

Music and Dance

By Sharon Fabian

The colonists didn't have much time for fun; they were spending their time building their own houses and finding their own food. In fact, the colonists had to do everything for themselves so they were constantly busy, but everyone needs a break now and then. When the colonists were ready to take a break, they had to provide their own fun too.

In colonial times, music and dance served the practical purpose of providing a way for the colonists to relax and socialize. Without any of the ready-made entertainment that we have today, live music and dances became very popular in the colonies.

Colonists played a variety of musical instruments. In fact, colonists played most of the instruments that we would hear in a band concert today. They played drums, trumpets, trombones, violins, and flutes. They also played harmonicas, organs, guitars, and other instruments.

Musicians played all types of music; they played ballads, folk songs, military marches, and classical music, but dance tunes were popular favorites.

One musician was all that was needed to provide the music for a fun evening of dancing, although for especially large occasions, several musicians might play as a group. A violin, or a fiddle, was the most popular instrument for dance music. Flutes were popular too, and there were several types of flutes including fifes and recorders. However, if there were no violin or flute players in town, any instrument would do.

The colonists danced English country dances, French minuets, and a variety of other dances. They learned the steps from books and dance teachers, or from their friends and family.

There were many, many kinds of country dances, but most of them began with two lines of dancers. Partners faced each other from opposite lines. It didn't matter too much who was at the head of the line because, after one round, that couple would be at the end and a new couple would be in the lead.

Minuets were dances for couples. They were formal dances for ceremonial occasions. The most important couple in attendance danced the first minuet of the evening - maybe the governor and his wife, or maybe an important merchant and his wife.

The colonists put time and effort into learning their dance steps. They didn't only want to get the steps right, but they wanted to make the dances look easy and graceful too. Dancing a graceful minuet was a way to show off, not only a colonist's dancing ability, but also his or her grace, good manners, and refined behavior.

Dances were also the place to show off the latest fashions. Colonists didn't have a lot of places where they could step out in style, and so they made the most of

opportunities like a fancy ball. Wearing stylish clothing was yet another way that colonists could display their social status.

The colonists were hard working, industrious people, so it's nice to know that, on occasion, they would spend a day getting dressed up and practicing their steps, and then dance the night away.



Name _____



Date _____

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Questions

- _____ 1. Music and dancing were not allowed in the colonies.
- A. false
 - B. true
- _____ 2. The colonists danced country dances and formal minuets.
- A. true
 - B. false
- _____ 3. A minuet is a dance from _____.
- A. England
 - B. France
 - C. Spain
 - D. California
- _____ 4. Country dances were brought to the colonies from _____.
- A. Spain
 - B. Florida
 - C. England
 - D. France
- _____ 5. _____ probably provided the music for most colonial dances.
- A. an orchestra
 - B. a band with a singer and three or four musicians
 - C. recordings
 - D. one musician
- _____ 6. Minuets were danced _____.
- A. at country dances
 - B. on formal occasions
 - C. on church holidays
 - D. at children's birthday parties
- _____ 7. Country dances featured _____.
- A. couples in two facing lines
 - B. one couple dancing at a time
 - C. dancers in four corners
 - D. none of the above
- _____ 8. Formal dances were a way for colonists to show off their _____.
- A. dancing ability
 - B. manners
 - C. new clothes
 - D. all of the above

