

Holiday traditions like Christmas, Hanukkah, and Kwanzaa are celebrated today, but did you know that enslaved African Americans celebrated a different tradition in the 1800s known as Jonkonnu?



Tryon Palace's mission is to engage present and future generations in the history of North Carolina from early settlement and development of statehood through the mid-twentieth century by collecting, interpreting and preserving objects, buildings, landscapes and events that enrich understanding of the making of our state and nation.

If you would like to learn more about Jonkonnu, contact Sharon C. Bryant at sharon.bryant@ncdcr.gov or call 252-639-3592.



To become a Foundation Member, contact Tryon Palace at 800-767-1560 or email foundation@tryonpalace.org



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JONKONNU

A Celebration of North Carolina's
African American Heritage and Culture



WHAT IS JONKONNU?

When Africans were captured and sold as slaves, they brought with them many of their religious, ceremonial, and festival traditions. Jonkonnu, also known as John Coonering, was one such Christmastide tradition that tapped into its African spiritual roots through combinations of costumes, music, and dance. The tradition appeared in Jamaica during colonial times, and later spread to other Caribbean islands, Bermuda, and North Carolina.

Revelers participating in Jonkonnu would dress in masks and multi-colored costumes, form a parade line, and travel from house to house clapping, singing, and dancing. During the festivities the performers could put aside their daily toils and enjoy themselves in the celebration. The parade would perform at each house until the homeowners (usually their white masters) came outside to greet the performers and pay them in coins. This was the only time during the year slaves could expect to meet their masters.

JONKONNU AT TRYON PALACE

You and your family can watch and participate in a Jonkonnu performance every holiday season during Tryon Palace's Candlelight festivities. This annual event features a parade of singers, dancers, drummers, and the masked Ragman dressed in a suit of colorful rags. Follow the merry parade from house to house and join in the fun of Jonkonnu.



WHAT HAPPENED TO JONKONNU?

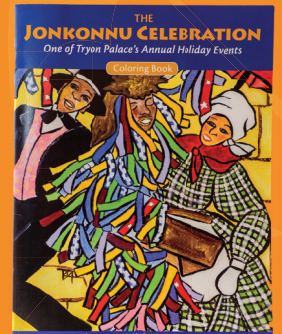
By the late 1800s, Jonkonnu celebration became less frequent in many areas, but remained popular in some places until the turn of the century. By 1900 increasing racial tensions forced African Americans to abandon Jonkonnu, resulting in a disappearance of the celebrations in North Carolina until the late 20th century.



WHAT YOU CAN DO WITH JONKONNU?

Tryon Palace's Jonkonnu celebration reaches beyond the holidays. Free drumming and dancing camps are held throughout the summer for children interested in learning about the joys of Jonkonnu.

Teachers and education programs can now purchase a Jonkonnu activity book with a CD, and are also welcome to make a request for Jonkonnu performances in schools, parades, and other community celebrations.



The Jonkonnu Celebration
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