Saltator's 1802 CONSTITUTION Cotillion

from A TREATISE ON DANCING...LESSONS, STEPS, FIGURES, &c. by Saltator, Boston, 1802, the earliest American dance manual

Reconstructed by Richard Powers

CONSTITUTION.

THE Figure. The 1st and 2d Couples centre-balance, cross right hands, moulinet to each others places; at the same time, the 3d and 4th couples pass half round them, the ladies to the left, and the gentlemen to the right; then the 3d and 4th couple centre ballance, moulinet to their first places; the 1st and 2d couple pass round them to their places; the gentlemen to the right, and the ladies to the left. This figure is performed ten times, once after every change, successively as before described.

A description of the ten changes, used in all regular cotillions, requisite to be first known, follows:

Change 1st. All eight address partners, in the time of chaffè, then the ballette. All eight circinate to the left half round, balance, circinate back to their places.

Change 2d. All dance address to partners, promenade them round with the right hand, dance address, promenade round with the left hand.

Change 3d. All dance address to partners, circinate them round on the right, dance address, circinate quite round on the left.

Change 4th. All dance address to partners, allemand them quite round on the right, dance address, allemand quite round on the left.

Change 5th. The four ladies centre ballance, moulinet half round briffè, centre balance, back again.

Change 6th. All four gentlemen centre-ballance, moulinet half round briffe, centre-ballance, moulinet back again to their places.

Change 7th. All the ladies centre balance, circinate half round, centre balance back.

Change 8th. All the gentlemen centre balance, circinate half round, centre balance, back.

Change 9th. All eight right and left quite round to their places.

Change 10th. All eight circinate quite round, then back again in a circle.

from the collection of Richard Powers
Cotillons are danced by four couples in a square. Cotillons begin with the First Change, then the Figure is danced. Then the Second Change, then repeat the same Figure. Continue this way through all ten Changes. It's like a figure/chorus pattern, except the repeating "chorus" is the Figure, which is always performed between the Changes. Each Cotillion had its own unique Figure, but Saltator's cotillons always kept the same ten Changes, which everyone knew.

The first Cotillons (also spelled Cotillons) arrived in London from Paris during the 1760s. Giovanni-Andrea Gallini's *A New Collection of Forty-four Cotillons* (an early English description of the Cotillon) insisted on intricate, specified footwork, including frequent use of the rigaudons, in contrast to the simpler footwork of the country dances that dominated English balls at that time. In response to the perceived difficulty of the footwork, several English dance masters set out to introduce simplified footwork, for example, Thomas Hurst's 1769 *The Cotillons Made Plain and Easy*, removing the rigaudons.

The only early American source to describe Cotillion conventions and Changes was Boston's Saltator. His Changes were essentially the same as Gallini’s ten changes, but twice as long, with balances added to make them 16 bars long. Saltator also followed Hurst's simplified approach, with the absence of rigaudons.

Footwork was individually varied. Saltator’s dance manual described twenty steps generally used in dancing but didn't specify exactly which ones were used for which figures in Cotillons. He wrote, "The quantity of steps used in dancing is almost innumerable, and it is impossible to give them a full description." And every dancer "has his own peculiar manner" of dancing. "Taste and genius will always find a source of novelty in arranging them in different manners, and to express various ideas." In other words, Saltator emphasized individuality and creativity, to "give birth to this endless variety," instead of prescribed footwork.

But Saltator did give footwork suggestions. His most common forward-traveling step was the L'entre Jeté, which is three chassés, step, assemble, described in the Second Change (p.3). This differs from the French and English convention of using contretemps, demi-contretemps, and gavot steps for traveling forward, using the chassé mostly for traveling sideways. As in the French and English cotillons, Saltator's most common side-traveling step was Le Chassé: chassé to the side, step crossing over in front, assemblé. And he used a brisé for casting off, which is described in the Fifth Change (p.4).

### The Figure, "Constitution"

- **4** Head couples advance with setting steps. Saltator's settings steps included pas de basques, but he emphasized individuality.
  - At the same time, side couples travel cross-wise—gents to the right and ladies to the left.
  - Saltator didn't say how, but the most common method at the time was a chassé croisé.
  - Then balancé to your vis a vis, to fill out the last two bars of music.
  - An alternate interpretation might be for the side couples to face each other and pass by, perhaps by the right hand or right shoulder, to travel around the outsides of the set to the opposite side.

- **4** Head couples moulinet (right hands across) halfway into the opposite place, turning by the R hand, casting off to the left with a brisé (see Change 5), into places facing in.
  - At the same time, side couples advance, around the outside, to the opposite side place.

- **8** Heads do what the sides did, and vice versa.
First Change – Honors, circle left, balance, circle right

All address (honor) partners then balletté. Saltator's two chapters on Address of the Gentleman and Address of the Lady described the bow and courtesy. It is important to disambiguate his "address" (honors) from his "dance address" (setting steps) in the later changes below. Saltator specified the duration of the address was "in the time of chasse" but his chasse step was actually described as a chasse, step, assemble, i.e., a two-bar bow.

Saltator's Balletté step was a back jig, similar to Francis Peacock's Kemkossy. R crosses 5th behind, side L to 2nd, R closes to 5th behind. Repeat opposite. He described a 4-bar Ballette phrase that concluded with an assemblé, closing the L behind to 3rd. Since this is a short 2-bar balletté, it may possibly be one balletté step and an assemblé with L behind to 3rd.

Since Saltator mentioned individuality and creativity, a different balance can be substituted.

Take hands-8 and circunate (circle) to the left. Saltator's description of circunate mentioned the Circular Chassé step: 4 side-close (quick-quick) chassés to the left (L to 2nd, closing R to 3rd), then a side step to the left (slow), close R to 3rd behind (slow), assemble L to 3rd behind (slow).

8 Balance with any setting steps (4 bars), then circle back to places.

Second Change – Balance, promenade, balance, promenade back

All "dance address" (balance) to partners. Saltator wrote: "The expression, dance address, means set, or perform the step pas-et basque [sic]; or balance, or any step of the same measure."

All promenade around the set, presumably toward the right. The gent takes his partner with his right hand, probably holding her left hand. (If it were right-in-right, there would be no reason to change to left hands to return.) Saltator didn't specify the footwork, but an obvious choice among his "direct" (forward-traveling) steps would be his #4 "L'entre Jeté. The forward chassé." This is essentially three chassés, jeté, assemble, which he describes beginning with the left foot, not the right as in most European sources. In his other similar enchainments, he finishes with a step-assemblé, instead of the later jeté-assemblé in Quadrilles.

All drop hands and balance partners, facing back toward places.

All promenade back to places, the gent holding his partner with his left hand.

Third Change – Balance, 2-hand turn partner CW, balance, turn partner CCW

All dance address (balance) partners.

Give both hands and turn partners "on the right," clockwise. Why clockwise? Note that Saltator changed his terminology here, from circling "to the" to circling "on the." I interpret this as meaning the opposite of "turn to" for three reasons. 1) Large circles (like 8 dancers) were usually described as turning in the direction you were traveling, so a CW turn was seen as traveling to the left. Small circles (like one couple) were usually described as turning in the direction you were rotating, so a CW turn was seen as rotating to the right. A clockwise waltz, for example, was called a right-turning waltz. Saltator was apparently familiar with this conundrum, and thus altered his terminology for clarity. 2) Most two-hand turns at the time circled clockwise first. If "on the" is interpreted as synonymous with
"to the," that would result in a nontraditional counterclockwise 2-hand turn. 3) The fourth change, the Allemande, also circles "on the right," so it must turn in the same direction as this 2-hand turn. The allemande even more clearly turns clockwise first, by the right arm.

8 All balance partners. Give both hands and turn partners counterclockwise.

**Fourth Change – Balance, allemande partner R, balance, allemande partner L**

4 All balance partners.

4 Allemande partners turning clockwise ("on the right"). Saltator says to allemande "quite round," which implies a full turn.

A 19th century description mentioned slightly arching your back so that you can see your partner. Saltator also mentioned the importance of seeing your partner while dancing. "The gentleman is required always...to keep his eye fixed on his partner in all figures whatever."

8 All balance partners. Allemande partners turning counterclockwise ("on the left") by the L arm.

**Fifth Change – Ladies balance, star R and cast, balance, star L and cast**

4 All four ladies balance advancing toward the center.

4 Ladies moulinet right hands across (I recommend two chassés, L and R), casting off toward the left to face in. Saltator specified casting off with the brisé step: step side L, hop or jeté R to 3rd in front, step L to 3rd in front, assemble R to 3rd in front, all while turning toward the left.

4 All four ladies balance advancing toward the center.

4 Ladies moulinet left hands across and brissé casting off to the right, to places.

**Sixth Change – Gents balance, star R and cast, balance, star L and cast**

16 All four gents do the same balance and moulinet figure.

**Seventh Change – Ladies balance, circle left, balance, circle right**

4 All four ladies balance advancing toward the center.

4 Take hands-4 and circunate (circle) to the left, as in the first change.

4 All four ladies balance advancing toward the center.

4 Take hands-4 and circunate to the right, to places.
Eighth Change – *Gents balance, circle left, balance, circle right*

16 All four gents do the same balance and circling figure.

Ninth Change – *Grand Right and Left Chain around the set*

16 All give partners R hand and pass by, with a grand right and left chain around the set, to places.

Tenth Change – *All full circle to the left and back to the right*

8 Take hands-8 and circunate (circle) all the way around to the left. Possible footwork is an extended Circular Chassé step: 12 slides to the left (side step L closing R to 3rd each time) finishing with the slow side L, close R to 3rd behind, assemble L to 3rd behind.

8 Circle back to the right.

Finish by dancing the Figure a tenth time. This is a departure from European cotillions that often ended with a Change, sometimes a repeat of the First Change.

Saltator advised concluding each dance with a "modest salute" to partners.

Memory aid for the Changes: Note that the Changes are paired after the opening two. Two turns in place, two moulinets, two circunations (small circles), and two large circles.

Walk-overs: Saltator wrote about walking through a Cotillion before dancing it:

> In learning cotillions, it is necessary to walk over the changes, four or five times, until the choir, or set understand them perfectly; then the figure in the same manner.

The later *Quadrilles* (circa 1815) were created from five or six favorite Cotillion figures, eliminating the changes.

Permission to teach this reconstruction

You may teach my reconstruction, free of charge, if credit is given in class and on any written description.

If this reconstruction is unmodified, use the phrase, "Reconstructed by Richard Powers."

If this reconstruction is modified, use the phrase, "Based on a reconstruction by Richard Powers."

This is the standard acknowledgment used by all dance historians.