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Cake Walk

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Cake Walk

The men and women in the Sunday best who grace the top of this keepsake tin are performing the famous Cake Walk, a dance invented by Black people almost two hundred years ago. Heads erect and dressed in their finest garments the dancers strutted and stepped to the delight of their audiences. The name came from the lively contests in which the best dancers would win a cake. "That takes the cake" is an expression you've heard many times, but you may not have known it had its origins at these popular contests.

Cake walk took the Black Belt by storm! From Mobile to Charleston, from Savannah clean down to New Orleans ... they did it everywhere. Before long, the dance made its way to New York City. The Apollo Theatre is generally credited with making the dance popular because they drew the largest crowds and awarded the biggest prizes.

The Cake Walk might not be considered a dance by present standards because it consisted entirely of exuberant walking or strutting. But the more novel or grotesque or high-spirited the performers got, the more the spectators cheered and applauded. Did you ever see a game cock, proud and erect, draw himself up and crow? Now picture a brother struttin' and crowin' and scratchin' in imitation of that feisty bird.

Names were given to the various steps, such as the "Rabbit Waltz," the "Buzzard Lope," or the "Coon Gallop." And all these variations may have evolved from one great storyteller, a slave who decided to liven up his tale of a cockfight by injecting his story with some vigorous actions and gestures.

Your commemorative tin captures an important historical moment – part Black, part American and part of our history. Historical Research Repository, Inc. was established in 1985 primarily to locate, publish, distribute and preserve authentic contributions made by African Americans to history.

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