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:
American Revolution (1763-1789) [9]
Antebellum (1820-1861) [10]
Colonial period (1600-1763) [11]
Early Statehood (1789-1820) [12]
Authors:
Williams, Wiley J. [13]
Origin - location:
Greensboro [14]
Charlotte [15]
Raleigh [16]
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