

Fiddle Tune History

By Andrew Kuntz

Duel Meanings

I had the pleasure recently of going on a historical tune hunt that at first disappointed, then elated me via its window onto the rich pageant of the American Revolution. First, let me explain that early North American fiddle and dance tune manuscripts are of intense interest to me, and when I find a publication or manuscript that is new to me I am delighted to spend time with it, in hopes of excavating and exposing more of the roots of fiddling in the continent. British country dance publications sometimes contain some odd inclusions of North American music, the novelty of which perhaps helped sell them in England, but it is relatively less common to find a truly American publication. So, it was with great pleasure that an English contact, Fynnian Titford-Mock, generously offered to send me scans of old publications, one of which was entitled *Twenty Four American Country Dances as Danced by the British during their Winter Quarters at Philadelphia, New York & Charlestown*, dated 1785. It's a date that is just at the beginning of the time period—roughly 1780 to 1840—that appears to me to be a crucial developmental time for American fiddling, but one that is obscure, so that any publication or fiddler's manuscript of the era cannot help but illuminate—or, so I thought.

I read with interest the frontispiece, which let it be known that it had been collected by "Mr. Cantelo, musician at Bath, where they are new Dancing for the first time in Britain, with the addition of Six Favorite Minuets, now performing this present Spring Season." It was printed by Longman & Broderip, Cheapside, London, a reputable and established music publishing firm of the era. A little research revealed that Cantelo was a career musician at Bath, the fashionable English spa resort town that had served the royal and upper class for several decades. The Roman name for Bath was *Aquae Sulis*, the "waters of Sulis" (Sulis was a Celtic goddess with affinities to the Roman *Minerva*), referring to the hot springs found there, but when the English conquered the territory they called it simply "the baths," later simply Bath. Allison Thompson¹, describes Bath as

A sleepy, run-down spa frequented only by valetudinarians in the early part of the [18th] century, it had been brought to prominence by Richard 'Beau' Nash (1674-1762), who arrived in Bath in 1705. There he took over the management of the Assembly Rooms and drew up a strict code of etiquette and dress, becoming the unquestioned autocrat of fashionable society. Assemblies began at six p.m. with minuets. These ran until eight o'clock, and were followed by country dances from eight until tea was announced at nine. More country dances followed the tea and, under Beau Nash's autocratic rule, dances in the Rooms concluded at eleven sharp—even if the musicians were in the middle of a tune. Nash's popularity waned after 1745, but his influence lingered throughout the century.

Bath was still quite fashionable in Cantelo's time for it received patronage from George III and his queen, Charlotte, and after, George IV. There was plenty of work for a good musician! Hezekiah Cantelo was married to Sarah, and they had six chil-



Bath, England, 18th century

dren, most of whom were musicians or married to musicians—a daughter, Ann (1766-1831) was a singer of some renown, married to another famous singer, Samuel Harrison. Hezekiah had a remarkable career at Bath and later at London (although the family retained connections at Bath), despite the tragedy of outliving many of his children. He was presented for membership in the Royal Society of Musicians the same year his *American Country Dances* was published, and eventually rose to become a Governor of that body in 1800. There are numerous surviving citations of Hezekiah's involvement in various concerts and performances, and he was known for his skill on the bassoon and pipes, although he also played trumpet, oboe, and flageolet. In apparent ill health in his last years, he received a small pension from the Society, and died in London in 1811. Most important, for our understanding of his *American Country Dances* publication, was that in 1786 he also belonged to the band of the First Regiment of Foot Guards.

I didn't know this, of course, when I first began to review *American Country Dances*. My first impression was that it was a collection of typically British-sounding country dance tunes, with little to distinguish them from the hundreds upon hundreds of similar pieces. Six minuets were tacked on to fill out the publication, somewhat annoyingly, as the minuet as a popular dance was on its "last legs" (as it were) by 1785, having been around for a hundred years. Worse, the country dances themselves did not appear to have any "American" content whatsoever, save that they were supposed to have been danced in America. In fact, with a superficial look, only one of the twenty-four pieces had a title that had American associations at all—"The Belles about the Flat Bush" which is explained as: "A Village on Long Island, so called" (Flatbush is now part of New York's Borough of Brooklyn). The majority had titles that referenced individuals—"Lady Louisa Lennox," "Miss Cornish" and "Miss Wroughton," and "Mr. Dawson." The music of the country dances I thought most disappointing—formulaic, simple, unchallenging, unimaginative. Nowhere was there evidence of any Colonial colloquialisms in rhythm or melody, which disappointed me. The minuets—Cantelo's work—seemed considerably more musically sophisticated,

but, as they had little to do with my interest in American melodies, I wondered if the volume was worth a second look?

What got me interested again was a particular historical curiosity (as my opinion of the music remained unchanged), for I noticed that some tune titles had clear references to events in the American Revolution. “The Monmouth—or the Victory” and “The Brandewine” clearly refer to major battles of the American Revolution. The engagement along Brandywine Creek, Pennsylvania, fought on Sept. 11, 1777, was a defeat for Washington and the Continental army. The battle at Monmouth Courthouse, New Jersey, on a hot day in late June, 1778, is usually described as indecisive; however, it resulted in Washington, checked in his advance, unable to prevent the British from withdrawing to New York. Both sides suffered in the heat of that day—there were more men killed on the American side from sunstroke than from enemy fire. Unfortunately, musically “The Brandewine” seemed to me to be a particularly uninspired air, although the three-strain “Monmouth” proved marginally more interesting.

Other melodies in the book had German titles, or, rather, they were “Germanic” names, probably being English in origin and title and addressed to their allies, the Germans, rather than actual melodies from that country. German officers—from the units monolithically called “Hessians” whether they came from the principality of Hesse or not—would have, of course, attended the series of fashionable balls held throughout the winters in the cities referenced on the cover of *American Country Dances*, for both armies took to the most comfortable winter quarters they could find when the weather precluded campaigning. The British, in control of all the major American cities, save Boston, certainly had the better deal, supported by the numerous Loyalists among the upper classes. One particular event bears mention: the *Mischianza* (rough Italian for a medley or mixture), an elaborate fête given in honor of British General Sir William Howe in Philadelphia in May, 1778. Howe had resigned his post and was returning to England, and received a grand celebration and ball from his corps of officers (who had ponied up 3,312 guineas to pay for it). The events were planned by John Montresor and John André, the latter a brave man hanged for his part in the Benedict Arnold affair. André was the “social director” of the army in winter, known as a poet, actor, painter, and erudite man-of-the-arts. Events at the *Mischianza* included a regatta along the Delaware River, accompanied by three musical bands and a 17-gun salute by British warships, followed by a procession, a tournament of jousting knights (British officers in costume), topped off with a banquet, grand ball and fireworks displays at Walnut Grove, the seat of the Philadelphia Wharton family. It is likely that, as in *American Country Dances*, melodies were played in honor of the Germans, as General Wilhelm von Knyphausen was in attendance.

American Country Dances has four melodies in the “German” category. “The Yager Horn” refers not only to a huntsman’s horn, but also to the German light infantry called Jägers or Jaegers, many equipped with rifles and not muskets. The music itself is reminiscent of a bugle or similar horn in the interval gaps in the melody, a melodic device that sometimes was employed in period marches and martial dances. “The

Anspacher” refers to the army of Anspach-Bayreuth which in 1777 was hired to assist the British Army in its struggle against the Rebellion in the American Colonies. A total of 1,285 officers and men left Anspach in March of 1777 and arrived in New York three months later. The next year several hundred more reinforcements were sent. Relatively few of the Anspach men returned home—some were killed in battle, and more succumbed to disease, but many chose to stay in the New World when the war was over. “The Donop—Lady Mary Murray’s Fantaisie” takes its name from Count Carl Emilius von Donop, a Hessian Colonel who sought fame and fortune in the war in America. He was commander of the prestigious Jägercorps, but Donop’s ambitions went beyond military service, for he hoped to remain in America to pursue power and glory. He was known to be a capable officer, civil and deferential to his superiors but brusque and harsh with his inferiors, and enforced discipline with severe beatings. He was not well-liked by his subordinates. The Von Donop regiment was engaged in several early battles of the war including the Battle of Trenton, where Von Donop (as legend has it) was detained by his dalliance with an attractive widow, a seamstress named Betsy Ross whose talents apparently were not confined to just sewing a flag. His expedition to America was cut short when he took 2,000 troops to subdue Fort Mercer in New Jersey. Unfortunately for Donop it was well-defended, and he lost his life in the assault. It appears that Lady Mary Murray (whoever she was—I have not been able to ascertain) gave approval to the dance in the Colonel’s name, for hers is attached to it. Finally, there is “The



Drawing of guest at the “*Mischianza*” by Major Andre.

Munichausen,” honoring Sir William Howe’s aide-de-camp, Captain Freidrich Ernst Münchhausen (no relation to the more famous baron). Münchhausen was attached to the Regiment Landgraff and also served on the staff of General Howe and his successor, Sir Henry Clinton, and wrote an interesting account of the Battle of Germantown from the Hessian point of view.

A few other tune titles in the collection can be traced to important persons or events of the era. “General Abercromby’s Reel—Or, the Light Bob” refers to General Sir Robert Abercromby of Airthrey (1740-1827), who had been promoted in 1773 to Lieutenant Colonel of the 37th Regiment of Foot, who took command of the light infantry corps for most of the war. Light infantry—“Light Bobs”—developed during the French and Indian Wars in an adaptation to fighting in North America. The famed Colonial unit Rogers’ Rangers was an example of such military adaptations that gradually influenced mainstream British army thinking, although the German jaeger formations were a similar influence from the Continent. “The Monckton— or British White Feathers” probably refers to Robert Monckton (1726—1782), a British officer and colonial administrator in North America. Despite having an illustrious military and political career, Monckton’s infamy arose from his role in the deportation of the French Acadian population from Nova Scotia because of their perceived refusal to swear an oath of loyalty to the British Crown. The Acadians eventually became the Cajuns of Louisiana, while Monckton is remembered by the city of Moncton, New Brunswick. The second part of the title “British White Feathers” is more obscure, but possibly refers to the white feathers light companies sported—“The Two Feathers,” for example was a distinction of the 46th Regiment, part of “The Light Brigade.” At one point in the war the Americans were so harassed by the Brigade that they vowed “No Quarter,” and in derision, to prevent any mistakes, the Light Battalion dyed their feathers red. Again, the melodies—Abercromby’s reel and Monckton’s jig—are dull and tiresome. “The Monckton,” however, introduces a mystery character to our tune hunt, for it is attributed to the “Hon: C.G.,” to whom no less than six melodies are attributed. More of him later.

Apart from the minuets (which are Cantelo’s melodies that have nothing to do with the American tunes, but rather were dedicated to patrons in Bath), there are several other names of individuals that appear in the tune list. Many mention individuals in the Murray clan: Lady Amelia Murray, Lady George Murray, Lady Jean Murray, and Lady Mary Murray are all named. All except Lady George Murray have their names attached to tunes that already have titles—“La Buona Figuliola—Lady Jean

Murray’s Dance,” for example (the title and presumably the tune are from an opera of the same name by the period Italian composer Niccolò Piccinni, 1728—1800). This appears to indicate that these members of the gentry selected or approved of the tunes/dances, or received the honor of having their names associated. Amelia Murray is known to history as the wife of Lieutenant Colonel William Murray of the 27th Regiment. Her husband had served with the 42nd Highlanders, under Wolfe, in America, and afterwards in the West Indies. Promoted, he was a Major under General Howe during the American Revolution, and had a desperate time when, in September, 1776, on the heights above New York, Murray was nearly carried off by the enemy and narrowly managed to save himself. Attacked by an American officer and two soldiers, he kept his assailants at bay for some time with his pistol. When this failed his assailants closed on him. Unfortunately for Murray he was “corpulent” and had trouble reaching his knife which had slipped behind him, but he managed to grapple with the officer and wrest away the latter’s sword, compelling the Americans to retreat. He wore the sword as a trophy during the campaign. Murray’s enjoyment of his next promotion, to Lieutenant Colonel of the 27th Regiment was short-lived, however, for he died in 1778. We do not know whether Lady Murray’s gaiety preceded her husband’s death in Philadelphia in 1778, or she was a merry widow.

Before turning to the fascinating mystery composer “Hon: C.G.,” there are two other tune titles of interest. Both “The Hamiltonian—Lady Amelia Murray’s Choice” and “Mrs. Lt. Col. Johnson’s Reel”—a somewhat awkward, but at least musically more interesting four-part reel—were written to honor local Philadelphia society belles. The Hamiltonian was perhaps named for Abigail Franks Hamilton (1745—1798) and her husband Andrew Hamilton, whom she married in 1768. He was the elder brother of William Hamilton, well-known proprietor of “The Woodlands,” a grand mansion overlooking Grays Ferry Bridge, and another Loyalist haven. “Mrs. Lt. Col. Johnson’s Reel” honors her younger sister Rebecca Franks (1760-1823), who married a British officer in 1782. The Franks girls were literally the belles of the ball, and, with friends, the toast of Loyalist society in occupied Philadelphia. They were granddaughters of Jacob Franks, a Jewish merchant who had made a considerable fortune in New York and Philadelphia trade, and who helped establish the first synagogue in New York in 1728. Jacob’s son, David, married Margaret Evans, daughter of one of the chief parishioners of Christ Church, and both daughters Abigail and Rebecca were baptized and attended their mother’s church. David was a powerful merchant in Philadelphia, and had been retained by the British

The Anspacher



army to victual their forces. His estate at Woodford was once a locus of the social scene, and officers such as Major John André (who painted a miniature of Rebecca, with accompanying verses, in 1775—when she was fifteen) were constant visitors. They embarked upon an almost endless series of parties, galas, assemblies, and other social delights with the many young, pretty, charming, and affluent ladies of the city—indeed, Rebecca was one of the “Queens of Beauty” at Howe’s Mischianza. Renowned not only for her beauty, she was intelligent, witty, and possessed conversational acumen, and she enjoyed close friendships with a coterie of the richest and prettiest girls in town. Perhaps she was one of the “Belles of the Flat Bush” named in the previous tune, for a letter survives in her handwriting dated August 10, 1781, from Flatbush, where she went later in the war to visit her father. Rebecca’s intended, Lt. Colonel Henry Johnson (1748-1835), commanded

an Irish light infantry battalion early in the war, but was surprised by American General Anthony Wayne at Stony Point. He surrendered and was paroled to England. Rebecca followed him there and they married in 1782. Johnson recovered from his military setback and went on to become General Sir Henry Johnson, who bravely (two horses were shot from under him) defended New Ross in the Irish rebellion of 1798. Lord Cornwallis said of him: “Johnson, although a wrong-headed blockhead, is adored for his defense at New Ross, and considered as the savior of the South.” He later inherited his father’s estate and was awarded a baronetcy.

Now we turn to the mysterious “Hon. C.G.,” whom some thought to be Charles Grey, first Earl Grey, the British commander at the massacre of Paoli in 1777. This is in error, however, for one of the last tunes in *American Country Dances*, penned by Cantelo,

The Belles about the Flatbush

Musical score for "The Belles about the Flatbush" in G major (one sharp) and 2/4 time. The score consists of four staves of music. The first two staves form the first line, and the last two staves form the second line. The music features a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some triplet-like patterns in the lower staves.

Mrs. Lt. Col. Johnson’s Reel

Musical score for "Mrs. Lt. Col. Johnson’s Reel" in G major (one sharp) and common time (C). The score consists of four staves of music. The first two staves form the first line, and the last two staves form the second line. The music is characterized by frequent triplet markings (indicated by the number '3' below the notes) and a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes.

positioning guns, and had been unaware of any messages Thomas might have sent. He also produced witnesses that testified to his bravery under fire in other engagements. The court's judgment was also to acquit Gordon of any culpability. Thus neither officer felt himself righted, and the quarrel festered even as the British, defeated at Yorktown, embarked for the return to England.

Once safely home in England, Cosmo apparently remained consumed by the insult to his honor and the failure of the military tribunal to redress the perceived wrong done to him. He resolved to take matters into his own hands. It was the height of the custom of dueling. During the sixty years between 1767 and 1827 no fewer than 172 duels were fought in England, which resulted in 69 men losing their lives and 96 wounded. Thomas received a challenge from Gordon, which he tried to evade by letting it be known that he did not consider Cosmo an honorable man, and therefore not fit to duel with. However, Cosmo persisted until Thomas could not ignore the challenge and a meeting was arranged between the two for the early morning of Thursday, September 23, 1783, in the ring in Hyde Park. The terms were simple: each man was to receive a loaded pistol, then walk toward each other and fire when they pleased. This they accepted, and advancing to within eight yards of each other, they fired. Only Cosmo's pistol discharged when the triggers were pulled, but the bullet missed. Thomas re-cocked and this time his pistol fired, lightly wounding Gordon in the thigh. First blood was not enough for honor to be satisfied in this affair, however, so the pistols were re-loaded and the antagonists once again approached each other. Again both men fired, and both missed. A third time the pistols were re-loaded and fired, but this time Thomas was immediately felled by a shot to the torso and lay mortally wounded. The ball was extracted on the field but the duelist died the next day.

Dueling may have been a relatively common custom, but it was still illegal, and a coroner's jury returned a verdict of willful murder. A warrant was issued for the arrest of Cosmo Gordon, who fled to the Continent until such time that the resulting furor should die down. He stayed away a year and resigned his commission. At the end of 1784 he returned to England to face charges, and had his day in court at the Old Bailey where he was tried for murder in December of that year. Thomas' seconds and servant testified, as did the surgeon who attended that fallen man, but the jury took only ten minutes to return a verdict of not guilty.

Cosmo drops from the historical record with but few mentions after this. He was sighted in Italy in 1792, and another time there appeared a newspaper notice offering a reward for a "patent umbrella" (a new invention at the time) lost while attending the races at Ascot, one with bamboo cane, copper springs and dark brown Padua silk with the name "Hon. Col. Cosmo Gordon" imprinted in a circle on the top. Finally, we have a notice that in 1793 Colonel the Hon. Cosmo Gordon undertook for a wager to walk five miles along the Uxbridge Road in an hour. Wagering, like dueling, was a phenomenon of the age, with bets being placed on nearly everything. Cosmo however, proved himself a true amateur, as he engaged, if he won, to devote the stakes to a fund for the relief



of the widows and children of soldiers and sailors. The gallant colonel (who was then aged fifty-six) walked his five miles from Tyburn to Ealing easily within the hour. He died in Bath in 1813 at the age of seventy-six, unmarried, and was laid to rest in the Abbey.

American Country Dances provides one last glimpse of Cosmo Gordon. The issue date of 1785 was just after his return to England — his trial and acquittal — perhaps the height of his notoriety. One might speculate that the story of the duel and trial, of his American adventures, may have come to the attention of musician Hezekiah Cantelo at Bath (for Cosmo seems to have made some connection with the fashionable town upon his return). It may be that Hezekiah, in his capacity with the regimental band of the Foot Guards, knew all about this ex-officer, and, if Gordon were musically inclined, they may have entered into some relationship around the fashionable country dancing at Bath. This, plus perhaps some public curiosity regarding the dancing at the great event of the *Mischianza* and similar British balls in New York and Philadelphia, may have led to the issuance by Longman and Broderip of *American Country Dances*. It would not be the first time that a publisher had latched onto notoriety to enhance sales. There is no other record of Cosmo having been either a musician or a dancer, but those arts were part and parcel of aristocratic training in the era, and it is not impossible that he wrote the pieces attributed to him. Certainly there is something of the amateur to many of the melodies contained in the volume.

¹ Allison Thompson, *Dancing Through Time: Western Social Dance in Literature, 1400-1918: Selections* (p. 103, 1998)
John Malcolm Bulloch, *Some Strange Adventures of a Famous Scots Family* (London, 1908).

My thanks to Fynnian Titford-Mock for providing me with a copy of *Twenty-Four American Country Dances* (1785).

[Andrew Kuntz is the author of a book of old time songs and tunes called *Ragged But Right* (1987) as well as the on-line tune encyclopedia "The Fiddlers' Companion" (www.ibiblio.org/fiddlers). When not researching tunes, he enjoys playing in Irish music sessions.]