



## Great Big Yam Potatoes

Through the leadership of Benjamin A. Botkin, chairman of the Joint Committee on Folk Arts of the WPA, state directors of the Music and Writers' Projects were encouraged to document folklore and folk music. Though Botkin encouraged state projects to collect many genres of folklore, there was a consciousness among WPA folklorists that, in the words of Herbert Halpert, "folksong was American folklore." Consequently, the project in Mississippi quickly focused on music.

Herbert Halpert, a young folksong collector and scholar in New York, had access to a recording machine, and, in fact, was recording material in New York City and New Jersey. The idea developed, with Botkin's leadership, that, with a vehicle, Halpert could make a collecting tour through the South, following the leads of state field workers, recording folk music for the Library of Congress. A United States Army ambulance was acquired and repaired; cabinets were built to hold the recording machine, clothes, books, and canned goods, and a small cot was installed. It was in this vehicle that Halpert arrived in Mississippi on May 8, 1939. He was joined by Abbott Ferriss, a young Mississippi native, who would later become a professor of sociology. Ferriss added a valuable dimension to the project, for he knew the indigenous culture of the state. Though not knowledgeable about folklore or folk music, Ferriss served as a tenacious and facile documentarian, and his field notes and photographs increase the value of the recordings many-fold.

A recording machine in Mississippi meant little, however, if no one knew who to record and where those people were; fortunately, starting in 1936, the Music Project had been hard at work. With countless numbers of workers all across the state listening and documenting the expressions of ballad singers, fiddlers, blues and gospel singers, and others, the project had at its disposal an enormous list of artists. This was still at a time in American folksong research when "the text was the thing," and workers collected hundreds of texts from every corner of the state. For all its intelligent and invaluable work, the project had very unusual beginnings, best described in a project summary:

In the summer of 1936 a few cases of Poliomyelitis made it advisable for the State Board of Health to order suspension of all classes containing children under 16 years of age. Unfortunate as this was, it really made possible the beginning of our folk music research, for with the disruption of their regular class work our teachers had time to start out on the hunt for all kinds of songs and tunes.

And hunt they did. Arthur Palmer Hudson's works, including "Specimens of Mississippi Folk Lore" and *Folk Songs of Mississippi*, served as introductions to the new collectors. Slowly, the main office in Jackson began receiving the kinds of songs and tunes they hoped for; and after only six months of collecting, the workers had amassed some 1800 manuscripts. Throughout the project, there was much communication with the national office, as Washington-based folklorists and musicologists received samples of the Mississippi sections. The master plan, it must be understood, was to eventually publish all of this work.

But it was not until Herbert Halpert arrived in the state with what Eri Douglass called the "sound wagon" that the broad survey work of the state offices could really be put to use. What the "sound wagon" offered was the opportunity to capture the voices of singers and notes of musicians on recorded discs. In 1939, this was a major step in the process of documentation, as a May 9 press release acknowledged: "The great wealth of songs that have passed the lips of Mississippians for generations is at last being recorded."

Indeed, there was a wealth of songs to record, and the state offices of the Writers' and Music Projects consulted their voluminous lists of singers and musicians to arrange Halpert's itinerary. A summary report prepared by the FWP explained: "Since our sections and informants are widely scattered and since the time Mr. Halpert could stay in Mississippi was very short, our intention was to get the most and the best that we could crowd into that time. Members of the Writers' and Music Projects acted as intermediaries, preceding the recording truck and lining up the informants in convenient places so that no more time than necessary was lost." Sybil McDonald, through local contacts, arranged Halpert's schedule in northeast Mississippi, and Jerome Sage and Jane Browne prepared his way in the rest of the state. This approach, therefore, put the state workers in the position of deciding what and whom to record, and Halpert, with his recording machine, was only to follow a prearranged schedule, stopping at the assigned places to capture the music on disc.

During the period from May 8 to June 11, 1939, Halpert and Ferriss recorded ballads from the northeast corner of the state; roustabout songs, field hollers, work songs, and blues from the Delta; play-party songs and sacred music from all over the state; and, most important for our consideration here, fiddle tunes from the eastern half of the state. In all, they recorded 168 records, containing over 300 songs and tunes. Fiddle tunes accounted for 115 pieces recorded at six different sites. As important as the fiddle music may seem to us today, at the time of the project it was very low on the priority list. The Music Project was geared toward writing down words to songs, and fiddle tunes, often without lyrics, did not rank high.

On a "Types of Songs Desired" list that was a working paper of the Music Project, fiddle music received small billing. The list was apparently sent to state workers to briefly describe what to look for in the field. Fifth on a list of eight items, the description read:

Fiddle tunes: especially from players who tune the fiddle in different ways for different songs; also any of the "little old foolish songs" that are sometimes sung to, or with fiddle tunes. We are not much interested in string bands.

The last line concerning string bands is an important one. Much of the other recorded examples of Mississippi fiddling, primarily the early commercial recordings, point to a very vibrant and diverse string band tradition. Halpert and Ferriss, however, recorded only one true "band," the Canoy Band of Magee, though nearly every fiddler interviewed suggested that he often played with a band.

If writing down the texts of songs and recording the voices of singers was the emphasis of the project, neither project workers nor Halpert and Ferriss overlooked the rich tradition of fiddle music throughout

the state. State workers obviously turned in the names and repertoires of Mississippi fiddlers, and Halpert, for all his interest in the words of songs, made sensitive efforts to record instrumental music. Never would he have recorded as many fiddle pieces as he did had he not realized the artistic and cultural importance of the music.

Since the recording sessions were prearranged, often several musicians gathered at one central place to meet Halpert and the "sound wagon." For instance, a session at the Meridian Civic Center on May 20, 1939, allowed Halpert to record six different people: W. A. Bledsoe, Horace Kinard, Frank and Mollie Kittrell, Hardy Sharp, and Douglass Williams. Though with this arrangement the fieldworkers sacrificed the recording of performers in their home environments, they did so in the interest of time. In contrast to the Civic Center session, some artists were recorded at home in the most natural of contexts. Charles Long played the fiddle, while Sam Nea! beat straws on the porch of Long's dogtrot home in Quitman, Mississippi. That session, also, had been prearranged by Jerome Sage, who had sent a letter two weeks prior telling the Longs when to expect the truck:

The truck with the recording machine will be on hand Sunday May 21st, and will very likely reach your home late that afternoon. Just now that is about as nearly the exact time as we can tell you; not knowing how long we will be at New Hope we are not able to set a definite hour . . . . It is fine that you are going to have such an important part in saving this music, and I know your wife and children must be pleased about it.

The success of the tour, then, relied very much on competent scheduling and planning, as Halpert and Ferriss traveled from one recording site to the next. At times Halpert did follow his own leads, probably ones from the Library of Congress, but these times were few, and mostly he depended on the itinerary of the Mississippi workers.

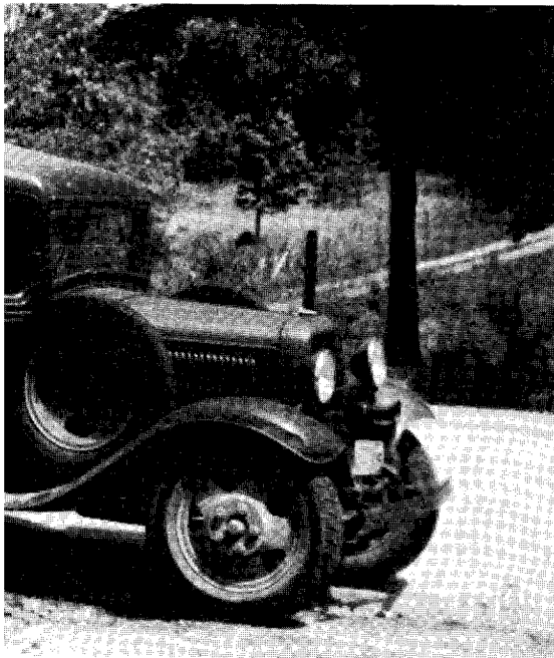
Each handling a different task, Halpert and Ferriss made a most thorough documentation team. As they



Herbert Halpert with "sound wagon." Saltillo, 1939

recorded the tunes and songs on acetate, they were extremely careful to interview each musician and to collect general biographical information. Often, parts of these interviews were recorded on disc, but just as often Ferriss collected additional information in his notebook. Fiddlers were asked who they learned to play the instrument from, where their tunes came from and what kinds of events they usually played for. These and other questions resulted in an extremely accurate body of documentation of immeasurable importance. Ferriss, though young and on his first collecting project, kept field notes as thorough as any worker of his time. Additionally, the photographs he made with an early 35 mm Argus camera-four rolls in all-present us with portraits of many fiddlers and singers, and photographs of homes, farms, and the general landscape. It was the technology of the recording truck that allowed music of Mississippians to be documented for future generations, but it was the fastidious work of Abbott Ferriss that today gives meaning and depth to the discs.

Like Ferriss, Halpert was thorough. Keenly aware of the importance of tuning variation in the fiddle tradition, Halpert sounded an "A" pitch pipe at the beginning of many of the recorded tunes. After blowing the pipe, he often plucked the strings of the fiddle to give later listeners the particular fiddle tuning. Because of such forethought, we are able to determine how a fiddler tuned his instrument for each piece. The pitch pipe, however, is important for another reason. Halpert was forced to use many different sources of electricity-car battery, house, school, and church outlets-and because of occasional variation in power, the disc rotated at a speed slower or faster than 78 rpm. Consequently, when the discs are played back on today's very precise equipment, the speed is slightly off. The tone of the pitch pipe, however, allows us to establish "A" at the beginning, and then master all recordings at "natural" speed. A seemingly simple effort on Halpert's part makes today's research and record-mastering accurate.

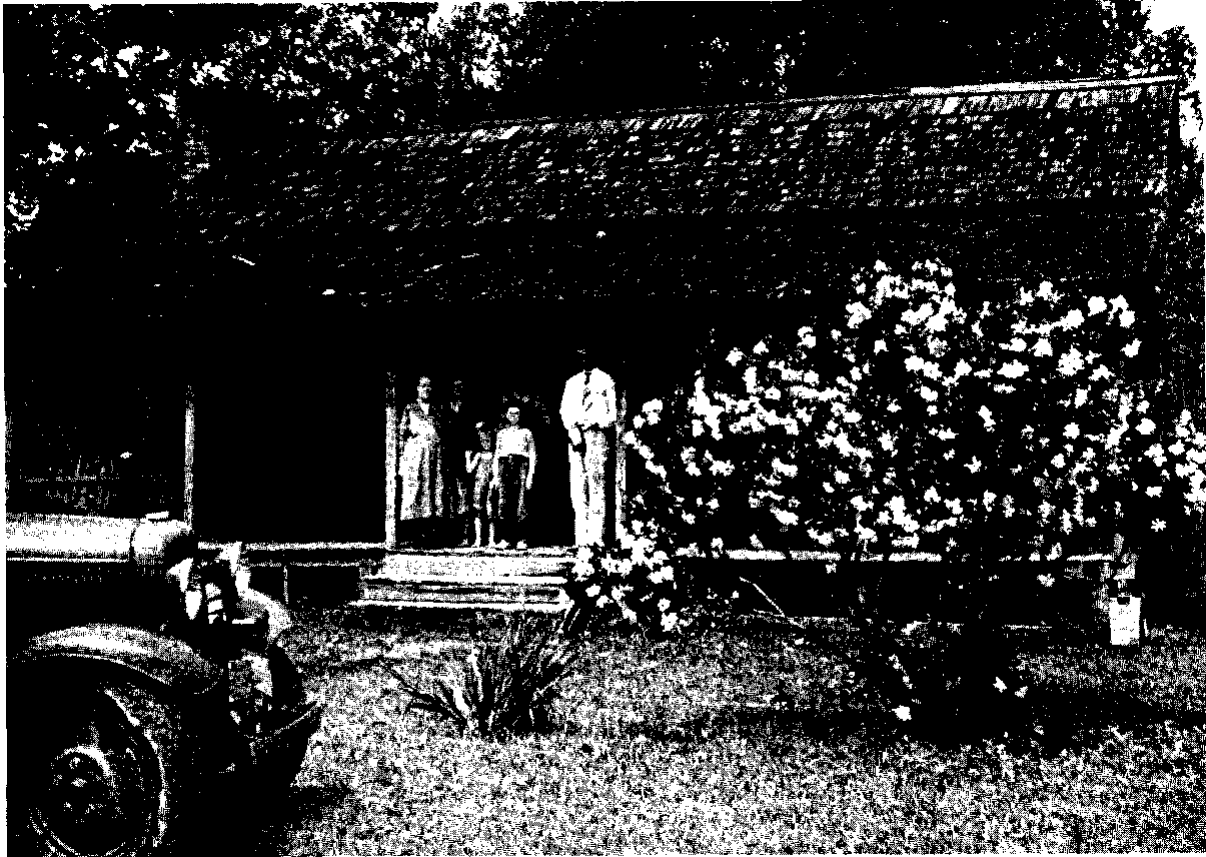


While all the tunes on this record are examples of traditional Anglo-American fiddling from Mississippi, the music also reflects several local and regional fiddle traditions. Each fiddler learned his tunes and style of playing within his particular area of the state. In this collection, at least two regions emerge-the northeastern region represented by John Hatcher and Ernest Claunch and an east-central region, centered around Meridian and represented best by the music of Charles Long and Frank Kittrell. Several generations are also represented; John Brown of Iuka and Stephen Tucker of Collinsville are fiddlers of an earlier generation than the others, while Enos Canoy and his band from Magee represent the emerging band style, with many tunes and techniques shared in common with Afro-American musical traditions of Mississippi. In addition, some fiddlers here learned their tunes from other parts of the South before moving to Mississippi: W. A. Bledsoe was raised in Lincoln County, Tennessee, while both Charles Long and Sam Neal had moved to Mississippi from Choctaw County, Alabama.

Community life was changing rapidly at the end of the 1930s, and with changes in life style came changes in music. These recordings were made in an attempt to preserve a small part of the music of rural communities in Mississippi, before roads and automobiles took people far from home for visits, and radio and records introduced outside ideas about music and entertainment into the most remote parts. The local Music Project workers who arranged for these musicians to record were often selecting fiddlers who played, as John Hatcher said, "the old timey tunes," or were known in the community as "old-time fiddlers." Several had not been playing regularly in the year or so before the recording truck arrived. Consequently, many of the tunes on this record are more reflective of the culture and performance of music in Mississippi at the turn of the century than of music in the 1930s.

The motives of the musicians who played for the recorder are not so easily understood. To most fiddle players and their families, "making records" was the most modern, out-of-the-ordinary activity imaginable. Though they were familiar with commercial recordings, none of them had recorded before and certainly had never heard their own music played back instantaneously. Generally, they were proud to have been asked to play, and were eager to show their talents and hear how their music would sound. Other musicians understood that the recordings were historical in nature and tried to play the older tunes in their memory. There were probably some, especially the younger fiddlers, who thought that if the right person heard these recordings, then a career in music might be launched.

For the most part, this album features the fiddle music played for dance. Some tunes, however, were more difficult pieces and were showcases for the fiddler's ability. These tunes were intended as listening tunes, not dance melodies, and might have been played at home for entertainment. Schools and churches held fiddlers' contests and suppers to raise money for community activities, and fiddle music was generally heard at such functions. Before the first decades of this century, the fiddle was virtually the only stringed instrument in homes of white eastern Mississippians, perhaps sharing the spotlight with the trench harp (harmonica) in some homes. The majority of tunes that



*Walker House, near Magee, 1939*

were played were learned from other musicians, and the existence of so many of the same tunes elsewhere in the South helps us understand that the musical traditions of Mississippi had come with the people who settled the land. Tunes continued to enter the repertoires of Mississippi fiddlers as more folks settled in the state and people brought "new" music as they returned from travels or war.

Until after World War I, dances were typically held at houses in the community. With the exception of churches, there were no large community centers in the rural areas. After the war, veterans' organizations began to build meeting halls for social clubs, and dances began to draw from larger areas. House dances, however, were usually just for the families in a relatively small area, as farm families that lived along the same road or creek would gather together. When someone in the area announced they were having a dance, the word spread from one house to the next. The dance itself usually took place in one room of the house, with the furniture moved into the other front room or into the hall. The fiddler sat in the corner near the fireplace, if there was one, and beside him might be another chair for the straw-beater. It was not until around World War I that guitars and banjos became common accompaniment. The fiddler, usually known by everyone, had a job to do, and oral history suggests that fiddlers were paid for playing, usually by the host of the dance, who charged each couple a small fee. The fiddle players was usually paid in cash, but no doubt many took home smoked meat, vegetables, sorghum, or other payments since money was scarce at the time in rural communities in east Mississippi.

The dances were directed by a caller, and although they used many of the same figures, they were not the square dances of today. A dance usually included as many couples as could fit in a circle in a room, and if more were in attendance, some would sit while others danced. Taking turns, each couple went around the circle counter-clockwise and danced the same figure with each other couple. Sometimes a chorus was danced by the entire circle at the end of each couple's round. Because a set could be large, each dance might last as long as twenty minutes, and the fiddler and his accompanist would play the same tune until the dance ended.

In listening to the tunes on this record, keep in mind that these tunes are really only short illustrations of dance tunes that could have been played from five to twenty-five minutes. Halpert was obviously concerned about conserving discs, for he had only a limited number and no way to get more. Consequently, when he recorded the fiddle material, he asked that each musician play the two parts of the tune and stop; this approach, logic suggests, would document the "core tune" as it exists in tradition while not wasting valuable discs. Though it would be infinitely preferable to have recordings of actual dances, Halpert recorded enough to "document" the tunes as they existed in tradition, and did so with limited resources.

Though the tunes collected in 1939 are by no means representative of fiddle music throughout the state, they do offer us an aural document of the instrumental music of many Mississippians. Through the tunes of the oldest fiddlers, such as Stephen B. Tucker, we are able to hear dance music common at the

time of the Civil War and before. Through the tunes of a younger generation, we hear the vibrant straw-beating tradition of eastern Mississippi. And, from the youngest of fiddle players, the acetate discs allow us to enjoy the music of the 1920s and 30s, a time when fiddle music was quickly adapting to an emerging modernization.

This record celebrates the music and artistic genius of a group of Mississippi musicians, who, for one reason or another, played for a recording machine in 1939. Perhaps they understood the importance of their acts then, perhaps not. Whatever their motives were at the time, today we owe them the greatest debt.

Tom Rankin, Folklife Program Director for the Mississippi Arts Commission, received his master's degree in Folklore from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

---

## Music Tour Remembered

By Abbott L. Ferriss

---

Meals in 1939 could be found in rural Mississippi for upwards of eighty-five cents or a dollar, and small hotels gave a night's lodging for one or two dollars. Even so, as we roamed the state recording folk music, Halpert often slept in the van he had driven from New York, and for convenience I sometimes found a bed in the spare room of the home of the musician whom we were recording.

Over dusty gravel roads and the newly-laid hard surfaces, our itinerary had been arranged so that we roved the entire state: from the cool hills of Tishomingo County to the sands of Harrison, from Parchman to Quitman, and many cities and towns between. Representatives of the Writers or Music Projects in each county had alerted locally-known folk singers and musicians to expect us, had written down the text of many of their songs, and often accompanied us to the home of the informant. Also, Arthur Palmer Hudson's *Folksongs of Mississippi* led us to many singers of ballads and play-party songs. We felt that, by following up on the leads of others and recording the authentic sound of a musical performance, we were contributing greatly to the study and preservation of Mississippi's folk culture.

Churches, schools and prisons were used for

indoor recordings, but the hot May-June weather usually led to recording on the front porch of rural homes. An automobile battery was wired to the heavy recording machine and the twelve-inch wax put in place. The needle cut from the inside outwards, creating a black string of wax. Silence was requested during the recording, but it often was broken by a rooster or a cow or the scrape of a chair over the floor by family members or friends who had come to watch. Halpert was attentive to informant fatigue and sometimes broke off a session so that the performer could prepare supper or rest; we often returned the next day if we had met an exceptionally talented informant.

Besides taking photographs, and finding out when and from whom the song or tune was learned, to the extent possible I also wrote down the words. I could not always keep pace with the singer, nor record more than a poor phonetic equivalent, in letters, of the words. This process undoubtedly resulted in as much misrepresentation as it led to accuracy, for we were finding Old and Middle English words mixed with Scotch and Irish, transformed by Civil War allusions and influences of cotton culture. We gathered work songs from the cotton fields and prisons, play songs of the genteel and proud Scotch-Irish, fiddle, banjo, and guitar tunes that had delighted the family before the radio or phonograph had substituted for this linkage with the cultural past, work songs and the plaintive "hal-loooos" and calls to animals or family that were heard as dusk and wood smoke from the kitchen settled upon the fields.

Memories linger, even after nearly half a century. The Claunches, at their home near Guntown, played

over twenty-five fiddle tunes, including "Bear Creek's Up" with Ernest Claunch singing:

Bear Creek's up  
Bear Creek's muddy  
When a man gets drunk  
He can't stand steady

At Parchman Camp No. 10 John Henry Jackson and Norman Smith rendered a cotton-chopping song that helped me work:"

Be so glad when the sun go down  
Be so glad when the sun go down  
Sun go down, sun go down  
Be so glad when the sun go down.

The lilting playsongs and dance tunes which accompanied frolicsome evenings in front rooms with family and friends were recorded. On the front porch of a dogtrot house near Quitman, Charles Long fiddled while Sam Neal "knocked straws". Long sang:

Eyes just like a cherry  
Cheek just like a rose  
How I love my Dony  
God in Heaven knows

These experiences led me to a deep appreciation of Mississippi folk culture, a respect for the dignity and humanity of its people, both black and white, and an abiding motivation to understand the process of cultural accretion and change.

Abbott L. Ferriss is professor emeritus of sociology at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia.

# Fiddling Style in Mississippi

by Tom Sauber

Compared to many areas of the South, traditional fiddling in Mississippi has received relatively scant attention, and much of that has focused on blues tunes and the more peculiar or idiosyncratic pieces recorded by musicians such as Willie Narmour and Sherrill Smith or the Nations Brothers. While tunes of that type certainly make for fine and interesting music, we should not be misled into thinking that they are representative of all Mississippi fiddling. Listening to the fiddlers and inspecting the list of tunes recorded by Herbert Halpert would, to the contrary, lead one to believe that blues tunes made up a rather small portion of the body of tunes played in Mississippi.

While there are certainly some tunes which must be classified as local pieces, many, if not a majority, are tunes which one could reasonably expect to encounter anywhere from Virginia to Texas. Moreover, even a casual listening should reveal that the fiddlers recorded in Mississippi in 1939 shared certain stylistic traits with fiddlers found throughout the entire geographic range of Southern style fiddling.

It is not possible however, on the basis of the fiddlers recorded on the 1939 tour, to speak reliably about a definitive Mississippi style. The sampling of fiddlers and tunes is too small, the fiddlers are from different parts of the state, and they vary widely in their tone quality, attack, note selection, and use of bowing patterns. It nevertheless is possible to speak of a Southern style of fiddling—distinct from Canadian, Irish, or Scottish fiddling—which the fiddlers on this record certainly represent.

One element of style which is central and basic to Southern fiddling and which sets it apart from the fiddling of other major regions, as Alan Jabbour has pointed out, is the use of a variety of bowing patterns which produce a subtle syncopation in the playing of Southern fiddlers. It is the use of these patterns and techniques which is the single most unifying thread running through these particular Mississippi tunes, and which defines them as being Southern.

One of the most basic techniques involves the use of a downward bow stroke to begin tunes, sections, or phrases within the body of a tune. Very often this downward bow will begin ahead of the beat or, in terms of the transcriptions, before the bar line (transcription I., mm. 10, 12, 14; II., mm. 3, 7, 9, 11, 13; III., mm. 1, 3, 5, 11, 15; IV., mm. 3, 5, 7, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15; V., mm. 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 15). Less frequently, an upward bow stroke may also be used to start a phrase in anticipation of the beat, such as is used by Charles Long in "Jones County" (Figure 1).



Figure 1

Another technique which is basic to Southern fiddling style involves "slurring" notes, that is, playing more than one note on a particular bow stroke. One common use of slurring is the execution of three notes consecutively on a downward bow. This may be done as an anticipation of the downbeat at the start of a tune as by Tucker in "Solider's Joy," or incorporated into the body of the tune as by Hatcher in "Old Miss Sally" (Figure 2).



Figure 2

Another common pattern also groups three notes together but on an upward bow. In this pattern the second of the three notes slurred falls on an accented beat (See transcriptions: I., mm. 10, 12, 14; II., mm. 1, 3, 7, 9; V., mm. 2, 6, 10, 14).

Two-note slurs are also common. One type may be played with either an upward or a downward bow with the first note of the slur falling on an accented beat (Figure 3).

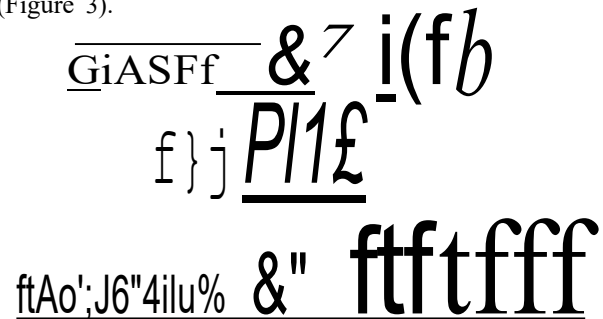


Figure 3

Another more difficult pattern consists of a two-note slur in which the second note of the slur falls on an accented beat. These, too, may utilize either an upward (Figure 4) or a downward (Figure 5) bow stroke.

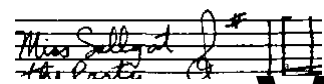


Figure 4



Figure 5

The use of two- and three-note slurs, alone and in various combinations, produces the subtle syncopation which is characteristic of Southern fiddling.

Another bowing technique, which is, for all intent and purposes, unique to Southern fiddling and is employed by almost all old-time Southern fiddlers, is the use of accents or stresses in the middle of an upward bow. In order to achieve this accent, the speed of the bow is increased during the course of the upward bow stroke. The accent often occurs at the ends of phrases but can just as readily be employed in the body of a tune and may be found in several variations (Figure 6).

- a) III., mm. 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 14.  
IV., mm. 2, 4, 6, 8, 12, 16.
- b) I., mm. 9, 11, 13.  
II., mm. 2, 4, 6, 8, 12, 14.
- c) II., m. 11.  
V., mm. 3, 7, 9, 13.

Figure 6

A technically more difficult use of the mid-bow accents involves the separation of one melody note from the preceding one by means of a rhythmic (mid-bow) accent rather than by changing the melody or the direction of the bow (Figure 7).



Figure 7

The bowing patterns and techniques examined here (and others not considered) comprise the traditional fiddler's rhythmic vocabulary. The size of that vocabulary and the ways it is used will vary widely from fiddler to fiddler according to the background, experiences, talent, and creativity of each individual. A good example is a comparison of the two versions of "Miss Sally" by W. E. Claunch and John Hatcher. Both feature many melodic and rhythmic subtleties within the framework of Southern fiddling. The fiddling of Charles Long, on the other hand, as evidenced by "Jones County," would seem to be less complex than that of Claunch or Hatcher, and yet it, too, falls solidly within the same framework. Hatcher and Claunch would appear to possess a larger rhythmic vocabulary than Long, and yet they all speak quite eloquently the language of Southern fiddling.

Tom Sauber received his master's degree in ethnomusicology from U.C.L.A. Also a fiddle player, he has recorded on several records and appeared and played music in the movie *Long Riders*.

# The Fiddlers and the Tunes

By Tom Rankin  
and Gary Stanton.

## Side One

### W. E. Claunch with his Daughter, Christine Hagood, Guitar

Recorded in Guntown, Lee County  
May 10, 1939

The son of a fiddle player and the youngest of five brothers, all of whom played music, William Ernest Claunch was born near Guntown, Mississippi, in 1894. He was raised on Claunch land that had been settled, cleared, and cultivated by this grandfather, also a fiddler, who had come from Nottingham, England, in the 1800s. "Every Claunch there ever was could play," he told Ferriss. Confirming that statement, Christine Hagood, the Claunches' only daughter, accompanied her father on guitar on many of the 1939 recordings. Remembering her father's music in an interview in 1985, Mrs. Hagood explained that he "never saw an instrument he couldn't play. He played the violin, he played the piano, the guitar, mandolin, banjo, french harp—it was just natural, it was just a natural talent God given Daddy."

His natural talent served him and his extended family well. They lived on the original family land in Lee County, and they would often get together at one house or another and play music. "Well, we would get together maybe once or twice a month," remembers Mrs. Hagood, "sometimes once a week, and all of the time we got together we made music. I guess that's one of the happiest memories of my life, to look back and think about that. I can just see it in my mind's eye, all of us getting together, what a good time we would have."

Unlike some other farmers in the area, the Claunch family owned their land. James Claunch, Ernest's father, cleared much of the family land with the help of his sons. The story was told that when Ernest Claunch was just a young lad—eight or nine years old—his father and brothers were busy clearing the bottoms of their land. James Claunch would have his four oldest sons grab their axes and saws and head for the woods, while the youngest one got his fiddle and followed behind. As the older men chopped, sawed, and sweated, Ernest Claunch sat on a stump and fiddled.

After the original family tract was divided up and partly sold, Ernest Claunch and his family bought other land nearby. As before, he raised cotton, corn, and a "truck patch," and kept several milk cows. Work was hard, and it was work the family did together. Christine.

Hagood, the only woman musician in the family, recalls learning to play the guitar after working all day in the field with her father:

I wanted to play. I just wanted to play. I kept aggravating Daddy. I said, "Daddy, I want you to teach me to play the guitar." He said, "I'm just not gonna do it." He said, "You won't stay still long enough." I said, "Well, I'll try." So, finally he decided, and I never will forget it. It was in hot weather and you know, we were farming. And he told me one day, he said, "Well, if nothing else will do ya," he said, "I'll teach you." He said, "You're gonna practice." I said, "Oh, I will. I will." And it got hot, you know. And when I come to the house and I was tired from the field, I didn't want to practice. He said, "Oh, yes you are. You said you'd practice."

She goes on to add that when she made a move to get up from her chair before the hour-long practice session was up, her father would tap her lightly on the head with his fiddle bow. "He didn't hit me all that hard," she explains, "but I got tired of that fiddle bow and sorta got down to business."

Though Mrs. Hagood and her father played together mostly around home, Ernest Claunch was a regular at dances and fiddle contests in the area. For a time, he played regularly at the theatre in Baldwyn, Mississippi, standing out front and playing the fiddle to attract business for the newest movie in town. He was apparently very comfortable playing in public, perhaps because as a young man he had "trooped" with a "circus."

Ernest Claunch and Christine Hagood played twenty-six tunes for Halpert and Ferris on May 10, 1939, all performed at the Claunch home. In the years following 1939, Ernest Claunch continued to play in and around his community, teaching many musicians his style and tunes and entertaining more people with his musical gift. He died on November 10, 1958.

1. "Grub Springs." The fiddle is cross-tuned [AEAE], played in the key of A. The guitar is clamped [with capo] at the second fret and flat-picked. This particular tune has never been reported elsewhere, although John Hatcher of Burnsville, Mississippi, played a different tune under the same title. The tune is typical of a large number of two-part Southern dance tunes in which one part [the fine] is played primarily on the higher strings of the fiddle and the other part [the coarse] is played principally on the middle strings. The two-part tune is played AABB. The coarse consists of a short phrase repeated three times contrasting with a fourth phrase that brings the melody back to A. The fine is a series of scales from the subdominant to the tonic with an especially nice stepped scale, which is identical to the principal melody of "Henry Holmes Holler" sung by Enos Canoy [side 2 band 4], musically equaling the wisdom "two steps forward and one step back" [D-F#-E-A-F#-E-D]. An exciting effect is created by ending the fine on the dominant chord [E] instead of returning to the original chord [A], which leads our attention back to the beginning of the tune, in order to resolve the melody. Claunch also hollers in unison with the fiddle at points in the performance, another way of adding excitement.

At most dances where music was played there was a caller, who sang out the calls for the couples to execute. However, it was not unusual for fiddlers to

know calls and even call house dances, if no caller was present. Claunch gives us just a taste of the calls he associated with the tune, but not the entire dance:

Up Four  
All Sides Circle  
All of them swing

Grub Springs, W.E. Claunch

2. "Bear Creek's Up." Fiddle and guitar are tuned standard [GDAE, EADGBE] and tune played in G. Learned from his father, James Claunch, this tune is a regional variant of "Sally Goodin," played in the key of G, which obscures the relationship with the more widespread tune played in the key of A. In fact, Claunch also recorded "Sally Goodin," and so for him they were separate tunes. Christine Hagood, Claunch's daughter, plays almost continuous bass runs backing up this tune, similar to the way Jimmy Carter (from Monroe County, Mississippi) backed up the same tune when his father and uncle recorded it in 1928 for Vocalion Records [Vocalion 5295 titled "Give me Chaw of Tobacco"]; and it is not unlikely that the commercial recording influenced the way the Claunches played the tune. Claunch owned a radio in the thirties and, judging by his comments and tunes, was familiar with tunes that had been recorded on 78 rpm records.

"Bear Creek's Up" is a title representative of many Southern dance tunes associated with particular rhymes, which use the first line of the rhyme to stand for the tune. The tune, of course, can be played quite differently and still use the same lyrics. Marion Thede notated a tune named "Bear Creek" with similar lyrics



W. E. Claunch with his Daughter, Christine Hagood, guitar.

but much less melodic content. T. A. Bickerstaff included the title "Bear Creek" in a seminar paper on traditional tunes at the University of Mississippi in 1927. Bear Creek does, in fact, flow through Tishomingo County and into the Tennessee River. It seems likely, however, that the title derives from the lyrics, not from a location.

Bear Creek's up and Bear Creek's muddy  
When a man gets drunk he can't stand steady

3. **"Great Big 'Taters."** The fiddle is tuned standard [GDAE], played in the key of G. No guitar accompaniment is on this tune. Again, this is a regional variant for a widespread Southern tune, usually titled "Sail Away Ladies." In the Old Southwest, however, the tune is much more frequently titled "Great Big 'Taters in Sandy Land" or often just "Sandyland." Having similar titles does not always mean the tunes will be the same. This is a different tune from either "Big Foot Nigger in a Sandy Lot," played by W. A. Bledsoe, or "Great Big Yam Potatoes," played by Hardy C. Sharp. This version has very little melodic development, as played here, suggesting that it was primarily sung, not played. Claunch undoubtedly had intended to play the tune with his daughter's accompaniment, but he momentarily forgot the tune, and when she prompted him with the words, he quickly launched into the tune without her. The couplet he sings is

Sift the meal and save the bran  
Goodby gals I'm goin in  
[Raise big taters in sandy land] *not sung*  
[Raise big taters in sandy land]

Great Big 'Taters - W.E. Claunch

Miss Sally at the Party - W.E. Claunch

miss auy ar rne rarry,, r la0le and gmtar are tuned standard [GDAE, EADGBE] and played in the key of G. Claunch learned this tune from his father.

James Claunch. This tune appears to be a regional one, played by several fiddlers in northeastern Mississippi but reported outside Mississippi only from Oklahoma by Marion Thede [page 86] and titled "I Asked That Pretty Girl to Be My Wife."

I asked Miss Sally to be my wife  
She stabbed at me with a Bowie knife  
Miss Sally, Miss Sally  
Miss Sally at the party

5. **"Wolves A-Howling."** The fiddle is cross-tuned [AEAE], played in the key of A. The guitar is clamped [with capo] on the second fret. This tune is reported in Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Texas, and Oklahoma—that is, the Old Southwest. The tune is almost always played with high bass and counter, where the low two strings are raised a whole step in pitch, allowing many accidental unison or harmony drones in the key of A. For comparison, listen to the Stripling Brothers Vocalion 02770 [reissued on County 401], or Earl Collins's recording of "Wolves Howling" on Briar 4204. The first line of these lyrics is common in tradition, but the second line is often an individual creation.

Don't you hear them wolves a-howling  
Setting in the corner talking to my darling.

### John Hatcher

Recorded in Iuka  
May 12, 1939

An "orphan boy" who was raised by his grandfather, fiddle player John Hatcher of Tishomingo County said he learned to play from two older fiddlers, Dick Brown and George Cheek. "They played at folks' houses at night," Hatcher remembered. "And I'd be there when I was just a boy." A farmer and wood hauler, Hatcher lived six miles southwest of Burnsville on forty-nine acres, which he described in 1939 as "a little rabbit ranch."

Hatcher recorded at the home of Mrs. Vivian Skinner, a Writers' Project worker, with John Brown on May 12, 1939. Unlike Brown, who had left his plow in the field to record, Hatcher was dressed in his Sunday best. Six feet in height with his hair carefully parted in the middle, fifty-three-year-old Hatcher wore a blue spotted neck tie at his recording. His recordings are some of the finest in the collection.

Like other fiddlers of his time, Hatcher frequented the fiddle contests in Corinth, Mississippi, and Sheffield, Alabama, and at schools in the area. He played for some time with a band, the Tishomingo County Jamboree Boys, which played weekly on a radio station in Jackson, Tennessee. He played most frequently, however, for dances in the area, picking up a small amount of money and providing fine dance music for his community. When folks took a break from dancing, Hatcher often sang. He can be heard singing with the fiddling of John Brown on "Wolves a-Howling" (side 1, band 11).

6. **"Tishomingo County Blues."** The fiddle is tuned standard [GDAE], played in the key of D. This tune, composed by Hatcher, is not an old tune, but the way in which Hatcher creates his new blues helps us understand how many traditional tunes were composed:



John Hatcher. Iuka, 1939.

All counties have blues. I felt that Tishomingo County was blue enough and ought to have one. I picked up notes from other tunes and made one up of my own. It took some time, not all at once.

Hatcher was responding to the enthusiasm created for fiddle tunes that celebrated the fiddler's home county, following the 1929 success of Carroll County Blues [Okeh 45371] by Willie Narmour and Sherrill Smith. The Leake County Revelers recorded "Leake County Blues," the Nation Brothers played "Lincoln County Blues," and even Jim Henry Boley, another Tishomingo County fiddler who did not record, had composed "Lee County Blues." Hatcher most clearly borrowed the coarse phrase almost directly from Carroll County Blues #1 (there were three different Carroll County tunes recorded), although the tunes are played in different keys. The fine part is similar to a large number of blues tunes, but not identifiably from one tune. Blues tunes test the fiddler's ability to play notes of uneven duration and longer bow strokes, so that the back and forth movement of the bow cannot serve as a metronome for the tune. These blues fiddle tunes are perhaps the clearest examples of the synthesis of Afro-American and Anglo-American musical styles, although the popularity for this particular type of tune came primarily via the recorded, hence popular, media of the day.

7. "Going Up to Hamburg." The fiddle is tuned standard [GDAE], played in the key of G. A local tune, reported only in northern Mississippi, this is the only recorded example. Other fiddlers in the Burnsville area, Henry McGaughy and Jim Thylor, are also remembered to have played the tune. The name refers to a Tennessee River community just across the line in Hardin County, Tennessee. This is an interesting tune, for the modal flavor of the tune with the fine starting with a double stop (both the A and E strings played) on

the low sections. Like several of the tunes in this collection, the melody may have begun as a holler and later been elaborated to a fiddle tune. Certainly the fiddle part closely follows the voice almost in unison:

Well Shane  
 Going up to Hamburg, pretty little lady  
 Going up to Hamburg, yes I am  
 Going up to Hamburg, pretty little lady  
 Going up to Hamburg, to get me a dram

8. "Old Miss Sally." The fiddle is tuned standard [GDAE], played in the key of G. Compare this version of this regional tune with Claunch's rendition. Hatcher performs the tune much more like a song, closely following the melody as sung. In addition, his fiddling changes as he carries entire phrases on a single bow stroke, rather than reversing the direction of the bow on every note. This creates a very smooth fluid-sounding melodic phrase, different from the very rhythmically punctuated, precise bowing of his dance tunes.

Oh Miss Sally, Sally, Oh Miss Sally, Sally  
 I asked Miss Sally for to be my wife,  
 She run at me with a butcher knife  
 Oh Miss Sally, Sally, Oh Miss Sally, Sally-0  
 Oh Miss Sally, Sally, Oh Miss Sally, Sally  
 Asked Miss Sally for to be my wife  
 Said she wouldn't to save my life  
 Miss Sally, Miss Sally, Oh Miss Sally, Sally-0

Old Miss Sally - John Hatcher

tnrdcur! C11JITE fUO | Q:TQJ  
 r 1Dr Eif11 C1J Jf1£Etu1 Q tijJ,  
 r 11EIJciJ cEts e4Tfurn. \$ .41A-i-  
 .ru [ffffQJ

9. "Leather Britches." The fiddle is tuned standard [GDAE], played in the key of G. This is one of the most widespread traditional American dance tunes and is found in virtually every collection of fiddle music. The American tune is closely related to the Scottish tune "Lord McDonald's Reel" (and is so listed in Cole's *1000 Fiddle Tunes*). Samuel Bayard also mentions an Irish air (song) "The Britches On" from which the customary rhyme may be borrowed. Commercially, "Leather Breeches" was recorded by the Leake County Revelers in 1927 [Col 1549] and the Carter Brothers and Son (from Monroe County) in 1928. Printed versions are available in Ford, *Traditional Music of America* [page 48], and a Texas version in Marion Thede, *The Fiddle Book* [page 115].

Traditional fiddlers in Mississippi rarely moved the fingering out of first position, but the melodic range of a tune could still be considerable. Hatcher's version of "Leather Britches" exploits the full two and one-half octave range of the fiddle. The tune has three parts, with the low part played across the middle strings, the

second part played across the two high strings, and the third part doubling the first phrase an octave higher solely on the high string [E]. In addition, he constantly varies the melody, shifting the number of times each phrase is played and the phrase endings, demonstrating his mastery of the instrument.

10. **"Farewell Whiskey."** The fiddle is cross-tuned [AEAE], played in the key of A. This is an unusual piece, with an infrequently encountered title, and a tune for which I can find no recorded or published variant. The use of harmonics is a technique that is very seldom used in fiddle playing. Samuel Bayard's collection of western Pennsylvania fiddle tunes lists a likewise unique tune named "Farewell to Whiskey," but Bayard remarks that the title is misused and properly belongs to a Scottish tune attributed to Neil Gow. The high part of this tune bears a faint resemblance to "Rye Whiskey," also called "Jack of Diamonds" in Texas, another drinking tune which uses unusual techniques of plucking the strings. However, the resemblances are distant, and certainly this is a separate tune from the more common "Drunkard's Hiccups." It's impossible to say where Hatcher learned the piece, although we can be certain that he didn't compose it himself. John A. Brown was also familiar with the tune, and mentions the sounds of liquor pouring in the harmonics on the bass string. It is certainly a difficult piece to perform and Hatches boasts, "Can't many white folks play this tune and no colored ones at all."

The tune nicely illustrates the use of this high bass and counter tuning, playing the same melody in two registers, first on the treble strings, and then with very little change on the bass. The harmonics are achieved by lightly touching the bass string without forcing it to the fingerboard while the bow is drawn lightly over the string. [The technique is used traditionally to represent sounds of nature, such as geese honking by Emmett Lundy of Galax, Virginia, or mules braying. Hatcher takes the ability a step further and plays the tune on the harmonics, like the bluegrass banjo player Earl Scruggs did on "Bugle Call Rag."]

## John Alexander Brown

Recorded in Iuka  
May 12, 1939

John Alexander Brown, sixty-seven years old in 1939, was a native of Itawamba County, Mississippi. Around 1900 he moved to Tishomingo County, just four miles east of Iuka. His bright blue eyes and heavy, flowing white beard made him an engaging sight for folks in his community, not to mention for Halpert and Ferriss. Ferriss took more photographs of Brown-five-than any of the other fiddle players recorded. From his photographs and notes, it seems he was indeed fascinated with Brown's character: "Music animated his eyes, [as he] swayed from side to side his shoulders and head. His interest, his enthusiasm to everything that he said, and his kindly attitude toward others made him delightful." Though perhaps the answer to any stereotypical expectations an outsider would have of a north Mississippi fiddler, Brown was by no means a rough and rowdy boozing musician. Rather, it is said that he refused to perform around excessive drinking and was always in control of himself. His careful,

delicate fiddle style was characteristic of his general demeanor.

"I just picked fiddling up from my daddy," Brown typically explained. "Just practiced the sounds of it, just listened. I heard a piece and went back home and played it." Later, he became a regular dance fiddler in the Iuka area, fiddling with varied accompaniment while a caller directed the dancers. Though the caller was generally paid nothing for his talent and effort, John Brown and other fiddlers received a small amount from those who danced.

As with John Hatcher, Halpert tried hard to convince John Brown to sing and play at the same time. Brown found this a nearly impossible request to answer, saying emphatically, "I can't sing and play both." Wanting to be the most cooperative of gentlemen for Halpert, Brown replied, "Mr. Hatcher might sing a little for you." With that, Hatcher and Brown team up on "Wolves a-Howling" to fulfill the request that they sing words to the tunes.

Vivian Skinner, a Federal Writers' Project worker in Iuka, set up contacts for Halpert's recording tour, and she was the one who knew of John Alexander Brown. A story is told that when the recording truck arrived in town, Brown was in the field plowing. Rather old fashioned even for that time, Brown was still using a team of oxen. Happy to oblige and record, he came from the field and went to the recording session without changing clothes. His dress, therefore, is in sharp contrast to Hatcher, who was in his Sunday best. After he and Hatcher had played and Halpert seemed satisfied with the tunes recorded, Brown said he had to hurry home as "I left my oxen out in the field."



John Alexander Brown, Iuka, 1939

11. **"Wolves a-Howling."** The fiddle is cross-tuned [GDGD], played in the key of G. John Hatcher is singing the rhyme. Brown's version of "Wolves a-Howling" is typical of rural traditional dance fiddling prior to the modern revolution in transportation and entertainment. Strongly rhythmic, yet economical of notes, it is certainly a piece he could perform for a house party when the dance might last twenty minutes at a time. Brown plays cross-tuned on all recorded selections. In Brown's generation, cross-tuning was more prevalent among Southern fiddlers than in other areas of the U.S. Especially when the fiddle was the only instrument, or was accompanied [seconded] by guitar or banjo, the absolute pitch of the instruments was rarely as critical as among musicians who expected to be performing with pianos and large, semi-permanent instruments. For his tunes, Brown chose to cross-key the fiddle by running the treble strings down to pitch, rather than tuning the bass and counter one step higher. He also holds the final notes of the first and second phrases, giving each phrase six beats, instead of the normal four. Hatcher, who is trying to sing the rhyme for the recording, finds himself well into the second line of the singing just as Brown begins the phrase. Wisely, Hatcher then confines his singing to the chorus. The effect should not be taken as a mistake, for each man is playing or singing exactly right. Rather, it's a demonstration of how traditional tunes can have many different versions, even within a single county. The combination came about because the folklorist recording these tunes requested the words, not because Hatcher volunteered to sing the lyrics. Here are the lyrics Hatcher sings:

—♥ Wolves-a-howlin'  
 All around my poor little darlin'  
 Can't you see those blue clouds flyin'  
 Poor little darlin', home a-cryin'  
 Wolves are, howlin', howlin', howlin'  
 Oh the wolves are howlin'  
 Howlin' round my [stop singing]

12. **"Dusty Miller."** The fiddle is cross-tuned [GDGD], played in the key of G. Brown learned this tune from his father in Itawamba County before 1900. This is not the "Dusty Miller" played by Oklahoma and Texas fiddlers such as Benny Thomasson or Dick Hutchison. The tune is truly an old tune, in a dorian mode as though the scale for the tune were only the white keys on a piano from D to D with both the third and seventh tone flatted. It is a traditional tune which could not easily be seconded on the guitar since it is neither major nor minor. Brown plays it as a three-part tune, with the first two parts played twice and the third part played only once [AABBC]. As with "Wolves a-Howling," Brown holds the initial note of the second phrase for extra beats, giving the tune an irregular phrase structure. Although this tune is not found in any other collections of American fiddling, other fiddlers have been recorded playing similarly archaic solo fiddle pieces. Compare this tune with Frank Kittrell's rendering of "Indian War Whoop."

13. **"Rats in the Meal Barrel."** The fiddle is cross-tuned [GDGD], played in the key of G. Brown learned the tune from his father in Itawamba County. T. A. Bickerstaff also collected this tune title from his uncle in Tishomingo County. Besides these references, the title has not been reported. The tune is a two-part

melody, each phrase repeated twice [AABB]. Like "Wolves a-Howling," which is very similar to this tune, the melody in the first revolves around the double stop of the highest strings playing in unison on the fifth tone [D]. Then while the note on the second string is held, the first string provides a contrasting figure. The second phrase revolves around the third tone [B].

## Frank and Mollie Kittrell

Recorded in Meridian  
 May 20, 1939

"If someone whistled a tune," explained Frank T. Kittrell in 1939 "I'd whistle it and go home and start playing. I might not learn it all then, but I'd keep playing and whistling until I learned it. It took a long time to learn what I did." What Kittrell had learned by the time he was sixty-eight years old (when these recordings were made) was over one hundred fiddle pieces, eight of which he played for Halpert at the Meridian Civic Center. The Kittrell pieces—"Indian War Whoop," "Cornstalk Fiddle and Shoestring Bow," "Going to the Wedding," "Little Boy Went a-Courtin'," "I Want to Go to Meeting and I Got No Shoes," "Cindy Jane," "Rye Straw" and "Hell After the Yearling"—feature his wife, Mollie Kittrell, "beating" straws on the fiddle.

The Kittrells, who lived near the Lockhart community in Lauderdale County in the early part of this century, cut timber and sharecropped on nearby farms. By the time these recordings were made, they had moved to Meridian, and Frank Kittrell was employed on the College Beautification Project for the WPA.

Kittrell learned to play fiddle after hearing music at dances throughout the county, but mostly by listening to his uncles: "My two uncles were the best fiddlers in Mississippi. I learned from them." He remembered going to a party when he was ten years old and hearing his uncle play "I Want to Go to Meeting and I Got No Shoes," while his cousin seconded on the straws. Recounting the moment to Abbott Ferriss in 1939, Kittrell suggested that people were playing different tunes than his uncle had played: "Nowadays, they are playing 'Turkey in the Straw' and all this classical stuff."

The straws nearly always accompanied the fiddle in the Kittrell household; one of the Kittrell sons frequently seconded his father on a Meridian radio station in the 1940s. In 1939 Kittrell said of the straws:

Way back yonder in those days they didn't have no company for the violin except a straw; broom straw was the company for the violin . . . That's the way I first remember, and the next was an old homemade banjo . . . and the next thing was a guitar and on up to where it's classical now.

Abbott Ferriss was obviously fascinated with straw-beating when he encountered it in 1939, and his field notes offer a fine description of the style in general, and of Mrs. Kittrell's in particular:

Mrs. Kittrell's straw was heavy and about 18 inches long . . . She holds the straw in the left hand, using index and thumb. The thumb of her right hand is held underneath the straw and below the left hand. The index finger of the right hand is held above the straw and above the left hand. In "knocking," Mrs. Kittrell makes deft up-down motions with her right hand. Her whole body shakes.

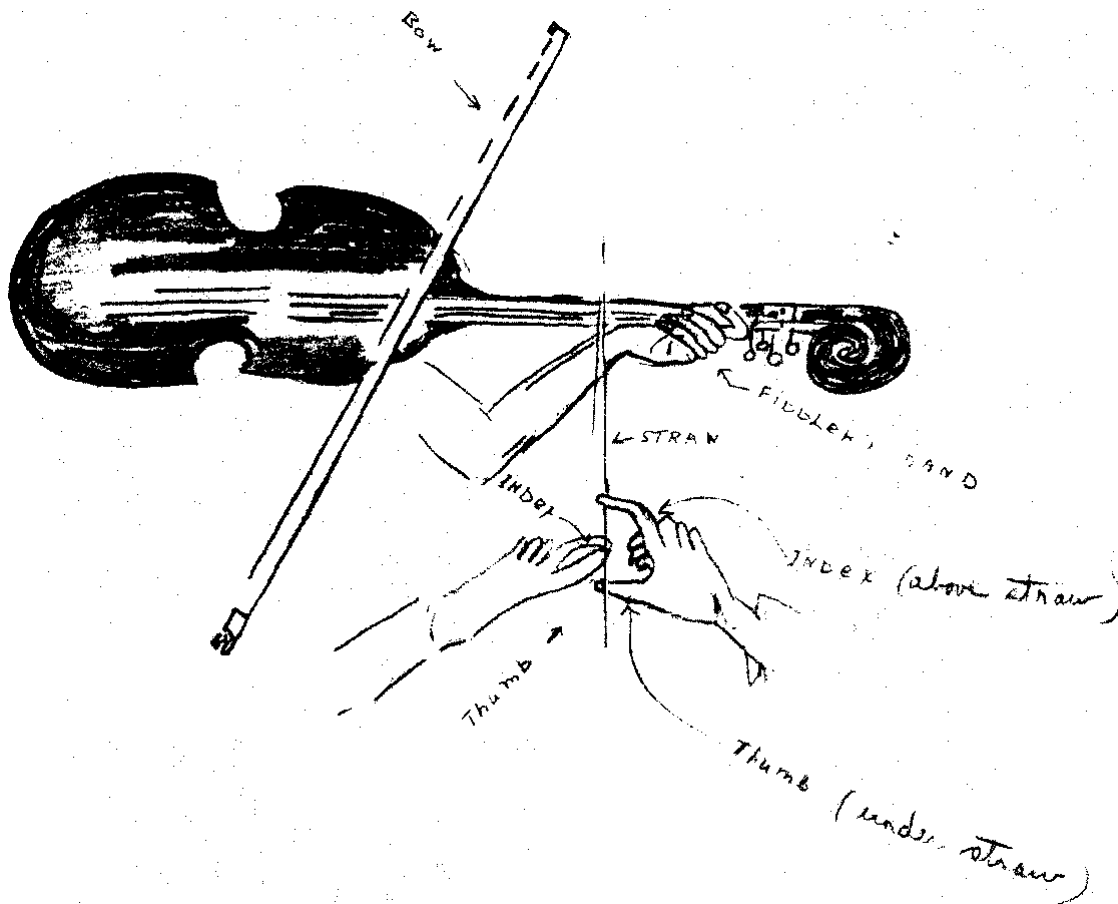


Diagram of straw-beating By Abbott Ferriss, 1939.

She "knocks straws" on the one or two strings that the fiddler does not use in playing the piece. The straw falls directly on the D and on the G strings. If the fiddler plays on the D and G strings, she "knocks" on the other strings. The straw falls on the upper portion to the handle of the fiddle.

Mrs. Kittrell can use two straws as well as one. In doing this, she has one in each hand.

T. F. Kittrell, Frank Kittrell's son, who used two straws when seconding his father, suggested that the two-straw method was more common. The Halpert-Ferriss recordings, however, document two individuals who used one straw (Kittrell and Sam Neal) and only one who uses two straws Oim Myers, who played with Enos Canoy). Whichever was more prevalent, T. F. Kittrell was quick to point out that both styles produced the same sound when played properly.

Frank Kittrell continued playing the fiddle up through the 40s and 50s, performing with a variety of bands in Lauderdale County. In 1939 he mentioned that he had organized seven bands in the Meridian area, reinforcing the notion that string bands were a common occurrence at that time. In his later years Frank Kittrell quit playing music, and in 1953, only one day before his eighty-first birthday, he died.

14. **"Indian War Whoop."** The fiddle is cross-tuned [AEAE- tuned one step low], played in the key of A. "Indian War Whoop" is a floating title, probably suggested by the sounds of the tune rather than by any rhyme associated with the piece. Hoyt Ming of Lee County recorded a different tune with the same title in 1928 for Victor Records [Vi 21294], as did Hiter Colvin of Union County, Arkansas, in 1929 [Vi 23815]. The tune the Kittrells are playing is a close relative to the "Dusty Miller," as played by John A. Brown. Mr. and Mrs. Kittrell are the smallest band possible, two musicians playing together, each molding their playing to fit the total sound. It just happens that they are laying in the same instrument. Beating straws on the fiddle hmlts the strings available to play the melody and also means that the bass and counter should harmonize with the principal key of the tune. Fortunately, "Indian War Whoop" is only in one key. Mrs. Kittrell's accompaniment with straws is not so simple as one might think. She is very familiar with the tune and frequently varies the rhythmic figure she is creating. The basic rhythm is two unaccented beats followed by an accented beat. Within the tune Mrs. Kittrell changes this basic rhythm by hitting every beat (instead of three out of four) in a measure, or knocking every other beat for two measures. When mixed together, these techniques strengthen and accentuate the rhythm of the tune, but no two tunes are beat exactly the same.



*The Kittrells. l-r: Frank T. Kittrell, Lavelle Jones, Carlos Riley, Lauderdale County, c.1950.*

15. **"Want to go to Meeting and Got No Shoes."**

The fiddle is cross-tuned with low treble [AEAC#], played in the key of A. Kittrell learned this tune from his uncle David Kittrell of Lauderdale County. The tune has three parts with only the first two played twice, so the tune is AABBCAABBC. The melody of the first phrase is similar to "Johnson Gals," recorded by the Leake County Revelers [Col 1549] in 1927. The tune, however, is well-known in Mississippi by the rhyme which Stephen B. Tucker from Meridian recited, "Don't care where in the world I go, can't get around for the calico." "Want to go to meeting and got no shoes" is almost certainly the second line of a rhyme as well. Kittrell explained in the recording session that this is still a "cross note" tuning, but with the E string loosened, so that the open high strings produce the harmony of a third (A-C#).

16. **"Ryestraw."** The fiddle is tuned standard with high bass [ADAE], played in the key of A. A two-part tune with each part played twice [AABB], "Ryestraw," "Joke on the Puppy," or "The Unfortunate Pup" is a tune found across the entire South among older fiddlers. The title refers to a scatological rhyme that everyone knows but no one sings. It was recorded by Clayton McMichen and Riley Puckett [Col 15521] in 1930. Kittrell plays the tune with the bass run up to A, so that his wife can beat straws. The coarse part of the tune is more stable, because of its association with the rhyme, than the fine, and many fiddlers begin the piece with the low, or coarse, part. For comparison listen to Stephen B. Tucker's version called "Joke on the Puppy" [side 2, band 14].

**W. A. Bledsoe and Horace D. Kinard**

Recorded in Meridian  
May 20, 1939

A Deputy Circuit Clerk in Meridian in 1939, W. A. Bledsoe was reared in Lincoln County, Tennessee, where he learned to play the fiddle from his father. Like many eager young boys, Bledsoe had to sneak his fiddling in so his father would not notice:

My father had a fiddle. He was twelve years old during the Civil War and he didn't have a chance to go to school, but he had a fiddle. And his father fiddled. And about 10 or 12 years old I began to get the fiddle out to play and he caught me playing one day and he told me that I-he didn't have a chance to go to school-that he'd do the fiddling for the family. Wanted me to let the fiddle alone. But I continued to slip the fiddle out when he wasn't there. And by the time he was due home I'd slip the fiddle back under the bed. And it wasn't long until I could play just about as good as he could.

Bledsoe was accompanied on his recordings by Horace D. Kinard (see Hardy Sharp for biographical information). They recorded only six tunes for Halpert at the Meridian Civic Center on May 20, 1939, one of which appears on the record.

17. **"Big Footed Nigger in a Sandy Lot."** The fiddle is tuned standard [GDAE], banjo tuned in G [gDGBD], and the tune is played in the key of G. Bledsoe learned this tune from his father in Lincoln County, Tennessee. The title to this tune probably derives from a rhyme or is embellishment on this rather standard dance tune. The tune is a mixture of common phrases, which is possible because in most dance tunes the phrases are all of equal length. The coarse phrase is a familiar part of the "Turkey in the Straw-Zip Coon-Natchez Under the Hill" tune family with the tonal center around the

middle strings. The high part, however, exists separately as part of tunes like "Fort Smith Breakdown" as played by Luke Highnight and his Ozark Strutters [Vocalion 5339]. Bledsoe is a good dance fiddler. The bowing here is extremely vigorous and regular with none of the intricacies of some more accomplished fiddlers in this collection who created more complicated scales by switching strings in a descending line of a phrase. Horace Kinard's banjo playing, too, is rudimentary—a clawhammer or grailing style with his thumb playing only the fifth string, and his fingers often strumming the remaining strings on the beat, much like a guitar player.

18. **"Farewell Mary Ann."** Fiddle and banjo are tuned standard [GDAE, aDADE], played in the key of D. Bledsoe learned this tune from an uncle in Lincoln County, Tennessee, before the beginning of the twentieth century. This tune is very close to a Grant County, Kentucky, tune recorded by fiddler Frank Miller in 1929 with the Blue Ridge Mountaineers as "Old Voile" [Gennett 6870]. Guthrie Meade reported in his liner notes to "Fiddle Band Music of Kentucky" that the tune has also been collected in Anderson County, Kentucky, as "Constitution Hornpipe," although the common printed tune with the latter title is in the key of F, and has a very different tune.

## Enos Canoy and the Canoy Band

Recorded in Magee  
May 26, 1939

The Canoy Band, recorded at the home of Maud Turner in Magee, Mississippi, was led by thirty-year-old fiddler Enos Canoy. Tim Canoy, Enos's cousin, and Lola Canoy, Tim's wife, backed Enos on mandolin and guitar, respectively. The only band recorded by Halpert in 1939, the Canoy Band played regularly at schools, political rallies, town fairs, and dances.

Enos Canoy was born one mile east of Magee in Simpson County, Mississippi, on March 8, 1909. Like many of his contemporaries, he grew up farming and in 1939 was sharecropping several miles outside of Magee. At the age of twelve, Enos began learning to play the fiddle and constructed his first instrument out of a pine box. Likewise, his cousin Tim, born in 1901, explained:

The first guitar I ever had, I wanted it so bad when I was a little boy 'till I taken a cheese box, put strings on it and learned to tune it. None of my family played. Whenever I hear a piece of music played, I quit work to listen.

Though Tim's side of the family did not play music, Enos's father was a fiddler; however, when Enos was four, his father died, and Enos learned most of his music from his uncle, Love Kennedy, and Robert Runnels, a respected Simpson county musician.

Enos was dedicated to playing music. Lola Canoy remembers him as one who truly "loved music." "He never would say quit," she remembered. "You could go places and play at night, you know, sit right there till midnight. He would never stop." Though Lola seldom, if ever, went to play dances with the band, she was a

regular with the group at fairs and community socials. So dependent were they on her consistent back-up guitar work and touching renditions of traditional love songs, they hardly gave her time to bear children: "I had nine babies. I'd play until I get ready to have my baby, and they wouldn't give me time to heal *before* I was up again playing."

Though they only lived several miles from Magee, Lola Canoy remembers that the family seldom went to town. As a young girl in the early part of this century, she says her family lived one mile from Magee and only made the trip twice a year. Prior to radio, music entertained the Canoy Band and their community, and at times the Canoy Band would go from house to house playing and singing, sharing their musical gifts with others. In the 1940s and 50s, radio allowed them to broaden their audience as Enos and the Canoy Wildcats played a weekly half-hour show on WRBC radio in Jackson. Enos and the Canoy Wildcats played throughout the 1950s, traveling to Laurel, Hattiesburg, Hazlehurst, and Jackson to perform for dances at clubs.

19. **"Old Blue Sow."** The fiddle is tuned standard [GDAE] but above concert pitch. The mandolin and guitar are tuned standard, with the guitar clamped [with capo] at the second fret and played with a flat pick. The tune is played in the keys of A and D. Enos Canoy learned this tune from Robert Runnels, an uncle who lived in Simpson County. This piece is less an identifiable melody than a patchwork of harmonic textures woven with a series of rhythmic bowing patterns. The fine part of this tune is played entirely in A beginning with the treble strings played in unison, then contrasted [C#-E]. In the second half of the fine part the fiddler creates a syncopation by constantly bowing both the treble strings noted C#-E and rapidly fingering the F# or A on the top string. The coarse part, in D, is an octave scale played on the middle strings and ending the first time on E and then with a repeated ending on D. No words however, can describe the slurs and bowing variation which make this a consummate example of the fiddler's art. Enos Canoy calls out a few figures, either for demonstration purposes or in imitation of commercial string band recordings where the intent was to give the feeling of a rural house dance. The calls are all from a visiting couple dance, often called for the central figure, "Chase the Squirrel," [See B. A. Botkin *The American Play-Party Song* pp.159-161] Canoy does not, however, call a dance.

20. **"Buck Dancing Charlie."** Fiddle, guitar, and mandolin are tuned standard but higher than concert pitch. The tune is played in the key of G. Enos Canoy made this tune up himself from melodic and rhythmic piece devices he had heard elsewhere. This is a one-chord tune which uses the complete range of the fiddle in first position, two and one-third octaves. Like "Carroll County Blues," played by Willie Narmour of Carrollton, Mississippi, this tune uses a slurred third to give the bluesy sound to the middle section. The tune has three distinct parts, each in a different register. The first, or fine, part is played primarily on the top string. The second part, or coarse part, is played on the middle strings, and a third part is played predominantly on the bass G string. The title, "Buck Dancing Charlie," refers to a common form of solo dance derived from Afro-American step dancing but made popular to white



*The Canoy's, Back, l-r: Tim, Lola, Onie, Enos; front, l-r: Joanna, Travis. Photo, c. 1940, Courtesy Lola Canoy*

Southern audiences through minstrel and medicine shows of the nineteenth century.

21. **"Lost John."** Fiddle, guitar, and mandolin are tuned standard but higher than concert pitch. The tune is played in the key of G. Enos originally learned this piece as a french harp [harmonica] tune, and later adopted it to the fiddle. This harp tune is different from the fiddle tune as played by Burnett and Rutheford [Col 15122]. There were several blues harmonica tunes recorded by this title, by Oliver Sims [Col 15103] in 1926 and Henry Whitter [Okeh 40391], as well as by the Grand Old Opry star De Ford Bailey [not released master# 47110] in 1928. These blues tunes, like "Lost John," are constructed around short repeated rhythmic phrases rather than having a melody whose framework is the complete tune. Like "Buck Dancing Charlie," this is a one-chord tune, with little phrases that are described in other tunes as fox hounds, or train sounds.

22. **"Henry Holmes Holler."** Sung by Tim Canoy, this tune is played on the fiddle by Enos Canoy. Tim never heard this holler sung by Henry Holmes, but his grandfather told him that Holmes could be heard in the morning and afternoon up to five miles. Although the distance seems exaggerated, the ability to communicate over long distances must have been more highly developed before mechanical and electric amplification became available. Yells, whistles, shouts, and hollers all figure prominently in the Civil War literature, especially

among the Confederate infantry. Field recordings of the 1930s documented few examples of hollers and shouts, suggesting that this form of communication that was once widespread was on the decline. When asked to play Tim's holler on his fiddle, Enos plays it perfectly with only one hearing, a demonstration of the abilities of a musician who plays by ear, not from sight-reading a musical score.

23. **"Poor Little Mary Sitting in the Corner."** The fiddle is cross-tuned with high bass and counter [AEAE], played in the key of A tuned high of standard. Jim Myers is beating two straws. No recorded or printed versions of this tune could be located. Enos learned this tune from his uncles Love Kennedy and Robert Runnels of Simpson County, Mississippi. This tune sounds like a children's game song, as "Little Sally Walker," with its narrow melodic framework in the coarse phrase. Unlike the band pieces which Enos Canoy played, he retuned the fiddle for straws so that the bass and counter strings that Jim Myers was beating would be the tonic [A] and the dominant [E]. Jim Myers is beating two straws, in comparison to Mrs. Kittrell, who used only one, and he changes strings between the coarse and fine part.

## Jim Myers

Recorded in Magee  
May 26, 1939

Jim Myers, who beats straws with Enos Canoy on "Poor Little Mary Sitting in the Comer," was born in 1901 in Smith County, Mississippi. In 1939 he was living and farming in Simpson County near Magee. Little is known about Myers except that he often played with Enos Canoy and the Canoy band. In response to Halpert's question about how he learned to play, Myers answered:

I learned to play when I was small, about nine years old. Well, I had a cousin that worked for Dad, made his home with Mother and Dad on the farm. He was an orphan boy. And I-he played the fiddle-I took a notion I wanted to fiddle. We was poor folks and about the time we got straight the boll weevil got us. Dad give us a cent apiece to catch the boll weevils and I went out in the cotton patch and caught about five hundred of them one day. Only asked for enough to get me a fiddle. I started from there.

24. "**Old Field Rabbit.**" The fiddle is cross-tuned [AEAE] and played in the key of A. This piece is evidently a song in the Afro-American tradition. Margueritte Boggan, of Magee, Mississippi, sang the words on another recording. No printed source nor previous recordings could be found of this tune. This two-part tune uses the same descending scale for a portion of both parts. The coarse begins on the counter [E] below the tonic [A], while the fine begins on the third [C#] above the tonic. The phrase structure for the tune therefore is ABABCBCB, a common form of traditional fiddle tunes, especially the rather simple locally composed varieties.

## Stephen Benjamin Tucker

Recorded in Meridian  
May 23, 1939

Stephen Benjamin Tucker was born near Collinsville in Lauderdale County, Mississippi, in 1859. When Jerome Sage of the Mississippi Music Project visited him in 1939 to ask if he was willing to record, he was living in a newly-bmlt log home on the same land his father had lived on. At the time he was eighty years old. In the years since his father left him eighty acres of land Tucker had enlarged the farm to over two hundred acres, raising six girls and two boys off the farm. Though his father never played the fiddle, one of his two brothers, both Civil War veterans, was a well-respected fiddler. "I was nine or ten years old when I learned," explained Tucker "so little I had to put the fiddle on my shoulder."

The fiddle Tucker brought to the recording session at Meridian Junior College was the one he bought when he was fifteen years old: "Bought [it] from a fellow named Thompson right after the Civil War. I have had it since he got shet of it." Soon after he acquired the

instrument, Tucker whittled an apron for it out of an old bone; his whittle work was still on the fiddle in 1939. Like his fiddle, many of his tunes came from older fiddlers soon after the war; he didn't remember any specific source, but simply explained that he picked up the tunes from hearing older fiddlers play.

Tucker lived very close to Charles Long and Frank Kittrell, both fiddle players who preferred having straws second them; however, the straws never suited Stephen Tucker. "I never did like to have straw beats" he explained to Ferriss. He had played with the straws accompanying him, but never found it appealing, saying that if a tune uses the last string on the fiddle, then straw-beating annoyed him.

Like many other fiddlers of his time, Tucker played for "frolics," picnics, dances, and with local bands. He also played in many fiddlers' contests and often won the prize: "Reason I did is I was the oldest and ugliest man."

Tucker told the Music Project workers that he hadn't played much in ten years and over time he had forgotten many of the older tunes. If he was out of practice, however, he still performed exceptionally well, recording twenty-four tunes for Halpert, nine of which appear on this record.

25. "**Cold Frosty Morning.**" The fiddle is tuned with high bass [ADAE] and played in D. Only three tunes in this 1939 collection are in 6/8 or jig time. Tucker plays all three 6/8 tunes, suggesting that this form was more popular when he learned to play. Since he began playing fiddle in the late 1860s, his tunes represent the repertory of an older generation than John Hatcher, Ernest Claunch, or the Canoy family. In general, jigs are seldom reported among Southern traditional fiddlers, with the exception being "Haste to the Wedding." Although both tunes are played in the key of D, "Cold Frosty Morning" is a quite different tune, and unreported in the printed collections in this setting. In form the tune is a two-part tune played AABBBA, but with the low tone drawn out, due as much to Tucker's lack of practice than as to intent. The tag on the end of the fine [B], along with the restatement of the coarse may also be creativity based on lack of practice, because the second time he plays the tune the tag is not



present. However, since the tune is played only one and one half times, we can't know how Tucker would have played it once he was warmed up. The coarse phrase begins with an octave jump from the D on the third string to the D on the second. This is entirely typical of jigs in D. Tucker explains that the open low A tone which he plays against the D string is planned.

"Because I get a sound out of that bass when it's tuned up that I wouldn't get-I'd have to have my fingers on it

26. "Bragg's Retreat." The fiddle is tuned with high bass [ADAE], played in the key of D. This tune is more widely known as Forked Deer, having been published under that title as early as 1839 [George P. Knauff's *Virginia Reels* Vol. 1no. 4). A three-part tune was recorded by East Tennessee fiddler Charlie Bowman [Col 15387] in 1929. Eddon Hammon's version of "Forked Deer," recently released from the West Virginia University Press, is a good comparison, both for the similarity of phrase structure and tuning. The title "Bragg's Retreat" almost certainly refers to Civil War General Braxton Bragg, but to what battle it is impossible to be certain. In any case the tune is considerably older than the title. Tucker plays the tune as a regular dance piece with phrase structure AABB, although because the original disc ran out midway in the second rendering of the tune, we can't say how his later variations might have changed the tune. Tucker holds the D note at the end of the fine part an extra beat, but there is no evidence that he meant to play this tune as an irregular piece. The scales played in the fine part of "Bragg's Retreat" wonderfully illustrate the Southern fiddlers' love of elaboration. Rather than playing a straight descending line, Tucker musically steps down the scale-now down a little, now up-showing us his mastery of the tune and the bow.

28. "Throw the Soapsuds in the Corner of the Fence." The fiddle is tuned with high bass [ADAE], played in the key of D. This is an amusing title, perhaps derived from a rhyme, but not encountered elsewhere. The tune combines a very familiar coarse phrase from "Rabbit in the Pea Patch" with a fine part which cannot be identified with another tune.

28. "Soldier's Joy." The fiddle is tuned with high bass [ADAEJ] and played in the key of D. Very few tunes in the repertory of American fiddlers have such a wide distribution as this tune. Both John Hatcher and Ernest Clauch also recorded versions of "Soldier's Joy" for this collection. More than most other tunes, "Soldier's Joy" has the capacity to fit in every regional style-to sound like a Canadian tune when played as "French Four" [LC-L62], to fit the Pennsylvania style of fiddling as "Kings Head" [Bayard #21), or to sound like a Southern hoedown when played by Gid Tunner and the Skillet Lickers [Col 15538). Tucker plays the tune as a three-part piece, inserting the coarse [BJ played an octave higher on the E string [B'] with a slide to the high D note. For that reason the phrase structure of the tune is AABBAAB'B'BBA.

29. "Raker's Hornpipe." The fiddle is tuned with high bass [ADAEJ, key of D. This is "Rickett's Hornpipe," one of a small number of hornpipes popular with Southern fiddlers. The tune is named after John Ricketts, an early American circus performer/entrepreneur before the beginning of the nineteenth century. Virtually all the tune collections of the late nineteenth century included this tune, although

the coarse was not necessarily rendered in the printed manner by Southern fiddlers. The tune was infrequently recorded by Southern fiddlers in the 1920s, but the Skillet Lickers recorded it in 1931 [Col 15682). Luther Strong of Hazard, Kentucky, recorded it for the Library of Congress in 1937 [LC-L62]. As Alan Jabbour pointed out in his liner notes to *American Fiddle Tunes*, the concept of the hornpipe as a separate dance has been lost in Southern fiddling, and these complicated tunes are often played at the same pace as breakdowns, straining the techniques of even so gifted a fiddler as Stephen Tucker.

30. "Indian Eat the Woodpecker." The fiddle is tuned standard [GDAE] and played in the key of C. While this tune is familiar sounding, the melody is not a close kin to any published pieces. The coarse part, played primarily up on the bass strings, is similar to "Tom Wagoner," as played by K. C. Kartchner of Snowflake, Arizona, but certainly removed from the modern versions of "Texas Waggoner" [VI 40145) as Eck Robertson recorded that tune. The fine part sounds similar to "Billy in the Low Ground," moving to the relative minor [Am] and being almost entirely played on the E string. A nice dance tune, the coarse strain consists of a single melodic phrase played twice. The only change is its ending, first on the dominant [G] and the second time on the tonic [C]. The melody of the fine is also only half the required length and repeats twice to complete the tune. Like many old-time fiddlers, Tucker chooses not to play each part four times to make a dance tune of standard measure; he instead shortens the fine part. The phrase structure thus is AAAABB.

31. "Christmas Time in the Morning." The fiddle is cross-tuned [AEAE] and played in the key of A. This is a version of "Christmas Time Will Soon Be Over," which was recorded commercially by Fiddling John Carson and his Virginia Reelers [M45273) in 1928. The coarse strain is the song melody. Tucker's fine part is more modal than the string band version and closer to the high part heard in "The Cuckoo's Nest," as, for example, played by Ed Haley from Logan County, West Virginia [Rounder 1010).

32. "Joke on the Puppy." The fiddle is tuned with a high bass [ADAEJ] and played in the key of A. This is Tucker's version of "Ryestraw." Although three strains comprise the tune as played by Tucker, other versions were played with from two to four distinct parts. This tune, however, is a good opportunity to see the redundancy inherent in many traditional fiddle tunes. The coarse phrase is the most stable element and corresponds to the rhyme mentioned in Kittrell's version. The coarse consists of a short figure across the middle strings ending first above then below the first note. The initial figure is then contrasted with a descending scale to complete the phrase [AA'AB]. As in most fiddle tunes, this entire phrase is played twice. The fine part is a contrast between a three-note scale on the top string ending at the high A note, and contrasted with a circular figure around the open E on the top string but ending on D note [CD]. The third part is essentially the fine part reversed, beginning with a circular figure around E and then a scale to the open A, repeated with the final scale being a combination of the C part of the fine, and the descending scale of the third phrase [EFEFCF]. The entire tune then is [AA'ABCDEFEFCE]. Three

phrases, but each made up of smaller repeated turns and scales.

33. "**Circus Piece.**" The fiddle is tuned with a high bass [ADAE] and played in the key of D. "Circus Piece" is not so much a name for the tune as the place that Tucker remembers learning this tune. The piece has been infrequently recorded across the South with no commonly associated title. A. L. Steeley, originally from Alabama but living in Texas, recorded the tune as "Texas Quickstep" for Brunswick [Br 285] in 1929. Earlier, in 1927, the Leake County Revelers had recorded the tune as a counterpart within their very popular "Wednesday Night Waltz" [Col 15189]. Perhaps because of the popularity of "Wednesday Night Waltz," they also repackaged this arpeggiated coarse phrase as "Mississippi Breakdown" [Col 15668] in 1931 (This made three commercial recordings of "Mississippi Breakdown," all different tunes). Henry Reed of Glyn Lynn, Virginia, played this tune for Alan Jabbour in 1966, just calling it a clog. The coarse part, a series of arpeggios first in the key of D, then G, then A, is the stable part of this tune. Like the hornpipe, the clog was a more complicated dance tune meant to be played at a moderate tempo. The loss of popularity of the dance itself has caused these tunes to be played as quickly as the simpler breakdown pieces.

## Charles Long and Sam Neal

Recorded near Quitman  
May 21, 1939

A native of Choctaw County, Alabama, Charles Long moved to Clarke County, Mississippi, in the early 1900s. As he did in Alabama, Long farmed in Clarke County, planting four acres of cotton and fifteen acres of corn in 1939, and raising hogs, sheep, cows, and a vegetable garden. Commenting on his move to Mississippi some years ago, Long said, "Line don't make much difference—we're all about the same."

Born in August of 1869, Charles Long first learned to play the "Juse" harp and later picked up the harmonica. "Next thing you knowed," he told Ferriss, "I was trying to pick out on a fiddle the tunes I'd hear. I bought four fiddles before I got one I liked," He borrowed a fiddle for the recording session in 1939, saying his was worn out and no good. In order to play the borrowed instrument, he had to whittle out a set of tuners. "Poor folks," explained Mrs. Long, "have to have poor ways."

In the hill country of Mississippi near the town of Quitman, Long played regularly with his family at home and played dances on the weekends. "When they got lined up for the dancing," he recalled, "is when I started playing. I guess we've played many a night and never played the same piece twice . . . There's two things a fiddler would get at a frolic—whiskey and a chair. Wasn't much trouble for a fiddler to get a partner, neither. [People were] scared he'd quit."

Playing with Long at the recording session was Sam Neal, a neighbor and also a former Choctaw County, Alabama, resident. Similarly, Neal had moved to Mississippi some twenty-five years ago. In all, they

recorded eleven tunes for Halpert and Ferriss, five of which had vocal parts. Neal, a sixty-year-old man who once played the fiddle himself, seconded Long on the straws on all the tunes. Though he has used two straws before, he performs on these recordings with just one in a style nearly identical to that of Mrs. Kittrell.

The recordings and interviews were made at the Long's home, eight or so miles east of Quitman on the Butler Highway. As Long and Neal played and graciously answered questions from Halpert and Ferriss, about twenty-five men, women, and children stood and sat on the front porch and in the breezeway of the dogtrot. Several others stood in the yard. When they were finished, Halpert and Ferriss prepared to leave. As they walked from the porch to the recording truck, Mrs. Long expressed her sincere appreciation for the recording opportunity, adding that she very much wanted to obtain copies of the discs. Charles Long then chimed in with the common parting words for visitors from far off: "Stay all night and we'll show you how poor folks live."

34. "**My Little Dony.**" The fiddle is cross-tuned [AEAE] and played in the key of A. Sam Neal is beating



Charles Long and Sam Neal  
Long's porch      Quitman, 1939

with one straw, but flexing at the wrist rather than the elbow as Mrs. Kittrell did. "Little Dony" belongs in the large tune family of "Liza Jane," although the coarse phrase of Long's tune is considerably different from the usual song air. Thaddeus Willingham of Gulfport, Mississippi, recorded the same song accompanied by banjo for this Halpert-Ferriss collection but called the piece "Oh, My Little Darling." Several different "Liza Jane" versions were recorded in the 1920s which make useful comparisons. Fiddling John Carson recorded "Goodbye Liza Jane" [Okeh 45049] with the same fine phrase as Long's. However, "Liza Jane" [Okeh 45202], recorded by the Carter Brothers and Son from Monroe County, Mississippi, is a completely different tune. This is really a song, rather than a fiddle tune, and is played too slow for a dance. Part of the archaic flavor is contributed because of accidental discords inherent in straw-beating. "Little Dony" uses the subdominant chord [D] at the end of the second line, but Long is beating on the open E string, creating an ambiguous harmonic relationship. The best tunes for

accompaniment by straws are either one-chord tunes or tunes that use only the chords of the open bass and counter [in this case A and E].

Herbert Halpert was particularly interested in songs, and requested the words whenever possible. It's entirely possible that he selected this tune from the list of what Long could play. The lyrics recorded here are often heard interchanged with a number of minstrel-like banjo songs:

Eyes just like a cherry	When you go a-courtin'
Cheeks just like a rose	Let my Dony alone
How I love my Dony	
God in Heaven knows	Preacher in the pulpit
	Bible in his hand
Fair you well my Dony	Said he wouldn't preach no more
Fair you well, I say	Till he got another dram
Fair you well my Dony	
Come another day	[Wish I had a band box]
	sung in a later version
You can ride the old	[Put my Dony in]
grey mare	[Tuke her out and kiss her]
I will ride the roan	[Put her back again]

35. "Hard Road To Texas." The fiddle is cross-tuned [AEAE] and played in the key of A. No musical examples of this tune can be found in printed or recorded collections. But while no similar tune is available for comparison, this tune is made up of such common melodic material that it sounds like many other better known tunes. "Hard Road To Texas" is a three-part tune, in which the fine is played on the treble string and the coarse played across the middle strings. The second phrase is played only once and is a melodic bridge between the fine and coarse parts, encompassing the coarse figure into its melodic contour. The phrase structure is AABCCC, because the coarse [C] is only half as long as the fine. While the tuning is described as AEAE, one should remember that the absolute pitch is not important for a fiddler *unless* he is playing with another instrument. The more important information is that the fiddle is cross-tuned, since it is the relative pitches of the strings which determines how the tune is played. Long is two steps low of standard pitch, making the tune sounded in G, not A. Some fiddlers would not distinguish between this tuning in A [AEAE] and tuning in G [GDGD] because they would play the same. This is especially problematic when tunes are transcribed in standard musical notation, because the absolute pitch may include sharps and flats that the musician would never admit to playing.

36. "Jones County." The fiddle is cross-tuned [AEAE] and played in the key of A. Like "Little Dony," this is more a song air than a fiddle tune, with a line and then refrain, both in the lyrics and melody. There are some differences between song airs and dance tunes. For example, most song lyrics do not permit each phrase to be played twice, but most dance tunes demand it. Long starts to play "Jones County" as a dance tune, repeating each phrase twice, but Neal jumps in and begins to sing before the second repeat. Jones County is southwest of Clarke County, where Long and Neal lived. The tune "Jones County" is a fine example of a locally constructed tune. The melody is made up from familiar phrases, the song lyrics are traditional images with very little action, and the referent of the song is a place with local, not national importance. Sam Neal sings the first verse, and Charles

Long sings the second verse.

Gone a whole week to see my love  
Down in Jones County  
Gone a whole week to see my love  
Down in Jones County  
Fair you well and goodbye too  
Down in Jones County  
Fair you well and goodbye too  
Down in Jones County

Jones County - Charles Long



37. "Alabama Waltz." The fiddle is tuned with high bass [ADAE] and played in the key of A. This is an interesting version of "Ryestraw" and was reported to be Mrs. Long's favorite tune. For a discussion of the tune, see Stephen B. Tucker's rendition [Side 2 Band 4]. It is confusing to hear a breakdown played in 2/4 called a waltz, which would be played in 3/4.

Half-meter tunes are extremely rare in this collection of fiddle tunes, though not in the songs. This may be a result of the bias of Halpert, reinforced by the recent introduction of this couple dance to the rural South. Waltz dances in Mississippi during the 1930s were still largely popular pieces and had yet to become a traditional dance form, as we know it today. But, of course, "Alabama Waltz" is a breakdown, not a waltz. The really special feature of this performance is that during the coarse strain the fiddle plays only the end of the lines, letting Sam Neal's straw-beating "take the lead" for the majority of that part. This stage trick of featuring one instrument was slowly acquired in professional country music and assimilated by rural musicians who wished to be "modern." 11-additionally among Southern dance musicians everyone played either a chord backup or the melody for as long as the dance or song lasted.

"My Old Dog's 'frailing Up A Squirrel." The fiddle is cross-tuned [AEAE] and played in the key of A. No references could be found to this tune, either in printed sources or in recorded collections. The tune is unusual, being modal in the fine strain and major in the coarse strain. The high part, or fine, revolves around the A on the top string, dropping in the first half line to a flatted seventh [G] on the downbeat and then playing the same melodic figure but going up to the B note above the A. The same strong change is felt in the coarse, but Long chords a D major [D-F#] and the remainder of the line resolves to the open second string [A]. The coarse is repeated three times, the first time through the tune; the fine is played only twice. If we

letter the half lines, the phrase structure appears ABACDCDCDC.

## Hardy C. Sharp, Douglass Williams, and Horace D. Kinard

Recorded in Meridian  
May 29, 1937

Hardy C. Sharp, born in Newton County, Mississippi, in 1884, began fiddling when he was fifteen after watching other older fiddlers play. "I got the idea and I found out that I can make a noise on it," he told Halpert and Ferriss. "I began to steal the fiddle out to see if I couldn't learn to play a fiddle. And the fiddle I stole was a fiddle that belonged to my brother, an old fiddle that didn't play anything much." Slightly gray-headed and fifty-five years old at the time of these recordings, Sharp lived in Meridian, where he worked for the W.P.A. Like many other fiddlers on this record, Sharp often played with a band, most often "The Old Time Fiddlers" of Meridian, a group he organized and played with on the radio.

Accompanying Hardy Sharp on these recordings was another Meridian resident, Douglass Williams, who was forty-four in 1939. Williams's first instrument was the bass fiddle, and he learned it at such a young age that he had to stand on a cracker box to play it. Later, at age eighteen, he began playing the guitar. Little is known about Williams except that at the time these recordings were made he was performing with his father's band in Clarke County, Mississippi. Backing up Sharp on his recording of "Mississippi Sawyer" is Horace D. Kinard, a forty-nine-year-old banjo player from Meridian. Kinard, who also accompanied W. A. Bledsoe at the same recording session, was a railroad worker who also sang several songs for Halpert.

39. "Eighth of January." Fiddle and banjo are tuned standard [GDAE, aDADE], played in the key of D. This is one of the most widespread of American fiddle tunes. The title commemorates the "Battle of New Orleans" during the War of 1812, and was called "Jackson's Victory" in some nineteenth century tunebooks. The fiddle tune may be older than the battle, but it is a tune that does not have an obvious British antecedent. While many fiddlers do play unfamiliar pieces at times, at dances, they played well-known tunes like "Soldier's Joy" or "Eighth of January" more often than "Indian War Whoop" or "Farewell Whiskey." Sharp plays a very standard setting for this tune.

40. "Mississippi Sawyer." Fiddle and banjo are tuned standard [GDAE, aDADE], played in the key of D. This tune is also known as "Downfall of Paris," and John Hatcher of Tishomingo County, Mississippi, played it under that title. This tune, which gives great latitude to the fiddler to show his talents, continues to be played in all parts of the southern United States, and was frequently commercially recorded during the 1920s. Alan Jabbour points out that while older tune collections suggest the coarse part was played first, the twentieth

century Southern fiddler more often starts on the fine. Kinard is frailing the banjo to accompany the fiddle and making no attempt to play the tune, although many musicians do play this tune on the banjo.

41. "Puncheon Floor." Fiddle and guitar are tuned standard [GDAE, EADGBE], played in the key of G. Douglas Williams flat-picks the guitar. This is an infrequently collected tune, but one which may be disguised in other titles, especially with string band accompaniment. Arthur Smith recorded the tune as "Lost Train Blues" [Bb 5858] in 1935, with considerable sliding double stops added for train sounds. Hoyt Ming and his Pep Steppers recorded "White Mule" for Victor Records [Vi 21534] with the same melodic structure as "Puncheon Floor," but considerably simplified and with a third part added. A tune printed in Ford's *Traditional Music of America* [page 57], probably from Missouri, is named "Puncheon Floor" and discussed at length, but it is quite a different tune. The tune as played by Hardy Sharp begins on the fine, centering around the G on the treble string, and ends by a descending scale to G on the counter [D string]. The coarse part of the tune is a shuffling bow phrase on a G chord [G-B] on the middle strings, finished with the descending octave scale as in the fine. The coarse strain is very similar to a variation used for "Katy Hill."

42. "Great Big Yam Potatoes." Fiddle and guitar are tuned standard [GDAE, EADGBE], played in the key of G. The guitar is flat-picked. A well-travelled Southern tune, frequently recorded by fiddlers across the deep South, but without a fixed title. The Leake County Revelers recorded this tune as "Been to the East, Been to the West" [Col 15318] in 1928. Fiddling John Carson of Atlanta recorded this same piece as "Hell Broke Loose in Georgia" [Okeh 45018]. But the title of this tune speaks more specifically to the number of farmers who raised "yam potatoes" in the sandy soil of central Mississippi. The coarse strain is the song melody, revolving around the D on the second string. The fine part begins with a run to high B on the treble string, then a descent chord by chord first to the tonic [G], the subdominant [C], the dominant [D], and resolves to the tonic [G] on the middle string.

Gary Stanton, a fiddle player and radio producer, is a graduate of Indiana University with a doctorate in American Folklore.

## Acknowledgments

This recording represents a melding of professional talents and institutional cooperation: the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, the Mississippi Arts Commission, the Center for the Study of Southern Culture, the National Endowment for the Arts-Folk Arts Program, and the Library of Congress.

Tom Rankin, folklorist with the Mississippi Arts Commission, researched the field recording holdings from Mississippi in the Library of Congress. He then located information about the musicians in the

Mississippi Department of Archives and History, repository of the materials generated in Mississippi by the Federal Writer's Project of the Works Progress Administration. Herbert Halpert, folklorist for the Works Progress Administration, had made a tour of Mississippi in 1939 collecting folk tunes and songs with Abbott Ferriss, now a professor of sociology at Emory University in Atlanta, assisting as a staff member of the Mississippi Writer's Project. It was Ferriss's field notes, photographs, and manuscript materials (Record Group 60) that complemented the Library of Congress tunes.

With a matching grant from the Mississippi Arts Commission, the Mississippi Department of Archives and History sponsored the production of the album and booklet. We are grateful to Tom Rankin for pulling together all of the elements which went into the production of this recording. Our appreciation also goes to Tom Sauber for tune transcriptions and essay; Gary Stanton for tune annotations and essay; Chrissy Wilson for supervising the production of the booklet; Cavett Tuff for designing the album cover; Tom Carter for tapes; Gerald Parsons and Joe Hutcherson, Library of Congress, for research assistance; Alan Stokes, Country Music Foundation, for mastering the field recordings; Bill Ferriss and the Center for the Study of Southern Culture for distributing the album; Herbert Halpert and Abbott Ferriss for their initial work in preserving this archive of sound; and special thanks to the families of the musicians for additional information and photographs.

Patti Carr Black  
Mississippi Department  
of Archives and History

## Works Cited and Additional Reading

- Samuel P. Bayard, *Hill Country Tunes: Instrumental Folk Music of Southwestern Pennsylvania*, Philadelphia: Memoirs of the American Folklore Society, volume 39, 1944.
- B. A. Botkin, *The American Play-Party Song*. Frederick Ungar Publishing Company: New York, 1937, 1963.
- R. P. Christeson, *The Old Time Fiddlers Repertory*, 2 volumes. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1973, 1984.
- Ira Ford, *Traditional Music In American*, 1940. Reprint edition, foreword by Judith McCulloh, Hatboro, Pennsylvania: Folklore Associates, 1965.
- Arthur Palmer Hudson, *Folksongs of Mississippi and their Background*. University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill, 1936.
- Marion Thede, *The Fiddle Book*. Oak Publications: New York, 1967.

## Other Recordings that Include Examples of Mississippi Fiddling

- AFS L62 *American Fiddle Tunes from the Archive of Folk Song*, edited by Alan Jabbour. Library of Congress: Washington, D.C.
- AFS L2 *Anglo-American Shanties, Lyric Songs, Dance Tunes and Spirituals*, edited by Alan Lomax. Library of Congress: Washington, D.C.
- AFS L9 *Play and Dance Songs and Tunes*, edited by B. A. Botkin. Library of Congress: Washington, D.C.
- Co 528 *Traditional Music of Mississippi: Thi. 1 Mississippi Breakdown*. County Records: Floyd, Virginia.
- Co 529 *Traditional Fiddle Music of Mississippi: Wil. 2 Don't If Ju Remember the Time*. County Records, Floyd, Virginia
- Co 532 *The Leake County Revelers: 1927-1930 Recordings*. County Records: Floyd, Virginia.
- Homestead 103 *Hoyt Ming and his Pep-Steppers: New Hot Times!* Homestead Records: Floyd, Virginia.
- SC 1700 *Mississippi Folk Thices*. Mississippi Department of Archives and History and Southern Culture Records. Southern Culture Records: University, Miss.



Canoy Wildcats. l-r: W. A. Green, guitar; unknown; Enos Canoy, fiddle; Curtis Mangum, guitar; Deward Canoy, bass; Herbert Canoy, drum. Bassfield, c. 1950.

# Fiddle Tunes in the Halpert-Ferriss Collection, with key noted for each tune.

*Tunes on this album printed bold.*

W. E. Claunch with his daughter Christine Haygood, guitar

Old Molly Hair-D	Great Titanic-A
8th of January-D	Walking in the Parlor-D
Grub Springs-A	Run Nigger Run-D
Give the Fiddler a Dram-A	Rabbit in the Pea Patch-D
Mississippi Sawyer-D	Great Big Taters-G
Black Eyed Susie-D	Miss Sally at the Party-G
Wagoner-C	Wolves A-Howlin'-A
Chicken Pie-G	Oh Yes, Mammy, Look at Sam-A
Bear Creek's Up-G	Pretty Little Miss-A
Grey Eagle-G	Drunkard's Hiccups-A
Pass Around the Bottle-C	Arkansas raveler-D

John Hatcher

Soldier's Joy-D	Tom and Jerry-A
8th of January-D	Pretty Little Girl
Arkansas raveler-D	All Around Town-A
Tishomingo County Blues-D	Farewell Whiskey-A
Goin' Up to Hamburg-G	Buffalo Gals-A
Scott #2-G	Bonaparte's Retreat-A
Black Eyed Susie-D	Danville Girl-G
Old Miss Sally-G	Up the Road-G
Grub Springs-A	Down Yonder-G
Long Eared Mule-G	Leather Britches-G
	Billy in the Low Ground-C

John Brown

Cindy-G	Froggy Went A-Courtin'-G
Wolves A-Howling-G	Not Gonna Have No Supper
Dusty Miller-G	Tonight-G
Sally Goodin-G	Rats in the Meal Barrel-G

Frank Kittrell, wife beatingstraws

Indian War Whoop-A	Want to Go to Meeting-A
Corn Stalk Fiddle-A	Cindy Jane-A
Goin' to the Wedding-A	Ryestraw-A
Little Boy Went A-Courtin'-A	Hell After the Yearlings-D

W. A. Bledsoe with Horace Kinard, banjo

Prettiest Little Girl in the County-0-G	Farewell Mary Ann-D
Big Footed Nigger in a Sandy Lot-G	Old Molly Hair-D
	Bill Cheatem-G

Enos Canoy Band with Tim Canoy, mandolin, and Lola Canoy, guitar

Possam and Raccoon-G	Where'd You Git Your
8th of January-D	Whiskey-A, Jim Myers
Old Blue Sow-A	beating straws
Buck Dancin' Charlie-G	Poor Little Mary Settin' in
Lost John-G	the Corner-A,
Pickin' the Devil's Eye-A	Jim Myers beating straws
Jim Myers beating straws	Henry Holmes Holler,
	sung by Tim Canoy

Jim Myers

Old Field Rabbit-A

Stephen B. Tucker

Cold Frosty Morning-D	Indian Eat the
Bragg's Retreat-D	Woodpecker-C
Hog Eye-A	Devil's Dream-A
Unnamed-D	Tom and Jerry-A
Throw the Soap Suds in the Corner of the Fence-D	Christmas Time in the Morning-A
Soldier's Joy-D	Pound Cake and Sugar-A
Mississippi Sawyer-D	Joke on the Puppy-A
Fisher's Hornpipe-D	Haste to the Wedding-D
Arkansas raveler-D	Unnamed-D
Run Nigger Run-D	Circus Piece-D
Raker's Hornpipe-D	Chippy Get Your Hair Cut-C
Texas Waggoner-C	Leather Britches-G
	Calico-G

Charles Long + Sam Neal beating straws

My Little Dony-A	Alabama Waltz-A
Hard Road to Texas-A	Little Willie-A
Drunkard's Hiccups-A	Big Eyed Rabbit-A
Sally-0-A	Rock Candy-A
Jones County-A	My Old Dog's Trailing Up
Steamboat-A	A Squirrel-A
Fisher's Hornpipe-A	

Hardy Sharp with Douglas Williams, guitar, or Horace Kinard, banjo

Puncheon Floor-G	Liza Jane-G
Great Big Yam Potatoes-G	8th of January-D
Leather Britches-G	Mississippi Sawyer-D