

Cotton Balls ^[1]

Cotton Balls

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]

From:

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

1 January 2006 | Williams, Wiley J.

Source URL: <https://www.ncpedia.org/cotton-balls>

Links

^[1] <https://www.ncpedia.org/cotton-balls> ^[2] <https://www.ncpedia.org/geography/region/coastal-plain> ^[3] <https://www.ncpedia.org/geography/region/piedmont> ^[4] <https://www.ncpedia.org/geography/charlotte> ^[5] <https://www.ncpedia.org/greensboro-0> ^[6] <https://www.ncpedia.org/african-americans/introduction> ^[7] <https://www.ncpedia.org/geography/raleigh> ^[8] <https://www.ncpedia.org/sir-walter-hotel> ^[9] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/us-revolution> ^[10] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/antebellum-1820-1> ^[11] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/colonial-period> ^[12] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/early-statehood-1> ^[13] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/authors/williams-wiley-j> ^[14] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/piedmon-21> ^[15] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/piedmon-24> ^[16] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/piedmont-0> ^[17] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/entry-source/encyclopedia->