

Cotton Balls ^[1]

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by Wiley J. Williams, 2006

Cotton balls were a prominent feature of social life in [eastern](#) ^[2] and [central](#) ^[3] North Carolina beginning in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. These dances celebrated special events, such as the harvesting of a cotton crop, or otherwise acknowledged the importance of the cotton economy in [Piedmont](#) ^[3] cities such as [Charlotte](#) ^[4] and [Greensboro](#) ^[5]. Although there were instances of people declining to dance with someone regarded as beneath their social class, cotton balls often served as a democratizing element in the state's cultural life, bringing people of all social classes together.

Sometimes the balls were preceded by a dinner, with wine, whiskey, brandy, and fruit punch being served during dinner and the dance itself. At first, the music was provided by one or more [African American](#) ^[6] musicians, but in time bands were likely to be racially mixed. By the 1820s, the balls were being held in prominent hotels, such as the Lafayette Hotel in [Raleigh](#) ^[7]. Charlotte's Mansion House, which became the Central Hotel, was also a favorite site for cotton balls. By about 1920, the Hotel Charlotte, the King Cotton Hotel, and the O. Henry Hotel in Greensboro and the [Sir Walter Hotel](#) ^[8] in Raleigh were competing to host cotton balls and other events.

Reference:

A. H. Frank, *Social Dance: A History* (1963).

Subjects:

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[Antebellum \(1820-1861\)](#) ^[10]

[Colonial period \(1600-1763\)](#) ^[11]

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Authors:

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Origin - location:

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[Charlotte](#) ^[15]

[Raleigh](#) ^[16]

From:

[Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press.](#) ^[17]

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