Make a Song and Dance Of It: The Development of a Civil War-Era Dance Exhibit

Meagan Alyssa Bojarski

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Nerces Bajracti
Student Name

Nerces Bajracti
Student Signature

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Date
Make A Song And Dance Of It: The Development Of A Civil War-Era Dance Exhibit
By
Meagan Alyssa Bojarski
An Honors Capstone
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Honors Diploma
to
The Honors College
of
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Dedication

Thank you to the education department at Burritt on the Mountain for taking me on as an intern, trusting my research, and assisting me in getting this dance station from an idea to a reality.
Abstract

This paper examines the process of developing a historical dance station for a living history museum from its earliest conception through its opening. The project was completed in conjunction with an internship at Burritt on the Mountain, a living history museum in Huntsville, Alabama. Whilst working at the museum, I had the opportunity to learn about the daily functioning of a living history museum and the multiple facets of developing a large event. Within this paper, I examine the development of just one part of Burritt’s summer event, Folk Family Fun: the “Make A Song And Dance Of It” station in which I guide visitors through the steps of the Gothic Dance. Within this paper, I examine the theoretical groundwork for my project, the thought process and criteria developed during the research phase, and the development of the physical properties of the dance station. Following the discussion of the project itself, I provide a brief discussion of less successful elements of the station and avenues for future work. It is my hope that this dance station will have enduring use at Burritt on the Mountain and will demonstrate the value in incorporating dance into local living history museums moving forward.
Introduction

The first question in every discussion of museums is how get visitors in the door. The second is how to keep them engaged once they are inside. In recent years, the common answer to both questions is to develop a program based on edutainment, attracting visitors through fun elements of the event and slipping in historical information along the way. While this tactic is very effective in attracting attention, many museums struggle to maintain the balance of edutainment, falling too far on one side or the other of the divide. The danger in that loss of balance is that the museum is understood to be a locus of factual information, and when accuracy loses the battle, people can receive false information or perceptions.

In the spring of 2018, I had the opportunity to participate in museum management through my role as an education intern at Burritt on the Mountain. I had been interested in the development of living history programs for several years before this experience but had been unable to develop anything that would continue beyond a one-day event. My experience at Burritt helped me to develop a sense of how living history museums ran, and allowed me to develop a long-standing living history component for wide public consumption.

Burritt on the Mountain is an open-air museum in Huntsville, Alabama. The museum features the estate of Dr. William Burritt, as well as a number of nineteenth and early twentieth century buildings and a reconstructed schoolhouse based on the Rosenwald program. Within the historic park, costumed interpreters go about the business of nineteenth and early-twentieth century individuals and answer visitors’ questions. On the average day, the park is open for self-guided tours, and large groups may book a guided tour. In addition to regular operations, Burritt on the Mountain has rigorous education programs for local schools and homeschool programs as well as a number of events for the general community. For the spring and summer season in
2018, Burritt on the Mountain held the Folk Family Fun event, where visitors could explore the park and participate in an interactive event at every location.

The Folk Family Fun event created interactive, family-friendly stations that allowed park visitors to explore the historic houses while getting some scope of the day-to-day work that would have been done there. For example, to allow children an interactive experience in association with the blacksmith location, the education department set up a station where visitors could bend flexible rods into common iron shapes. There were also blacksmith demonstrations, which allowed the two put together to function as both first and second person interpretation, as the blacksmith demonstrated their skill and the station guided the visitors in their activity. In addition to providing a number of different interpretation types, this guided visitors in an engaging and active experience without requiring a staff member to be present at all times. This allowed the park to be accessible to families every day, rather than simply when a field trip or other event was taking place.

For my event, I was tasked with developing a station where visitors could experience and practice at least one nineteenth century dance, preferably tied to the Northern Alabama region. I had previous experience with teaching historical dance, but this project had a number of limitations, which made it difficult to apply my background directly. This paper explores the development of the station from the earliest planning station to its opening, with the purpose of documenting the project to aid those who might want to develop a historical dance station for public consumption in the future.

This work is divided into four chapters and three appendixes. The first chapter is a literature review, in which I explore scholarship on the role of dance in education, major ideas about living history, and the potential relationship between dance and history. The literature
review provides a foundation of scholarship that I relied on while working on the project, and provides readers with some of the primary problems and concerns that should be considered when doing similar projects in the future. The next chapter, Research, discusses the limitations I had when developing the project, the criteria I developed to combat these limitations, and a sample of dances that I considered, including descriptions of the dance steps and how well each dance fit my criteria. I am hopeful that this chapter gives some insight into my thought processes while preparing this project.

The third chapter, Production, describes the physical work that went into putting together this dance station. Included in that is the development of dance steps and descriptions, the production of a script and audio track, the development of signs for the station, and the planning and production of a floorcloth to be used while dancing. The final chapter of this work is a self-assessment of this project and its successes and failures. Due to the nature of Burritt on the Mountain, there was no way to collect quantitative results of this project to judge its success. As such, I do my best to identify strengths and weaknesses of my process and product in order to provide advice for anyone interested in engaging in similar work in the future. The appendixes include the steps, diagrams, and script for the Gothic Dance.
Chapter One: Literature Discussion

Before I could begin the process of planning my dance station, I explored prior research into the intersections of dance, education, and public history. While I found a wealth of information in standards for one or two of these elements, I was unable to find any case studies of museums doing comparable work. In this chapter, I briefly survey the role of dance in education, the primary goals and difficulties in living history, and how dance and history have been combined in the past. The information collected below is the foundation on which I based my work and demonstrates the absence of public history programs of this nature.

Dance and Education

Research into dance studies in the United States began in the 1980s, with an emerging interest in dance as an art form in its own right. In 1984, Curtis L. Carter wrote a critical discussion of the place of dance in education from classical times until the time of writing, with some speculation on dance education’s future. At the time that the article came out, he found that dance had three potential sites in education: as a dance major, as part of a performing arts major, and as a form of physical education.¹ Carter claimed that, as dance became more widely acknowledged as art, its history would become more significant, with potential for serious academic dance studies programs to be developed. The problem that he foresaw was that the mastery of dance and the mastery of academic research were too time consuming for anyone to successfully do both, resulting in dancers who did not know the field’s history and historians who did not truly understand the necessary mechanics and emotional qualities of dance.²

² Ibid, 297.
Colla J. Mac Donald produced a work just seven years later extolling the possibilities of integrating dance into Canadian elementary school curriculum, not simply as physical education, but as a tool to promote learning other subjects. She interviewed teachers to determine their potential worries about including dance in their classrooms, advised them on ways they could introduce the technique, and then held interviews after the experience to determine if it was successful for them. She found three key benefits to using dance as a pedagogical technique: children’s enjoyment of dance will translate into enthusiasm about learning; dance may allow for diversity in class formats; and creative dance is beneficial to childhood development. In light of these findings, she advocated for the expanded use of dance in early education, both for its own purposes and as a gateway to other subjects.

Sheryle Bergmann found Mac Donald’s article to be contradictory, producing her own theoretical work exploring whether the reasons that Mac Donald and others suggested dance was beneficial were valid or not. These reasons included arts for art’s sake, physical education, therapeutic properties, and dance as an avenue for teaching other subjects. She was extremely accepting of the first reasoning, claiming that art was valuable for its own sake and should be widely integrated in education for this purpose. After accepting this claim, however, she then judged every other reasoning against that one, finding that physical education and art were not contradictory, but therapy and art were, as the manner of teaching for those different purposes would be sufficiently difficult to cause problems. She found that dance integrated into other subjects was possible, but had to be done mindfully, as it may limit its value as art or create

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unnatural relationships that actually disconnected students from the subjects they were meant to be learning more naturally.  

  Keinänen et al. produced a meta-analysis in 2000 that consolidated twenty years of research into dance education, questioned their validity, and determined whether dance instruction definitively improved learning in other subjects. The authors collected only quantitative, measurable studies, coding them to determine if successful dance programs were local successes or widely demonstrable. Their findings were largely inconclusive, due to the limited number of studies and poor handling of variables. The one clearly positive correlation was between dance and visual-spatial skills, but they still questioned how definitive these results were in light of how few studies discussed the topic.  While this research did not find a certain connection between dance and success in other cognitive fields, it provided new standards for later research to strive towards so that their findings could be more conclusive.

Living History

  Jay Anderson, a pioneer in the field of living history, suggested that the subject had three possible uses: to interpret history more effectively, to test an archeological theory, or to


participate in a recreational activity. While the latter two of these purposes are often detached from public history work, functioning as experimental archaeology or reenactments, the first is becoming widely accepted, particularly in local historic house museums and at more widely known museums such as Colonial Williamsburg and Plimoth Plantation. The Association for Living History, Farm and Agricultural Museums (ALHFAM) claims that living history within a museum context dates back to at least 1891, with Skansen, an open-air museum in Stockholm, Sweden. Its place in American society was cemented in the 1960s and 1970s when museums sought bicentennial activities that would engage visitors more than their traditional exhibitions did. Anderson suggested that the value in living history rested in its differences from traditional historical presentation by virtue of its focus on the lives of ordinary men and women, typically maintaining a rigidly regional focus. Furthermore, it connected members of multiple disciplines and laymen into one setting and provided a reprieve from the heavy focus on the future in other parts of society. Anderson’s work helped to validate living history whilst it faced harsh criticism as a supposedly unscholarly endeavor.

Criticism of living history primarily rests on the failures at accuracy and authenticity that often come with the practice, particularly when living history museums are run by non-historians or those who put other objectives before accuracy. Fred Schroeder claimed that many history enthusiasts suffer from nostalgia which leads them to only go to museums that they expect will


reinforce their conception of the past as idyllic and greater than the present, a dangerous concept considering the history of genocide, slavery, and racism within the United States’ history. His criticism of living history goes along with this fear, as living history either does not or cannot portray some of the worst parts of history, as living actors cannot be whipped or killed for obvious reasons. This is a legitimate concern, as antebellum living history museums are some of the most common and can hide the true horrors of slavery, both by not portraying whippings and other forms of cruel treatment and by presenting all-white histories in the attempt to demonstrate the lives of ordinary citizens without depicting slavery. While some living history museums are attempting to combat this problem, it has still not been solved in its entirety. Schroeder suggested that the solution to this problem lies in the coexistence of living history and traditional methods, as living history cannot present the full picture. This suggestion has been largely taken to heart, with living history attracting attention and traditional artifacts and text providing a fuller story. Unfortunately, the coexistence of traditional history with living history may fail if visitors lose interest in reading and ignore that information altogether.

Richard Handler and William Saxton pushed this issue a little further with their exploration of authenticity in living history practice. They suggested that there are three key points which should be kept in mind when examining living history: living history practitioners always have authenticity at heart; living history practitioners often find their own lives alienating and thus seek a more comfortable, narrative life in living history; and living history as a practice

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10 Ibid.
is innately contradictory due to the previous two statements.\textsuperscript{11} The key facet of living history that they find problematic is the idea that “an authentic life is a storied or emplotted life.”\textsuperscript{12} While there are other issues of authenticity within the practice, Handler and Saxton provide a seemingly unsolvable problem in pointing out the structured nature of living history, as the knowledge of the past limits possible twists and turns, and safety concerns limit the freedom that visitors can have in their explorations of the past.\textsuperscript{13} Much of this cannot be handled, as practicality and safety must come before authenticity. As most of those who visit history museums are either there with their schools or because of an active interest in history, it would be difficult to escape the sense of inevitability to history that comes from hindsight. Furthermore, if the narrative were changed to allow for less of a rigid structure, it would likely cause many problems, as the museums would not be accurately presenting history. With this in mind, the authenticity of uncertainty must conflict with the accuracy of events, and thus museums must choose the version that will bring in the most visitors: the accurate, structured narrative.

Scott Magelsson provided a possible solution to Handler and Saxton’s problem in the suggestion of second-person living history as a possible alternative to the typical model. He defined first person interpretation as conventional living history, with a costumed interpreter speaking from the point of view of their character. Third person is more standard in museums, with a guide (costumed or not) discussing the lives of the people who lived there. “Second-person interpretation,” as Magelsson defined it, involves visitors pretending to be part of the past


\textsuperscript{12} Ibid, 250.

\textsuperscript{13} Handler and Saxton provide other problems of authenticity in pages 244-5.
and participating fully in those activities, rather than “passively consuming it.”14 While this provides a more engaging experience for the visitor, allowing more choice than a purely voyeuristic approach, it still has problems. Magelsson acknowledged that agency is still extremely limited in second-person living history, as visitors are frequently given a script to follow with limited choices that may or may not have any consequence in the grand scheme of things. In order to combat this difficulty, Magelsson suggested that second-person living history is best suited to “hands-on learning” about crafts and chores.15 These activities do not require an extensive script, but still allow visitors to get a better understanding of the basic mechanics of historic life. While this does not address the problem of elite-focused living history, it is a step in the right direction for solving the authenticity problem.

**Dance and History**

There has been very little research into the potential benefits that may come from the addition of dance to historical interpretation, but it is a logical connection to make. Theresa Jill Buckland argued that dance could be the “embodiment of cultural memory,” with the power to preserve and transmit cultural traditions and ideologies.16 She explored these possibilities by examining two British folk traditions: the Abbots Bromley Horn Dance and the Brittania Coc-Nut Dancers. Her study discussed two forms of dance transmission, “incorporating practice,” where the knowledgeable party physically demonstrates the steps to the ignorant party, and

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15 Ibid, 298.

“inscribing practice,” where the ignorant party learns the steps through pictures, videos, and text. The participants showed a growing comfort with sharing videos and photographs of their dances, and suggested that inscribing practice was a functional method of preservation. Buckland suggested that the continued performance of these traditional dances allowed the dancers to act “almost as ciphers, to transmit codified movement information” which was important to the culture and history.

Wallace et al. conducted a study examining the impacts of a 13-week dance intensive at an urban, public charter school that sought to teach a more immersive understanding of history through dance. The participants, in 7th and 8th grade, were accustomed to interdisciplinary, artistic learning methods, which made them receptive subjects. The Project, Dancing Through the Decades, included three classes, the first focusing on the dance steps and feel, the second allowing practice time, and the third drawing connections between dance history and social, political, and cultural movements. Student responses indicated that they had developed a better understanding of the history they had studied through this experience, and the overall results of the experiment demonstrated an improvement in self-image and social relationships amongst participants. This was one of the first attempts to integrate dance as historical interpretation to

17 Ibid, 10-11. These terms were originally used by Paul Connerton in his 1989 work, How Societies Remember, and were adapted by Buckland to specifically discuss dance transmission.

18 Ibid, 12.

external parties, as all previous historical dance work had been internal reenactments or folk
dances that had persisted into modern practice.

Adrienne L. Kaeppler explored the value of archival dance footage to cultural identity,
bringing recordings of Tahitian dance from 1937 and Hawaiian hula dance from 1960 and 1961
to the locations where they were originally filmed in order to see how the current citizens reacted
to them. She found that the citizens were extremely attached to the dances, though there had been
at least a generation since they were performed. From their reactions and explanations, she
argued that research into dance as cultural identity ought to focus on three elements: what the
performance entailed, what its context and meaning was, and what the dancers and viewers felt
during the performance. 20 This research introduced the power of emotional context to the
historical study of dance, emphasizing that more than just the steps was required to truly capture
the historical and cultural significance of dance traditions.

Conclusion

While this scholarship clearly demonstrates a growing interest in the integration of active
and engaging performance into education spaces, there are still many gaps to be filled. I believe
that the work I have done through this project helps to fill one of these gaps: the absence of
serious concern with dance traditions in historical inquiry. Scholars frequently avoid discussion
of leisure in historical work because there are limited sources with which to draw on. However,
dance traditions, while not entirely captured in text, are extensively published facets of daily life

20 Adrienne L. Kaeppler, "Capturing Music and Dance in an Archive:: A Meditation on
Imprisonment," in A Distinctive Voice in the Antipodes, ed. Kirsty Gillespie, Sally Treloyn,
and Don Niles, Essays in Honour of Stephen A. Wild (ANU Press, 2017), 429–442, accessed
due to the prolific nature of dance manuals. The instruction of dance has the potential to embody culture in an individual, and as such deserves attention in the scholarly sphere. The distance between dancers and the degree of physical contact they are allowed demonstrates social and specifically gendered norms; the type of music being danced to illustrates culture; the number of dancers indicates communal participation. All of these and more can be explored through the use of historical dance, and are concerns I had in mind as I began this project.
Chapter Two: Research

The vast majority of the time that I spent on this project was devoted to the research and evaluation of potential dances. The nature of the Folk Family Fun event, while excellent at attracting visitors, made it difficult for me to teach dance as I would instinctively plan to do. In this chapter, I discuss the limitations of my project, identify the resulting criteria that I judged dances by, and explore four dances (Hey for Three, Soldier’s Joy, Virginia Reel, and Gothic Dance) that I considered for the project. For each dance, I provide the dance steps, how well it fit my criteria, and why I decided to use it or not in the final product.

Limitations

The first and most critical limitation on this project was my inability to teach dance kinesthetically or visually. While these are the most common ways for someone to learn dance, they did not fit into the Folk Family Fun event. The station needed to be available during all open hours for months on end, which meant there was no way for me to directly instruct visitors in the dance. My prior experience with historical dance had always allowed me to actively engage with those that I was instructing, so this was a big change for me. I was also unable to incorporate a visual component (pictures or video) because it would disrupt the authenticity of the historic house. Instead of these techniques, by which visitors could mimic my movements and techniques, I had the ability to teach dance simply through audio cues which would be played in the room through a hidden CD player.

In addition to the limitations of teaching methods, I had to select my dance carefully to suit the size of the room and number of viable participants. My station was located in a small room in the Balch House, which had an available space roughly measuring 10 ft. by 8 ft. This space did not allow for many dances at this time, which frequently had dancers cross the room
and spin around it. Along this same point, I could not rely on any specific number of dancers, which severely limited the more intricate, social dances. While I could reasonably expect for there to be at least two visitors present (one child and one parent), I could not rely on any specific numbers beyond that. The majority of dances from this time period required at least six participants to function properly, as dance was an innately social activity.

Criteria

In order to properly create a dance station despite these limitations, I explicitly set criteria that dances had to fit under before I could consider them for this event. To address the first issue, the inability to teach through mimicry, I had to examine what I would be able to teach through. I had an audio track that could contain music, instructions, and dance calls, as well as a floorcloth that could provide guidance for where to step and a sign that would be placed within the room. With these as my only methods of instruction, dances had to be relatively simple, able to be learned quickly and without excessive explanation. A major facet of this was finding a dance with a limited number of repetitive steps, which visitors could grow more comfortable with as they repeated them.

To address the space and participant problems, dances had to be functional and enjoyable with only two participants, and had to remain within a relatively linear space. The floorcloth was just slightly smaller than the room’s available 80 ft\(^2\), so I could not select any dance that required sweeping movements, particularly if there were more than two participants at a time.

The final criterion was the most obvious, functioning based on the project itself, rather than any of its limitations. The dance selected had to be suitably “authentic.” While there is a great deal of controversy over what authenticity means, I judged it by two standards. First, I had to be able to find the dance in a dance manual from the mid-nineteenth century to the early-
twentieth century. If I could not find written documentation of the dance from a relatively contemporary period, then I did not consider it at all. The second standard was more lenient, because it was incredibly difficult to be certain of: I had to feel reasonably comfortable with portraying the dance as something local to the region. This was incredibly difficult to be certain of, but I felt the need to have some proof either that the dance was performed in the South, that the dance manual it was from was read in the South, or that it was popular enough that it would be unreasonable for it not to have been performed in the South.

**Examining Dances**

When I sought out dances, I explored both nineteenth century dance manuals and common folk dance manuals. These typically detailed the steps in a relatively simple manner, and provided some sense of authenticity. Dances that were listed in dance manuals could be learned just through reading, though those reading the manuals likely had a better sense for the posture and techniques of those dances than most modern visitors would. Below are the four dances that I most seriously considered as options for this station, along with how well they fit my criteria.

*Hey for Three*

In order to avoid working with an overly complicated dance, I first considered teaching a basic dance pattern that was included in a number of nineteenth century dances. This possibility would allow for in-depth discussion of technique and was the easiest to accommodate participant and spatial limitations. Of the possible steps, I found that the Hey for Three best suited my purposes. The Hey for Three is a relatively simple dance pattern that seemed to fit the project’s
criteria better than any complete dance.\textsuperscript{21} It did not need extensive instruction, could theoretically be done by however many people came, and did not require much space. The dance step, to be done properly, has three people forming an imperfect figure eight, passing by one another and switching spaces (see below).

The Hey for Three forms an almost perfect figure eight loop. The first and second spaces should be closer to one another than the second and third. The following steps should be performed simultaneously:

One person (blue) starts at the first space, facing right. They then travel up to the second space and down to the third. They then turn to face the left and walk up to the second space and down to the first.

Another person (red) starts at the second space, facing right. They then travel down to the third space and turn around to face left. They then walk up to the second space and down to the first. They turn around again to face right and go up to the second space.

The final person (green) starts at the third space, facing left. They go up to the second space and down to the first. They turn around to face the right and go up to the right space and down to the third.

Despite its obvious strengths, the problems with teaching the Hey for Three were twofold: first, it taught nineteenth-century technique, but not culture, and second, it was logistically difficult. The purpose in including a dance station as part of this event was to demonstrate the way that culture worked, particularly as it related to gender relations and interactions. This step failed to introduce the partner dynamic that was integral to the majority of nineteenth century dance, and I felt it would inevitably lessen the impact of the dance station. In addition, while the dance pattern was common, it was not explicitly a Southern, or even

American, dance pattern, with my clearest point of reference for it coming from British dance manuals.

The second problem was deceptive, as it had initially seemed as though the Hey for Three would be easier to do logistically than a complete dance. While the step obviously used three participants in most circumstances, I believed it could be done by just one if there were mats demonstrating where to step, and could be theoretically done by as many people as could have come into the room. However, if I were to develop the mats that would be necessary for less than three participants, it would limit the number of people who could practice the steps to however many mats were created. In addition, while just one person could perform the pattern, it would not be particularly enjoyable that way. Even with a full set of three participants, it was very possible that teaching only one dance step would not be sufficiently engaging, which would limit its effectiveness overall. In light of these problems, I felt it was best to examine full dances and modify or shorten them to suit the project.

Soldier’s Joy

The Soldier’s Joy was extremely well established as a Civil War-era dance, included in several contemporary dance manuals and still frequently performed at Civil War reenactments. The popularity and authenticity of this dance made it preferable for this work, as it would clearly demonstrate the culture of the time. In light of the criteria that I had drawn up logistically, it was functional. The steps were fairly simple and very repetitive, with close-range movements and switching of positions that I felt could be done within the space available. Below, I include the instructions for the dance as presented by the Civil War Dance Foundation:

- **Honors** (to partner, then opposite)
- **Forward and Back** [8]
- **Two Hand Turn Opposite** [8]
Come out of turn and face your partner. This will change the formation to two lines facing each other (see below).

**Balance** [8]
Walk past partner's right shoulder [4], stop, do not turn around, back up [4] passing right shoulders.

**Two Hand Turn Partner** [8]
Come out of turn facing other couple

**Ladies’ Chain** [16]
Ladies cross [8] to other gentleman and immediately return to partner [8].

**Forward and Back** [8]

**Forward and Through** [8]
Walk straight ahead with the ladies splitting the other couple. The gentleman’s first step should be to his left to create a hole for the other lady to pass between him and his partner. If in middle of line, couples will meet a new couple and repeat the sequence of moves with them. If at the end of the line, turn around and wait one sequence for next couple to face you. Make sure the lady stays on the gentleman’s right.22

When I began exploring this dance, I believed that I might have more space than initially assumed, which would allow for multiple stations around the room to teach the individual steps. The Soldier’s Joy was intended for groupings of four, which allowed large groups to participate, while also allowing for fewer participants if needed, so long as there was a floor mat designating the home positions of the dancers. In order to make the dance more easily teachable, I planned to remove the Ladies’ Chain and focus on the steps that were simpler and did not require any particular number of participants. However, as I attempted the dance within the available space, I found that it would be incredibly difficult to fit into the room. In addition, the sheer number of steps would be difficult to learn on the first run through, and there would not be any space to practice based on the square pattern of the dance. While none of the steps were particularly

22 These instructions come from Annette G. Keener-Farley and Lawrence E. Keener-Farley, *An Introduction to Civil War Dancing* (Camp Hill, PA: Civil War Dance Foundation), 7. The full text is available at request from the Civil War Dance Foundation website.
difficult, the dance required either a substantial amount of space or dancers comfortable with the steps. Because I could not rely on either, I decided against using the Soldier’s Joy for this event.

*Virginia Reel*

The Virginia Reel seemed to be the most obvious dance to do, as it is both one of the most famous Civil War-era dances and the best documented. It is a favorite amongst Civil War reenactors, folk dancers, education systems, and films. Because of this popularity, the Virginia Reel was the first full dance that I considered, and one that I sincerely wanted to use for this dance station. A critical part of my desire to perform the dance was that this was the only dance that I possessed concrete evidence of having been performed in Huntsville. The *Harper Weekly* contained a short description of a military ball in 1864 held by northern soldiers occupying the city. This article included a sketch of the dancers performing the Virginia Reel.23

The Virginia Reel has a very long history, potentially derived from Irish and Scottish dances from the 16th century. Prior to gaining the name Virginia Reel, a very similar earlier dance named the Sir Roger de Coverly was wildly popular in England, with the earliest known publication dating back to 1695.24 In the United States, the dance hit its height of popularity in the mid-eighteenth century, with more publications than nearly any other dance. Though there are variations between versions, I have included one version of the dance below, which I planned to draw on heavily if I were to teach the dance.

```
First Gentleman: And last lady forward and back, … 4 bars
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Lady:</th>
<th>And last gentleman the same, ... 4 bars</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Gentleman:</td>
<td>And last lady swing with right hands ... 4 bars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Lady:</td>
<td>And last gentleman the same, ... 4 bars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Gentleman:</td>
<td>And last lady swing with left hands, ... 4 bars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Lady:</td>
<td>And last gentleman the same, ... 4 bars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Gentleman:</td>
<td>And last lady swing both hands, ... 4 bars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Lady:</td>
<td>And last gentleman the same, ... 4 bars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Gentleman:</td>
<td>And last lady Dos A Dos, ... 4 bars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Lady:</td>
<td>And last gentleman the same, ... 4 bars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Couple:</td>
<td>Turn right hands, ... 4 bars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Separate and turn second couple, left hands ... 4 bars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Turn right hands, ... 2 bars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Separate and turn third couple, left hands, ... 2 bars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Repeat to bottom,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Join hands and back to places at top.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All:</td>
<td>Gentlemen to the left, Ladies to the right.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>March down outside, and up the middle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head Couple,</td>
<td>Down the middle to the bottom.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Despite the many positive factors in favor of selecting the Virginia Reel, most having to do with popularity and authenticity, the Virginia Reel did not fit the logistical criteria well at all. I taught the Reel at a previous event, and while it was extremely well received, I needed at least two couples to know the steps before I could try to introduce it to others. Knowing that I would not be able to demonstrate the dance in person or rely on any prior knowledge, it seemed unlikely to succeed. Furthermore, in order to participate in the titular reel step, there needed to be six to eight participants, which I could not count on. I considered removing this portion of the

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dance for ease of teaching, but that would limit its historical accuracy, enjoyability, and authenticity. Because of these factors, I was regrettably unable to use the Virginia Reel for this event, though I was able to integrate it into a separate dance event at Burritt on the Mountain, in which I would be able to teach the dance in person.

The Gothic Dance

In comparison to the other dances that I have already explored, the Gothic Dance was one that immediately caught my eye, yet was dismissed nearly as quickly. One of the first sources I examined in my exploration for appropriate dances was the Civil War Dance Manual (CWDM), which included this dance amongst sixteen other period-accurate dances. I was drawn to the dance at first because the CWDM claimed, “Any number of dancers can join in this dance” and the steps appeared relatively simple both to explain and to perform. However, I had great difficulty in finding any historical basis for the dance. The Gothic Dance is printed in Elias Howe’s American Dancing Master, and Ball-Room Prompter, but I found no mention of it anywhere else. Both due to this dance manual originating in Boston and the lack of corroborating sources, I concluded that the dance was likely not very popular at the time and thus could not reasonably be authentic to the region.

However, as I continued exploring and rejecting dances, I found myself continually returning to this dance. While it was better with four participants, it could be done just as easily with only two, a number we could expect. I would have to remove the final step because of space and complexity, but that removal would not be as detrimental as the removal of the reel would have been to the Virginia Reel. Where the distinctive aspect of the Virginia Reel was the reel dance effect to the end of the line, this dance was defined by the ducking of the ladies under the
arms of the gentlemen, whose arms created a “gothic” arch. Below, I include the dance steps as described by Elias Howe:

*Form two lines down the room, the ladies on the right and gentlemen on the left.*
No. 1. Ladies advance two bars. Gentlemen then advance while ladies retire: gentlemen stop and hold up both their hands, while ladies pass under them to the other side. Repeat the whole to places.
No. 2. Two ladies and two gentlemen hands four round; gentlemen stop across the room and hold up their hands while the ladies pass under and twice round their partners; first and second couple galop [sic] down to the bottom and stop. Repeat the whole until into place.26

While the arching arms in this dance are unique, I found that the Gothic Dance was still representative of the cultural elements of dances from this period, particularly in its other steps. In light of this, I began seriously considering using it for this project and claiming it was similar to dances done in this region. While that would not have been my preference, it fit into the practical constraints of this project better than any other dances I had explored.

In my continued research, I found the information that I needed to feel comfortable presenting this dance. While exploring Elias Howe’s background, I discovered that the man was incredibly influential in the world of music, publishing many music and dance books, some of which remained in circulation for over twenty years. During the Civil War, Howe produced and sold drums, fifes and instruction manuals for the Union Army, gaining enough attention that President Lincoln offered him a position as the Army’s Director of Bands. Many of his instruction manuals found their way into Confederate hands, which helps to provide authenticity to my decision to present the Gothic Dance as one that may have been performed in Huntsville,

26 Elias Howe, *American Dancing Master, and Ball-Room Prompter* (Boston: Elias Howe, 1862), 129, https://www.loc.gov/resource/musdi.102.0/?sp=1. To see a visual of these dance steps, see Appendix II.
The extreme popularity of Howe’s music books likely transferred to his dance manuals, and between the presence of his books in Confederate camps and the popularity with Union troops who later occupied Huntsville, I decided that the Gothic Dance could be considered suitably authentic. With the historical authenticity settled, I selected the Gothic Dance as the subject of this project, and began work on production.

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Chapter Three: Production

Once the research had been done and the Gothic Dance selected, I set into the production phase of the dance station. While this took considerably less time than the initial research phases, there were a number of practical concerns I had to address, chiefly in how I developed the physical components of the dance station. In this chapter, I describe the development of the script and audio track for instruction, as well as the physical properties that were created for the project, namely signs and the floorcloth.

The Audio Track

Before I could begin creating the audio track for the room, I needed to develop a script that described what the station was and how to perform the dance (see Appendix III for the completed script). I examined the dance in Howe’s original version and its reproduction in the Civil War Dance Manual and translated them into vernacular terminology, creating both a call list and basic instructions for how to perform the dance (see Appendix I). Once I had a basic listing of steps, I practiced the dance with a group of four friends and by myself, to determine how easily the various steps could be explained and to see what numbers were most effective. The dance functioned very well, but I believed that the second portion of the dance would be difficult to teach without demonstration. I removed that and constructed my final call list and list of instructions based on the steps that remained.

I added additional instructions indicating how the station worked and how the audio track connected to the floorcloth. This step was relatively straightforward, but I was very particular about the terminology that I used. Though it was unlikely to be an issue, I wanted to be careful with how my station approached the issue of gender roles. Gender relations are the easiest elements of culture to be found in dance, but as some cultural beliefs have changed since then, I
considered it important to be deliberate and careful with my approach to gendered terminology. While the more authentic approach would strictly tie dance steps to “gentlemen” and “ladies,” it is common practice in the modern day to use the more gender neutral terms “leads” and “follows.” In order to avoid this potential problem, I made it clear that visitors would be “play[ing] the role of the lady or the gentleman” and welcomed them to try both. This prevented any potential complications and allowed for a more open experience. My supervisors at Burritt approved the script and confirmed that the steps were simple enough for the target age range to comprehend.

After I produced my script, I began looking for a few musical tracks: one that would be effective for teaching the dance steps, one for practicing them with dance calls, and two that could be used for independent dancing. The education department at Burritt on the Mountain provided me with a CD of music that they used for park music, which was authentic to the style of music in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. I looked for tracks that had a clear beat, fit a four-beat rhythm, and could reasonably match up to my dance calls. I selected four tracks: a slow song for instructions, a faster track for dance calls, and two other tracks that would run without voiceovers. I recorded the voiceovers in tune to these music tracks, and blended them into a 16 minute, 44 second audio file using GarageBand which I then burned to a CD and played on repeat in the room where the event took place. A link to this audio file is included in Appendix III.

**Physical Properties**

A major practical aspect of planning this event was developing signs that would direct visitors to the correct building for each station and provide some explanation of what to do once they got there. My supervisors developed the sign directing visitors to my station (left below)
based on my descriptions of the dances, including its historical context, and I was responsible for writing the sign that would be inside of the room (right below).

We based the sign within the room off the audio script, including the initial instructions as well as the calls for the Gothic Dance. I was advised that the signs should be relatively brief, as visitors may not read them if they were crowded with instructions, so I did not include as much historical information as I would have in a live demonstration.

The final property of the dance station was the floorcloth, which required the most planning and preparation outside of the initial research. Floorcloths were commonly used in the United States from the colonial period into the Antebellum period. They functioned similarly to rugs, adding decoration and color to rooms that might otherwise be undecorated. In addition to their aesthetic value, floorcloths added protection to the floor and insulation from extreme
temperatures. By the nineteenth century, it was common to see as many as five different colors, though Charles Eastlake, a designer from England, “recommended simple geometric pattern in two colors.”

My design was modeled off of Eastlake’s suggestion, containing multiple checkered diamonds in red and blue, with a black background and white border helping to differentiate the shapes and add aesthetic appeal (see images below for progression and final product).

The floorcloth was 117.5 inches x 70 inches, so I decided to create two rows of six diamonds, with each row providing space for two dancers. Dancers would begin at the far diamonds, with the ladies beginning on the red diamonds at one end of the cloth and the men on the blue ones at the other end. I measured, sketched, and painted the floorcloth, using three coats of color and two coats of waterproof sealant.

Once every component was completed, we assembled them in Balch House. Upon entering the room, visitors could hear the sound of music and, depending on their timing, my voice directly them on the nature of the dance. On their left, the sign sat on a chair, letting them

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know what the dance entailed. On their right sat the floorcloth, which they could use as a guide through the dance. On April 24, 2018, the dance station opened to the public.
Chapter Four: Self-Assessment

My time at Burritt on the Mountain ended just after the dance station launched, so I did not have the chance to see how the station was received or ask visitors about their experiences. Because I had no qualitative or quantitative judge of visitor responses, I feel it is important to look back on this project critically to judge what was successful and what was unsuccessful. Should there be future projects that are similar to this, I believe they may benefit from some of the ideas I had in hindsight. Below, I present a brief discussion of the projects strengths and weaknesses, as well as a few thoughts on how I would change it if I were to complete this project again.

By and large, I believe that this dance station was successful in achieving its objectives. The “Make A Song And Dance Of It” station was developed to fit into the Folk Family Fun event, attracting visitors to an enjoyable experience of a historical dance. By those qualifications, I succeeded and am incredibly proud of my work. My research process did a good job balancing practical considerations with issues of accuracy and authenticity, and I believe that I selected the right dance for this project. I am particularly pleased with the floorcloth, as it was beneficial to the dance station but could also be used for more practical purposes moving forward. Because I based my design on historical trends and commentary, it has enduring value beyond the Folk Family Fun event, and can be used as a floorcloth in its own right. Developing the floorcloth was probably the most physically and mentally taxing aspect of the project, as I designed, measured, sketched, re-measured, re-sketched, and painted the cloth myself. This process was far more difficult to work on than I had expected, but I believe it was incredibly successful.

While I am certainly proud of the work that I did, it is inevitable that, after completing a project, one thinks of how they could have done it better. In respect to this project, my biggest
concern is related to my initial motivation for creating the dance station. I believe that dance can teach people a great deal about the society and values that existed at a particular point in time, but I did not actually illustrate these facets of society in the final product. I worry that I became so consumed with creating an accurate dance that fit all of my criteria that I lost focus on what could be learned through the dance. Looking back to the question of balance in edutainment that I discussed at the beginning of this work, I am not entirely confident that I maintained that balance. While I am confident that this dance station was enjoyable, I question how well it served its educational purpose. The sign outside of the house mentions Elias Howe to provide some context for the dance, but the information about gender dynamics and interactions that I felt was so clear in my mind while I developed the station never really made it into the final product. When I developed the signs and audio file, I was so concerned with describing the dance in an easily consumable fashion that I did not think to include perspectives on social interactions and gender dynamics. While I can justify some of that as being a product of the practical concerns of age-appropriate content and limited attention spans, the absence of that discussion severely limited the potential impact that the dance station might have had.

On a similar note, the dance station fell prey to Schroeder’s concern that living history can eclipse the darker sides of history through advancing nostalgia. While it was by no means intentional on my part, my final product is entirely distinct from the events of the 1860s, when the dance was created. There is no discussion of slavery in my dance station. Furthermore, there is no discussion of the Civil War at all. While I relied on information about the war to feel justified in the dance’s authenticity, I failed to translate that information into the actual station. Looking back on it, a possible way to layer that information into the station would have been through narrative elements of the audio file, rather than just mechanical commentary. Future
experiments of this kind might benefit from an introduction claiming something like the following: “The year is 1862, and Union troops occupy Huntsville. Tensions are high between the soldiers and citizens, so it has been decided to throw a ball to encourage positive interactions between the occupying soldiers and the ladies of Huntsville. One dance that may be performed is the Gothic Dance, which was released in Elias Howe’s *American Dancing Master, and Ball-Room Prompter*. To be sure that you are prepared for the ball, I will teach you the steps of the dance.” From there, I could potentially slip in advice about gender dynamics or etiquette, both in a daily life setting and concerning the occupying forces. If I were to do a comparable project in the future, weaving context into the mechanics would be my primary concern.

My final point of criticism of this project was precisely the reason that I have this chapter: I had no true data to analyze. While it may have been difficult to change much about the station once it was launched, it would be beneficial for future work to know how many people visited the station, how many participated, and what their thoughts on it were. Not collecting this information makes it difficult for me to draw conclusions or advocate for other museums to create similar events, as I cannot conclusively describe the event’s success. If I were to do this project over again, I would make a point to collect this information to allow my project to be more easily generalizable.

It is my hope that this discussion provided some insight into the strengths and weaknesses of this project, particularly through ways by which this project or comparable ones might be improved in the future. I believe that the project was a success, but there is certainly room for improvement, particularly where the integration of historical background into practical dance instruction is concerned. The balance of edutainment is particularly difficult to maintain with a project of this type, and I would advise others to keep it as a central part of their thought process.
while they develop living history programs of this type. Without the appropriate balance, the value of dance as an instructor of cultural context simply becomes a setting for nostalgia, which may be more harmful than beneficial.
Conclusion

Over the course of this project, I was able to develop a historical dance station for Burritt on the Mountain, which was in use for over three months. This paper described the process of developing this station, including the establishment of prior research, selection of material to teach, the development of the station itself, and a reflection on potential improvements to the station for future projects. I believe that this dance station held a unique position within museum contexts, as dance remains a highly ignored aspect of history, both in academic and public contexts. It is my hope that the station I developed will be available for use regularly in the future, which may begin more conversation about the role of dance in public historical interpretation.

As I said at the start of this paper, the survival of museums is reliant upon the balance of education and entertainment. Dance has the potential to do both, providing fun activities for visitors while also teaching them about the daily life of historical peoples. Many aspects of living history are individual, focusing on housework and small aspects of daily life; dance and other social events provide opportunities to learn about the development and maintenance of society. By integrating dance into living history museums, museum professionals may be able to transition between big-picture traditional history and hyper-focused living history more effectively, establishing a fuller depiction of the past.
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Appendix I: Gothic Dance Calls

Calls for teaching the Gothic Dance (full):

Start everyone out in two lines, ladies on the left, gentlemen in the right. Have all women hold hands with each other; the same for the gentlemen.

1. Ladies and gentlemen all step to center. Ladies curtsy, then men bow. (Honors) Return to starting positions.
2. Ladies cross to the gentlemen.
4. Men raise arms into arches; ladies pass under and cross to the far side. Turn to face each other.
5. Ladies cross to the gentlemen.
7. Men raise arms into arches; ladies pass under and cross to the far side. Turn to face each other.
8. Top two couples come to center. Join hands in circle- pattern: man, man, lady, lady. Skip around circle for 4 beats. Men stop with their backs to the line, lift arms to make arches. Women pass under, circle around men and go under arch again. Partners join up again. Polka-step (or gallop) to the bottom of the line. Everyone else moves forward.
9. Repeat steps 2-8 until all couples have gone through and/or the music is done.

Calls for teaching the Gothic Dance (basic steps):

Start everyone out in two lines, ladies on the left, gentlemen on the right. Have all women hold hands with each other; the same for the gentlemen.
1. Ladies cross to the gentlemen.
2. Ladies return. Gentlemen follow your ladies.
3. Men raise arms into arches; ladies pass under to the left and cross to the other side. Men step forward. Turn to face each other.
4. Ladies cross to the gentlemen.
5. Ladies return. Gentlemen follow your ladies.
6. Men raise arms into arches; ladies pass under and cross to the other side. Men step forward. Turn to face each other.
7. Repeat

Official Calls for the Amended Gothic Dance:

1. Ladies forward
2. Gentlemen Chase
3. Gentlemen Arch
4. Ladies Forward
5. Gentlemen Chase
6. Gentlemen Arch
Appendix II: Gothic Dance Figures

Step One: Ladies Forward
All ladies cross the space to their partners

Step Two: Gentlemen Chase
Ladies cross back to their starting positions. Gentlemen follow them.
Step Three: Gentlemen Chase
Gentlemen join hands and raise them into an arch. Ladies pass under the arch to their left, while men step forward. All turn to face each other.

Step Four: Ladies Forward
All ladies cross the space to their partners.
Step Five: Gentlemen Chase
Ladies cross back to their starting positions.
Gentlemen follow them.

Step Six: Gentlemen Chase
Gentlemen join hands and raise them into an arch. Ladies pass under the arch to their left, while men step forward. All turn to face each other.
Appendix III: Gothic Dance Script

Introduction

Today, we’ll be learning the Gothic dance. The first thing you need to do is decide if you want to play the role of the lady or the gentleman. Feel free to try both roles. Ladies will begin on the far left red diamonds and gentlemen will begin on the far right blue diamonds. This is your home spot. Always start the dance at your home spot, facing your partner on the diamond across from you. Hold hands with the person beside you at all times unless instructed otherwise.

Slow Call w/ Directions (no music)

Before we practice with music, I’m going to walk everyone through the steps. We only have three patterns with this dance, so we’ll walk through those twice before we turn on the music.

Our first pattern is called Ladies Forward. If you’re a lady, walk forward until you’re on the red diamond in front of your partner. (pause)

Next, we’ll have the Gentlemen Chase. For this step, I want all of our ladies to walk backwards to your home space and all of our gentlemen to walk towards them until you’re on the blue diamond in front of your partner. (pause)

Next, we’re going to have the Gentlemen Arch. Gentlemen, raise up your arms to make an arch. Ladies, release the hand of the lady beside you, step under the arch to your left and walk to the last blue diamond. Gentlemen, once your partner has passed under your arms, release the hand of the gentleman beside you, and step forward to the red diamond. Everyone turn to face your partner. (pause)
We’re going to repeat these pattern one more time to get everyone back to their starting positions. Take the hand of the person beside you every time you start.

*Ladies Forward.* Ladies walk to the blue diamond in front of your partner. (pause)

*Gentlemen Chase.* Ladies, walk back to the last blue diamond. Gentlemen, follow them to the farthest red diamond from you. (pause)

*Gentlemen Arch.* Gentlemen, raise up your arms to make an arch. Ladies, release the hand of the lady beside you, step under the arch to your left and walk to your home space. Gentlemen, once your partner has passed under your arms, release the hand of the gentleman beside you, and step forward to your home space. Everyone turn to face your partner. (pause)

Good job. We’re going to put some music on now, and I’ll walk you through the steps. We’re going to do two songs with me calling, and then you’ll have some time to dance on your own.

**Slow Song w/ Calls**

Ladies, cross to your partner.

Ladies, back to home. Gentlemen, follow your partners.

Gentlemen raise your arms. Ladies, pass under the left. And everyone cross to the ends.

Everyone turn around.

Ladies, cross to your partner.

Ladies, back to the blue end. Gentlemen, follow your partners.

Gentlemen raise your arms. Ladies, pass under the left. And everyone back to home. Everyone turn around.

(repeat until the song is winding down)
Good job everyone. Are you ready to go a little faster?

**Faster Song w/ Calls**

1. Ladies forward
2. Gentlemen Chase
3. Gentlemen Arch
4. Ladies Forward
5. Gentlemen Chase
6. Gentlemen Arch

(repeat until the song is nearing an end)

**Introduction to Extra Music**

We’ll be playing some music now for you to dance to however you want. You can feel free to continue practicing the Gothic Dance or you can do your own thing. We’ll start up the instructions again in about 6 minutes.

The audio version of this script can be found at:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1rs8y34dtplutnERQhbzlHLamj8Wob_UA/view?usp=sharing