

# Money Musk

Richard Powers

This was one of the most popular American contra dances of the 19th century. Most American publications of contra dances included Money Musk, and many listed it as the first dance in the book.

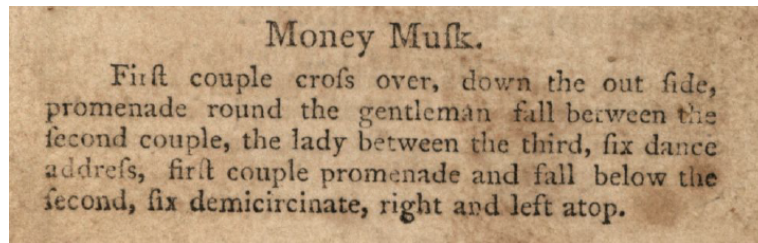
At first, Money Musk was the name of the **music**, composed by Daniel Dow in the late 18th century, named for an Aberdeenshire Scotland estate called Monymusk House. The tune became popular in Scotland, Ireland, England and then the United States. The contra dance Money Musk appeared in the U.S. at the turn of that century.

The contradance Money Musk is still widely danced today. March 14, 2009 was the first "International Money Musk Moment," when callers, musicians and dancers did Money Musk in 22 locations, including Switzerland, Denmark, and New Zealand. The following year this expanded to over 2,000 dancers.



## 1802 Saltator

The tune Money Musk was handwritten into several American music notebooks during the 1790s. Elisabeth Crawford from Massachusetts described the dance figures in her 1794 notebook. The first published description of the dance was in Saltator's first edition of *A TREATISE ON DANCING*, Boston, 1802 (currently in my collection).



Contra dances were primarily **triple minor sets** at that time, with sets of three couples, all gents on the same side, facing ladies on the opposite side. Divided into four parts, this is:

- First couple cross over, down the outside, promenade round, the gentleman fall between the second couple, the lady between the third,
- six dance address, first couple promenade and fall between the second,
- six demicircinate,
- right and left atop.

The description isn't clear but a likely interpretation is:

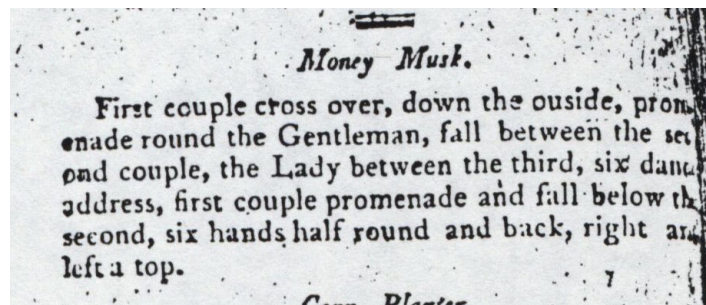
- 4 bars First couple cross over, passing right shoulders, down the outside, enter the center of the set between 2nd and 3rd couples.
- 4 bars They offer crossed hands and promenade in the center turning CW 3/4, with the gent falling back between couple 2, facing down, 3-in-line, as the lady does the same between couple 3, facing up.
- 4 bars "Dance address" is probably some kind of balancé, i.e., addressing the others but with dancing.

- 4 bars First couple offers crossed hands and promenades turning CW 3/4, the gent falling back between gents 2 and 3, facing across 3-in-line, as the lady does the same between ladies 2 and 3.
- 4 bars Taking hands 6, half-circle to the left, probably with a long chassé, step (not jeté), assemblé.
- 4 bars Same to the right.
- 8 bars Top four dancers full Right and Left, like a small Grand Chain in a square.

Saltator described the footwork for country dances in his dance manual.

### 1807 Saltator

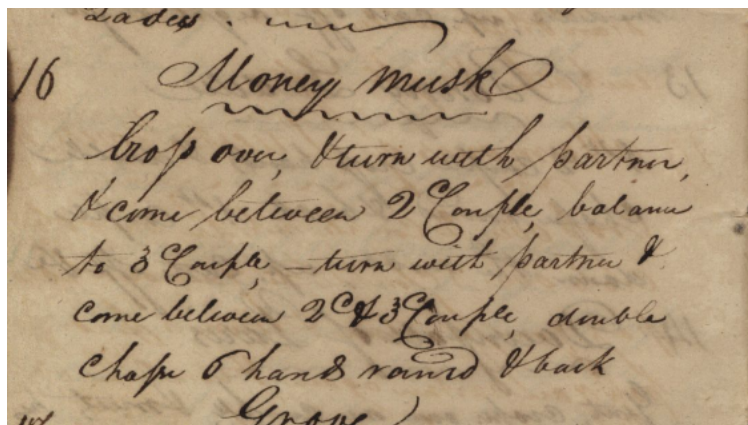
The dance is the same but the terminology "six demicircinate" is clarified as "six hands half round and back."



### The 1807 Boston manuscript

I own the only copy of the second oldest handwritten manuscript of American contra dances, *COTILLIONS & COUNTRY DANCES*, Boston 1807. It's a comprehensive 64-page manuscript collection of 158 set dances. I scanned it and made it available as a free download. <http://richardpowers.com/Downloads.htm>

Here is Money Musk:



Dividing that into three parts, it reads:

- Cross over, & turn with partner, & come between 2 Couple,
- balance to 3 Couple — turn with partner & come between 2 C & 3 Couple,
- double chasse 6 hands round & back

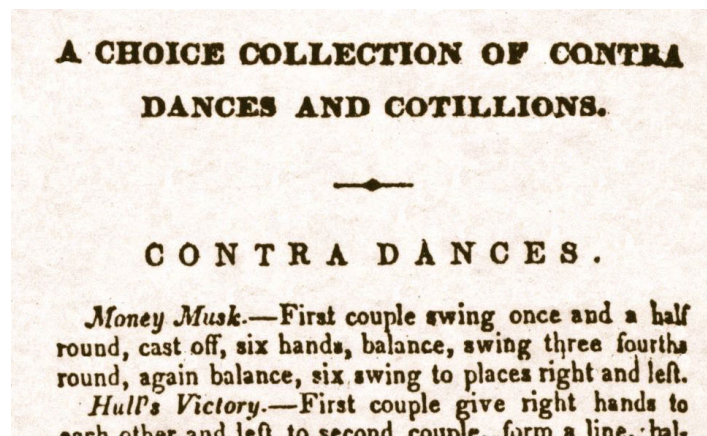
This seems to be almost the same as parts 1, 2 and 3 of Saltator's Money Musk, both descriptions from Boston, in the same year.

- Here we see confirmation that Saltator's "dance address" is indeed a balancé.
- Saltator's "promenade" is more clearly defined, as "turn with partner," most likely a right-hand turn (a single-hand turn is soon to be termed "swing partner"). All later versions were a right-hand turn.
- The footwork for the circling hands-6 to the left and right is now specified as a double chassé.
- Curiously Part 4 is missing. Since every other version of Money Musk, including Saltator from the same year, ends with a Right and Left at the top, and since this manuscript description only covers 3/4 of the music, we might assume that the author simply forgot to write down Part 4. An alternate possibility is that they danced a 24-bar form, but all versions of the tune Money Musk were 32 bars at that time.

### 1833 Watertown, New York

Next we find a description of Money Musk in *THE LETTER WRITER...BEING A CHOICE COLLECTION OF CONTRA DANCES AND COTILLIONS*, published by Knowlton & Rice, Watertown, NY, 1833.

Money Musk is described first:



Dividing this into four parts:

- First couple swing once and a half round, cast off,
- six hands, balance, swing three fourths round,
- again balance, six swing to places
- right and left.

**Here we have three significant changes.** 1) Instead of crossing over, the first couple swings once and a half around before casting off down the outside. 2) They reverse the order of their placements: at the side facing across first, and in the center of the column facing up and down second. 3) Since this reordering requires an extra musical phrase, the circling to the left and right (demircinate) is gone.

#### The footwork:

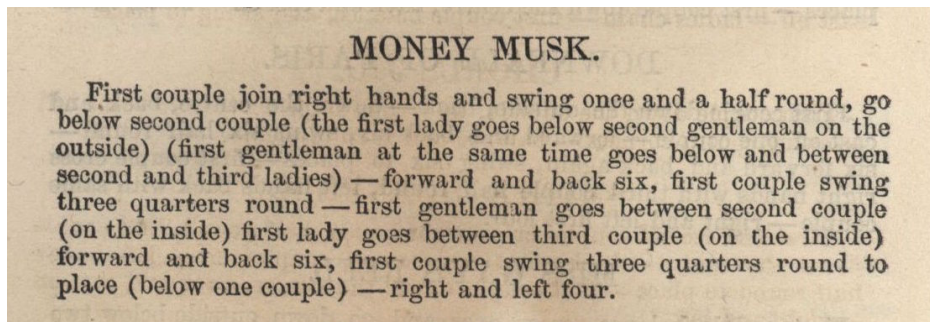
1833 was a transition era for footwork. In the 1830 *A GUIDE TO THE BALL ROOM*, R. Hill wrote, "The old steps, such as the Chassez, Glissade, Contretems, Balloté or Rigadon, are still made use of—indeed it is impossible to substitute steps more beautiful for general use, or better calculated for the carriage of the person." But the new fashion of **walking** quadrilles and contra dances was beginning to replace the old steps.

Now it is possible to have an accurate reconstruction:

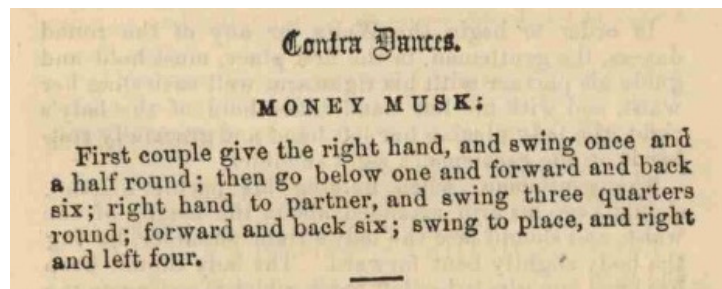
- 4 bars First couple offer right hands and turn ("swing") once and a half around.
- 4 bars Cast down the far side, to end between 2nd and 3rd couples, taking hands-3 along the sides.
- 4 bars Balancé for four bars.
- 4 bars First couple offer right hands and swing 3/4 around, the gent falling back between couple 2, facing down, and the lady falling back between couple 3, facing up, taking hands-3.
- 4 bars Balancé for four bars.
- 4 bars First couple swing 3/4 around, returning to their original sides, between couples 2 and 3.
- 8 bars Top four dancers full Right and Left, like a small Grand Chain.

### 1858 Elias Howe

The clearest description of the mid 19th century Money Musk is found in HOWE'S COMPLETE BALL-ROOM HAND-BOOK, published in Boston by Elias Howe in 1858. It is almost the same as the 1833 Watertown version, except the **balancé** is replaced by **forward and back six**.



**Thomas Hillgrove** gave essentially the same description in 1857, again listing Money Musk first among his contra dances, but his arbitrary punctuation was less clear than Howe's separation of the four parts with "—".

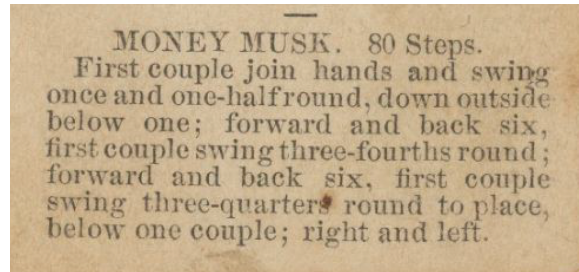


Most 19th century descriptions after this were the same version.

## Alternate footwork

The original footwork for contra dances was **1)** three chassés followed by a jeté and assemblé, with optional intricate footwork. Then, **2)** as mentioned on p.3 above, simple walking started to be introduced in the 1830s.

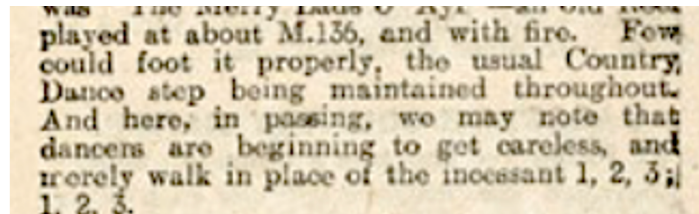
**3) H.G.O. Washburn**, of Belfast, Maine began publishing a series of manuals of contra dances in 1855, continuing until 1876. His system was to specify the number of steps in each contra dance. Money Musk contained 80 steps:



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

In all of his contradances, this meant taking five steps to each two bars of music. Knowing the previous tradition of chassés, this most likely means dancing in phrases of one chassé (three steps) then two steps, like two jetés, or two walking steps. Keep repeating that pattern of one chassé and two steps.

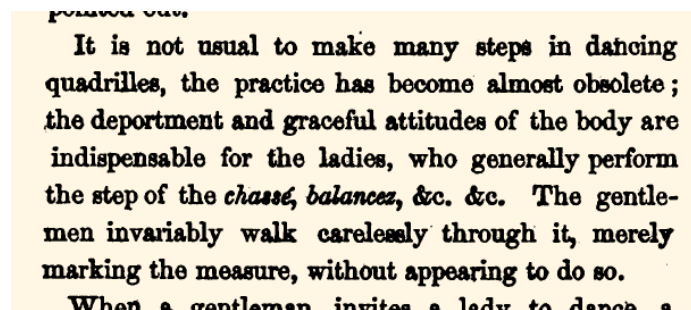
**4)** The older chassé footwork was often continued in country dances throughout the 19th century. Here is an 1898 description by **J. Scott Skinner** (Dundee and London) describing a country dance, with "the usual Country Dance step being maintained throughout. And here, in passing, we may note that dancers are beginning to get careless and merely walk, in place of the incessant 1, 2, 3; 1, 2, 3."



J. Scott Skinner, THE PEOPLE'S BALL ROOM GUIDE, and Manual of Dancing, 1898, Dundee and London.

That count no doubt refers to the triple footwork of chassé steps, as opposed to the 1, 2, 1, 2 of walking. This would mean continually dancing simple chassé steps throughout the country (or contra) dance.

**5)** Another option, noted by **J. Albert Jarvis**, London, in 1857, was ladies dancing while the gents walked through the figures:



J. Albert Jarvis, DIPROSE'S BALL ROOM GUIDE, 1857, London

## 1926 Benjamin Lovett / Henry Ford

The automobile tycoon Henry Ford hated the modern Jazz Age dances, and responded with a revival of 19th century dances, enlisting the services of dance master Benjamin Lovett to lead the dances and write *GOOD MORNING; OLD FASHIONED DANCING REVIVED* in 1926. Money Musk was featured, of course. After 70 years, it was still identical to the mid 19th century version.

### MONEY MUSK

Metronome 112.

Six couples in a set. Give first call before the music begins.

- First couple swing once and a half  
around..... 8 bars
- First couple advance, give right hands, and turn once and a half around and stop, the gentleman between the second and third ladies, and his partner between the second and third gentlemen. Both are now in opposite lines.
- Forward six..... 4 “
- Gentleman who is standing between two ladies will join hands, while his partner who is between two gentlemen will also join hands, and all move forward four steps, and back four steps.
- Swing three-fourths around..... 4 “
- The same lady and gentleman join right hands and turn three-quarters around, so that they finish between the lines, the lady facing toward the head of the set, her partner facing her and toward the foot of the set.
- Forward six..... 4 “
- The lady joins left hand with the gentleman on her left, and right hand with the lady on her right, forming a straight line, facing toward the head of the set. The gentleman joins right hand with the gentleman on his right, and left hand with the lady on his left, all facing the opposite three. All forward and back.
- Swing three-quarters to place..... 4 “
- The same couple join hands; swing three-quarters to their own side of the set, one couple below, where they started. This leaves two ladies together and two gentlemen together.
- Right and left..... 8 “
- The same two couples pass through to opposite side of set, each give the left hand and turn. Return to place in the same manner.
- The same couple continues the dance, progressing toward the foot of the set, casting off one couple each time, continuing until all couples have gone through the movements. After the first couple has danced by three couples, the couple then at the head begins. There are now two couples leading at the same time. To end the dance call,—All join hands forward, turn partners, promenade to seats.

## Today's Version

Sometime after the publication of *GOOD MORNING*, an American contra dance caller (we don't know who) decided to replace each Forward and Back (4 bars) with a short Balance (2 bars). This necessitated casting down the outside quicker, 2 bars instead of 4.

These abbreviations shortened the dance from 32 bars (4 parts of music) to 24 bars (3 parts)—or as the New England contradance caller Tony Parkes put it—"cramming 32 measures of dance in to 24 measures of music". Musicians now play the tune as A, modified A, and B.

This is the version done by thousands of dancers around the world today. If you think the timing of part 2 is awkward, taking too long to get to the top and bottom places, then rushing too fast to get to the side places, I agree. Enter "money musk dance" in a YouTube search to see many videos of today's version.

The Right and Left Four, like a Grand Chain in a square, has been replaced by a same-gender English Chain (Right and Left Through) with pairs of same-gender dancers wheeling a half-turn without touching.

- 4 Top couple clasp R palms and turn once and a half.
- 2 Go down the outside one place, between 2nd & 3rd dancers.
- 2 Take hands 3, all balance forward R foot & back L foot.
  
- 4 Top couple clasp R palms and turn 3/4, M falling back between couple 2, facing down, and W falling back between couple 3, facing up.
- 2 Take hands 3, all balance R foot & L foot.
- 2 Top couple clasp R palms and turn 3/4 to places.
  
- 2 Top 2 couples pass R & L through without touching.
- 2 Wheel CCW a half turn.
- 2 Top 2 couples pass R & L through without touching.
- 2 Wheel CCW a half turn.

## The Progression of Triple Minor Sets

Triple set progressions are a little complicated. After once through the dance, Couple #1 (Top Couple) has progressed down one place and has a new set of three couples below them. There is now one couple out at the top, not dancing. That part is normal. The former Couple 2 is now in the Couple 3 place, and vice versa.

At the same time, there are two couples out at the bottom, not dancing. The top of those two couples is a Couple #1 who has just completed coming down the line and is now out, without two couples below them. While standing out, **that couple must progress to the very bottom of the set.** i.e., change places with the other couple standing out at the bottom. Otherwise, the bottom couple will remain at the bottom forever.

After the next progression, there are now two couples out at the top, not dancing. They might be tempted to start dancing, but they will remain out, waiting until they have three couples. Meanwhile, at the bottom, the couple who had been out after the first progression is now dancing, as a Couple 3, leaving the former Couple 1 still out at the bottom of the set, alone.

At the next progression, the new Couple 1 (formerly an inactive couple) has started dancing, and will remain a Couple 1 as they go down the set. If everyone was dancing at first, with complete triple sets, everyone is now dancing again, including the former Couple 1 out at the bottom of the set, who are now a Couple 3.

There is one more complication at the top, two progressions later, where a couple reaches the top, is now out but with a couple out above them. The next time they are dancing, as a Couple 2 below the new Couple 1, then the next time after that, they are out again. But that resolves itself, as they soon become a Couple 1. A similar out-then-in-then-out situation happens at the bottom of the set, which also resolves itself.