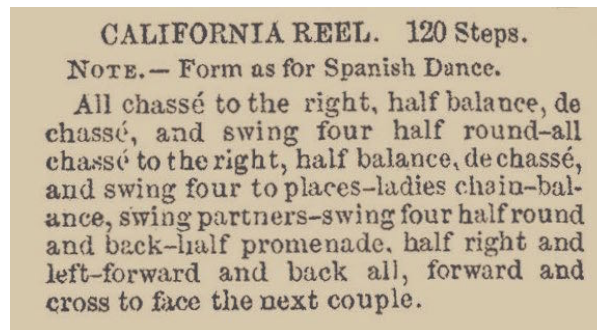
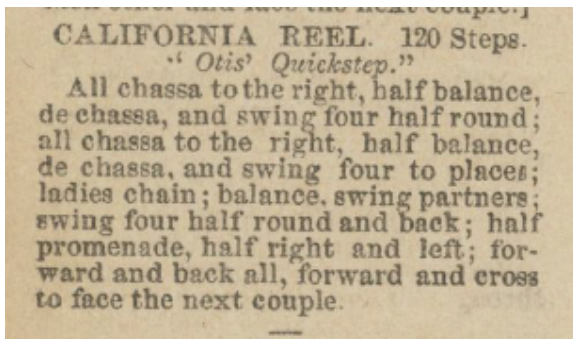
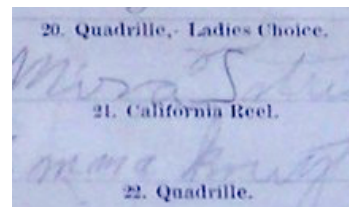


|     |                  |
|-----|------------------|
| 14. | Two Step.        |
| 15. | California Reel. |
| 16. | Quadrille.       |

# CALIFORNIA REEL

American contra dance

Reconstruction by Richard Powers



through the figures. Every twenty steps is marked by the semicolon. ( ; )

1855 • H. G. O. Washburn  
THE BALL-ROOM MANUAL • Belfast, Maine

1863 • H. G. O. Washburn  
BALL-ROOM MANUAL OF CONTRA DANCES & COTILLIONS

This is a lovely contra, but there is clearly a mistake in the description. Either the specified length of the dance—120 steps—is wrong, or one figure is wrong.

In each of his dance manuals, Washburn explains that every two bars is five steps (presumably chassé, jeté, assemblé, or maybe chassé, walk, walk). Indeed most of his standard four-part 32-bar contras are listed as 80 steps. All of his six-part 48-bar contras are listed as 120 steps.

Furthermore Washburn explained that, "Every twenty steps is marked by the semicolon (;)" His 1863 notation changed the semicolon to a dash ( ; to - ) but the count remained the same. As you can see from the semicolons or dashes in the above descriptions, that comes to 140 steps (seven parts) not the 120 that he specified.

## Version A

Following Washburn's semicolon rule literally arrives at this 56-bar, 7-part, reconstruction:

Formation: Duple improper longways contra or circle, because of 1863 Washburn's "Form as for Spanish Dance". Washburn's Spanish Dance description said it could be either longways sets or in a circle. The description begins with "All" which means that the entire set commences at the beginning, as with the Spanish Dance.

**A1** Facing up and down the hall, taking partner's inside hand, chassa 3 slides to the right and close, then and short balance forward and back. [4 bars]

Chassa 4 slides to the left, take hands-4 with vis-a-vis and continue with 3 more slides left to circle halfway to the left, and close. [4]

**A2** Repeat this figure. [8]

**B1** Ladies chain and back. [8]

- B2** Double balance partners and swing by the right hand. [8]
- C1** Hands-4 with vis-a-vis circle left halfway and circle right. [8]
- C2** Half promenade across with partners; half right and left home. [8]
- C3** All forward and back; forward to pass through. [8]

### **Version B**

The first three contra dances in Washburn's manuals were 120-step, six-part contra dances. This format was fairly common. And there were many three-part 24-bar contra dance tunes, which are simply played twice for these six-part dances. California Reel, with seven parts, stands out as an aberration, or more likely, a mistake. It's likely that the description is incorrect, and lists an extra figure that was not actually in the dance, because Washburn specified that the California Reel is 120 steps, which means six parts, not seven.

My class of experienced historical dancers in Tomsk, Russia (Siberia) danced both versions, and they unanimously agreed that the circle half round and back felt like it didn't fit. I agree. The balance to partners and swinging by the right easily and naturally flows into a crossed-hand half promenade.

The six-part version also makes more musical sense, as mentioned above.

Formation: the same as above.

**A1** Facing up and down the hall, taking partner's inside hand, chassa 3 slides to the right and close, then and short balance forward and back. [4 bars]

Chassa 4 slides to the left, take hands-4 with vis-a-vis and continue with 3 more slides left to circle halfway to the left, and close. [4]

- A2** Repeat this figure. [8]
- B1** Ladies chain and back. [8]
- B2** Double balance partners and swing by the right hand. [8]
- C1** Half promenade across with partners; half right and left home. [8]
- C2** All forward and back; forward to pass through. [8]

Useful note for today: Since this dance was modified, to make it work, there is no great harm in modifying it a bit further to fit music that your musicians have. Specifically, if your musicians only have a four-part 32-bar contradance tune, you can skip from the ladies chain to the forward and back and pass through. We use the term "Modified California Reel" instead of "The California Reel" if we change it.