



Boquet Balls:

Social Dance in Territorial Tallahassee (1820's)

Faith Goyette, Dr. Benjamin Gunter & Idy Codington

Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL



BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- **Theater with a Mission (TWAM)** is a Tallahassee based organization that brings you face to face with Florida's history through accurate and educational entertainment.
- With Tallahassee's bicentennial approaching in 2024, "Tallahassee Turns 200" is TWAM'S project to celebrate the bicentennial by bringing the dramatic year Tallahassee was founded (1824) back to life through theater.
- My contributing research to TWAM is on the dances, structure, and etiquette at Balls that contributed to the social life of early Tallahassee.
- **Why this is significant in our lives-** FSU students contribute to the current social life of Tallahassee! While we may not host Balls, social dancing has not fled from our dear Tallahassee, it's simply morphed and changed to match the demanding needs of the city we know and love.

METHODS

1. **Orientation:** I began by examining secondary sources as well as a few primary sources to familiarize myself with early Territorial Florida and Tallahassee (1821-1841).
2. **Specialization:** I chose a topic of special interest during this time period and built an annotated bibliography of five primary sources relevant to Balls and social dance, to further my understanding of their roles Territorial Tallahassee.
3. **Intersection:** Then I chose one primary document where several special interests intersected and highlighted findings from this document in a poster with transcription, translation, interpretations, critiques, and insights about historical significance/context.

FINDINGS

My special interest's intersection is in the first-hand accounts of socialites attending and recording the happenings of "Boquet Balls" from years 1822-1830.

-What was a Boquet Ball?

- A Boquet Ball was a regularly scheduled social dancing event hosted by a single gentleman. These Balls were famous for good company, a "handsome supper," and coupled dancing. The Boquet Ball receives its title from the uniqueness of using a bouquet of flowers at the end of the last dance to pass on the duties of hosting the next Ball to an unsuspecting gentleman.

-Structure

- The gentleman who hosted and paid for the Ball was referred to as the King, and the lady "who shared the honor," the Queen. The Balls opened with the Spanish Contra-Dance where the King and Queen started as the lead couple. The second dance is historically a Waltz that was followed by "whirling couples," and "dos-a-dos." Midway within this ball, around 11:00 pm, a lavish supper was served, accompanied by wine and champagne at the King's expense. The final dance of the evening is recorded as the "Old Virginia Reel," whereafter the couples would stay on the dance floor to see which gentleman the Queen would award the bouquet of flowers, and the task of hosting the next Ball.

-Beginning and End of Boquet Balls

- The earliest traceable account of a Boquet Ball was December 1, 1822, from George A. McCall who later became a brigadier general in the American Civil War. This Ball was held at Hotel d'Espagne in Pensacola prior to Tallahassee's founding (1824). The last Boquet Ball in territorial Florida's history was recorded by Lizzie Brown, daughter of Florida's second Governor, in Tallahassee during 1830. The Boquet Balls ceased when Elizabeth Duval, daughter of Florida's longest serving governor, demanded that they end because they were too much stress on the young men to host.



REFERENCES

Groene, Bertram H. "Lizzie Brown's Tallahassee." *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, vol. 48, no. 2, 1969, pp. 155-175. *JSTOR*, https://ucf.digital.flvc.org/islandora/object/ucf%3A25404/datastream/OBJ/view/The_Florida_historical_quarterly.pdf.

McCall, George A. (George Archibald). *Letters From The Frontiers*. Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1974. Print.

"The Virginia Reel: Arranged for the Piano Forte." 1824: n. pag. Print.