

An Eighteenth-Century Collection of Contra Dances

EDITORIAL NOTE. The popular revival during recent years of square dancing, one of the familiar early American pastimes, has included no small amount of historical research on the subject. From such articles as "The History of Square-Dancing" by S. Foster Damon in the *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* for 1952, LXII, 63-98, it is interesting to learn that several collections of dances published in America were in fairly wide circulation before 1800. In the *Proceedings* for 1950, LIX, 217-220, there is a bibliography of these works on the American Dance down to 1820.

Both of these sources mention an unusually interesting manuscript collection of dances written in 1783 by Clement Weeks of Greenland, New Hampshire. In the light of current interest this collection is reproduced here in its entirety through the courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society to which it belongs. Only the original index at the very end of the manuscript has been omitted.

The author, Clement Weeks, was born in Greenland on December 4, 1750, the son of Major William and Elinor (March) Weeks. He graduated from Harvard in 1772 (his student notebooks being still preserved in the College Library and in the collections of the New Hampshire Historical Society) and became a teacher in the school at Greenland. He seems to have been a prominent citizen in the town, was Justice of the Peace from 1796 to 1806, and died unmarried in 1829. A few additional references to him can be found in Micajah








Otis Hall's *Rambles about Greenland in Rhyme* (Boston: Alfred Mudge & Son, 1900).

The manuscript consists of thirty pages simply sewn together and entitled "Figures of Contra Dances." The word "contra" then, as now, implied a dance composed of opposite lines of couples, either a line of men facing a line of lady partners or lines in which men and women alternated, each facing a partner. Many additional terms used throughout the manuscript are still in use today. Others have apparently become obsolete. Unfortunately there is no ready glossary of dance-terms for that period although Saltator's *Treatise on Dancing* (Boston, 1802), among the contemporary works, has proved particularly helpful in identifying some of these early terms.

The source and provenance of each of the dances in the Clement Weeks manuscript would, of course, make an interesting study in itself. At one point he notes that "the foregoing 35 figures [were] taken from D. Smith's Collection." No published work by an author of this name has yet been found, and it is supposed that "D. Smith" may have been a friend or acquaintance and his "Collection" a manuscript only.

Finally, it should be noted that Clement Weeks has employed a system of symbols—thirteen in number—which were obviously intended to amplify the written description of the "figures." In some places these symbols have apparently been added after the description was written out. Elsewhere, as illustrated, they were an integral part of the text. The symbols

themselves in this transcription have been replaced wherever they occur with a numerical equivalent in brackets according to the following table:

1	—	8	
2	÷	9	
3	-	10	
4	÷	11	
5	÷	12	
6	÷	13	
7	÷		

Figures of Contra Dances [cover]

A Collection of Dances belonging to Clement Weeks of Greenland Feby 12th, 1783.

Six hand Reel. Set & turn your partners by the right hands, set, & turn them by the left hands back again, right & left, then the Haze, lead down & cast off at the bottom.

Welcome here again. Cast down 2 Cou[ples]. [3] Set, cast up 2 Cou. [4] & set; cross over 2 Cou. [6] lead up 2 Cou. cast off 1 cou. [7] dance Corners; [9] lead out at the Sides.[?]

Wild Irishman. Right hands across, left hands back again, cross over 1 Cou. turn your partner by the right hand, four hands round with the 3d. Cou. right & left at top.

Success to the Fleet. 1st. and 2d. Cou. right hands across, left hands back again, lead down 2 Cou. lead up 2 Cou. Cast off & right & left at Top.

Hessian Camp. 1st. Man turn round 2d. Man; [3] 1st. Woman do the same; [4] 1st. Cou. turn round single twice & clap hands according to time; Cross over 1 Cou. & turn 4 hands round with the 3d. Cou. Clap hands, Right & left at Top.

Suca bids me. 3 hands round the Man's Side; [3] 3 hands round the Woman's Side; [4] Cross over 1 Cou. turn your Partner by the right hand, right & left at Top.

The Lily. The 1st. & 2d. Cou. change places & then back again, Cross over 1 Cou. turn four hands round with 3d. Cou. Right & left at Top.

College Hornpipe. Set, right hands across, set, left hands back again; then each take hands & hunt round each other, Cross over 1 Cou. and right & left at Top.

Jack's alive. Lead out opposite Sides & opposite partners foot it; [3] back again & foot it, [4] Cross over 1 Cou. [6] & right & left. [7]

Flowers of Edenburgh. 1st. & 2d. Cou. set & right & left; [3] the same again [4]; 1st. & 2d. Cou. lead through the 3d. Cou. 1st Cou. cast off one Cou. & hands round with the 3d. Cou. right & left at Top.

Lady's Breast Knot. Three hands round the Woman's Side, [3] three hands round the Man's Side; [4] Cross over 2 Cou. [8] lead to the Top & cast off [9]; fall back 1 Cou. set Corners, [4] lead out at the Sides. [9]

Nancy Dawson. Cast down 2 Cou. foot it; [3] up again [4] Cross over 2 Cou.; [8] lead up 2 Cou. [9] set Corners; [4] lead out at the Sides. [9]

Rural Felicity. Turn right hands with your partner & cast off; [3] turn left hands & cast back again, [4] hands 4 with 2d. Cou. [8?] Cross over 2 Cou. & lead up 1 Cou. [9] set Corners, [4] lead out at the Sides.

Jolly Drummer. 1st. Cou. cast down one Cou. [4] back again, [4] Cross over one Cou. [8] Right & left, [9] set Corners, [4] lead out at the Sides. [10]

St. Patrick's Day in the Morning. 1st. Gentleman turns with the 3d. Lady; [3] the Lady the same with the 3d. Gentleman [4], Cross hands with 1st. Cou. [6] cross over one Cou. & right & left at Top.

Trip to Halifax. First Gen. foot it to the 2d. Lady & turn [3]; first Woman do the same; [4] Cross over 1 Cou. & turn your partner, Right & left at Top.

Balance a Straw. Cast back 1 Cou. [4] up again, [7] lead down 2 Cou. [6] up again, [7] The 2d. Cou. do the same, [2] set at Top & bottom, [4] lead out at the Sides.

Barrel of Sugar. Haze on opposite Sides, [4] Cross over 1 Cou. Right & left with the upper Cou. [7] set Corners, [4] & lead out at the Sides. [7]

The Baulk. Cast down 2 Cou. [1?] up again [4] fall back 1 Cou. set Corners; [1] Hands round with ye. 3d. Cou. Right & left at Top.

Black Joke. 3 hands round the Woman's Side, [3] 3 hands round the Man's Side; [5] Cross over 1 Cou. [6] right & left at Top.

Cuckow's Nest. Cast back 2 Cou. [2] up again, [4] Cross hands with the 1st. Cou. [3] Cast back one Cou. [8] Right & left at Top.

Black Dance. Cast down 2 Cou. up again; [4] swing Corners, [7] dance Corners [9], lead out at the Sides. [10]

Jenny Dangs. Cast back 2 Cou. [1?] up again, [4] haze with the 1st. Cou. [9] set Corners [10] lead out at the Sides.

Over the Hills &c. Two upper Cou. change places, [3] back again & foot it [4] Cross over one Cou. [8] & right & left.

The Dusty Miller. Lead down one Cou. & cast down 2 Cou. [1?] lead up to the Top, & cast off 1 Cou [4]; swing Corners; [9] set Corners, [4] lead out at the Sides. [10]

Hunt the Squirrel. 1st. Cou. haze on opposite Sides & foot it; [1] then on your own side [4] Cross over 1 Cou. [8] The 1st. Cou. cross over them; [9] the Gentleman hunts the Lady upon his Side [3]; the Lady on hers [4]; Cross over 1 Cou. [8] Right & left at Top.

Lady Hope's Reel. Cast down 2. Cou. [1] up again, [4?] haze on opposite Sides; [8] Cross over 2 Cou. [9] lead to the Top & cast off [3]; fall back & set Top & Bottom, [4] lead out at the Sides. [9]

Merry Dancer. 1st. and 2d. Cou. change places; [3] back again; [4] Cross over one Cou. [8] lead up 2 Cou. Cast off & turn your partner with the right hand, [9] 4 hands round with the 3d. Cou. [11] Right & left at Top. [12]

The Royal Charlottee [?] Foot it & right hands across, [3] foot it & left hands back again, [4] Cross over two Cou. [8] lead to the Top & cast off. [9]

The happy Cobler. Cross over 1 Cou. & turn your partner [3]; 4 hands round, set Top & bottom; [4] 4 hands at Top; [8] Right & left at Top. [9]

Allez Man de Suisse. Allez man with the 2d. Lady [10] The Lady allezmand with the 2d. Man [10] Lead down [10] 2d. Couple do the same [10] Hands round six [10] right & left at Top.

Benard's Reel. Cast down 2 Cou [10] up again [10] Cross over 2 Cou [10] Set Top & Bottom [10] Hey down on your own Sides [13]

Jack's alive, a Phyladelphia Reel. Cast down 2 Cou. [9] up again [9] Hands across 4 [10] back again [10] Set Corners [10] lead out at the Sides [10]

Soldier's Joy. Cast down 2 Cou. up

again [9] Cast in & out 1st. and 3d. Cou [9] Allezmand 1st. and 3d. Cou [10] Cross over one Couple right & left at Top.

Lily. Hands across 4 [9] back again [9] Cross over 2 Couple [9] 2d. Cou. do the same [9] Hands round 6 [13] lead up to the Top 2d. Cou. do the same [13]

the foregoing 35 figures taken from D. Smiths Collection

Dusty Miller Lead down one Couple, cast back the second; cross up one Couple; give your right hand to Partner in the middle; left to lower Lady; right to Partner, left to upper Lady; Set at Sides, & lead out at Sides.

College Hornpipe. Cross Hands; cast in & out with your partner; right hand & left.

Christmas is coming. Cast back two Couple; up again cross over two Couple; set at Sides and lead out at Sides.

Dutch Skipper. Cross hands; cross over, right hand and left.

Queens Hall. Cross hands, cross over, right hand & left.

Eastern Hall. Cast back two Couples, lead up one, right hand & left, set at Corners, lead out at Sides.

Don Pedra. Set across, lead down two Couple, up again, cross over, right & left, Set at Corners, lead out at Sides.

Bonny Lad. Cast back two Couple, up again, cross over, right hand & left foot at Sides, set at Corners, lead out at Sides.

Boston's Delight. Cast back two Couple, up again, Hands four with lower Couple, right hand & left with upper Couple; Set at Corners, lead out at Sides.

Suckey bids me. Set across, cross over, right hand & left.

The Draught. Turn right hand with your partner, fall back one Couple, turn left

left [*sic*] hand with your partner, right hand & left.

Green Sleeves. Fall back one Couple, turn hands, lead up, turn hands, haze, set across, set at Corners, lead out at Sides.

The Morning Star. Cast down 1 Cou. up again [4] Gallop down 1 Cou [8] cast back, Right & left at Top.

The Wild Irishman. Cross right hands, round [3] Left hands back again [4] cross over one Cou. turn your partners [6] right & left or this

Cast down 2 Cou. [3] up again [4] lead down 2 Cou. [6] up again [7] Set Corners [4] and lead to the Sides [7]

Succa bids me. 3 hands round the man's Side [3] 3 hands round the wo. Side [4] Cross over 2 Cou [8] right & left. [9]

The Lily. Cast down 2 Cou [3] Cross up again [4] first man foot to the 2d. Lady [8] the same to the 2d. Gentleman [9] Cross over 1 Cou [8] right & left.

Hessian Camp. First Man turn round 2d. Man [3] First wo. do the same [4] turn single twice Clap hands according to music Cross over 1 Cou. turn your partner with the right Hand [8] 4 Hands round with the 3d. Cou Right & left at Top [9]

welcome here again Cast down 2 Cou [3] up again [4] lead down 2 Cou [8] up again [9] the 2d. Cou do the same, cast down 1 Cou [3] set Corners [4] lead out at the sides [9]

The Baulk Cast down 2 Cou [3] up again [4] fall back 1 Cou set Corners [1] hands round at the bottom [1] right & left at Top.

The Feet of a Man talking, when standing, should be in the 2d. or 4th Position—and of a Woman in the 1st. or 3d. Position.