

## Cotton Balls <sup>[1]</sup>

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by Wiley J. Williams, 2006

Cotton balls were a prominent feature of social life in [eastern](#) <sup>[2]</sup> and [central](#) <sup>[3]</sup> 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](#) <sup>[3]</sup> cities such as [Charlotte](#) <sup>[4]</sup> and [Greensboro](#) <sup>[5]</sup>. 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](#) <sup>[6]</sup> 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](#) <sup>[7]</sup>. 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](#) <sup>[8]</sup> in Raleigh were competing to host cotton balls and other events.

### Reference:

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

### Subjects:

[Colonial period \(1600-1763\)](#) <sup>[9]</sup>

[American Revolution \(1763-1789\)](#) <sup>[10]</sup>

[Early Statehood \(1789-1820\)](#) <sup>[11]</sup>

[Antebellum \(1820-1861\)](#) <sup>[12]</sup>

### Authors:

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### Origin - location:

[Greensboro](#) <sup>[14]</sup>

[Charlotte](#) <sup>[15]</sup>

[Raleigh](#) <sup>[16]</sup>

### From:

[Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press.](#) <sup>[17]</sup>

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[3] <https://ncpedia.org/geography/region/piedmont>

[4] <https://ncpedia.org/geography/charlotte>

[5] <https://ncpedia.org/greensboro-0>

[6] <https://ncpedia.org/african-americans/introduction>

[7] <https://ncpedia.org/geography/raleigh>

[8] <https://ncpedia.org/sir-walter-hotel>

[9] <https://ncpedia.org/category/subjects/colonial-period>

[10] <https://ncpedia.org/category/subjects/us-revolution>

[11] <https://ncpedia.org/category/subjects/early-statehood-1>

[12] <https://ncpedia.org/category/subjects/antebellum-1820-1>

[13] <https://ncpedia.org/category/authors/williams-wiley-j>

[14] <https://ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/piedmon-21>

[15] <https://ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/piedmon-24>

[16] <https://ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/piedmont-0>

[17] <https://ncpedia.org/category/entry-source/encyclopedia>