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The Texas Tommy, Its History, Controversies, and Influence on American Vernacular Dance

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THE TEXAS TOMMY,
ITS HISTORY, CONTROVERSIES,
AND INFLUENCE ON AMERICAN VERNACULAR DANCE

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures ........................................................................................................... vi  
Abstract ............................................................................................................ vii

1. CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION ................................................................. 1

2. CHAPTER TWO: THE CHRONOLOGICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL ORIGIN OF THE TEXAS TOMMY ................................................................. 7

   An Origin from the East or West? ................................................................. 7
   The Texas Tommy on the Barbary Coast ..................................................... 13

3. CHAPTER THREE: THE POPULAR DIFFUSION OF THE TEXAS TOMMY ................................................................. 30

   Migrations East ................................................................. 30
   On Stage in New York City ................................................................. 35
   The Rag Dance Craze ................................................................. 43

4. CHAPTER FOUR: WHAT DID THE TEXAS TOMMY LOOK LIKE? ........... 47

   The Vernacular and the Stage ................................................................. 47
   Film ................................................................. 52
   Breakdown of the Texas Tommy ................................................................. 57
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Texas Tommy Swing sheet music cover .......................................................... 8
Figure 2: Texas Tommy Swing sheet music (Ziegfeld version) ...................................... 9
Figure 3: Texas Tommy lyrics .................................................................................... 10
Figure 4: Pavlowa and Mrs. Oelrichs Articles .............................................................. 11
Figure 5: Barbary Coast Fire Insurance Map ............................................................... 15
Figure 6: Exterior of Spider Kelly's, c. 1913 ............................................................... 16
Figure 7: Pacific Street clubs, c. 1910 .................................................................... 16
Figure 8: Patrons dancing inside Spider Kelly's, c. 1911 ............................................. 16
Figure 9: The Hippodrome, The So Different, & the Thalia c. 1910 ......................... 16
Figure 10: Texas Tommy Fails to Shock Censors ...................................................... 21
Figure 11: Orthodox society is divided ..................................................................... 22
Figure 12: San Francisco Examiner reports on Barbary Coast closure ...................... 24
Figure 13: Ziegfeld Will Advertise San Francisco ...................................................... 31
Figure 14: Telegraph from Johnny Peters ................................................................ 32
Figure 15: Letter to J.J. Shubert from A.T. Worm .................................................... 33
Figure 16: The Ziegfeld Follies of 1911 program ...................................................... 36
Figure 17: Over the River program .......................................................................... 37
Figure 18: Whirl of Society program ....................................................................... 37
Figure 19: Texas Tommy Dancers Tonight ................................................................ 38
Figure 20: “Texas Tommy” Dancers Appear ............................................................. 39
Figure 21: Whirl of Society program (page 2) ............................................................. 39
Figure 22: “The Passing Show” A Splendid Display .................................................. 40
Figure 23: Darktown Follies program ...................................................................... 42
Figure 24: A photograph of the Texas Tommy ............................................................ 50
Figure 25: Turning section with the breakaway .......................................................... 55
Figure 26: Step-Hop section .................................................................................... 56
Figure 27: Gliding section ....................................................................................... 56
Figure 28: “A Tough Dance” .................................................................................. 65
ABSTRACT

In dance histories the Texas Tommy is a noted but contentious member of the family of 1910s Rag dances. Its disputed geographical origins and the dance’s questionable relationship to the Apache have resulted in inadequate information and in mythologizing about the Texas Tommy, a significant predecessor to the larger genre of Swing dances. This thesis attempts to map the Texas Tommy’s history, chronologically and geographically, while examining the disputes about the dance’s origins, then comparing the similarities and differences between the Texas Tommy and the Apache.

The Texas Tommy was one of the first Rag dances to emerge in mainstream America. The dance first appeared in the slums of the port of San Francisco, known as the Barbary Coast, where sailors, prostitutes, and much of the city’s black population congregated in the unruly dance halls. Stage actors and actresses often took new material from Pacific Street, the center of the Barbary Coast, and used the dances, including the Texas Tommy, in their theatrical shows. Some of these performers eventually took the dance east to New York City’s stages and dance floors, where it immediately became popular with mainstream society. The Texas Tommy possessed appealing, eccentric characteristics for the city dwellers. It represented the naughty, seditious, but alluring Barbary Coast in San Francisco, as well as the dangerous wild west. The Texas Tommy became prevalent on the dance floor and grew to be the dance most closely associated with the new Ragtime music. In New York’s social scene, the dance’s wild, fast, and vigorous movement was particularly seductive to the younger crowd, who ultimately adopted it as a code of rebellion. Having found a national audience, the Texas Tommy left a legacy that ultimately helped initiate and influence the swing dances that followed.
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

In 2006, a dance that was popular more than 100 years ago is at the center of a heated debate in dance circles. Dance historians list the Texas Tommy among the Animal Dances of the 1910s, notable for its use of the breakaway. Early American ballroom-dance specialists place the Texas Tommy with the family of One Steps\(^1\) (1911-1914). Lastly, the recent resurgence of the Lindy Hop\(^2\) has generated oral histories initially suggesting that it was the Lindy Hop that originated the breakaway. In this breakaway the man tosses his partner out and away from him, holding her with one hand and then pulling her back. As internet information became more substantial, Lindy Hop enthusiasts first discovered the Texas Tommy as a dance that predated the Lindy Hop. Shortly thereafter, they also found the earlier Apache\(^3\) that predated the Texas Tommy. Both dances utilized the breakaway, a radical dance move in the early 1900s, and superficially, the Apache and the Texas Tommy seem similar. They are characterized, respectively, by a sexy interplay between the partners, and fast virtuosic movements that look wild. Both are rotating partnered dances that employ heavy holds in the closed and open positions. Therefore, many dance histories even assume that the Texas Tommy and the Apache are the same dance with different names, particularly since each of their names alludes to the wild west.\(^4\) Confusion is perpetuated even further because the Texas Tommy evolved from a vernacular dance into a stage form – where the Apache was also primarily performed. And additionally, “Texas Tommy” and “Apache” are two names applied to one common move used by Lindy Hoppers today.\(^5\)

Obviously, a comprehensive study of the Texas Tommy would benefit the academic dance field and the large international community of Lindy Hoppers by presenting clarifying primary-source information about this important progenitor.

Swing dance made an indelible mark on American culture. Swing was a dance craze that occupied America’s youth longer, arguably, than any other – for over two decades.\(^6\) It was dances such as the Lindy Hop, dances that highlighted improvisation and individual expression, and the incorporation of other musical genres and movement
vocabularies, as if mimicking the idealistic notion of an America that accepted diverse peoples, that helped Swing craze grow in popularity. Swing was rebellious in that it discarding the dance structures of previous generations in order consistently to reflect the mindset and energy of American youth. The Texas Tommy is the beginning of these trends, a starting point – if such can be defined – of Swing dancing.

*   *   *

The assortment of diverse peoples from different cultures that make up America have been forced to intermix for survival, economic gain and the dubious, yet commendable, search for liberty. These peoples attempted to perpetuate the traditions of their motherlands, and consequently, most early American accomplishments were watered-down versions of older practices. Soon, however, successful American innovations would be derived from the fusions of multiple cultures, which would be especially apparent in the new forms of Jazz music and dance.

Jazz is truly an American product, representing a Creolized blending of two of America’s oldest transplanted peoples: Africans and Europeans. The unique African tradition of powerful interdependence between music and dance continued in its African-American adaptations. In the African paradigm, the dancer becomes another musician, and the two challenge each other, forcing the accelerated development of both. “By the mid-1890s, three new kinds of music had begun to filter into [New Orleans] – three strains without which there would have been no jazz”. These genres included blues, spirituals and ragtime music. “…Ragtime [was] the formal outgrowth of the decades-old African-American improvisational practice of ‘ragging’ tunes – syncopating and rearranging them to provide livelier, more danceable versions”. From its infancy, Jazz swung. And, it has continued to swing until the present.

The Texas Tommy developed during a period of rapid change. Upon the termination of the institution of slavery, African Americans began to migrate throughout the United States. To many European Americans, theirs was practically a foreign culture. During the earlier Victorian age (1837-1890), restrictions placed upon the development of music and dance by the codes of Victorian propriety produced an atmosphere ripe for
rebellion. The rebellion flourished with Progressive Era reforms (1895-1920), which emphasized the individual and formulated new roles for women. Significant strides in the integration of African-American cultural traditions were seen, and by the turn of the twentieth century, the impact of African-American elements in American popular music and dance was easily recognizable.

Fresh fusions of music and dance fostered a new excitement that ruled the social dance floor from approximately 1910 to 1914. New movement combinations and vocabularies transformed the social partner dances, producing more grounded, improvisational, flirtatious, and even humorous dancing. One of many social dances that swept the nation in the early 1910s, the Texas Tommy, is not an “Animal Dance,” although it is often called that. This ubiquitous term referred to all Rag Dance crazes (right before the Modern Dancing dance craze led by Irene and Vernon Castle). Along with other Rag Dances, the Texas Tommy was performed to fashionable Ragtime music, whose lively and highly syncopated march-like rhythm and upbeat tempo assisted the spread of African-American movement vocabularies. As is true of most American social dance forms of the twentieth Century, evidence indicates that the Texas Tommy evolved from popular black vernacular dance forms that spread from regional black communities to mainstream America, taking root in the metropolitan centers.

The Animal Dances consisted of a simple traveling One Step. Often dancers mimicked the animal behaviors from which the dance derived its name – Pecking, a forward jabbing movement of the head; the Shimmy, a trembling undulation of the shoulders; Fish Tail, a continual lateral swishing of the buttocks. Among the Animal Dances were the Grizzly Bear, the Turkey Trot, the Bunny Hug, the Chicken Scratch, and the Kangaroo Dip. These and other Rag Dances created during the same five year span were first introduced by published sheet music that simultaneously served to popularize the tune, the catchy lyrics, and the dance. Moreover, because there was no standardization of the original Rag Dances, they evolved into multiple versions across the nation, open to individual interpretation. In contrast, the Texas Tommy did not mimic any animal, and in its original form the couple revolved around each other instead of traveling around the floor. It allowed for improvisation, but was less focused on the silly and fun animal gestures, concentrating instead on virtuosic challenge.
Using primary source materials, this study will provide a better understanding of the Texas Tommy. Specifically, this study documents the dance’s disputed origins in the Barbary Coast, its position as one expressive element in the Rag Dance craze, and its relationship to earlier dance predecessors such as the Apache.

The Texas Tommy is nearly a century old. Only three previous published sources have any significant amount of information about the Texas Tommy. These include Marshall and Jean Stearns’ *Jazz Dance: The Story of American Vernacular Dance* (1968), and Tom Stoddard’s *Jazz on the Barbary Coast* (1982), and Caroline and Charles H. Caffins’ *Dancers and Dances of Today* (1912). Therefore it was essential to examine more than 400 primary source items, mainly printed materials. Newspapers, music, and telegrams only provide small pieces of the larger story, yet, when taken as a whole, these fragments combine to yield significant insights.

Chapters Two and Three trace the Texas Tommy chronologically and geographically, detailing its Barbary Coast environment and its subsequent rise in San Francisco’s high society. Then in 1911, 1912, and 1919, the Texas Tommy made three major transitions from San Francisco to the east coast, where it became a mainstay in popular entertainment and theatre. Chapter Four assembles a written description of how the Texas Tommy looked, based on the newspapers, interviews, images, music, and film clips, which culminates in a digital documentation of my interpretation of this historical dance. Finally, the differences and similarities between the Texas Tommy and French Apache will be addressed in Chapter Five. Comparisons will be made of the Apache’s and Texas Tommy’s geography, time periods, narrative moods, costumes, music, stage and social versions, along with the steps, movements and structural forms.

In many ways Rag Dances embodied Progressive-era ideals. Towards the end of the Progressive era (1890-1920), people of all economic classes and races were reassessing and reevaluating issues surrounding gender, individualism, expression, and their place in society, defining how these factors fit with the national sensibility. Since these dances did not require codified patterns and defined spaces on the dance floor, they relaxed the strict leading-and-following rules, allowing women more creative input and men more freedom to interact imaginatively. The importance of these dances is that they

4
embodied social ideologies, transforming them to visible patterns on the dance floor and physical relationships between partners.
Chapter 1

1 One Step is a traveling dance that follows the line-of-dance around the room. The family of One Steps include the Animal dances. Line-of-dance is a social dancing term referring to the counter-clockwise circle along the outer edges of a dance floor. Many dances such as the waltz, polka, and foxtrot travel along this line.

2 The resurgence began in the 1980s.

3 The Apache is another dance craze during the early twentieth century.

4 The Dance history community has projected this notion even more so than the Lindy Hoppers.

5 In an interview by the author with Sylvia Sykes in 2006, she stated that Dean Collins (one of the prominent Lindy Hoppers during the 1930s and 1940s and a leader of the craze on the west coast), said the eight-count behind-the-back breakaway was called the “Texas Tommy,” while the six-count behind-the-back breakaway was the “Apache.” She also clarified that the current dancers did not know these distinctions and used the names interchangeably.

6 The Lindy Hop dance craze lasted throughout the 1930s and 40s. The dance has continued on dance floors for the past ~86 years, finding a resurgence in the 1980s, culminating into a second dance craze in 1998.


9 In this thesis the more accurate term “Rag Dances” will be used instead of “Animal Dances” to avoid confusion.

10 “Modern Dances” refer to the plethora of partner dances during the late 1910s, not to be confused with the current use of “Modern dance” that refers to concert dance.

11 In this thesis the more accurate term “Rag Dances” will be used instead of “Animal Dances” to avoid confusion.

CHAPTER TWO
THE CHRONOLOGICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL ORIGIN OF
THE TEXAS TOMMY.

An Origin in the East or West?

One of the current controversies surrounding the Texas Tommy is the question of its chronological and geographical origins. Some academics argue that the Texas Tommy was a creation of Tin Pan Alley and other Manhattan commercial institutions. Others suggest that it originated on the opposite coast in San Francisco’s Barbary Coast. The most commonly given chronological landmarks with which the Texas Tommy dance is associated place it in New York City during 1912, where it experienced great popularity. However, records indicate that the Texas Tommy arrived in New York City a year earlier, for example, the “Texas Tommy Swing” sheet music published in Manhattan in 1911, and both the dance and the music appeared in Florence Ziegfeld’s Follies later that year. The dance also made a significant appearance in the Darktown Follies of 1913, however, the dance is most often mentioned alongside the slew of Rag Dances that were popular from approximately 1912 to 1914. Earlier records, however, establish the dance’s emergence on the Barbary Coast in San Francisco preceding its introduction to New York City. The three foremost publications dealing with the Texas Tommy (the Stearnses’ Jazz Dance, Stoddard’s Jazz on the Barbary Coast, and the Caffines’ Dancing and Dances of Today) all suggest that the roots of the Texas Tommy can be traced to the Barbary Coast.

Stearns and Stoddard conducted numerous interviews with dancers and musicians in both San Francisco’s Barbary Coast and New York City. Stearns claims that the dance became a hit at Lew Purcell’s, a popular dance club on the Barbary Coast, in 1910. He also references Nettie Compton who states that “when I danced at Purcell’s in 1912, everybody was working out his own variations on the Texas Tommy”. Susie Beavers suggests that “Johnny Peters brought the Texas Tommy to San Francisco in 1910”. Tom Stoddard in his book Jazz on the Barbary Coast, places the Texas Tommy on the Barbary Coast even earlier. Sid LeProtti, one of the musicians Stoddard studied, claimed that the
Texas Tommy originated at Purcell’s and was danced throughout the Barbary Coast between 1906 and 1911. Though the Texas Tommy might have been popularized in New York City after 1911, it appears to have developed earlier in the Barbary Coast. The clearest indications, aside from interviews, are the location and the copyright dates found on the “Texas Tommy Swing” sheet music. (See figure 1)

The first known copyright was issued in 1911 to Val Harris and Sid Brown, published by the World’s Fair Publishing Co. in San Francisco. Later the same year copyright was transferred to Jerome H. Remick & Co., based in New York City and Detroit. The music and lyrics remained the same in the second printing, although the new cover was used to promote the show Ziegfeld Follies of 1911. (See figure 2) This information gives a strong indication that Tin Pan Alley did not create the dance or the music, although it is evident that the famous music-producing section of New York City was instrumental in making the song and dance popular.

The Texas Tommy was obviously not danced exclusively to the “Texas Tommy Swing” as the dance was developed well before the song. It was danced to many of the Ragtime songs of the period. Sid LeProtti, a black jazz musician from the Barbary Coast discussed the popularity of dancing the Texas Tommy to the song “King Chanticleer”. “King Chanticleer”, a popular Rag, was further popularized in the show entitled Chanticleer starring Maud Allen during this time period.
Further evidence suggesting the origins of the Texas Tommy on San Francisco’s Barbary Coast is found in numerous interviews and references. Stearnses’ and Stoddard’s writings provide the bulk of the interviews that claim that the development of the Texas Tommy occurred on the Barbary Coast. However, Herbert Asbury, well-know author of *The Gangs of New York*, references similar origins in his book *The Barbary Coast*. He proclaims that,

The turkey trot, the bunny hug, the chicken glide, the Texas Tommy, the pony prance, the grizzly bear, and many other varieties of close and semi-acrobatic dancing, which swept the nation…were first performed in the dance-halls of San Francisco’s Barbary Coast…The birthplace of the best-known of these terpsichorean masterpieces – the turkey trot and the Texas Tommy - …was the Thalia, which was for many years the largest dance-hall on the Pacific Coast.\(^{11}\)

It is significant that Herbert Asbury also claimed that the Texas Tommy developed, and possibly originated, in San Francisco’s Barbary Coast because he is a researcher who specialized in both New York City and the Barbary Coast.

Other prominent figures, such as Irene Castle and James Reese Europe, also support the Texas Tommy’s San Francisco origins. In her book *My Husband*, Irene Castle tells of seeing Blossom Seeley perform the Texas Tommy in the show “The Hen-Pecks” in New York City.\(^{12}\) Later she describes her own and her husband Vernon’s attempt to recreate the popular dance. “I wore a little short pierrot costume and carried a big white teddy-bear. It was sort of a Texas Tommy dance. As this was entirely from memory of
what we had seen Blossom Seeley do in ‘The Hen-pecks’…we were trying, both of us to imitate her Frisco style’. By noting Blossom’s “Frisco style”, Irene Castle was associating the dance with San Francisco. James Reese Europe, a famous African-American bandleader in New York City who worked with the Castles, makes a similar claim in suggesting that the dance came to New York City from San Francisco in 1910.

The lyrics to the “Texas Tommy Swing” describe the dance, along with the Turkey Trot and the Grizzly Bear, as popular dances that originated in San Francisco (see figure 3). It is interesting to consider the cover of the original 1911 sheet music. On it are two reprinted articles from The San Francisco Examiner, “Pavlowa Endorsed Texas Tommy Swing” and “Mrs. Oelrichs liked Texas Tommy Swing.” Examination of the original articles reveals some fiction in these reprints (see figure 4). The original articles describe the Turkey Trot and do not even mention the Texas Tommy. The cover extends its promotion of the Texas Tommy further by stating:

The dance that makes the world stare… The Texas Tommy Swing invades the north and east like a dainty zephyr from the perfumed cotton fields of the sunny South. The rhythm of the Grizzly Bear, the inspiration of the Loving Hug, the grace of the Walk-Back and the abandon of the Turkey Trot all blend in the harmony of the Texas Tommy Swing, which was really the parent of all the others.
This exaggeration goes on to boast the widespread popularity of the dance, and the famous dancers who performed it.

The Texas Tommy clearly contains strong African-American influences. This fact could suggest that the dance was born in the southern United States. Many of the interviews infer that the Texas Tommy was brought to San Francisco from elsewhere. Some, like Nettie Compton’s, claim it did indeed come from the South. Most, however, speak of Johnny Peters bringing the dance from Texas. Johnny Peters was a famous Texas Tommy dancer who, with his partner Mary Dewson, introduced the dance to Chicago and New York. Later, after Dewson became ill, Ethel Williams replaced her as Peters’s dance partner appearing in vaudeville and other variety stage shows and private parties until their celebrated performance in Darktown Follies. Stoddard also places an
emphasis on Johnny Peters, an Oklahoma Baptist preacher’s son, who apparently claimed that he learned the dance from his uncle who came from Galveston, Texas.\textsuperscript{18} Johnny Peters is remembered as the great Texas Tommy dancer, who introduced the dance to many, but he did not invent the dance; nor can it be said, because of the conflicting accounts, that he exclusively introduced the dance to San Francisco. Stoddard also comments that according to Sid LeProtti and Will Mastin, the dance did come from Texas – where the word “Tommy” referred to a prostitute. Stoddard continues, suggesting that “the dance might have been a way of enticing customers, or ‘showin’ your stuff,’ for Texas whores.”\textsuperscript{19} Stearns validates Will Mastin’s comment by explaining that Mastin was the producer of the famous \textit{California Poppies}, a Texas Tommy dance troupe in San Francisco.\textsuperscript{20} Evidence supporting the Texas Tommy’s origins in Texas includes the dance’s name, and these various interviews. From this information it can be inferred that the Texas Tommy’s inspiration, including possible movement vocabulary and form originated in Texas but that the dance’s development into a recognized form manifested itself in San Francisco and the Barbary Coast.

Another line of reasoning is that many popular African-American-influenced dance crazes were developed in Harlem in New York City. If Harlem produced dances such as the Black Bottom, the Charleston, and the Lindy Hop, then it would seem to follow that the popular African-American-influenced Rag Dances also originated and developed there. This seems logical, but one must consider that the popular dance crazes that Harlem introduced did not emerge until the 1920s and 1930s, during or after the Harlem Renaissance. In the teens, the black population in Harlem was only beginning to define itself. The evidence indicates that most of the Rag Dances developed first in San Francisco’s Barbary Coast and were then brought to popularity in New York City.

Evidence suggests that the movements of the Texas Tommy may have originated in Texas, but when it arrived in San Francisco’s Barbary Coast it evolved further into a formal dance with a recognizable style. Certainly in San Francisco it enjoyed great notoriety among the city’s youth. Later it came to New York City as a popular dance craze representing the quixotic west.
The Texas Tommy on the Barbary Coast

Why was the Barbary Coast cooking up all of these new exciting vernacular dances? California, beginning as a Spanish province, becoming a Mexican state and then an independent country before joining the United States, had multicultural foundations. California’s diverse population included Native Americans, Mexicans, Europeans, Chinese, other nationalities from the “Orient” and African Americans. The demographics are notably comparable in diversity to those of New Orleans, the birthplace of Jazz. The West ignored race divisions more readily than the East because in the West, the more important issue was survival. For even though California earned statehood in 1850, the complete settlement of the West did not occur until much later, keeping California detached from the cultural influences of much of the rest of the country. As a result, African Americans could find tolerance, acceptance and even respect in California.

San Francisco was a mining and shipping town in the late 1800s, a gold rush metropolis on the West coast that attracted a variety of people. Located next to the northeastern docks in the San Francisco bay, the Barbary Coast in particular served as the city’s slum and red-light district servicing sailors from around the world, African Americans, and other curious visitors. It was notorious all across America for its danger and good times. Among its collection of ethnic groups, the coast boasted a large black population that provided much of the entertainment by playing the new fashionable Jazz music. Chinese women were bought and kept as slaves to serve the widespread prostitution industry in the district. Still, the Barbary Coast was better known for its dance halls than its prostitution. Some of the most famous included Lew Purcell’s, the Thalia, Spider Kelly’s and the Hippodrome. After the great fire of 1906, the dance halls were reestablished, but they could not ultimately survive the many reforms during the mid-teens that strived to close them. In order to stay open, the Thalia claimed to be a dance academy. The reformers won the battle in the end and as the dance halls, the cornerstones of the Barbary Coast, closed, so did the district “below” (north of) Market Street. Thus the Barbary Coast disappeared from the popular scene by the end of the 1910s.
The dance halls on the Barbary Coast were wild, exciting places where the lower classes of San Francisco played and partied hard.

The entertainment like the quadrilles were very interesting because they was a little bit different than the quadrilles what they used to dance in the white dance halls... First, they played a few bars of fast music; then, the floor manager would say, “Okay, okay, you boys let’s go! Get your partners!” and they’d all get out on the floor, collected together. Then they’d dance. The first part of the dance was fast, and then the floor manager would signal to stop, and we’d stop for the intermission. The bartender had the glasses all on the bottom bar, and the floorman would go around to the customers and take their orders for drinks. He’d call the drinks to the bartender – “Whiskey,” “Wine,” “Beer,” “Cigar,” “Beer” – and the bartender would set the glass up. After the drinks was called, we’d play again, and they’d dance. Then, when the bartender finished pourin’ the drinks, he’d yell, “All made!” The floor manager would blow the whistle and that would end the dance, and they’d pass out the drinks. In the white dance halls, they’d dance and then go to the bar and order.

Right after the quadrille was over, the floor manager would say, “Drag ‘um!” Then you got down to your slow music. They had several boys that hung around the place that was very good dancers, and they would put on this show. In this second part, the money would start rainin’ while they danced everything from a Hootchy-Kootchy on up. There was plenty of money, mostly halves and dollars, all in silver. After the dance, they’d pick up the money and divide it up. The musicians always got two dollars out of it.24

The dance halls were dives where one could find plenty of drinking, gambling, prostitution and, most importantly, dancing. This was fertile ground for creating and developing the numerous vernacular dances that emerged at this time. As Asbury states, “not only did the dance-halls of the Barbary Coast attract enormous crowds, but they exercised a tremendous influence upon the dancing habits of the whole United States”.25

In examining a fire insurance map from the period it is clear that the Barbary Coast was packed with a variety of nightlife. Walking west on Pacific Avenue, located south of Broadway and North of Market Street, as the visitor passed the six-way intersection of Kearney, Columbus, and Pacific, he/she would be stepping into the heart of San Francisco’s most notorious district. (See figures 5 -9) The establishments to the right would be the following: a saloon, a shooting gallery, a dance hall, Spider Kelly’s (a saloon and dance hall), the Hippodrome (a dance hall with galleries), Purcell’s So Different (a dance hall), the Diana (a dance hall), the Bear (a dance hall), the Thalia
Figure 5: Barbary Coast Fire Insurance Map
Figure 8: The Hippodrome, The So Different, & the Thalia c. 1910

Figure 6: Patrons dancing inside Spider Kelly's, c. 1911

Figure 7: Pacific Street clubs, c. 1910

Figure 8: Exterior of Spider Kelly's, c. 1913
(a saloon, dance hall, vaudeville stage, and moving pictures), a saloon, a shooting gallery, a dance hall and saloon, and a restaurant surrounded by two other saloons. The other side of the street consisted of a drugstore on the corner followed by a similar line of saloons and dance halls.

The main traffic in the Barbary Coast was concentrated on Pacific Street between Kearney and Montgomery. Pacific Street’s congested traffic consisted mostly of pedestrians, because few automobiles dared to enter the crowded street. “We used to call it Terrific Street. I can remember the time you could come across San Francisco bay on the ferryboat, and you could pick out that blaze of electric lights on Pacific Street… just millions of electric lights.”

The three most prominent establishments were The Hippodrome (the largest dance hall), The Thalia, and Purcell’s. The Midway and the Bella Union were also notable. The latter catered mostly to sailors and even featured “Little Egypt”, a popular vaudeville belly dancer, who gained notoriety in the Chicago Columbian Exposition of 1893. The Thalia was one of the largest dance halls and proved very stubborn in the city’s continuous attempts to shut Terrific Street down. Its considerable 18-piece band “received orders… to prepare to remain on duty unto 3 o’clock in the morning,” to defy an ordinance during 1910. Later, in defiance of another dance hall closure ordinance in the summer of 1915, owner Terry Mustin claimed the Thalia was “a first-class dancing academy,” offering lessons at 25 cents per hour by reputable dance instructors. Though he was arrested for running a disorderly house the proprietor was declared not guilty by a local jury. All of the dance halls on Pacific Street demonstrated a similar obstinacy.

Smaller than its neighbors but just as infamous, Lew Purcell’s was the establishment most closely connected to the famous Rag Dances that claimed their origins in the Barbary Coast. A Works Progress Administration (WPA) Writer’s Program study of San Francisco’s theatre life suggested, “No resort was better known than Lew Purcell’s So Different Saloon (520 Pacific Street), a Negro dance hall, where the ‘Turkey Trot’ is said to have originated.” Lew Purcell and Sam King, both (black) ex-Pullman porters, founded Purcell’s immediately after the 1906 fire, making it one of the first buildings rebuilt in the district. Later, Sam King split from the partnership to run his own saloon down the street. “At Nigger Purcell’s there was all-Negro entertainment but
no Negro patrons… ‘that was where your dances came from.’ They hired the finest Negro entertainment from all over the country.”\textsuperscript{35} For many years Sid Leprotti was the leader of that “fine entertainment” – he was a long-time Barbary Coast\textsuperscript{36} musician most famous for leading the So Different Jazz band that played at Purcell’s. Leprotti remembered playing at a time when jazz music was becoming popular. He said that during his first gig for Sam King, not long after his move to the Barbary Coast, he remembered the patrons yelling for him to play a slow drag or blues. They were tired of the pieces the bandleader chose, so every time the conductor left to relieve himself they would start begging. King noticed this, and got rid of the old guy and made Leprotti the band’s leader.\textsuperscript{37} Sid Leprotti described the musical entertainment of Pacific Street as usually starting out with just solo piano, then later working up to four, then six pieces according to what the establishment could afford. By 1915 the “So Different” band at Purcell’s included a string bass, baritone sax, clarinet, piano, flute and drums (bass, snare and cymbal).\textsuperscript{38}

The Thalia and Purcell’s both have been described as the “place where those dances came from”. The white public remembered Purcell’s as the point of origin for the new trends, however, most of the black club owners and musicians affirmed that the Thalia was the “real” source of the dances. Considering that Purcell’s was owned and operated by African Americans, it is probable that Purcell’s management understood that its white audience wanted to see the newest, most thrilling varieties of dance and music such as Ragtime, Blues, Turkey Trot, and the Texas Tommy. These new genres probably did not originate at Purcell’s, but Purcell’s almost certainly served as the first gateway for the dances to enter the white mainstream society of San Francisco. The Thalia had a similar environment and content, but it catered to patrons of both colors. The Rag Dances most likely developed into recognizable social and performative dances in the Thalia and Purcell’s.

The Texas Tommy is one such dance performed in the “resorts”\textsuperscript{39} on Terrific Street including the Thalia and Purcell’s. Musician Sid Leprotti describes the Texas Tommy as the most prominent during his tenure.
One of the most famous dances which practically originated out of Purcell’s was the Texas Tommy dance, and it was danced all over [circa 1906-1911]. We had several fellas that did it very good, like Johnny Peters, Dutch Mike, and Pet Bob, Johnny was a waiter in our place and was an Oklahoma boy… He said to me one time, ‘Why, that Texas Tommy dance is common down at home; it originated in Texas.’ Dutch Mike, as we called him was a Scandinavian boy; he don’t fit the nationality of Dutch at all. He come around the place practically every night. He danced with the Negro girls, Mary Dusen and Little Bit, who were very good Texas Tommy dancers.

The Barbary Coast’s dance halls, its people, and its bawdy atmosphere provided the prime ingredients for the creation of the Texas Tommy. Providing a plethora of dance spaces where outsiders could observe and participate, Pacific St. became a crucible for American social dancing of the period.

San Francisco’s experience with the Texas Tommy was not limited to the Barbary Coast’s dance halls; the dance penetrated all levels of society including the city’s most elite. The curious spectators who visited the streets of the Barbary Coast consisted of San Francisco citizens, some reporters, the police of course, and actors and actresses seeking new material. Entertainers brought the controversial dances to the stage, where even more San Franciscans observed the fresh dance vocabularies and styles. Pacific Street’s notoriety attracted actors and dancers such as Maude Adams, Mabel Hite, Mike Donlin, Anna Held, and even the famous ballerina Anna Pavlowa: these personalities were known to have taken “slumming” trips to the black dance halls of the ‘Coast.

In New York, it required a prominent actress or dancer to give a rag dance a Broadway baptism before it became popular. Since no visit to San Francisco was complete without an expedition to the most lurid of the dance dens, the slumming stage personalities often saw a dance that had possibilities. Mabel Hite, Anna Held and Lillian Lorraine were the most prominent of those who adventured on the Barbary Coast. Many less noted performers also “did the Coast” and emerged with ideas they later reproduced on Broadway. Mable Hite is generally credited with having pirated the Turkey Trot from the Barbary Coast…

Anna Held, in a similar slumming expedition, encountered the Texas Tommy.

He [Dutch Mike, a well known white patron and Texas Tommy Dancer on Pacific Street] was presented to Miss Held, with many flourishes, as ‘the world’s peerless exponent of the Texas Tommy. The bright particular star of the Barbary Coast, who just can’t keep up with his engagements to teach Nob Hill society, members of the Bohemian Club and guests at the Fairmont Hotel, the rudiments of the
alluring Texas!’ Such a flattering introduction necessitated a demonstration and
“Dutch Mike” grabbed his partner by the waist and went into action. With more
energy than grace, he whirled, shuffled and wrestled through the intricacies of the
dance. Anna Held quickly caught on to the steps and brought it back to New York
with her, where it created a sensation.44

Anna Held is noted by some to have had an essential role in introducing the Texas
Tommy in the East.45

Though not an actor, Dutch Mike became a famed teacher and performer of the
Texas Tommy. Both Sid LeProtti and Reb Spikes describe the Scandinavian boy as a
frequent visitor to Purcell’s who danced with the negro Texas Tommy dancers (Mary
Dewson and Little Bit) entertaining the other patrons. He was a good Texas Tommy
dancer, able to compete with his companion Pet Bob and one of the establishment’s
waiters, Johnny Peters.46 He taught at the famous Fairmont Hotel, which boasted that it
was the place of origin for the Rag dances. Clearly the hotel was only one of many places
that helped to introduce the popular slum dances to San Francisco high society. Dutch
Mike, joined by his partner, actress Stella Johnson continued to entertain San Francisco’s
public with the Texas Tommy in 1912; they were billed as the originators of the dance.47
The partners continued to make this claim until at least 1921.48

Another well-known San Francisco entertainer, Val Harris, was probably
considered the city’s most notable expert on the Texas Tommy. He is said to have
codified the steps into an understandable format for his white patrons.49 Harris is also the
author of the lyrics to the “Texas Tommy Swing” sheet music.50 Later when controversy
erupted about the infamous dance and local authorities attempted to outlaw it, Harris
defended his profitable investment, winning the case in court.51 An article in the San
Francisco Call entitled “Texas Tommy on Trial for Neck Tonight” gave a dramatized
account of the trial, personifying the Texas Tommy.

One there is who will defend him [the Texas Tommy] – Val Harris, the poor old
father, who originated Texas Tommy and now says that although his child is sadly
changed, he loves him still.

Four hops and a glide was Texas Tommy says Harris, “and four hops and a glide
he will be again, when removed from the sinister influence of those evil
companions, Turkey Trot and that French Apache. Once he was such a good boy,
and I hate to see him fallen so low.”52
Other famous actresses were reported by the San Francisco newspapers to have taken the popular slumming trips. Visits to Pacific Street like these from prominent entertainers helped to sanction and solidify the new Rag dance’s popularity and allure. Immediately upon finding new dances during their slumming trips, actors and actresses placed these “new” dances onstage in the latest variety shows, revues, and vaudeville stages.

The name “Texas Tommy” created a sensation in itself. Will Mastin said that the slang term “Tommy” implied whore. “The dance was going to be performed at a theatre in San Francisco and the whole audience was waiting to see some terrible suggestive dance. The police were there too. Then the group came out and did this dance and they were really surprised, because there was nothing bad about it at all.” Many audiences apparently came away astounded either by the demanding configurations, or by the lack of vulgar movement and intent. Often the upper echelons of society sent small companies of women to censor performances. The Texas Tommy’s association with the salacious Pacific Street, combined with its suggestive name, made it a prime target. Newspapers reported one such investigation in regards to the show *Slumming* at the Portola Theatre. The paper’s front page headline read, “Texas Tommy Fails to Shock Censors.” (See figure 10) Five well-known and influential society women visited the show, along with two police captains, with the intention of condemning the Texas Tommy. The paper confirms that the Texas Tommy danced on stage contained “all the essential features of the Texas Tommy as it [was] danced in its habitat, the Barbary Coast.” In response to the performance the appointed chair of the committee Miss Katherine O’Loughlin responded, “We were not shocked. It is awfully strenuous, but I fail to see where it is bad.” Captain Patrick Shea even presumed to comment that, “It is an artistic dance.” Though this stamp of approval
was obviously endorsed by some, others felt differently when the dance began appearing on the social dance floors of San Francisco’s “Smart Set”. (See figure 11)

The appealing rambunctious dance was quickly adopted by the youth in both the middle and upper classes.

Orthodox society is divided. One set has danced the Tommy all summer. It finds an irresistible fascination in the stamping steps and long glides… The gentleman in authority is silent about the Tommy. He infers in a characteristic detached way that time will tell. The younger married crowd is quite keen for it. The debutantes are not concerned. They’ve never seen it, and don’t care, having a barn dance. But the middle and older sets are militant. They can not countenance the Tommy. Not that they’ve seen it. But the name is enough. No one would care to hear a man ask her daughter for a Tommy. It is undignified before the music begins.58
As the dance seeped into upper-class society, the younger generation embraced the Texas Tommy as eagerly and vigorously as the Texas Tommy couple embraced each other in order to survive the performance of the dance. Unfortunately, parents were opposed to such vitality in dancing.

The Texas Tommy’s popularity spread and appeared on University campuses where an enthusiastic poem supporting the dance was even written by college students. The creative verse is a satire of Kipling’s “Files on Parade.”

I.

“Why are the shoulders heaving so?” asked Mamma-by-the-wall.
   “It is the rag: it is the rag,” said little Carrie Crawl.
   “Why do they walk instead of waltz?” asked Mamma-by-the-wall.
   “They all have got the fever now,” said little Carrie Crawl.

The rag has come to stay, and you can hear the music play.
You may cry that it is shocking, but it’s growing day by day.
The poor old waits and two-step both have faded far away.
For they do the Texas Tommy till the morning.

II.

“How strange the music that I hear!” said Mamma-by-the-wall.
“It’s Alexander’s Rag-Time Band,” said little Carrie Crawl.
“Pray, what can ‘rag-time’ be, my dear?” asked Mamma-by-the-wall.
“Why, everybody does it now,” said little Carrie Crawl.

The rag has hit the campus now, they do it everywhere;
They creep at teas and parties, and at every such affair.
The Prof. crawls out at evening as he ways to blank with care.
And he does the Texas Tommy till the morning.

III.

“Why are my shoulders twitching so?” asked Mamma-by-the-wall.
“You’ve caught it, to! You’ve caught it, to!” cried little Carrie Crawl.
“What makes me want to roll my eyes? asked Mamma-by-the-wall.
“You’ve got it bad! You’ve got it bad!” cried little Carrie Crawl.

First you raise your shoulders, then you roll your eyes,
Then you slide along the floor and heave a dozen sighs.
Get that raggy motion while you slide through paradise,
And you’ll do the Texas Tommy till the morning.”

60
As the Texas Tommy continued to gain popularity with the younger set, San Francisco society began to view it as a growing moral and physical threat. Newspaper headlines proclaimed: “Citizens’ Protest Against ‘Texas Tommy’ Stirs the City Dads to Action,”61 “‘Texas Tommy’ Meets Board’s Frozen Frown,”62 and the afore mentioned “Texas Tommy on Trial for Neck Tonight.”63 One report stated that “the so called ‘Texas Tommy’ is nothing else but a variety of illegitimate dancing.”64 Another even more telling report stated:

Texas Tommy is the shuttlecock of moral investigation. Just now it is being shifted back and forth between the board of supervisors and the police commissioners. “Kick it out!” said the public welfare committee of the supervisors. “Kick it out yourself; we ain’t arbiters of what is polite and what ain’t,” replied the board to the committee.

So last evening the Lone Star Thomas could be seen wandering between the hall of justice and the temporary city hall in Market Street wandering and wondering what its ultimate fate will be.65

Parents expressed grave concern about the detrimental effects of dancing the Texas Tommy on the youth’s moral fiber: “Heart broken father deplores child’s acquired habit of wiggling shoulders.”66 Of course the controversy over to the Texas Tommy simply

Figure 11: San Francisco Examiner reports on Barbary Coast closure
intensified both its attractiveness to the city’s youth, and their parent’s opposition to it. Moreover, competitive businesses surrounding Pacific Street wished to rid the area of the “dancehalls and undesirable cafes,” further inflaming the controversy. Still, the dissention over the Texas Tommy represented the first steps in the effort that eventually led to shutting down the Barbary Coast. (See Figure 12)

It is important to note that by 1912 during the “war” against the dances and the district they came from, the press indiscriminately used the name Texas Tommy to indicate and represent all the Rag Dances. Yet, the using of the name “Texas Tommy” as an umbrella term confirms the dance’s superior status in public opinion above all the other Rag dances in San Francisco. Concurrently, however, San Francisco’s most popular Rag dance spread across the country, despite the imminent demise of its home.
Chapter 2


3 This show is an important milestone in African American stage dance; it’s significant the Texas Tommy was included. However, previous shows contributed more to the Texas Tommy’s popularity than this one did.

4 Most notably: the Turkey Trot, the Grizzly Bear, and the Bunny Hug.


6 Ibid p.128


8 Stoddard, Tom. *Jazz on the Barbary Coast*. (Berkeley: Heyday Books 1982), p.39

9 Ibid p.39

10 A San Francisco newspaper, 12 May 1912 and other items form clipping files from the San Francisco Library and Archive for performing Arts


17 Ibid, p.128.
The development of Jazz music in New Orleans is often attributed to the city’s accepted diversity; the same should be said about San Francisco.


Fire Insurance Map of San Francisco, San Francisco Public Library
The names listed of the establishments are probable locations based on photographs and addresses from the period; the map only lists the address and type of business.

Writers’ Program of the Works Progress Administration, Theatre Research series, Vol. XIII-Minstrelsy, (San Francisco) Notes.

Harris, Gene, interview by Marshall Stearns, Chicago, 29 December 1959.

1906 till 1921 (when the coast closed down)

38 Ibid p. 12 and 45.

39 The Barbary Coast establishments like the dance halls and bars were called resorts.


41 Maude Adams is a well known actress of the time, famous for her performance of Peter Pan and the Salome dance. Her name is repeatedly spelled Maud or Maude.

42 Anna Held was a famous theatrical leading lady, who was also Ziegfeld’s mistress.

43 Cooper, H.E., “Rag on the Barbary Coast.” *The Dance Magazine* (December 1927): 60

44 Ibid

45 Ibid 31

46 Stoddard, Tom. *Jazz on the Barbary Coast*. (Berkeley: Heyday Books 1982), p 39 and 103


49 “‘Texas Tommy’ meets board’s frozen frown” *The San Francisco Call* (28 February 1912):1.


51 “‘Texas Tommy’ meets board’s frozen frown” *The San Francisco Call* (28 February 1912):1.

52 “Texas Tommy on Trial for Neck Tonight” *San Francisco Call* (3 May 1912) 18


54 “Texas Tommy Fails to Shock Censors” *The San Francisco Examiner* (14 February 1912): 1

55 Ibid
56 Ibid
57 Ibid
58 “Smart Set” The San Francisco Call (2 November 1911): 7
59 The newspaper titles Kipling’s poem “Files on Parade,” however the correct title is “Danny Deever.”
60 “Satirize Texas Tommy In University ‘Pelican’” The San Francisco Examiner (1 February 1912): 13.
61 “San Rafael to Have a Censor of Dancing” The San Francisco Examiner (17 July? 1910).
62 “‘Texas Tommy’ meets board’s frozen frown” The San Francisco Call (28 February 1912):1.
63 “Texas Tommy on trial for neck tonight” San Francisco Call (5 March 1912):16.
64 “Texas Tommy Dance Denounced” San Francisco Call (30 December 1911) 14
65 “Buck Passes over Texas Tommy Rag” San Francisco Call (3 August 1912) 4
66 “Texas Tommy on trial for neck tonight” San Francisco Call (5 March 1912):16.
67 “Texas Tommy on trial for neck tonight” San Francisco Call (5 March 1912):16.
CHAPTER THREE
THE POPULAR DIFFUSION OF THE TEXAS TOMMY.

Migrations East

The Texas Tommy made its first appearance on the east coast in *Ziegfeld Follies of 1911*, which opened on June 26, 1911, in New York City. The dance was so popular that in the following year it inundated New York City’s stages. But the important question remaining is this: how did it travel approximately 6,800 miles, and who facilitated this transplant?

Three major west to east migrations took the Texas Tommy to the East coast. Surprisingly, the popular theatrical producer Florence Ziegfeld was responsible for the first transfer. The second and most significant migration involved Johnny Peters and Mary Dewson, a Texas Tommy exhibition dance couple, while the last migration involved Will Mastin and his “California Poppies.”

In early 1911, President Taft made the long-awaited decision about which city would hold the Panama-Pacific International Exposition of 1915. San Francisco and New Orleans both ran enthusiastic campaigns to obtain the coveted exposition with hopes to boost their economic and social standing. San Francisco, upon winning the appointment, attracted influential citizens such as Florence Ziegfeld Jr., an eminent producer from New York City, who was immediately impressed by the metropolis’s appeal. Commenting on the city’s attraction he stated, “I have been peculiarly impressed by this city and the people here.” As a result of the nation’s interest in the city that would hold the next world exposition, Mr. Ziegfeld wanted to dedicate an entire act in his forthcoming New York City production to the celebration of San Francisco.
The fair’s purpose was to celebrate the opening of the Panama Canal and the 400-year anniversary of Balboa’s discovery of the Pacific Ocean; hence the name “Panama Pacific International Exposition.”

The real benefit of the event was that it would boast the city’s recovery from the devastating 1906 fire and earthquake. It was this theme that Mr. Ziegfeld decided to copy in his upcoming Follies revue: the historical city before the fire, its devastation, the rebuilding effort, and finally “the Golden City, by the Golden Gate, in the Golden State.”

Ziegfeld picked out iconic cultural elements, including dance, to copy and use in his production. Since the Texas Tommy was San Francisco’s most famous and popular Rag dance it was perfect for the show. Ziegfeld bought the publishing rights to Val Harris’s “Texas Tommy Swing,” reprinted the sheet music, and used the song in the revue.

The second migration of the Texas Tommy was provoked by the well-known actor Al Jolson. Jolson had an actor’s contract with the Shubert theatre.
franchise and after a disagreement with Mr. Shubert, went to San Francisco to pout and to visit his wife. While in the city during the early months of 1912, he came across the Texas Tommy. Seeing it performed by Johnny Peters and Mary Dewson, he considered the dance to have significant potential. He wrote to Mr. Shubert (see figure 14), asking to bring the dancers to Chicago with him to perform in his upcoming production, *A Modern Eve*. Peters and Dewson were already established Texas Tommy dancers in San Francisco; both had danced in Purcell’s and both apparently appeared in subsequent stage shows. Al Jolson brought the pair to Chicago where the dance was added to the show with much success.

In response to seeing an early version of *A Modern Eve*, Mr. A. Toxen Worm, a well-known and respected Shubert scout and manager, immediately wrote Mr. Shubert:

I saw part of “A Modern Eve” rehearsal last night, which looks rather good. They have got together a first-class company. They also have one specialty number called “The Texas Tommies”, which, when placed in the middle of the show, will kill everything in it, and the actors will have to look to their laurels. That’s how good this bunch is. It is an act that you should have duplicated for the Winter Garden at once, if you could get hold of five couples that can do the dance that these “Texas Tommies” do. I understand the act comes from Frisco...
The Texas Tommy dance is singled out in this and other descriptions as a show-stopping exhibition of speed and talent. It is also acclaimed as an intriguing novelty representing the wild west to the civilized east. “Hollaender [the pit orchestra conductor] does not know how to conduct ragtime, and his handling of the orchestra was a great handicap to the Texas Tommy dancers last night, as he could not follow their speed. The number made an enormous hit just the same.”  
(See figure 15) A Modern Eve was a decisive success in Chicago and the Texas Tommy number was transferred to New York theatres as suggested by Mr. Worm.
Johnny Peters and Mary Dewson traveled to and performed in Chicago, but there is no mention in any correspondence of other San Francisco dancers obtained from Terrific Street. Popular hearsay tells of a group of dancers brought east by Al Jolson, but numbers are never assigned. This story is included in interviews such as that of Marshall Stearns with Will Mastin: “Al Jolson brought a group to the Winter Garden but I didn’t know what they did because I was in San Francisco.” In the telegrams between Al Jolson and Mr. Shubert only a single pair of dancers were considered and brought to Chicago. Conceivably the African-American dance couple, Dewson and Peters, trained the three to four other couples in Chicago for A Modern Eve’s admired number, and then the group came with Al Jolson to New York. Marshall Stearns’s interview with Ethel Williams confirms this theory. “Johnny Peters and Mary Dewson came here [New York City] with Al Jolson and white Texas Tommy dancers… I took Mary Dewson’s place because she got sick. There were eight of us altogether.” In the interview, Ms. Williams discusses the shows in which she and Peters performed, and the contests they won. She emphasizes dancing the Texas Tommy and using it as a springboard for their careers, eventually performing in the famous Darktown Follies of 1913 show My Friend from Kentucky.

The final migration of the Texas Tommy from west to east was initiated by Will Mastin, whom Stearns described in his private notes as “egotistical and not too eager to talk.” He worked in many of the famous Barbary Coast resorts, including the Thalia and Purcell’s. Perceiving a financial opportunity, Will Mastin gathered a Texas Tommy dance troupe of his own, dubbing them the “California Poppies.” He and the group traveled through Chicago to New York City some time in 1918 or 1919. The exact dates are unknown because the two primary references are interviews taken forty years later. However, multiple resources place this migration in the late 1910s, along with a second trip later, also led by Mastin, in the early 1920s.

Although most of Pacific Street had suffered from the moralist watchdogs’ attempts to close its “indecent” establishments, Willie Coven remembers that Lew Purcell’s was “still jumping” in 1916, and the Texas Tommy was still performed. It was from Purcell’s dance floor that Mastin collected his dancers including Pet Bob, known as the world’s fastest Texas Tommy dancer. The group started out with nine dancers, then decreased to seven. Unlike previous Texas Tommy dance groups that had arrived in New
York, these dancers are likely to have all been African Americans. The odd number of dancers raises a question, because the “California Poppies” were branded as Texas Tommy dancers, which was a couple’s dance. With no solid explanation of this incongruity, one could suppose that the extra dancer might have been Mastin. Another rationalization might be that the troupe featured the Texas Tommy, but performed other dance specialties as well.

Although Will Mastin and his “California Poppies” are documented in multiple interviews to have made an enthusiastic impression in New York City around 1919, the city’s newspapers do not confirm this. This final migration of the Texas Tommy seems not to have received the amount of press coverage that some of the other Rag dances did, indicating that this third introduction of the dance to Manhattan did not achieve the notoriety that the previous two.

The west-to-east transition emphasizes that the Texas Tommy had transformed from a social dance to a stage dance. Each major trip takes either the social dance, or the social dancers, and places them on a New York City stage for entertainment and profit.

**On Stage in New York City**

*Ziegfeld Follies of 1911* opened at the Jardin de Paris in New York City on June 7, 1911. The revue was the first widely reported introduction of the Texas Tommy to New York audiences. Ziegfeld and his theatre company had been touring San Francisco with their previous show *Ziegfeld Follies of 1910* in late April of 1911. Wanting to exploit the location of the next world’s fair, Ziegfeld announced that he would feature San Francisco’s sites and nightlife culture in his next production. Among the artifacts and ideas that Ziegfeld and his company took back to New York was the Texas Tommy.17
The show boasted such vaudeville celebrities as Fanny Brice, Bert Williams, Lillian Lorraine, The Dolly Sisters and Vera Maxwell. Set on the Barbary Coast of San Francisco on New Year’s Eve, Act I, Scene 9 of *The Ziegfeld Follies of 1911* climaxes with the Song “Texas Tommy”. (See figure 16) Sung by Vera Maxwell, the song is the same “Texas Tommy Swing” that Val Harris copyrighted on the west coast. Ziegfeld bought the song and had the copyright transferred to his New York publisher. The song features two dancers, presumably performing a version of the Texas Tommy dance, backed by the entire ensemble. However, this version of the dance was most likely not an authentic representation of the original. The featured professional performers might have learned the dance while touring the previous year’s show in San Francisco, but the producers did not bother to use any of the actual African-American originators in the show.\(^{18}\)

The placement of the Texas Tommy dance and song in the show in December of 1911 is near the end of Act I, not a particularly prominent position, and the Texas Tommy in this instance did not make a large impact on New York City audiences. In confirmation, many of the show’s reviews do not emphasize the dance as anything important. However, Mr. Ziegfeld did think it profitable enough to include the song in the series of printed sheet music from the show (see figure 2), and he also added the number to another one of his shows that was starting to tour, *Over the River*. 

Figure 15: The Ziegfeld Follies of 1911 program
Figure 16: Over the River program

Figure 17: Whirl of Society program
Although *Over the River* opened in 1910, the Texas Tommy dance was not added to the production until as late as 1912.\(^1\)\(^9\) James Davis and Pearl Matthews are included in the program as cabaret artists, who performed the “Original 'Texas Tommy,’” this time placed near the end of the final act, a much more prestigious placement on the program.\(^2\)\(^0\) (See figure 17) The couple performed other various Rag Dances throughout the show, but the Texas Tommy seems to have been the highlight of their repertoire.

In 1912, after finishing *A Modern Eve* in Chicago, Al Jolson and his company – including the Texas Tommy dancers – came to the Shubert Theatre in New York City to open in *Whirl of Society*. (See figure 18)

Playing at the Winter Gardens the show starring Al Jolson opened on April 12, 1912. The eight Texas Tommy dancers Jolson brought from Chicago were billed as performing the “Original Texas Tommy dance” and are highlighted in the cast list from the “company of 100.”\(^2\)\(^1\) Apparently these dancers created quite a stir in New York City society, for their upcoming performance was mentioned in *The New York Times* preceding the opening night. The article hails two of the eight dancers as holding championships in the dance “from the Barbary Coast.”\(^2\)\(^2\) (See figure 19) Most likely the couple was Johnny Peters and his partner. At this point Mary Dewson is said to have gone back to California due to illness and was replaced by Ethel Williams.

Unfortunately it is hard to tell if this switch had happened by this show’s opening since the Texas Tommy dancers are not billed by individual name, and cast lists in the Shubert records are not clear. In Stearns’s interview with Williams, she stated that Mary Dewson made it to New York and then she took her place. Either woman could have performed. However it is probably safe to assume that after the opening Ethel Williams and Johnny Peters would have been the premier couple performing the Texas Tommy, for it is implied that the switch happened soon after the San Francisco dancers’ arrival.

![Figure 18: Texas Tommy Dancers Tonight](image)
A second article appears after opening night that again features the Texas Tommy dancers’ performance. (See figure 21) “The audiences showed an unmistakable liking for the free vigorous actions of the dancers, and for the novelty of the steps.” These “energetic” dancers were apparently dressed in cowboy costumes to underscore the wild west association with San Francisco’s athletic dance.

Presenting a variety of shows, the Winter Garden broke the entertainment into four parts. Part one was a minstrel show with Al Jolson playing “Bones” against the “Interlocutor,” “Tambo,” and the chorus. Part two, titled “Danse Classique,” appears to be a solo ballet number. The headline show Whirl of Society: A Musical Satire of Up-to-Date Society occupies the third slot of entertainment. Here the majority of the named cast, dancers, and show girls perform, and the section uses the Texas Tommy dance as its finale. The final, shorter, part four was presented as “The Captive, an Oriental Phantasy in Two Scenes and a Prologue.” (See figures 18 & 22)

To capitalize on intelligence that Ziegfeld was delaying the opening of his Follies of 1912, the Shubert brothers decided to open their own revue in the same format. Thus, the Passing Show of 1912 opened on July 22 at the Winter Gardens. “A rival to the Ziegfeld Follies, the Passing Shows became a prototype of Shubert glamour, talent and panache.”

The production focused on dance, featuring the Texas Tommy among the array of terpsichorean sport.
There were two divisions of last night’s offering which bore the relative titles of “The Ballet of 1830” and “The Passing Show of 1912.” As a matter of fact the show might have been entitled, “Part 1 –Dancing”; “Part 2 –More Dancing.” As the Winter Garden aims to reflect; in spectacular fashion, the leading form of entertainment of the day, there can be no doubt that we are at the height of a revial of ballet… “The Passing Show of 1912” is a revue in which a series of burlesqued scenes from the various current events “political, theatrical and otherwise” is presented in a spirit of good natured travesty, but these burlesques of men, maids, and matters were really secondary in interest to the dances. That is, the dances were accepted as principals of a performance which included almost every variety of terpsichorean effort, from grotesque gyrations by Miss Trixie Friganza to the marvelous undulations of Adelaide; from the posturings of the mystic Orientals to the everyday ragtime steps, and from the graceful movements of the light-toed coryphées to the boisterous cavortings of the Texas Tommies.  

The Texas Tommy dance created enough of a stir to be mentioned in the article to its familiar New York public. (See figure 22) The number of dance specialists performing in the show contributed not just to the show’s success but to its cost. An exorbitant $500 was listed to be paid to such specialists. Only the rent and the payment of 48 show girls surpassed the payment of approximately 15 experts.  

It is unclear where the Texas Tommy was placed in the performance. The dance would have been placed within an act that encompassed multiple performances. The score for the show includes a two-minute long song entitled “Texas Tommy.” Unfortunately, due to the state in which the score was found, it is again unclear which production number contained the dance.  

The year of 1912 continued with many notices about the Texas Tommy dance being performed in many different theatre establishments in New York City. The following table lists references to the dance’s appearances in the New York Times’s theatrical advertisements:
Clearly the Texas Tommy was prominent on New York City stages and had established itself as a theatrical dance. It was placed in a number of Broadway variety shows, often as the headliner act or in the show’s finale, having achieved a high level of visibility and popularity.

Table 1: Texas Tommy on New York City Stages as advertised in *The New York Times’s* (not all shows are listed, such as *Follies of 1911* or the *Darktown Follies of 1913*)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Theatre</th>
<th>Show</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4-Apr-1912</td>
<td>Winter Gardens</td>
<td>“Whirl of Society”</td>
<td>8 TT dancers from SF/BC finale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14-Apr-1912</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-Apr-1912</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28-Apr-1912</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-May-1912</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-Mar-1912</td>
<td>Columbia Theatre</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>TT troupe from BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-May-1912</td>
<td>Columbia Theatre</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>8 dancers New from SF, burlesque</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-Jun-1912</td>
<td>Columbia Theatre</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>featured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-Jun-1912</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-Jun-1912</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-May-1912</td>
<td>Hurtig &amp; Seaman’s Music Hall</td>
<td>“The Social Maids”</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28-May-1912</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28-May-1912</td>
<td>Grand Opera House</td>
<td>benefit</td>
<td>Goldsmith’s Texas Tommy Dancers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-Jun-1912</td>
<td>American Roof Garden</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-Jun-1912</td>
<td>Hammerstein’s Victoria Theatre and Roof Garden</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>8 TT dancers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-Jul-1912</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-Jul-1912</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29-Jul-1912</td>
<td>B. F. Keith’s Union Square</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>8 TT dancers headliners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-Jul-1912</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-Aug-1912</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22-Sep-1912</td>
<td>at baseball park</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-Apr-1913</td>
<td>Proctor’s</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>8 TT dancers headliners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-Jan-1914</td>
<td>Palace</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>Chinese version</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27-Jan-1914</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-Oct-1914</td>
<td>Broadway Theatre</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A later significant theatrical appearance of the Texas Tommy was its inclusion in My Friend from Kentucky, or, as it is better known to historians, the Darktown Follies of 1913. James Weldon Johnson marks the show as “the beginning of the nightly migration [of whites] to Harlem in search of entertainment.” With an entire cast of African-American performers the show opened in Harlem’s Lafayette Theatre in 1913. Both Johnny Peters and Ethel Williams danced the Texas Tommy before the chorus of the “At the Ball” finale number. (See figure 23) The show propelled Ethel Williams’s career as she continued to star in subsequent productions of the Darktown Follies series.

Although it first appeared on New York’s stages in 1911, the Texas Tommy did not achieve its status as a profitable social dance that producers added to their lineups until 1912, the year of its biggest theatrical successes. In its numerous debuts, billed as the “Original Texas Tommy,” the dance was often highlighted in the big finale, where the dance was performed with four couples during the year of its fame. A year in the spotlight was a considerable accomplishment in a theatrical world that changed its bills every couple of weeks to maintain the interest of the audiences. Like many Rag dances, the Texas Tommy faded from public interest after a period of time and rejoined the lists of the general Rags. What could not be predicted was that the dance would resurface in an updated version that would be known as the “Lindy Hop.”

Figure 23: Darktown Follies program
The Rag Dance Craze

The Texas Tommy was only one of many Rag Dances that enticed the public between the years of 1911 and 1914. By the end of the Rag Dances’ rule, the movements and controversies they had introduced were replaced by more “dignified” or codified dances, which new exhibition ballroom teams such as Vernon and Irene Castle instituted.

Certainly, the Texas Tommy did not experience the same amount of fame on New York City social dance floors that it had enjoyed in San Francisco society. Instead, by 1914 it was one of the many Rag dances that newspapers listed among the slew of Turkey Trots, Grizzly Bears, and Bunny Hugs. Instead of the Texas Tommy, “for an unknown reason the Turkey Trot was singled out by the press as the new dance which was either thrilling or outraging the entire population.”

Just as in San Francisco, in New York City the controversies that surrounded the Rag dances included indictments of low sordid origins, close embraces, moral abandonment in the dance’s execution, the unfamiliar and socially inappropriate movement vocabulary, and, in the case of the Texas Tommy, the name of the dance itself. Of course American youth embraced the newfound freedom in these couples dances and the rebellion that the Rags happily represented. Dismayed parents and community leaders continuously denounced and prohibited these dances from proper societal functions.

The Vatican was even pulled into the dispute. While a number of bishops had condemned the dances, Pope Pius X allowed an audience to some Rag Dances. He responded that “if [the dance] were made a penance, it would be looked upon as sheer cruelty.” The article reporting this occasion stated that his Eminence recommended that the dance change its name, and suggested that the “Venetian Furlana” might be a more enjoyable recreation.

Eventually, numerous exhibition ballroom teams emerged on the commercial scene and provided newer and more appropriate dances to appease the conservative American dance appetites.

The Texas Tommy is unimportant, but all the others – the tango (which was much more beautiful then than it has become in recent years), the Castle waltz (which is not very different from the current varieties), the Castle polka, the delightful maxixe (which is a far better dance than some of the more recent importations
from South America), and even, perhaps, the Castle Walk – are seen to be timely and readily revisable, provided only that their normal tempos are restored. These dances combined an assortment of borrowed steps, and because the professional exhibition teams added glamour and polish to their performances, they evoked public fascination that appeased the public’s reservations with Modern Dancing.

Though it was not often singled out during its heyday on New York City’s dance floors, the Texas Tommy would later be remembered not only as a prominent Rag dance but eventually as the initial dance of Swing. “Jazz dancing has gone through a strange evolution. It really started with the Texas Tommy…” The Texas Tommy was placed by the public at the forefront of the genealogy that eventually led to the Lindy Hop.
Chapter 3

1 “Ziegfeld will Advertise San Francisco in his forthcoming Revue, ‘The Follies of 1911’” San Francisco Chronicle (23 April 1911)

2 “Ziegfeld will Advertise San Francisco in his forthcoming Revue, ‘The Follies of 1911’” San Francisco Chronicle (23 April 1911)


5 Are two popular African-American Texas Tommy dancers from the Barbary Coast,

6 Worm, A. Toxen. Letter to Mr. J. J. Shubert (4 April 1912).

7 Worm, A. Toxen. Letter to Mr. J. J. Shubert (22 April 1912).

8 Numerous newspapers, interviews, etc…


12 Of the later famed Will Mastin trio that included Will Mastin, Sammy Davis Sr. and Sammy Davis Jr.


17 “The Follies of 1910” The San Francisco Chronicle (30 April, 1911): clipping file SPLPA.

Various programs from “Over the River”

“Over the River” Program. New York New York (16 September 1912)

The Winter Garden program Whirl of Society April 15, 1912

“‘Texas Tommy’ Dancers To-night” New York Times (12 April 1912).

“‘Texas Tommy’ Dancers Appear” New York Times (13 April 1912).

“‘Texas Tommy’ Dancers Appear” New York Times (13 April 1912).


“The Passing Show” Newsletter of the Shubert Archive, summer 1987, volume 11, number 12


“Texas Tommy” orchestral score from “Passing Show of 1912” found in The Shubert Archives


Originally was put together in Washington D.C. in 1911 according to Stearns p125.


“The Dance: Castle Style” New York Times (16 April 1939).) p16

“Virtuoso of Jazz Favors new Rhythm” New York Times (31 August 1923).) p15
CHAPTER FOUR
WHAT DID THE TEXAS TOMMY DANCE LOOK LIKE?

The Vernacular and the Stage.

There is no absolute way of knowing what the Texas Tommy looked like.\(^1\) As with many early social dances in America that were practices of lower classes, the Texas Tommy remained poorly documented. The Texas Tommy originated in some of the worst dives and slums in America. These neighborhoods were not the preferred subjects of early filmmakers. An additional problem is that the dance is now over one hundred years old, and the last surviving originators passed away 20 years ago, making interviews impossible. What is known is that the Texas Tommy was a couples dance that predominantly used facing partners in a closed partner position.\(^2\) Immediately this differentiates the Texas Tommy from its Animal Dance contemporaries. The One Step (the form of the Animal Dances) did not exclusively use a closed position but varied its partner facings throughout the dance.

The Texas Tommy was a fast and intense dance, performed to the energetic rhythms of Ragtime music. The Texas Tommy’s speed and intensity seems to have been extreme in comparison to other social dances of the era, as is evident in the Caffins’ description of the dance in their 1912 book *Dancing and Dancers of Today*:

> The “Texas Tommy” dancers are perhaps more acrobatic than eccentric. Their evolutions require … absolute precision and dexterity of movement…There is, however, a certain wild, nervous verve, and exuberance of energy and vitality in their wonderful *tours de force* that suggests the purely physical wellbeing of hardy bodies with muscles all taut, clear eye and cool head, of folks who… look death in the face without wincing…Their play is likely to be as tense as their work, but it can appreciate dexterity and precision of method and enjoy the sense of mastery that the superior possession of these qualities enhances.\(^3\)

This excerpt implies that the dance was intense and vigorous. Published in 1912, this description should be considered more accurate with respect to the dance’s vernacular origins than Albert Newman’s 1914 description of a more staid ballroom version. From
the Caffins it is clear that the dance in its early development was a vernacular dance that reflected its originators’ hard physical life style.

Even descriptions of earlier staged versions of the Texas Tommy also reflect the dance’s intense nature. Mr. A. Toxen Worm, a dedicated manager and press representative for the Shuberts, who is described as “wildly colorful,” “passionate,” “near-savage,” with an attitude of a “bulldog.” He oversaw *A Modern Eve* in Chicago. In reporting to the Shuberts on the show, he commented on this in his correspondence, quoted in the previous chapter: “Hollaender does not know how to conduct ragtime, and his handling of the orchestra was a great handicap to the Texas Tommy dancers last night, as he could not follow their speed. The number made an enormous hit just the same.”

The best textual information describing how the Texas Tommy looked comes from a number of interviews. The Caffins’ description uses the conceit of the Texas Tommy dancer moving like a cowboy lassoing his steer.

The whirl which spins his partner toward the footlights with such momentum that without aid she must assuredly fly across them, must be nicely adjusted so that in neither force nor direction shall she escape the restraining grasp of his hand outstretched just at the right moment to arrest her. His own weight must be braced to counterbalance hers… Poise and gentleness of handling must regulate the seemingly fierce toss of his partner, first in air, then toward the ground, otherwise she would be battered to pieces across the outstretched leg over which he bends her before restoring her to normal balance.

The description is of a powerful breakaway, where the man tosses the woman out from closed position, releasing the connection only to catch her again before she spins out of his reach. There is so much power and momentum in this throw-out that the man must use his weight to counterbalance his partner when he catches her. This couple ends the move in an extraordinary dip. This early description of the Texas Tommy supports the idea that the dance was performed with the dancers circling each other, like the Lindy Hop, which allows the creation of so much force and momentum. The dip however, is not mentioned in other sources describing the Texas Tommy.

Other descriptions of the Texas Tommy include Steams’s interviews with many dancers who remembered it. Ethel Williams, who helped to popularize the dance with Johnny Peters states, “It was like the Lindy, but there were two basic steps – a kick and
hop three times on each foot, and then add whatever you want…Your partner had to keep you from falling – I’ve slid into the orchestra pit more than once.”

Willie Covant said that the dance “had a different step than the Lindy, or Jitterbug, that’s all,” implying that the dances looked similar (using the same circular structure) but utilized a different basic step. Reb Spikes, a musician from the Barbary Coast, told Tom Stoddard that the Texas Tommy “was quite a bit like the Jitterbug.” These interviews provide strong evidence that the Texas Tommy, at least in its earlier years (before it and its contemporary Animal Dances were tamed by the exhibition ballroom teams), used a revolving pattern, allowing the partners to circle around each other moving from open to closed positions. The lyrics of the “Texas Tommy Swing” song also provide instruction on how to do the dance. They describe a very close dance that includes “a hopping on the right and a hopping on the left.” The lyrics describe the man throwing his arms around his partner’s waist; this movement is similar to a breakaway move that is used in the current Lindy Hop vocabulary. The modern step, in the Lindy Hop, is called the “Texas Tommy” and is used as a variation of the swing-out, the dance’s basic breakaway movement. The man takes the woman’s right hand and places it behind her back. As he grabs her hand with his other hand, he whirls her out forcefully. The reference in the lyrics of the “Texas Tommy Swing” does not affirm that this modern movement is the original, by any means, but, it is perhaps a later parallel.

There is clear information about the Animal Dances that were contemporaries of the Texas Tommy. They were social dances, danced to the same genre of music, and by the same people. What then makes the Texas Tommy distinct? How do we know that it was not, like the Animal Dances, based on a One Step, following the line of dance? Most of the descriptions of the dance available reference the Lindy Hop. The Lindy Hop departs from the ballroom form in that it is a stationary circular dance.

During 1914, the exhibition ballroom teams started to gain enormous popularity and influence. Headed by Vernon and Irene Castle, the most famous exhibition ballroom dancers of the period, they started to “tame” the many Rag Dances, adapting them to upper class expectations of proper deportment. In the Castles’ dance instruction book, published in 1914, they suggest these restrictions:
Do not wriggle the shoulders. Do not shake the hips. Do not twist the body. Do not flounce the elbows. Do not pump the arms. Do not hop – glide instead… Drop the Turkey trot, the Grizzly Bear, and the Bunny Hug, etc. these dances are ugly, ungraceful, and out of fashion.\textsuperscript{11}

The Castles were the dominant social dance trendsetters of this time period. Their recommendations likely catalyzed the Rag Dances’ evolution into calmer ballroom dances. In his dance manual \textit{Dances of Today}, also published in 1914, Albert Newman’s instruction of the Texas Tommy can be interpreted as implying either that the couple was traveling along the line of dance or, instead, that the partners circle around each other– in the vein of dances such as the Lindy Hop. It is unclear.

Glide L. F. to side (1), raise R. F. a little to rear, and hop three times on the L. F. in this position count (2) (3) (4), turning to the right.

Repeat same with the R. F., continuing the turn, one measure.

This is virtually a skating movement and should be made with a slight bend on the first step. The hops should be made softly and the raised foot held not too high…

Repeat the entire dance, turning to the left also.

Great care should be taken not to exaggerate the hops, and to turn quite around in the skating movement.\textsuperscript{12}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{texas_tommy.jpg}
\caption{A photograph of the Texas Tommy}
\end{figure}
This instruction can easily be considered a traveling dance or a circular dance. The illustration that accompanies the description only shows a couple in closed position hopping on one foot; it does not clarify this issue. (See figure 24)

If Albert Newman is indeed describing a type of traveling dance for the Texas Tommy, it must be noted that his interpretation of this genre of dances seems clearly to have been modified for the ballroom: “there are a number of arrangements of the Texas Tommy, but none are more suitable for ballroom purpose than this.”

Newman supports the later modified versions of the Rag Dances, evident in his discussion of the acceptable dance positions.

Notwithstanding the fact that there is virtually only one position which might be said has been universally adopted, there are many people who, desiring to become conspicuous, try to set the fashion by using such positions as the Bunny Hug, the Grizzly Bear and other awkward positions, which are the subject of much criticism.

When considering the Grizzly Bear, Newman states, “However, all the objectionable features have been eliminated. It is quite acceptable and has become one of the popular steps.” Newman’s examples of the Grizzly Bear, the Turkey Trot, the Kangaroo Dip, the Chicken Scratch, and other various Rag Dances, are the modified ballroom adaptations – not the original vernacular ones. As previously quoted, the Texas Tommy he describes also appears to be modified for the proper ballroom dance floor. Moreover, Newman does not include the breakaway in his instruction of the Texas Tommy. Being the most wild and unpredictable part of the dance, the breakaway would be the most objectionable in the ballroom.

As danced before 1914, the original Texas Tommy looked very much like the Lindy Hop, including breakaways as the couple revolved around one another. As the exhibition ballroom teams gained popularity and influence, smoothing the Rag Dances into acceptable ballroom dances, the Texas Tommy evolved into a more formal version.
Film

The most clear and telling reference to the Texas Tommy is a short film clip of the dance performed in a social setting in the Barbary Coast around 1914. This rare clip was provided by the California Historical Jazz Dance Foundation. Given the social-political circumstances, it is astonishing that any patron interested enough in a slum dance would spend the money to film the dance. As previously discussed, the city’s fathers and religious activists were aggressively attempting to close down the Barbary Coast and its notorious resorts\(^1\) during this time. Despite that climate of repression, at least this one piece of film exists.

However exciting, it would be a mistake to consider this visual representation as the essential example of the Texas Tommy. To determine the most accurate representation of the 1910s dance, the clip must be assessed in context with the interviews, dance manuals, newspaper descriptions, and music. This is particularly important because the dance continually changed to fit the upper- and middle-class people that were attracted to the dance and wanted to pay to learn it. The film represents a single social and racial class dancing the Texas Tommy on the Barbary Coast in 1914.

Finally the film only provides a brief snapshot of the dance, not the dance in its entirety. What is filmed is the variation of moves and movements that the subjects chose to perform. Also, there is often a more self-conscious performative quality in the execution of any dancing done before a camera. There are of course many other reasons why building one’s knowledge of a social dance from a single film is not good scholarly practice – all this is said to emphasize that this film clip must be viewed within the context of the overall research.

The silent film is black and white and includes three different partnered dances including a variation of a Ring Shout and possibly a Turkey Trot. The last section is an obvious Texas Tommy and retains some water damage on the film itself. The camera angle gives the audience a view of the back and right walls of a resort. In the back of the establishment, a band consisting of a flute, upright piano, a clarinet, a euphonium (similar to a tuba) and drums keep an upbeat rhythm for the clientele. In front of them and along the side wall are small round tables allowing for three to four chairs each, cramming
about 16 patrons into the space seen through the camera. Three waiters continually squeeze themselves between the tables and the dance floor that is in the foreground.

The light floods into the establishment originating on the camera’s left. Judging from the shadows, the light source could likely come from sunlight, possibly placing the location outside. The ground could be compacted dirt, especially if the establishment is outside. However, judging by the way the dancers’ shoes hit the surface and the reaction of their bodies, it might be concluded that the foundation was a hard surface, perhaps wood. Further supporting this hypothesis, the male dancers early in the film often shuffle their feet without any evidence of kicking up dust. With so little support I am not completely convinced either way regarding whether the resort is outside or what type of floor it uses.

One item of note that may tip the opinion toward the resort being outside is the unrehearsed entrance of a dog onto the dance floor. The dog jumps on the dancers who ignore him – probably because of the filming or perhaps the velocity of their spin at that moment. The audience, however, is annoyed and quickly catches the dog and holds it until a waiter whisks it off screen. Though dogs and dirt floors could have equally occupied some of the dives of the Barbary Coast, this resort, with its decently dressed patrons and décor, probably would not have considered either the dirt or the dog kindly.

Still, whether the establishment was outdoors or not, one final thought is that the décor of the two walls seen in the picture is of decent quality and not likely to be found outside and exposed to the elements. An explanation could be that it was a film set, but the dancing, the atmosphere, the dog, and the audience’s actions do not really support this interpretation.

Notably, the dancing in the film does not appear to be staged. First, the people in the background do not appear to be acting. They are coolly enjoying the dancers on the floor and the drinks that they order. The man in the left corner seems to have a cold, hiding his sneezes while he continually blows his nose. A dog in a staged performance is often a comical element, but in this case it is an annoyance and not perceived as humorous. Finally, during the Texas Tommy dance, a man on the side intrigued by the dancing, stands up and pulls some change from his pocket, counts it, looks around at his friends, and tosses it on the dance floor. The dancers, musicians, staff, and guests all
appear to be African Americans. The patrons are dressed in presentable pedestrian clothing, as are the resort’s staff. The dancers are perhaps the most telling. They do not appear to be performing to the camera. Their backs are often to the camera, and they are focusing on each other and seem to be having a good time. They do not even seem to be performing to their audience in the establishment. They are dressed as their audience is—nothing flashy. The women wear long dresses which include corsets of the time period (especially evident by their posture and movement range) and heeled shoes, while the men wear pants, jackets and either a bowtie or necktie. Most are wearing dark colors, except for the men’s simple white shirts. Although many of the resorts in the Barbary Coast provided entertainment as well as a dance floor for their patrons, these dancers are obviously social dancers and not the night’s entertainment. This opinion is supported by the reaction of the crowd who act indifferently towards the dancers, but who do clap casually at the end of the Texas Tommy tune. They are focused upon getting service from the waiters, on their companions, and on their drinks—nothing is over-exaggerated as it would be in a staged performance.

Assuming that this version of the Texas Tommy is a social dance performed later (1914) in the Barbary Coast by African Americans, the dance itself may now be examined. The Texas Tommy is the last dance in the clip; the film is cut after each of the two previous dances. There is a single couple on the dance floor, whereas the other dances utilized four couples. The dance floor is small, and due to the scope of the dance, the dancers barely pull off some of the movements within the provided space. The two main sections of this Texas Tommy dance are a revolving movement that ends in a breakaway and a step-hop partnering; both movement ideas are repeated and varied.

The man uses an African-influenced “get down” posture with an action-ready stance, a relaxed pelvis, tilted upper body and bent knees. The woman, even within the circular force of the turns, is upright and within the rotations leans her upper body back slightly. That she is likely wearing a fairly restricting corset explains why she does not match her partner’s posture. But despite this, their weight changes are grounded. While the rotating sections force the dancers to travel slightly in a counterclockwise direction around the small floor, the step-hop section does not travel. There is a strong circular
momentum produced in the rotating section, creating the forceful breakaway that the partners struggle to control at times.

The couple connects with each other through a firm hold that is untraditional. The man and woman clutch each other’s triceps just above the elbow, while the man’s right hand holds her back and the woman’s left grasps his upper bicep. This partnering position remain relatively constant throughout the entire dance, but allows only for some variation, such as a two handed open position, when performing some of their variations upon the basics. Because of the speed in which the movement is executed the woman does not add much improvisation to the dance, even during the breakaway.

Within the rotating section the man creates momentum with a grounded step using counterbalance in the opposite direction from which the preparatory step explodes. The couple begins turning to the beat of the music, and completes two to six rotations before the breakaway. In their breakaway he sends her into a free spin using the direction of the rotation to propel her away from him. He catches her right hand and lands in a counterbalanced grounded stretch. It is not a violent throw, but there does seem to be a risky element to the movement. The couple immediately transitions out of the position into more rotations. (See figure 25)

Between the series of rotations the partners perform a different section of the dance. They use a step-hop pattern, establishing the rhythm of a second basic step, allowing for deviations from this rhythm producing other variations of movement. They begin in a facing partnered position using a two-handed open connection. From this position they perform the basic step twice, and then perform a variation of it with back-to-back barrel turns, eventually returning to the step-hop basic and then their original turning section. The second time they revisit this step-hop section they remain in the

Figure 25: Turning section with the breakaway
strong closed connection as in the rotating section and proceed to execute a number of slightly complicated underarm turns for the woman. The dancers continue into another rotating section. (See figure 26)

![Figure 26: Step-Hop section](image)

The final segment of their Texas Tommy ends with a slightly different partnering and different basic step. There are only a few seconds of this segment before the film cuts off. The section seems to resemble the type of glide step that many sources attribute to the Texas Tommy. The couple is partnered in a skating side-by-side connection and proceeds to perform slightly different footwork from the previous step-hop basic. (See figure 27)

![Figure 27: Gliding section](image)
Breakdown of the Texas Tommy

Three distinct sections of the Texas Tommy dance can be identified within the references presented here taken as a whole. Most of these sources single out a combination of two of these sections without mention of a third. However, this is easily explained when considering that the dance changed over time and the society in which it was danced varied. Some sections were simply dropped, while others were not prevalent until later. The three major sections consist of a rotating part, a step-hop basic, and a gliding segment.

From the beginning of this study it appeared evident that to understand the Texas Tommy best, a recreation of the dance needed to be attempted to discern the intricacies of the movement. The lack of multiple visual sources led me to this conclusion. I felt the need to combine my research into one visual study. To recreate this dance I used a fellow Lindy Hopper, whose movement quality in the execution of the Lindy Hop (a older dance in the African American social dance vein) resembles the more aggressive, athletic, and grounded style of the second generation Harlem Lindy Hoppers.18

During the documentation we utilized the Jazz Dance Foundation’s film and Newman’s dance manual Dances of Today, both produced in 1914. To supplement this information we relied on the multiple interviews that both Stearns and Stoddard conducted. My partner was also required to become familiar with the references and history of the Texas Tommy previously written here.

The music used was a virtual orchestration created from the Texas Tommy Dance score from the Passing Show of 1912. The full score was copied from the Shubert Archives in New York City, then rewritten in a digital format, which was then virtually orchestrated and mastered into a final recording. The product’s performance is conscious of the style of the music composed and played during the early 1910s.

Approaching the rotating section first, the posture of the dance was the initial surprise. The footwork produced a modified chaîné, a traveling turn using alternating feet. We did this facing each other using the strong tricep hold that the dancers on the film clip utilized, while allowing my feet to fall next to his. Both of us began using an African American style posture as in Lindy Hop. This posture required our center to pull
away from each other while keeping our feet and upper body closer. However, to produce the rotation’s traveling aspect, this posture did not work. After further study of the film we realized that while the leader did indeed employ the posture, the woman was forced by her corset to stand straighter and lean back in the turning with her upper body. Upon applying this discovery, the rotation worked. We also placed emphasis on our weight changes. To accomplish the required speed, connection, style, and posture of the dance, both the leader and follower need to use a grounded transfer of weight.

To find the power with which to begin the turns the leader applies a preparatory force in the opposite direction from that in which he intends to propel himself and his follower. Once turning, the momentum and power build enough that if released in the direction of the spin, the follower is discharged with force. The movement proved tricky and involved practiced timing. The release or breakaway is a free spin in the film, where the leader completely disconnects from the follower, then precariously catches her right hand at the last moment in a facing position. The dancers have the least control of this movement. This interpretation of the breakaway complements the complaints of Texas Tommy followers being thrown off the stage, along with the description of the dance being acrobatic by other observers. Another translation of the Texas Tommy’s breakaway is found in the present Texas Tommy move used in a variety of contemporary Swing genres. In this variation the man places his partner’s right hand behind her back, while reaching around her with his other hand to catch it. He finishes the switch before turning her in order never to break their connection. This particular execution is awkward at faster paces and did not seem to be a good solution, especially with the strong gripping partnership that the turning section required. After working through the original solution that the film provided, it was easy to determine how the second variation of the breakaway might have developed. In order to assure that her partner might have enough time to catch her hand, a nervous follower would likely move her right hand around behind her back as she started the free turn, especially if she is less hindered by dress and undergarments. Regardless, the best solution for the combination of posture, speed, and steps that the dance required was the first breakaway as seen on the film.

Transitioning between rotations from the breakaway, or into the next sections of the dance, necessitated a quick rebounding of momentum from the final stance of the
breakaway. Our first instinct was to sit into the final stance. However, due to the follower’s corset, she lacks the ability to contract her torso to absorb the momentum to match the leader. Instead, a quick rebound is more effective and also allows for smoother transitions and overall flow of the dance.

The next section, employing the step-hop basic, created some confusion. Many sources, including the interviews, sheet music, film, and dance manuals referenced this pattern. The dancer stepped and hopped to the side while kicking the opposite foot to the other side, then repeated the movement on the other foot. After completion, the movement is followed by four alternating steps or runs. The basic produced a loose step, hop-kick, step, hop-kick, run, run, run, run pattern. However, the sources did not agree on which foot the move should begin. To produce the turns effectively in later variations we chose the film’s version, allowing the leader to step with his right foot first, to kick his left, while the follower mirrors him. Later, upon further examination of the film, there did not seem to be any discrepancy from the dance manuals, for it appears that the leader may start with his left foot. This would then mean that the back-to-back barrel turn variation begins its turn on the second step kick instead of the first. In performing the later back-to-back barrel turn series we found that we relied on a basic to prep the turn, however, starting the turn on the second hop-kick allows for the first hop-kick to become the prep.

The film also shows a useful variation of the step-hop basic, which consists of four step-kicks, completely dropping the runs. This agrees with the open and improvisational manner that the Texas Tommy was described to have in many of the written references. Also, it allowed both series of turns to be executed with ease. In the recreation of the Texas Tommy we have choreographed both variations.

Both movement variations or “moves” seen on the film use different turns and partner positioning. Instead of taking the liberty to create other variations as would have been done in the Texas Tommy dance, we copied these to ensure accuracy for our recreation. In continued research and exploration of the Texas Tommy, I believe it would be important to create other variants to remain within the creative, flexible and improvisational spirit of the Texas Tommy.
Chapter 4

1 Researchers on more contemporary dance forms have an abundant amount of film along with a significant number of the original performers still living. Consequently dances, like the Lindy Hop, have been reproduced effectively.


4 Levy, Suzanne. “A Toxen Worm, 1910-1921,” clipping file Shubert Archives

5 Worm, A. Toxen. Letter to Mr. J. J. Shubert (22 April 1912).


8 Ibid p.128.

9 The terms Jitterbug, Lindy, and Lindy Hop are often used interchangeably to describe the same dance.


13 Ibid p 164

14 Ibid p 35

15 Ibid p 60

16 Placing the dance in its cultural context and reviewing the evidence presented in this paper, this seems a likely conclusion. To further investigate this theory one might compare the sheet music for “King Chanticleer” a song popular for the version of the
Texas Tommy done in San Francisco, and compare it to the “Texas Tommy Swing” music published later in New York City.

17 The many dancehalls in the Barbary Coast were referred to as resorts.

18 This leader is also fluent in other genres of dance including Hip Hop, Break dancing and Ballet. I felt that this combination gave him the understanding of how he needed to manipulate his body and at the same time produce the style and energy of the Texas Tommy. As a concert dancer who is confident in Lindy Hop and other styles of vernacular dancing I felt that I was a more than adequate follower for the experiment.
Some incorrect histories assert that the Texas Tommy and the Apache are closely related, but a detailed research and extensive examination of primary materials shows they are not. These genealogies claim that the breakaway first appeared in the Texas Tommy and the Apache and that it is the definitive connection between them. However, they miss an even earlier form of the breakaway using the one-handed connection, found in vernacular dances of the Bowery. Though detailed investigation into this earlier introduction of the breakaway is beyond the scope of this study, these early Bowery dances will be briefly discussed. The focus of this chapter, however, is to provide an accurate comparison of the differences between the Texas Tommy and the Apache.

The Texas Tommy was a rousing dance that became popular in the slums of the port of San Francisco where sailors, prostitutes, and much of the city’s black population congregated in the unruly local dance halls. Danced to the new Ragtime music, its wild, fast, and vivacious qualities characterized the Barbary Coast and represented the iconic wild west.

The Apache dance most likely developed in the 1890s in the Parisian slums and dancehalls. These slums were infamous for their raucous nightlife and thugs, called “apaches” because of their "savage" behaviors. Parisians adored myths about the American wild west – certainly since William Cody's Wild West Show, with Native American sharp shooters and warriors, was a featured attraction at the 1889 Paris Exposition Universelle. Apache Indians were warlike, resistant to the end, the last hold-outs against western expansion, and emblematic of the untamed fighters who would not give in to authority. The Apache dance is thought to have evolved from the valse chaloupée, a rocking waltz that gained prominence at the turn of the century in the Parisian underground after the rage for the earlier can-can. The Apache dance had the same appeal as the Texas Tommy, but it capitalized on the couple’s rough, subversive movement that epitomized the relationship between the hoodlum apache and his woman.
The Texas Tommy and the Apache are highly regarded in the evolution of social partner dances since they both claim, and are recognized historically for, the innovation of the breakaway – when the couple separates from a closed face-to-face position into an open, one-handed connection. In fact, newspaper articles, periodical descriptions, and interviews of the time support these claims. The Apache gained the greatest newspaper coverage from 1909 to 1910, while the Texas Tommy received its fame in 1912. Despite the fact that the social dances developed earlier, they appeared onstage – suspiciously – around the same time, further perpetuating the confusion between the two dances.

Citing alleged geographical differences and the vernacular forms’ chronological separation, other researchers differentiate between the Apache and the Texas Tommy. The Apache was exoticized because of its Parisian heritage and controversial sadomasochistic performative mode, whereas the Texas Tommy possessed an upbeat “Frisco style.” Although the theatrical Apache and Texas Tommy captured America’s attention around the same time, as social dances they began at different times. The Texas Tommy developed around 1906 on the Barbary Coast of San Francisco, achieving more general recognition in the 1910s. The Apache, on the other hand, is a slightly older dance. The real truth in this ongoing controversy, however, is that neither dance has been sufficiently researched.
Peculiar Predecessors to the Texas Tommy;  
Disputed Geographies, Time Periods, and Lineage

Early American exhibition dance relatives of the Apache certainly existed. Little is known about these slap-stick semi-tough couples dances. More detailed research about these forms is beyond the scope of this thesis, but it would be a worthy investigation. Many questions exist about the origins of these early dances – particularly in relationship to the dramatic American appearance in 1908 of the fully developed Apache.

What is incontrovertible, however, is the filmed evidence. Both the “Bowery Waltz” (1897) and “A Tough Dance” (1902) were filmed by Thomas Edison’s Mutoscope Pictures and, despite the fact that the Edison footage only survives as tiny dance snippets lasting a few seconds, the clips reveal useful movement material. They provide bits of movement vocabularies that eventually show up in the Apache, nicely fitted together and codified.

The “Bowery Waltz” is so named because of the types of characters who dance it. “Bowery” was a code word to signify Manhattan’s worst slum, saloon-infested area, and its Irish inhabitants. In the 1890s, Bowery Irish were despised as the lying and thieving under-class, often considered lower that the city’s African-American population. The dancers play a down-and-out drunken couple attempting to waltz. Dressed in ragged everyday clothes, they seem happily surprised to remain upright and waltzing.

This burlesque of the waltz, is performed by a young man and woman. The dancing couple overemphasize every standard movement of the exhibition. Considering the date of the film and its lighting (from above), there is every reason to believe it was photographed in the Black Maria, the Edison studio in East Orange, New Jersey.4

The couple is ludicrously intoxicated, their attitudes are sloppily friendly. As in the later 1902 “A Tough Dance,” this waltz travels around the stage counter-clockwise, dancers in a closed position, clutching each other. They temporarily disconnect, get “lost,” and then sighting each other, they happily re-connect. Their technique for staying upright is to precariously balance against each other’s shoulders. She is as pliable as a rag doll, and sometimes he drags her.
The key movement occurs when he abruptly throws her down to his left side then pulls her right back up to a standing position – a little slip or toss that seems unavoidable, funny, and dexterous. This throw-down also will be seen in the 1902 “A Tough Dance” and in the 1908 popular dance craze the Apache, but it will be changed, altered and smoothly integrated into the choreography. The breakaway, the drag, as well as a greatly expanded side-to-side toss (the Box Car) are moves retained in the present-day Lindy Hop. (See Figure 28)

![Figure 28: "A Tough Dance"](image)

In addition to the indication in Kemp Niver’s description that this “Tough dance” is a version of the Apache, the dance itself provides evidence. The costume is that of the apache, the rough quality and “narrative” are also similar. (See Figure 28)

As supported by the records of the United States Copyright office, the film was copyrighted December 9, 1902 by Thomas Edison’s American Mutoscope & Biograph Co. The recorded footage and the date of the film positions “A Tough Dance” as an earlier American cousin of the Apache. The couple in the film, Kid Foley and Sailor Lil, dance in what appears to be in an outdoors setting. The Library of Congress (LOC) description of the short is found in its publication Early Motion Pictures.

Two people imitate the celebrated dance of the French apache. As the film begins, a man dressed in rough clothing approaches a woman, also dressed in tattered garments, who is standing near the center of the camera position. They begin to accentuate their shoulder movements and, at the end of the film, are hitting one another and rolling about on the floor. The participants were Kid Foley and Sailor Lil, who claimed to be the champion performers of this popular Bowery dance.

The descriptions of the “Bowery Waltz” and “A Tough Dance” were researched by Kemp Niver, who headed the rephotographing of Edison’s collection from the 1940s
through completion in the 1960s. Mr. Niver prepared the descriptions using various resources including printed material from the American Mutoscope & Biograph Co. 

From the 1902 date of the Edison filming, the 1940-60 description written by Niver, and other evidence various scenarios are suggested. A dance very much like the Apache was already a well-established exhibition dance in America six years before the French Apache arrived in the United States, suggesting the existence of an Americanized, more light-hearted branch of this dramatic, sadomasochistic family of dances. Or, the newspapers are six years off in their dates of the Apache’s arrival. Or, Niver may have written the Apache comparison later in order to assist the viewer by comparing it to a familiar dance. If it did indeed come from Edison’s notes, then America may have established its own branch of Apache dances.

The Niver description indicates that the “Tough dance” was popular in America before 1902, while also establishing that this earlier American version was of French origin. In a single reference to the Tough dance in *The New York Times*, the Bowery is added, reading “Bowery Tough Dance.” The 1906 article advertises an upcoming performance:

> Amongst the many original entertainments at Forest Park this season may be mentioned the Bowery Tough Dance, held on Friday evening, and, although there is little left nowadays of the Bowery tough, it was nevertheless an excellent imitation, and was thoroughly enjoyed by the many New Yorkers summering at this popular mountain resort.

**Geography**

The stereotype of the dangerous slum dweller became a favorite figure in the 1900s in Europe and America. The dancing master Joseph Smith claimed to have lived and embraced this lifestyle as a means of learning the Apache dance. “There are twenty thousand low, murderous, cowardly, skulking characters in Paris called apaches. These men are, in a way, like the gangsters of New York, though neither so cowardly nor so treacherous – that is, they do not betray their pals to save their own miserable skins.” The apaches of Paris were considered dangerous men who preyed on the unsuspecting tourist. But, his weakness was a woman. Although he was enticed by her, he often asserted ultimate control by killing her and thereby eliminating the temptation. The Apache dance was a dramatic enactment of the relationship between the apache and his
woman. As a stage presentation, it allowed the public to be shocked, titillated and thrilled while remaining unharmed by the association, safe in the security of their seats. The audience could vicariously experience a passionate dance.

Newspapers in New York City covered the Apache’s appearance on stage for over a year before it arrived on San Francisco’s vaudeville stages. In December, 1908, Alice Eis and Bert French were the first couple as reported in *The New York Times* to introduce the French importation. The Apache dance exploded onto San Francisco stages later, in March of 1910, showing that the French dance traveled across the United States from east to west.\(^\text{12}\)

**Time Period**

It has become a sort of madness in New York, the desire to see dancing.... Isadora Duncan brought us the Greek dance, which later was kept alive by Maud Allen and other imitators of Miss Duncan; Ruth St. Denis introduced Hindoo dance; M and Mlle Dearly at the Moulin Rouge in Paris created the Apache dance, which has since been given in every possible form in America, ending with Polaire’s vivid performance at Hammerstein’s this Summer; the Salome dance was a craze of itself for a Summer, and Mary Garden, Eva Tanguay, and Gertrude Hoffman all served to show how to dance for the head of a prophet; last season the greatest of the Russian Dancers, Pavlowa and Mordkin, brought their art to the Metropolitan Opera House and made that temple of melody yield so completely to their influence that they became a part of the bill three or four times a week.\(^\text{13}\)

American society devoured a host of foreign-inspired dance crazes in the early twentieth century. During the apex of this trend, European and American publics were flooded with fantasized and romantic images of the “East,” a constructed “Orient” referring to a non-specific geographic location that could include Northern Africa (Egypt), the Middle East, and the majority of Asia. Although the Apache dance was not from the “East,” it was from the artistically exotic city of Paris, home of the *avant-garde* artists, the demi-monde, and a squalid underworld.

Americans seem to have been obsessed by Paris and its underworld during the 1910s. During a single week, New York City vaudeville revues featured “A Night in the Slums” at the Manhattan Opera House, “The Queen of Bohemia” at the Murray Hill Theatre, and “The Queens of the Jardin de Paris” at the Olympia.\(^\text{14}\)
The Apache in its partnered stage-dance form remained in the public mainstream of New York City from 1909 until the summer of 1910. The dance reportedly was popular on the Parisian stage during the summer of 1908, and was familiar to Americans tourist. In the United States, the dance gained the most fame from performances on the Vaudeville stage, although it did appear in a few full-length musicals as a featured dance, usually in the finale. Later, as the dance developed into subsequent variations, it was used as a climax in which the heroine fought the apache for her life.

The timeline of the Apache as recorded by the press has a variety of conflicting premieres. The earliest review of a stage performance discovered to date was that of Laura Gerite and Bert French. “The much-heralded ‘Apache dance,’ a French importation, was performed for the first time last night…” However, Joseph Smith built his fame on the idea that he introduced the Apache to America after living in Paris. Tony Macaluso also claimed to have invented the dance, whereas Maurice Mouvet claimed his friend Max Dearie created it.

Maurice Mouvet himself was a famous Apache dancer in New York City in 1911. He lived in Paris for twelve years after moving there with his parents, and while there he became a renowned dancing master. He even apparently introduced a version of the Apache at the Café de Paris in France during 1907. (See figure 29) In May of 1910 his wife died, after which he was persuaded to return to America. He and his second partner and wife became known for their Apache and other dances, rivaling the fame of Vernon and Irene Castle.

Joseph Smith wrote a great deal about his discovery and codification of the French Apache dance. (See Figure 30) In the same article that advertised Joseph Smith and Louise Alexander’s first appearance together performing the Apache, Mr. Smith was cited in the accompanying lengthy editorial for his explanations of his innovation. Joseph Smith and Louise Alexander, whom he chose for her “French” appearance, were recognized Vaudevillian dancers. When the “happy stars” were spotted driving, they were again remarked on for introducing the Apache. It is an indication of both the dancing couple’s and the dance’s fame that even a daily excursion was newsworthy.
Figure 29: Dancer From Paris Introduces New Steps
In an article enticing audiences to the upcoming *Miss Nobody from Starland* the writer promoted the play by informing his readers that Joseph Smith, the first to stage *The Black Crook* and first to introduce the Apache to America, was busy drilling the chorus girls through routines for the upcoming play. However incorrect his assertions were, Joseph Smith repeatedly distinguished himself by claiming to be the inventor or importer of numerous dances in America, including the Apache, repeating this claim in an angry Letter to the Editor published in January of 1914, restating his stage inventions of the Tango, Turkey Trot, and Apache. Wherever the truth lay Smith was notorious for his exaggerations, as evident in this 1909 article.

Joseph Smith, the dancer, who opens in vaudeville at the Fifth Avenue today with the Apache dance, was the subject of an amusing story told by a vaudeville player at the Metropole last evening. The player said Smith was in Chicago at the Sherman House telling what things he would do to the thugs of Chicago if they tried to hold him up. ‘I’d twist their noses off,’ said Smith. Little Arthur Dunn, about four and a half feet high, was present, and just for fun hit Smith a blow in the stomach and said: ‘Twist mine off.’ Smith smiled an unhappy smile and talked no more about the jest.

The Apache’s fame in America was at its peak between 1909 and 1910. The Texas Tommy reached its peak of popularity in 1912, according to references in *The New York Times*, gaining its fame in San Francisco in the summer of 1910. Before reaching New York City and the upper society in San Francisco, additional time was required for it to develop.

In March 1910, the Apache was featured in the musical *La Petite Grosse*. This is just months before the introduction of the Texas Tommy into San Francisco’s elite society. It is the only evidence in print that suggests the possibility that the Apache may have influenced the Texas Tommy’s codified form.
Mise-en-scène and Music

Atmosphere and Costume

The atmosphere of darkness, oppression, submission, allure, and violence created by the Apache on stage remained constant with each variation of the dance. The setting of the dance was a dingy dimly-lit bar or cabaret, which included a small empty space in its center, presumably for dancing. The air was filled with smoke as the customers quietly whispered amongst themselves. One source summarizes it thus: “the atmosphere hangs like a pall of heaviness.”

The Apache represented the American stereotype of the French underworld. Joseph Smith, in one of his first interviews about the dance, described his experience with the apaches in Paris in great detail.

Mr. Joseph Smith, the Apache lover in this dance, conceived it after several weeks’ study of the characters and customs of the underworld in Paris. He lived with them, joining them in their methods of life, for the purpose of getting a true picture of these things… ‘I have seen many dances said to have been taken from the thug life of Paris, and when I visited that quarter of the French capital I found that none was the true picture of the horrible though fascinating brutality shown in the passion of the pairs of the men and women of the underworld. I studied them, I saw them in all their brutality, which shows best their dances and songs, … It is truly awful, yet it is life almost as primitive as in the days of cave dwellers, who lived by brute force, and to whom women were slaves for the convenience and comfort of their masters – men.’

Figure 31: Joseph Smith
The costuming also played an essential role in the Apache dance. The man wore a fitted shirt covered by a jacket, easily identified by the knotted red rag encircling his neck and the beret covering his ratty hair. The brim of the cap cast a shadow over his scruffy face, obscuring his eyes. The woman often wore a full dress or skirt including a petticoat. Her tight-fitting blouse contained a low neckline hidden in the beginning of the pantomime by a shawl. The actress often began the dance with her hair up, later allowing it to fall loose for added effect. By the end of the dance, her clothes were often torn as a result of the violence enacted upon her. The costumes of the performer became an essential device in the dance, affecting the movement and the audience’s perception of the violence portrayed. (See figure 31) Joseph Smith apparently chose Miss Alexander for the part because her appearance and spirit mimicked that of the women of the Parisian ghetto.\(^{30}\)

Even her long hair became intertwined into the plot of the performance. During rehearsal her locks fell from its bun amidst the violent movement of the dance, fond of the effect Mr. Smith had weighted hair bone pins made to exaggerate the trick.\(^{31}\)

Whereas the Apache represented the dark French underworld, the Texas Tommy portrayed an upbeat San Francisco and a spirited wild west. The Texas Tommy’s original reputation was that of a “going slumming” dance. San Franciscans were tantalized by the Barbary Coast, the city’s dance hall and red light district, notorious across America for its danger and good times. After the great 1906 fire, the district became better known for its dance halls than for its prostitution.

As the dance transitioned to New York City, so did its reputation. At first, in shows such as the *Follies of 1911*, the Texas Tommy still symbolized San Francisco but as “Mr. Tommy” progressed in his stage career he began to epitomize the entire wild west. This new representation was apparent through the dance’s new costuming when it entered the vaudevillian stage. “The ‘Texas Tommy’ dancers from San Francisco made their first appearance at the Winter Garden last night… they were dressed in cowboy and cowgirl costumes, and carried revolvers, with which they punctuated the dancing.”\(^{32}\) As the Texas Tommy dancers continued to perform, the apparel became an established device in their act. If the Texas Tommy originally characterized the vivacious but squalid
Barbary Coast, as it migrated East, its temperament evolved to symbolize the fast, exuberant, athletic, yet “wholesome” wild west.

To understand the relationship between the Apache and the Texas Tommy, consider this analogy: The Apache is as distinctive from the Texas Tommy as the Tango is distinctive from the Lindy Hop. The comparison is accurate. Both the Apache and the Tango have similar dark narratives, whereas the Texas Tommy and the Lindy Hop are indigenous American dances that exude a spirited, vigorous young America at its zenith. “In its [the Texas Tommy’s] essential naïveté and suggestion of wholesome and careless horseplay it presents a marked contrast to the grim ‘throwback’ to savagery displayed in those dances originating in Paris which depict the psychology of the ‘Apache’ of the slums of that city.”

Although both dances originated in the slums, the Apache and the Texas Tommy embodied different stereotypes with distinctive performance styles.

Music

Music and dancing at the turn of the Twentieth century heavily influenced each other. Ragtime music, especially, often had corresponding dances. The sheet music title, its colorful graphic illustrations on the front cover, and its lyrics often described the dance – along with printed dance instructions sometimes contained within the sheet music. The relationship spurred the industry known as Tin Pan Alley. However, the Apache’s music was not a Rag, but a lively waltz, reflecting its valse chaloupée Parisian heritage.

The first known printing of Apache sheet music appeared in 1909 and was titled “L’Amour de L’Apache.” The music featured the Mons G. Mollaso dance team in photographs of their performance of the Apache in the show Queen of the Moulin Rouge on the cover. Subsequent American songs for the Apache were published in 1916, 1935, and 1950. (See figure 32)
One of the most interesting versions of the Apache sheet music, “Tanets apashei”, or “Danse des Apaches,” was published in St. Petersburg, Russia in 1914. The song was originally composed in 1904 by the German composer Paul Lincke. Lincke was recognized for his piece “The Glow Worm,” and was renowned for other cakewalk and ragtime compositions. The composer attained a two-year commitment in Paris where he directed the famous orchestra of the Théâtre Folies Bergères. It was here that he would perhaps have seen the Apache performed and thus composed his Apache dance music.
The Texas Tommy music and Apache music were fundamentally different. The Apaches were usually in triple meter, whereas the Texas Tommies were played as a duple meter rag. The most prominent sheet music for the Texas Tommy is the “Texas Tommy Swing.” Originally copyrighted by a San Francisco World’s Fair Publishing Co., the song premiered in New York with the dance in the *Ziegfeld Follies of 1911*. Containing a melody similar to “Turkey in the Straw” (from 1834) in common or 4/4 time, the piece was to be played at a moderate tempo with a bouncing base line. The syncopated rhythm would have kept the dance floor moving at about 130-140 beats per minute.

The Texas Tommy was obviously not danced exclusively to the “Texas Tommy Swing” as the dance was developed well before the song. It was danced to many of the Ragtime songs during its time. The “Texas Tommy Swing” as well as many other songs that the dance was known to be performed to, was in cut or 2/4 time, at an allegro (fast) tempo. The defining difference between the Apache and Texas Tommy music is that the Apache was in triple meter, while the latter kept a duple meter.

**Narrative**

The Apache stands out because of its dramatic narrative. This melodramatic pantomime became the substance and form of the dance. Joseph Smith repeatedly claimed the adaptation and introduction of both the Apache and the Tango. He stated in a mini-autobiography that appeared in *The Saturday Post* in 1914, “I was the first to do the Tango in this country. I brought it over from Spain, where the natives have danced it for generations. It is nothing more or less than the Spanish Fandango modified and adapted for ballroom purposes. The claim that the Tango was brought from the Argentine Republic is absurd…” The Tango and the Apache have similar, if not identical narratives. The pantomimic element of the dances might be interpreted as the theatrical device upon which Mr. Smith relied.

The apache and his woman entered the dark bar. The woman seduces the apache, and enamored by her, he demands to dance with her. The control of the relationship is transferred from the woman to the apache as the dance progresses. He commands further domination over his lover as he becomes envious of her other admirers. The dance grows more violent, corresponding to his mood. He begins to throw her to the ground away
from him, then desperately pulls her body back to him, struggling with his feelings. His brutality escalates as he drags the woman across the floor by her hair. She does not reject him and is unafraid of his aggression. Instead she is completely enamored with his image.

Dancing was used to transition between each vicious motif; generally with a waltz variation employing a vernacular embrace and a bent posture. The pantomime ends spectacularly with the death of the woman as the apache cuts her throat.³⁷ (See Figure 33)
This notorious melodrama comprised the majority of the action found in the Apache dance. Partner dancing was only used as a transition between motifs and was not emphasized. After the dance craze was finished, musicals such as *The Mysterious Miss Apache* borrowed the narrative of the dance for its plots.\(^{38}\) Thus, the essential element of the Apache was its narrative, whereas the Texas Tommy remained a partnered dance that was often a featured segment of a show but did not attempt to further the show’s plot.

**Stage and Social Dance; Steps, Movement, and Form**

**Stage and Social Dance**

On stage the Apache always featured only one couple at a time. The public adored these dance teams, and prominent Apache couples included Alice Eis and Bert French; M. Molasso and Mlle. Corie; Miss Alexander and Joseph Smith; and Maurice Mouvet and Joan Sawyer or Florence Walton.\(^{39}\)

Although the Apache dance enjoyed its greatest success on the stage in America, there is one suggestion that the dance might have had a brief life as a social partner dance in the latter half of 1911. One article reporting on a meeting of a dancing master’s congress in Berlin, claims that the American dancing masters were “horrified” at the Apache. But, the author continues, some society circles in the West end of New York City were considering the dance.\(^{40}\)

Connecting its fame to the rage for Salome dances, the Apache developed into solos performed by a female apache this time, who captured her victim.\(^{41}\) Mlle. Polaire’s femme fatale Apache dance in the summer of 1910 marked the beginning of this trend. The heroine, threatened by the male apache intruder, danced to deceive him into trusting her, and, at the opportune moment, she took his knife and stabbed him, saving herself.\(^{42}\) Although the characters, props, and narrative of the French partnered dance remained, the dance was drastically altered in America.

In contrast, the majority of the Texas Tommy acts included more than one couple performing the dance on stage simultaneously. Throughout the year of 1912, a troupe of eight Texas Tommy dancers from San Francisco appeared on the New York stages.\(^{43}\)
Furthermore, the Texas Tommy continued as a popular social dance and a stage dance until the fad dissipated.

**Steps, Movement, and Form**

The Apache and Texas Tommy are celebrated for including the breakaway, when the woman is twisted from closed position to an open one. But in one “variation of the Apache dance … the girl is forced to twist and writhe, is thrown to the floor, [and] crawls on hands and knees to her lover…”

In comparison the “Texas Tommy Swing” lyrics describe the man throwing his arms around his partner’s waist, to spiral her out. If both dances employed the same movement, they are radically different in purpose and aesthetic. The Apache’s breakaway is a violent movement emphasizing the aggressive action of repeatedly throwing the woman to the floor. (See figure 34-35) In contrast, the Texas Tommy’s breakaway appears to be a dance move that brings the dance to its climax, accentuating the exhilaration and athleticism of the performance, the same as an aerial move in Lindy Hop.

As mentioned earlier, a contemporary Lindy Hop step mimicking this breakaway, in fact, is called either the Texas Tommy or the Apache (pronounced like the Native American tribe) and is used as a variation of the swing-out, the dance’s basic breakaway movement.
Figure 35: Apache Illustrations
Incident to the pantomime, which is very eloquent at the Orpheum, there is the “Apache dance,” which is more gymnastic than graceful, more startling than sensational and as danced last night by Mlle. M. Corio and Fernand Coudray was something in the nature of a test of endurance in which the girl endured the most. Hair pullings, slaps on the shoulder, violent jerkings around the floor, wild swings in the air while La Petite Gosse holds on to her partner with a necessary ardor in order to avoid being catapulted into the orchestra; locked gyrations savage glarings in each other’s eyes and other elements of like character make up this imported Parisian tidbit from the slums.45

The best descriptions of the movements of the Apache come from the 1912 Caffins book, *Dancing and Dancers of Today*. Newspaper and periodical articles concentrated on the performers and the narrative, sensational and sexualized as exemplified by this review: “He saunters down the promenade between the tables. Each foot is advanced with the deliberation of a cat’s and lingers in its tread, and as each advances its side of the body swings slowly forward; so that the stealthiest of the movement winds its way up to the shoulders. Only the head with its apathetic mask remains rigid.”46 Demanding the woman’s attentions, the man began a jerky waltz, broken often by breakaways, less a distinct step and more a repeated brutal throwing of the woman to the ground then dragging her back up into the fray. As the waltz continued, the violence increased.47

The ferocity of the Apache was evident in its physical attributes in Joseph Smith and Louise Alexander’s Apache publicity photos. The caption reads “Strenuous ‘Underworld Dance’ remains one of the features in ‘The Queen of the Moulin Rouge’ at the Circle Theatre.”48

In many photographs the final action of the murder of the female, was depicted as an aerial step. “[The woman] is held upside down by him [her apache love] as an evidence of special tenderness and appreciation, and undergoes various other attacks, presumably amatory and violent certainly.”49 As the woman was held aloft, the man grabbed her throat as if to cut it. The Caffin description supports this image: “the man has forced the girl’s body across his thigh, thrust her head back [to cut her throat].”50 This climax is indicative of the body position found in promotional photographs of American Apache performers. (See figure 36)
Another crucial distinction that separates the Apache and the Texas Tommy is that the Apache was a dramatized waltz. Certainly the newspaper and periodical articles confirm this. The Caffins in their 1912 publication *Dancing and Dancers of Today* state outright that the Apache couple waltzes for the majority of the dance, adding theatrics to capture the mood of the Parisian underworld. The 1909 sheet music of the Apache clearly qualified the composition as a “Valse.” The song’s triple meter in 3/4 supports the Apache’s distinction as a waltz. (See figure 37)

![Figure 37: Apache sheet music](image)

Another important Apache waltz source, is the 1902 Thomas Edison film “A Tough Dance.” This Tough dance was described as “parody of a waltz.”51 It is difficult to ascertain if the couple was dancing in duple or triple meter, due to the lack of music, although at times it appears that they were performing to a duple meter. The meter, in this case, would not support the argument that the dance is a waltz – but the form of the dance does. Their Americanized Tough Dance travels the line-of-dance using a great deal of space on the dance floor. They revolve around each other taking three steps at a time. As they move, the partners allow their bodies to rise and fall with each triple step. These characteristics reflect the features of the waltz.

The embrace was decisively different from that in the traditional waltz. The man in this Americanized Apache held his partner in a bear hug, sometimes placing his hands on her rump. The movement was rough and sporadic, and became athletic as the breakaways intensified. Though the film predates most references to the Apache dance, the dance it portrays is either a more affable Apache, or at least a forerunner. Furthermore
the 1902 date confirms the dance’s relationship to the waltz which was popular at that time.

The Texas Tommy and the Apache had some similarities. Each included the breakaway and a dip ending the dance, and both dances rotated on the dance floor. The foremost differences between the movements of the Texas Tommy and the Apache are in their steps and spatial patterns and music, the Apache using a waltz to transition between motifs. The Texas Tommy rotated around a central partnered axis, generally remaining in the same spot on the dance floor rather than traveling around the line-of-dance. The Texas Tommy is identified by specific steps of glides, and step-hops. Finally, both dances were intensely athletic, but the Texas Tommy had a quick virtuosic athleticism, while the Apache produced a rough abusive energy.

**Conclusion of the Apache Comparison**

The Apache and the Texas Tommy are two different dances as indicated by the dances’ different geographical origins, dates of popularity, and performance and movement elements. The Apache and the Texas Tommy originated in famous ghettos, yet on different continents. Although close chronologically, the two dance crazes occurred in America different years: the Apache from 1909 to 1910 and the Texas Tommy from 1911 to 1912. The moods and emotional intentions associated with each dance are extremely different. One is a seditious and violent enactment, alluding to the Parisian underworld. The other personified in its costumes and mood the fast, energetic and somewhat idealized wild west.

The music for each dance confirms a significant difference. The Apache was danced in triple meter, while the Texas Tommy in a syncopated duple meter. Both dances exploited the breakaway. While the Apache utilized it to emphasize narrative, as a transition between each brutal motif with the waltz, the Texas Tommy utilized the breakaway as a climactic ending to its step-hop and gliding section. The Texas Tommy was danced on and off the stage, while the Apache remained a stage form.
Finally, the Texas Tommy foreshadowed the Lindy Hop by using the famous breakaway as an integrated movement. Partnered “jazz dancing has gone through a strange evolution. It really started with the Texas Tommy.”\textsuperscript{52}
Chapter 5


7 The above description is as accurate an account as can be hoped for.


9 In 1910 Joseph Smith’s skills as a self-promoter made him the most prominent Apache dancer in the press. His status as a dancing master in New York City was built on a strong family dance tradition. His father was George Washington Smith, a famous American dancer in the 1800s, who performed with other celebrated dancers like Fanny Elssler and in notorious ballets such as the Black Crook. Magriel, Paul, ed. Chronicles of the American Dance. (New York: Da Capo Press Inc., 1978) p 187.


12 The Apache and the Texas Tommy did develop as vernacular forms in the slums of their respective cities before being codified and introduced into higher society as theatrical forms. The Apache contrasts the Texas Tommy by its origin in Paris before becoming popular in New York. The two dances literally came from opposite sides of the globe.


23 "Joseph Smith," *New York Public Library for Performing Arts – Clippings* (31 May 1909)

24 "Joseph Smith," *New York Public Library for Performing Arts – Clippings* (6 January 1910)


26 "Smith's Jitsu Didn't Help Him," *New York Public Library for Performing Arts – Clippings* (29 March 1909)


34 Worldcat search
35 "The Apache Dance in "La Petite Gosse"," *San Francisco Chronicle* (28 March 1910)
42 ""He took up the bill providing for the licensing and regulation of dancing academies and halls..."", *New York Times* (7 June 1910) p 9.
45 "The Apache Dance in "La Petite Gosse"," *San Francisco Chronicle* (28 March 1910)
48 *Apache Dancers*, New York Performing Arts Library, Special Collections (photograph) (26 February 1909)


CHAPTER SIX
CONCLUSION

This investigation was prompted by an interest in the disputed origins of the Texas Tommy and its relationships to other vernacular dances during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Analysis of available sources, including innumerable and previously unexamined primary sources, indicates that the Texas Tommy first emerged as a recognized Rag dance on the Barbary Coast. It then traveled through a succession of three west-to-east migrations, culminating in its greatest popularity as both a social and stage dance in New York City in 1912. The research also indicates that while the Texas Tommy and the Apache were general contemporaries and both contained the revolutionizing breakaway, contrary to earlier histories, they are not the same dance.

The Texas Tommy was one of many dance crazes during a time in which America was enamored of dancing. The dance was at the height of its popularity on the social dance floor and on the stage throughout 1912. Obviously the Texas Tommy is not recognized historically for becoming a predominant fad; however its considerable influence resulted from its timing and substance.

Surrounded by short-lived dance fads, which proved to be predominantly gimmicky and profit oriented, the Texas Tommy dance stood out in name and in content. The Animal Dances consisted of modified One Steps, each variation’s foundation based on a comical representation of an animal’s movement. These dances proved easy to learn, and therefore spread rapidly allowing anyone not only to dance, but to innovate as well. The Texas Tommy was not an Animal dance, but was still a substantial dance with recognized vocabulary and a requirement for virtuosity.

The term “Texas Tommy” inspired something more serious than trotting around the dance floor flapping your wings– it represented something vulgar yet alluring–rebellious. Asking a girl to do the Texas Tommy was implying something about whoring to the uninformed follower. It is also significant that the term “Swing” is used simultaneously with both the dance and the music. The Texas Tommy was the first dance to be described by the term “swing,” which later, came to represent, arguably, the most
significant African American dance and music craze in the early Twentieth century. Its name stands alone among a barnyard of other dances, and its adoption of the surname swing places the Texas Tommy in the genealogy of the most predominant African-American dance crazes.

While maintaining the tradition of improvisation, the dance’s form and vocabulary were also vernacularly codified. The Texas Tommy diverged from the presiding institution of comical One Step variations. The Texas Tommy had step patterns and rhythms that supported three distinct movement forms: rotations into a breakaway, a step-hop pattern, and a gliding section. The vocabulary required study, unlike the free forms and interpretations that the Animal dances allowed. The structure of the Texas Tommy was also different in that instead of traveling around the room, its most popular section rotated around itself utilizing the breakaway—revolutionizing couple partnering within the form of the dance itself.

While standing out among its contemporaries and influencing its successors, at least in name, the Texas Tommy’s chronological placement is of vital importance. As mentioned earlier, the dance appeared during a crossroad in American dance and music. African-American influences on American culture culminated into a lasting mixture of European and African traditions creating a new and truly American art form—Jazz. The first indication in mainstream society is Ragtime music, the precursor of Swing. The Texas Tommy is remembered by the later art form, as a significant dance in the establishment of Jazz.

Remnant art forms remain in their successors. The Lindy Hop still contains, in its most basic vocabulary, the “Texas Tommy.” This move is a variation of the Lindy Hop’s basic Swing-out, and is understood to have been a part of the dance’s original vocabulary, and not a recent creation. The move stands out for the Lindy Hop does not contain vocabulary named for the Turkey Trot or other predecessors within the Rag dance genre.

Though perhaps not through direct influence, the Texas Tommy must also be considered a forerunner to the Lindy Hop. For the Lindy’s innovations of the breakaway within the very form of the dance, its stationary tendencies, its virtuositic styling, and its inclusiveness of other dances, all appeared within the Texas Tommy. These elements,
along with the constant reference to the similarities between the two dances mentioned by those who danced the latter, suggest this intimate connection.

The Texas Tommy stands amongst all the Rag Dances as having perhaps the most long term and significant impact upon American vernacular dance. It is arguably the first dance of Swing. The Texas Tommy and its contemporaries serve as a constant reminder of the struggles between the various classes of society and the blending of the cultures that created it.
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Rebecca Strickland began her study of dance—as most do—twirling around the living room as she learned to walk. Training in concert dance she eventually earned a minor in Dance during her undergraduate study. She began to focus on dance history in her involvement in Lindy Hop and her undergraduate honors thesis on the Swing dance. She is an accomplished vernacular dancer: training, teaching, performing, and competing in Lindy Hop, Charleston, Blues, Vernacular Jazz, Balboa, Shag and other Swing genres. In her graduate study she has centered her research on African American Social dance in the early twentieth century to complement her movement expertise.