group of sword dancers. There are typically six to eight dancers, collectively known as the *Bursch*--which perhaps can be translated as "the lads" or "the band." Two fools accompany them, one called "Foschai" or "Edles Blut;" the other, "Mehlbua" or "Mehlweib," collects money and gifts. The two fools dress the same, generally in a clown's outfit covered with red cloth patches. Foschai carries a stuffed sausage (a traditional fool's weapon in central Europe), and Mehlbua an

outsized wooden spoon. The dancers wear their Sunday best suits, plus broad white sashes and hats decked with artificial flowers and tinsel. The music is provided by the local band, or perhaps just an accordion player, playing favorite local waltzes, polkas, and marches. In contrast to Ammann's 1888 report, the musicians play for the sword dance itself as well as for other dancing.

The dancers travel about the district, from Twelfth Night on, but they are sure to be in their home towns on Shrove Tuesday. When they reach a suitable community, the captain asks for permission to perform. Once they have this, they perform at different homes or farmsteads.

The performance described is much like Ammann's, with a couple of differences that Wolfram consistently emphasizes in his writings. (Wolfram, like Cecil Sharp, always looks to prove profound ancient ritual survivals in modern sword dances.) First, a mock duel between two dancers might take place, in which one was killed and then revived by the fool. Second, the captain stands on the fool's back to give his speech ("I've stepped on top..."), rather than on a dancer's. Wolfram sees in both these points, which emphasize the role of the fool, support for his view of the ritual significance of sword dances, particularly because of the death-and-rebirth ritual implications. However, Wolfram is the only scholar who has consistently found these features in the region, and it seems that he overemphasizes their importance and the regularity of their appearance. It is also possible that changes took place between the 1880s and 1930s, with the role of the fool becoming more central.

Wolfram notes that the dances performed by different groups in the district are essentially the same, though there might be some variations, for example in the sequence of figures. Writing in the 1930s, Wolfram presents the dances as being the exclusive heritage of the local German communities, with no involvement by Czechs. However, in a 1969 booklet published by the Institute for Scholarly Film in Göttingen, Germany, he says that Czechs participated as well, and that Czechs and Germans would visit one another's villages to perform. They would use either language, depending on the audience. This change by Wolfram is just one small example of the ways in which national and ethnic conflicts have affected folk dance scholarship in central Europe.

After World War II, several million ethnic German refugees from Czechoslovakia tried to remake their lives in the ruins of post-war Germany and Austria. Many attempted to maintain old community ties and customs. Some sword dance groups were formed, and performed in towns where people from the east had settled, chiefly in Austria and Bavaria, or at folk festivals. In one case, a group of families from Oberhaid wound up in the town of Schönbrunn in Franconia in 1944. Among them was a former sword dancer, Ludwig Rückendorfer. He taught the dance after the war, but his group could not perform because there was no musician available. But then Rückendorfer found an old accordion and taught himself to play it.

The heyday of these efforts to sustain the Bohemian sword dances came in the late 1940s and early 1950s. After that, the ties to the old homeland frayed, especially in the booming prosperity of the West German "economic miracle." Still, as late as the 1960s, the Institute for Scholarly Film made an interesting film of the "sword dance of the Bohemian Forest" as performed by a group of nine dancers. One of the most interesting points about the dance is its stepping. On the first time through the dance, a waltz step is used, and on repeat, a kind of "gallop" step. (Unfortunately, the only copy I could find was a film strip in the Dance Division of the New York Public Library, without sound; but these steps agree with the earlier, written descriptions that refer to the musicians playing popular waltzes and polkas. The cost of purchasing the complete videotape from the Institute was prohibitive--several hundred dollars.)

There are a number of interesting points of comparison between the Bohemian sword dances of the late 19th-early 20th centuries and those from England in the same period. In both cases, it was a wintertime custom (though Christmas or Plough Monday in England, and Shrovetide in Bohemia). Young men--villagers or residents of smaller towns or even industrial suburbs--would travel about an area, performing and collecting money. Fools would come along, sometimes participating in the performance, sometimes responsible only for getting the money. The dances themselves shared the element of dancers linked by holding swords, or sword substitutes, hilt-and-point. But the specific figures were

not very similar. The Bohemian dances never used a rigid lock of swords for display; they also seem to have been somewhat less complex than either Yorkshire long sword or the rapper dances of Durham and Northumberland, at least as the latter were noted down in the early 20th century by Sharp and other English collectors.

An obvious question is that of relationship between the English and Bohemian styles--and central European ones in general. It is most likely they are "cousins," different branches on the family tree of European linked sword dances. There is little likelihood of direct contact between northern English and Bohemian customs in modern times. Both types of sword dances appear to be descendants of the earlier styles which are known from many lands of western and central Europe.

Notes

- 1. For an overview of writing about this topic, see my "The Historiography of European Linked Sword Dancing," *Dance Research Journal*, 25 (1993), 1-12.
- 2. The article which I am translating here is his, "Der Schwerttanz im südlichen Böhmen" (The Sword Dance in Southern Bohemia), Mittheilungen des Vereines für Geschichte der Deutschen in Böhmen, 26 (1888), 35-42. The others are: "Der Eibenstein, ein altheidnischer Opferstein an der Grenze von Böhmen und Oberösterreich" (The Eibenstein, an Old Pagan Sacrificial Stone on the Boundary of Bohemia and Upper Austria), Mittheilungen der Anthropologischen Gesellschaft in Wien, Sitzungsberichte, vol. 16 (Jan. 1886), nr. 1, pp. 56-58, and "Nachträge zum Schwerttanz" (Addenda on Sword Dancing), Zeitschrift für Deutsches Alterthum und Deutsche Litteratur, 34 (1890), 178-210.
- 3. Wolfram is a controversial figure, largely because of his enthusiastic embrace of Nazism in 1938-45, and his connections to the SS. (See note 14 to my "Historiography," for references.) Nonetheless, his writings represent an important body of work on central European sword dances and related customs. His book, Schwerttanz und Männerbund (Sword Dancing and Men's Groups; Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1936-38), was never published in full, because the second half was destroyed in the war. His most balanced piece on the dances of the Bohemian Forest region is Böhmerwälder Schwerttanz (Göttingen: Institut für den Wissenschaftlichen Film, 1969). Other articles are, "Die Böhmerwälder 'Faschingsbursch,'" Wiener Zeitschrift für Volkskunde, 40 (1935), 33-44, and "Deutsches Brauchtum im Böhmerwald," Germanien, 10 (1938), 355-60. The latter was published in this SS-sponsored journal shortly after the Munich treaty, which forced the breakup of

Czechoslovakia, and by which the Bohemian Forest area with its largely ethnic German population was absorbed into Germany. Wolfram's writings in the *Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society* include: "Sword Dances and Secret Societies," vol. 1 (Dec. 1932), nr. 1, pp. 34-41, and "Ritual and Dramatic Associations of Sword and Chain Dances," vol. 2 (1935), pp. 35-41.

4. Josef Lanz, "Verpflanzung ostdeutscher Volksschauspiele durch Umsiedlung, Flucht und Vertreibung," Jahrbuch für Volkskunde der Heimatvertriebene, 3 (1958), 20-55, provides some information on the "transplantation" of sword dances and other folk performances in West Germany after World War II. (See pp. 45-49 on the dances.)

"Bobbin' Around": Yankee Character Song and Bampton Morris Tune

by Rhett Krause'

In a previous article in *Country Dance and Song* I briefly mentioned that the Bampton morris tune "Bobbing Around" is of American origin. This article presents a more detailed account of the couple who wrote and popularized the American song "Bobbin' Around", describes how this song was introduced into England, and prints the original lyrics and tune.¹

The Origins of "Bobbin' Around"

William Jermyn Florence was born in Albany, New York, in 1831 and made his first appearance on stage in 1849. On New Year's Day 1853 he married Malvina Pray (1831-1906) who had already established herself as a popular dancer on the New York stage.²

Before discussing the Florences' professional career together, a small amount of background information is necessary. Humorous depictions of stereotypical ethnic characters were a dominant theme in 19th century American popular entertainment. In the 1850's both the minstrel show and "Irish" comedians were quite popular. Native New Englanders were also occasionally the object of humor, and a small number of actors made their names impersonating Yankee characters.

In 1849, Malvina Pray's elder sister had married Barney Williams (1824-1876), by then a well known minstrel show performer

^{&#}x27;Rhett Krause is an experienced morris and rapper dancer and is currently "Betty" for Longwood Rapper. He is the author of several previous articles in *CD&S*.

and Irish comedian. They began a long career of performing together, and by 1850 had hit upon the combination of him playing Irish parts while she portrayed a Yankee character.³
When the Florences

began performing together in 1853, they followed the lead of their relatives the Williams by appearing as Irish and Yankee characters, performing in their own sketches with titles such as Irish Assurance, Yankee Modesty, Mischievous Annie, and The Yankee Housekeeper. This combination, along with Mrs. Florence's dancing talents, was to prove extremely popular, and they were frequently billed as the "Irish Boy and the Yankee Girl".4

William Florence published "Bobbin' Around" in 1855, and both the original sheet music and secondary references are clear that the tune and lyrics



William Jermyn Florence. Photo published by permission of the Harvard Theatre Collection

are his original compositions. The song is sung by a Yankee woman who jilts her fiance, leaving him at the altar. Mrs. Florence had great success with this song, inserting it into any of several of their comic sketches. The first record I have found of Mrs. Florence performing "Bobbin' Around" is at the Holiday Street Theatre in Baltimore in July 1855, but that same month it was already a hit on the New York stage, including at the Bowery Theatre where it was sung by her sister, Mrs. Williams. "Bobbin' Around" was also altered and adopted by a number

of minstrel companies, and as early as August 6, 1855 it was presented in New York by Charley White's Minstrels, sung by an actor Budworth [either James (1831-75) or his brother William (1836-1908)]. A minstrel show version of this song is reproduced in Appendix A.⁵

"Bobbin' Around" Introduced into England

After a successful tour of the United States and Canada, the Florences sailed for England, arriving in Liverpool April 12, 1856. They opened at the Drury Lane Theatre in London on the 28th of that month, and remained there as a great success until June 7, with *The Times* of London noting "these wonderful American productions are vociferously encored nightly by audiences crammed to the ceiling." The only detailed review of the Florences' act I have been able to find is from *Bell's Life in London* and this was written during their initial week in London. It is generally quite favorable and notes that Mrs. Florence sang two songs "said to be the rage in the United States": "Polly Won't You Try Me, Oh?" which was very well received in London, and "Bobbing Around" which was somewhat less popular, "only obtaining a disputed encore."

Despite this initial apparently lukewarm reception of "Bobbin' Around", later American accounts describe it as being quite popular in England and this is supported by the fact that the *Catalogue of Printed Music in the British Library* shows a proliferation of "Bobbin' Around" variants by British composers printed between 1856 and 1861. This includes three different versions of a Bobbing Around polka, piano arrangements such as "Fantasia on 'Bobbing Around' for the Pianoforte", and a Glaswegian version "Bobbing Around the West End Park".

After closing in London, the Florences had a successful tour of England, Scotland, and Ireland before sailing back to the United States where they arrived August 17, 1856. They opened at the National Theatre in Washington D.C. on August 25th and the following comment appeared in the Washington Evening Star the next day:



Malvina Pray Florence. Photo published by permission of the Harvard Theatre Collection.

There was a large gathering last night of our theatre-going people to welcome the return of the Florences from their triumphant career on the other side of the Atlantic. It too often happens that American actors of talent are not recognized at their true value at home until they receive the stamp of Old World approbation; but this cannot be said in view of the enthusiastic reception now given to Mr. and Mrs. Florence since everybody knows that they universal favorites were throughout our wide Union prior to their departure for Europe.

However, considering the severe ordeal American actors are compelled to pass through

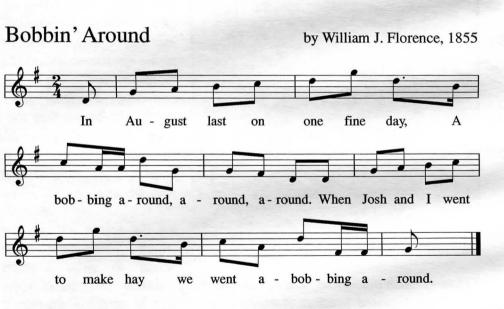
before English audiences, and of running the gauntlet of criticism no ways kindly predisposed towards American talent, it is naturally a matter of pride to the friends of Mr. and Mrs. Florence that they have not only disarmed criticism, but compelled the warmest admiration while on the London boards and wherever they appeared during their tour.

The bill offered by them tonight is a remarkably rich one, as will be seen by the advertisements in another column, and cannot fail to give satisfaction.8

The Florences returned to Great Britain in 1857, again performing "Bobbin' Around", and would make further trans-Atlantic tours during their long careers. Later, they would publish books of their songs and would perform in a wide range of straight drama and comedies. Further details of their later careers are not relevant to this article.

Comparison of the Original American Version and the Bampton Tune

Below is the melody and words to "Bobbin Around", taken from the 1855 sheet music:



In August last on one fine day,
A bobbing around, around, around,
When Josh and I went to make hay,
We went a bobbing around.
Says Josh to me "Let's take a walk",
A bobbing around, around, around,

"Then we can have a private talk" As we go bobbing around.

We walked along to the mountain ridge, A bobbing around, around, around, Till we got near Squire Slipshod's bridge, As we went bobbing around. Then Josh and I went on a spree, A bobbing around, around, around, And I kissed Josh and Josh kissed me, As we went bobbing around.

Then Josh's pluck no longer tarried,
A bobbing around, around.
Says he, "Dear Patience, let's get married,
Then we'll go bobbing around."
Now I knew he loved another Gal,
A bobbing around, around,
They called her long legg'd crook'd shin curly tooth'd Sal,
When we went bobbing around.

So after we got into church,
A bobbing around, around,
I cut and left Josh in the lurch,
Then he went bobbing around.
Now all you chaps what's got a Gal,
A bobbing around, around, around,
Do think of long legg'd crook'd shin curly tooth'd Sal,
When you go bobbing around.

This can be compared to the Bampton morris tune "Bobbing Around" from Lionel Bacon's *A Handbook of Morris Dances*, which lists Sharp's *Morris Dance Tunes* (1910) as its source¹⁰:

Bobbing Around

Bampton Morris Tune



There are a few obvious differences between the American and the English tunes, such as the fact that the morris tune is written as a jig while Florence's tune is not. However, the "A" music of the morris tune is clearly the same melody as Florence's 1855 composition. The origin of the "B" music from Bampton remains a mystery. It is quite different then either the introduction or the music between the verses of Florence's tune, which are not reproduced here. One possibility is that the morris tune represents a combination of two popular melodies of the time, but this is speculation.

The possibility that Florence made use of a pre-existing English tune has been suggested to me, but I believe this is unlikely. In none of the contemporary accounts or playbills from either side of the Atlantic is there any mention of "Bobbin' Around" as anything but an original composition. The 1855 sheet music explicitly states "Words and Music by Mr. W. J. Florence." Certainly the title is Florence's as the extensive collections of the New York Public Library and the British Library show no song or tune by this name prior to 1855, but an

abundance of references in the years just after this, when Florence's song was at its peak of popularity. Finally, this example of adoption of American popular tunes by English morris teams is not unique, as the American minstrel tunes "Such a Getting Upstairs" and "Buffalo Girls" were both used by the Headington men.¹¹

The American origin of "Bobbing Around" does not make it any less valuable or "traditional" as a Bampton morris tune. A distant foreign origin should not detract from the merit of a part of popular culture, just as English precursors to baseball and an English origin to the tune of our national anthem make neither of these any less quintessentially American.

Conclusion

The music and song "Bobbin' Around" were written by the American William Florence and popularized on both sides of the Atlantic by the performances of his wife. At some time in the last half of the 19th century, the title and melody were adopted by the Bampton Morris Men, changed to a jig rhythm, and combined with "B" music of unknown origin.

This article is meant simply to describe an unusually well documented example of when and by whom a Cotswold morris tune was written, how it came to be popular, and how its original version differs from the dance tune. By no means do I suggest that a popular American origin makes "Bobbing Around" any less worthy as a morris tune, and I would argue strongly against any such suggestion.

Appendix A

A minstrel show version entitled "Bobbing Around No.2", appears in the *Bobbing Around Songster* (Philadelphia and Baltimore: Fisher and Brother). This songster is undated but is likely to have been published within ten years of the 1855 origin of "Bobbin' Around". The New York Public Library lists it as published in 1851, but this is clearly mistaken, as it also contains Stephen Foster's 1855 hit "Hard Times

Good evening white folk, here I am, Bobbing around, around, around, Just listen to dis colored man, For I've been bobbing around.

Whenever I promenade the street, Bobbing around, around, around, Something new I always meet, As I go bobbing around.

Our dandies now do dress so strange, Bobbing around, around, around, One would think they were deranged, To see them bobbing around.

You'd laugh to see them walk the street, Bobbing around, around, around, With Shanghai coats down to their feet, As they go bobbing around.

Our ladies too they look so queer, Bobbing around, around, around, With their bonnets behind their ears, As they go bobbing around.

Their long-tail dresses take the lead, Bobbing around, around, around, Sweeping Machines we no more need, Since they've been bobbing around.

The Temperance men have passed a Law, Bobbing around, around, around, But make it worse than it was before, For it keeps you bobbing around.

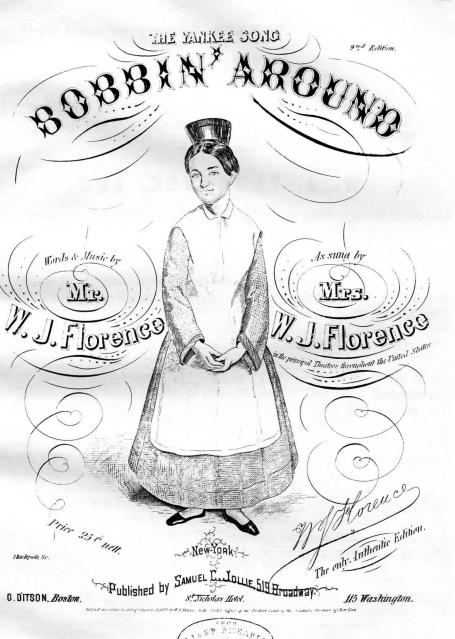
You must get a jug and fill it full, Bobbing around, around, around, And when you're dry you take a pull, To keep you bobbing around.

Notes

- 1. Rhett Krause, "Morris Dancing and America Prior to 1913", Country Dance and Song, vol 21 (March 1991), pp. 1-18. The Song is usually spelled "Bobbin' Around" in America and "Bobbing Around" in Great Britain.
- 2. The earliest biographical sketch of the Florences was published when they were both only 25 years old and freshly returned from their first English tour. This is in the New York Clipper of October 11, 1856. Brief biographical notes may be found in several theatrical reference works, including T. Allston Brown, History of the New York Stage, (New York: Dick and Fitzgerald, 1870). William Florence died in 1891.
- 3. Barney Williams was a teenaged black-face dancer prior to the origin of the minstrel show. I have found records of him dancing the "Camptown Hornpipe" on the New York stage as early as July 1840. George C. D. O'Dell, Annals of the New York Stage, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), Vol.VI, p.399. In November 1850, Mr. Williams appeared at the National Theatre, New York in "Paddy the Piper" which was followed by his wife's Yankee character in the sketch "Our Gal". Malvina Pray danced on the same program. O'Dell. Annals, vol. IV, p.36.
- 4. The first record I can find of the Florences performing the Irish boy/Yankee girl combination is June 13, 1853 in New York City (O'Dell. *Annals.* vol. VI, p. 236). "Bobbin' Around" (sheet music) Words and Music by Mr. W. J. Florence as Sung by Mrs. W. J. Florence in the Principal Theatres Throughout the United States (Boston: Oliver Ditson, 1855. New York: Samuel C. Jollie, 1855).
- 5. Baltimore Sun, July 16 August 4, 1855. O'Dell, Annals, vol.VI, pp.348, 378, 419.
- 6. The Times (London), May 17, 1856 (Admittedly, this comment appears in an advertisement for the Drury Lane Theatre, and therefore is biased. I have not found any actual review in *The Times*.) Bell's Life in London, May 4, 1856.

- 7. K. G. Saur, The Catalogue of Printed Music in the British Library to 1980, (New York: 1987), vol.21, p.220 lists the following versions of Bobbing Around, all printed in Great Britain:
 - W. J. Florence, "Bobbing Around", 1856.
 - H. W. Goodban, "Bobbing Around for the Pianoforte", 1856.
 - H. T. Swatten, "The Bobbing Around Polka", 1856.
 - W. L. Williams, "Polka 'Bobbing Around' From the Popular Melody", 1856. "Bobbing Around the West End Park", Glasgow, 1856.
 - F. Beyer, "The Bobbing Around Irresistible Polka", 1858.
 - T. Chantrey, "Fantasia on 'Bobbing Around' for the Pianoforte, 1859.
 - J. S. Stein, "The Popular Melody 'Bobbing Around' for the Pianoforte", 1859.
- 8. Washington Evening Star, August 26, 1856.
- 9. W. J. Florence, "Bobbin' Around", 1855.
- 10. Lionel Bacon, A Handbook of Morris Dances, (The Morris Ring, 1974). Bacon's version is identical to the tune "Bobbing Joe" from Sharp's Morris Dance Tunes. Pianoforte Solo. Set V. (London: Novello and Co., Ltd., 1910). "Bobbing Around" and "Bobbing Joe" both refer to the same tune and dance.
- 11. Krause, "Morris Dance and America prior to 1913". Mary Neal was aware of "non-traditional" origins of morris tunes, writing in 1915: "There is no doubt that at any given time the musicians used to adapt to the dances any popular tune that took their fancy, and I think that probably the name of the dance was altered to fit the tune. Anyway the tune which Mr. Trafford (the Headington musician prior to William Kimber, Jr. -RDK) liked, called "Buffalo Girls", had certainly been taken for the name of a dance.... In insisting on the traditional nature of the dances it is necessary to admit that the same cannot be said of all, or even most, of the tunes played today." Frank Kidson and Mary Neal, English Folk Song and Dance. (Cambridge: University Press, 1915), pp.131-132.

The Badby men had a dance and tune called "Old Black Joe", which suggests that the tune was borrowed from Steven Foster's 1860 popular minstrel show song by the same name. However the morris tune seems to me to differ so much from Foster's work that it is either an unrelated tune or has evolved greatly from the original. The Badby version of "Old Black Joe" is recorded in: Sharp, Morris Dance Tunes. Set Nine and is also found in Bacon's Handbook.





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AS SUNG BY

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An Index to Country Dance & Song Society News No. 1, December 1966 -- No. 115, December 1993

by Allison Thompson

Newsletters like Country Dance & Song Society News often begin as "throw away" notes to members, merely listing upcoming events, of limited interest after the fact to anyone except dedicated historians of the associations which publish them. However, newsletters grow and change rapidly and frequently encompass materials of on-going interest to people in the field. In the case of CDSS News, original music, dances, calls, and notes of historical significance have all appeared, and over the years a valuable body of material has been published in its pages. An index "opens up" this material to the membership by making it easily discoverable by new and developing callers, musicians, and researchers. Consequently, we hope that this index will allow a quick reference to a variety of CD&S interests, on-going debates over dance style, and a growing body of original calls, music, songs, and related material on dance style, dress, and the varied interests related to those matters. Space and time considerations prohibited making this Index to the News truly complete, although it will facilitate simple research. All song, tune and dance information is accessible; the numerous articles on style in English versus contra dance, or on how best to call squares should be clearly referenced to the user.

In April, 1966, the CDSS Executive Committee decided that the Society needed a newsletter. Late that year, the first issue was published. The *News* appeared sporadically at first. May Gadd edited the first few issues; then, successively, Maddy De Leon, Josephine Giarratano, Jim Morrison and again, May Gadd. Jerry Epstein became editor-in-chief in November 1974, sharing responsibility for the *News* with several others; later he and Bertha Hatvary shared the editorship; then Bertha, with Genny Shimer, continued to edit; followed by John Forbes. Caroline Batson took the post as editor with issue #56,

January/February 1984, and the *News* has expanded greatly in content and style since then. To some extent, the different editors put their own imprint on the *News*; for example, in the 1970s, under Jerry Epstein, there was a greater emphasis on the organizational changes within CDSS as the society struggled to adapt to the vacuum left after May Gadd's death. These topics pertinent to the organization's history and structure are referenced in the Index, as are other topics of an historical nature, such as accounts of Cecil Sharp's teaching or his visits to Appalachia or the history of Pinewoods Camp. CDSS is sometimes referred to in the index as CDS, the organization's former name, one more of the transitions over time.

Now published bi-monthly, the *News* provides information about upcoming dance events held across the country, reports on special events recently held by member groups and letters from dancers on topics of dance style, etiquette, caller technique, and music. Articles from dance leaders and researchers discuss topics such as how to teach social dance, how to work with musicians, or how to set up a sound system. The *News* contains announcements from and about member dancers (births, marriages and, sadly, deaths). Finally, one of its most popular features is the frequent publication of songs, dance tunes, and dance notations--whether original, collected from folk tradition or interpreted from dance manuals. What could not be indexed in detail in this index were the numerous and fleeting references to the activities of individual callers or musicians, or of individual CDSS groups. The researcher of these topics is recommended to review the individual *News* issues.

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