

- ›The master of the ceremonies must take care that every lady dances, and press into service for that purpose those young gentlemen who are hanging round the room like fossils. If desired by him to dance with a particular lady you should refuse on no account.
- ›If you have no ear, that is, a false one, never dance.
- ›To usurp the seat of a person who is dancing is the height of incivility.
- ›Never go to a public ball."¹⁰



There were others who condemned "mixt" dancing entirely; to them it didn't matter whether a ball was public or private. The Ministers of Christ at Boston had published *An Arrow Against Profane and Promiscuous Dancing Drawn Out of the Quiver of the Scriptures* a full century and a half before the founding of Lowell but it still resonated with many. Written by Increase Mather, this 1684 pamphlet admonished: "The miserable Dancer knoweth not, that as many Paces as he makes in Dancing, so many steps he makes to Hell."¹¹ *An Arrow* declared further: "The unchaste Touches and Gesticulations used by Dancers have a palpable tendency to that which is evil."¹²

What is the difference between a Dancer and a Mad-man?
Replied: *There was no other difference, but only this; that the person who is really **Pbrentick**, is mad all the day long; when as the Dancer is only mad an hour in a day perhaps.*

—Attributed to Prince Alphonsus by Increase Mather

More specifically, Mather stated: "From the Seventh Commandment [thou shall not commit adultery]. It is an Eternal Truth to be observed in expounding the Commandments, that whenever any sin is forbidden, not only the highest acts of that sin, but all degrees thereof, and all occasions leading thereto are prohibited."¹³

Of course, Mather was absolutely right. If the act of lusting is a form of adultery—as those versed in the bible, from the Puritans to Jimmy Carter, have long said—then there's no question that adultery goes on virtually anywhere that there's dancing. In what other nineteenth-century situation could men and women hold hands, put their arms about each other, and move together in rhythm in front of friends, neighbors, and family?

Away from the dance floor, there were other explorations of intimacy among the younger set in the form of "kissing games." The description below comes again from Mr. Hadley and refers to Middlesex Village (a section of Chelmsford that would become Lowell) in the early 1800s.

"Pleasant gatherings, particularly in winter months, were held in various homes, and if these occasions were not characterized by so many artificials and by so much of what is now termed good form, they were none the less hospitable and enjoyable. Whist parties, singing parties, and among the younger portion, kissing parties, were common enough; while the elders met once a week...for prayer and meditation, or the study of the Scriptures."¹⁴

But, unlike dancing, the kissing games were widely considered an innocent introduction to courtship and do not seem to have provoked the wrath of the righteous to any significant degree. Kissing games did not involve the sweaty, breathless, body contact that was found between couples exerting themselves on the dance floor. Dancing was, in fact, illegal in the early days of Massachusetts. The following comes again from Rev. Waters' *History of Chelmsford*:

"A few items from the printed volume of *Laws & Liberties*; revised, 1672, may be interesting. Gaming and dancing and the observance of Christmas were punished by fine. The law forbidding the celebration of Christmas was repealed in 1681."¹⁵

