

Cotillions of the Lancaster Assembly

M. Luther Heisey

Long before the Cotillions of the Lancaster Assembly became famous the art of dancing is mentioned in the early archives of Lancaster County.

When Witham Marche attended the Commissioers Treaty gathering in Lancaster he kept an interesting diary. In an entry for June 27, 1744, we read of informal festivities, wherein is noted that a young Indian danced a jig with Andrew Hamilton, town clerk of Philadelphia, in a most surprising manner. "The younger persons raised their jollity by dancing in the Indian dress, and after their manner."

James Hamilton, proprietor of Lancaster, "made the ball, and opened it by dancing two minuets with two of the ladies here, which last danced wilder time than any Indians," to the music of harp and fiddle.

"The females were in general very disagreeable. The dancers consisted of Germans and Scotch-Irish; but there were some Jewesses who had not long since come from New York, that made a tolerable appearance, being well-dressed and of an agreeable behaviour." The dances were concluded about twelve o'clock.

In 1797 Mr. Baconais advertised in the Lancaster Journal that he has opened a school for dancing, and continued it in 1800, hoping "to merit the countenance and support of the public." Mr. Cezeron advertises in 1810 a Cotillion Party, and "informs the ladies and gentlemen of Lancaster and its vicinity, that he has opened his Cotillion Party, at his school room for the reception of those who have already been at dancing school, where a number of new cotillions are introduced and played by him." No person under the age of sixteen years to be admitted.

Most of the instructors of the dancing schools in Lancaster were qualified Frenchmen, some also teaching their language.

Only ladies who are subscribers are privileged to come to Practicing Balls without tickets.

Gaiety persisted through the Revolutionary days. There were grand balls or assemblies during the early months of the year 1778, held in the taverns with large reception rooms, where card playing, music, singing, and dancing were indulged in until the morning hours. A band of musicians, who were captured Hessians, played for a fee of £15. The socially elite and citizens of prominence attended these affairs. While they regaled themselves, there were some discordant voices raised against the Assemblies, which occurred even when Washington's soldiers were suffering in the camp at Valley Forge. Among those displeased with the merry-making were Christopher Marshall, the diarist, and two local clergymen. Christopher voiced his objections in no uncertain terms.

The observance of General George Washington's birthday was never ignored. That called for a time of respect and gaiety. On those days the Assembly held a splendid ball and supper attended by a "brilliant assemblage of ladies," especially in the years of 1796 to 1799. On these occasions "the utmost harmony and decorum prevailed." They tripped to the light fantastic toe at the Courthouse, the famous White Swan Tavern, and the Fountain Inn; the hostelries usually furnishing an elaborate repast.

The passing away of General Washington sobered the community's pleasure-loving element, but in 1805 an Assembly was promoted by Mr. Yeates, Mr. Hubley and Mr. W. Barton. The gathering in 1808 was attended by His Excellency Thomas McKean, Governor of the State, Thomas M. Thompson, Secretary of the Commonwealth, and members of the Legislature, for then Lancaster was the capital of the state.

The subscription ball in 1812 was held in John Hatz's rebuilt tavern, "Sign of Dr. Franklin," on North Queen Street. A copy of the list of subscribers was preserved and reprinted in later years, and revealed a veritable "Who's Who" of Lancastrians. From among the many we give a few of the names shown: William Bausman, James Buchanan, Robert Coleman, Jacob Eichholtz, Walter Franklin, Wm. Jenkins, Geo. L. Mayer, John Passmore, Molton C. Rogers, Graeff, Hand, Hubley, Humes, Krug, Lightner, Ellicott, Porter, Slaymaker, Yeates and Zantzinger.

For a celebration of Washington's birthday in 1825, there was announced a Birth Night Ball. "Gentlemen disposed to subscribe are informed that a subscription paper is left at the house of Mr. Cooper (Red Lion Inn)."

"Should there be any omission in furnishing invitation tickets to Ladies, they will be supplied on application to either of the managers."

"Adam Reigart	Geo. W. Jacobs
John Reynolds	John B. Mayer
Geo. L. Mayer	Rob't Moderwell
Edw'd Coleman	Robert M. Barr
Benj. Champneys	Talbot Martin"

A long remembered event was the splendid Cotillion held in Masonic Hall, arranged so that 'the noble mothers and fair daughters' of Lancaster could meet the gallant Lafayette on his visit here, July 28, 1825. Were you so fortunate as Mrs. Russell, your invitation of no small scope, being four and a half by six inches, greeted you thus:

"The honor of Mrs. Russell's company is requested. Lancaster, July 28, 1825.

John Reynolds, George Porter, George Louis Mayer, Hager Reigart, John F. Steinman, Fred Hambright, Samuel Humes, Jr., Cyrus P. Jacobs, Robert Moderwell and Evan R. Evans."

The ball was preceded by a sumptuous dinner (at \$5 per plate, a high figure for those times) in an upper room of the Courthouse, attended by over one hundred of Lancaster's principal men, as an honor to Lafay-

ette and his suite. The popular visitor was first greeted by Lancastrians at the county line at Mount Vernon, then the cavalcade moved on to Sadsburyville and halted at White Chimneys, the home of Amos Slaymaker, where refreshments were served on the lawn to the visitors. Passing Paradise and Grove's field, the General was brought to Henry Slaymaker's Inn, the Pennsylvania Arms, on East King Street, which was his headquarters for the stay.

By 1830 changes were made at the Red Lion (Cooper House), for the spacious ball room was altered into a theatre, and here the noted actor, Joe Jefferson performed.

Before the close of the Civil War the military indulged in a

Grand Regimental Ball

Wednesday Evening, April 13th, 1864

Floor Manager

Capt. Wm. M. Whiteside

Assistants:

Capt. R. M. Dysart

Capt. Phillip Bissinger

Capt. Thad. Stevens

Capt. W. S. McCaskey

Capt. David Bair

Capt. James P. Dysart

Of further managers there were 75 from the military, 42 of the civilians, with numerous committeemen on Invitation, Visiting and Refreshments.

Office of the Guard: Capt. George Musser

Assistants: Lieut. Chester Hubley, Major M. H. Locher,

President and Secretary.

The Lady's Invitation was a brilliant affair; the type in red, the oval line an ornamentation in gold.

Grand Regimental

B A L L

for the benefit of

THE BAND

of the 79th P.V.

On Wednesday Evening

April 13th, 1864

at Fulton Hall

Ladies

Invitation

And now, let us accept the gold-edged, four by six inch invitation to the Grand Annual Assembly at the Stevens House, at the close of the year.

"The pleasure of your company is requested at the Grand Annual Assembly, Monday evening, December 31st, 1883, at 8 o'clock, at the Stevens House, Lancaster, Pa."

Managers:

"Saml. H. Reynolds	R. A. Malone	S. W. Altick
Saml. H. Price	H. Z. Rhoads	B. F. Breneman
B. J. McGrann	J. L. Steinmetz	W. J. Fordney
D. G. Eshleman	P. Eck. Slaymaker	Jas. M. Burke
Chas. H. Locher	John E. Malone	Geo. Steinman"

Reception Committee:

"A. J. Steinman	W. Leaman	R. B. Risk
J. Hay Brown	A. C. Reinoehl	T. S. Dickey
W. E. Lant	B. F. Eshleman	H. E. Slaymaker
H. E. Muhlenberg, MD		Thos. C. Wiley"

The order of dancing opened with a

Grand Promenade March

Quadrille Plain

Waltz

Lancers

Galop

And there were Quadrille Waltz, Quadrille Varieties, and Quadrille Polka.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

"Mr. Lancaster History" was born 82 years ago in the County whose history has continued to engage his active attention. Mr. Heisey received a good education (when he was not misbehaving) in the Lancaster schools and later he was privileged to be one of "Jack's Boys", an honor reserved for the students of John P. McCaskey. He was employed in the printing trade for a number of years prior to becoming a postal clerk. Following his retirement from Civil Service, he operated the Franklin and Marshall College Post Office during the years of World War II. Mr. Heisey was elected in 1935 to the offices of corresponding secretary, editor and librarian of the Society. From 1937 he held the posts of editor until 1955 and corresponding secretary until 1960 when that office was eliminated, and he was promoted to the vice presidency. He presently serves as first vice president, and is one of the most active officers of the Society. Mr. Heisey is an ardent genealogist and has written more than a hundred published articles.