

# 220. THE SQUIRREL HUNTERS (FV)

Horner, F, 1944, B; 1960, JB.

A

The musical score is written on four staves in F major (one sharp) and 2/4 time. The first three staves contain the main melody, featuring a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes, often beamed together. The fourth staff begins with a section labeled 'B.....' and continues with a section labeled 'Var. A' and 'B', which includes wavy lines representing improvisation or variation. The piece concludes with a double bar line and a final flourish.

<http://www.civilwar.com/news/recent-postings-54491/150419-squirrel-hunters-blocked-rebels.html>

An urgent call was put out in Ohio, Indiana and Michigan for a 30-to-90-day call-up of a militia that became known as "**the Squirrel Hunters**," named because they were **farm boys who didn't have to shoot twice to hit a squirrel**, according to Geaslen.

<http://www.oberlinheritagecenter.org/squirrelhunters>

In late summer of 1862 two Confederate forces, one under General Robert E. Lee and the other under Generals Braxton Bragg and Kirby Smith, began moving northward. Their respective targets were Maryland and Kentucky. Lee's goal was to move his men to a fresh food source, gain Maryland as a Confederate state, and deliver a knockout blow against the Union forces under General George McClellan. General Bragg's objectives in Kentucky were more or less analogous to Lee's. He hoped to defeat the Union army under General Don Carlos Buell, place a pro-Confederate government in the capitol and recruit thousands of Kentuckians into the Confederate army. The ultimate aims of both invasions were to add to the strength of the Confederate armies and gain European recognition of the fledgling nation.

As the Confederate invasion into Kentucky unfolded, a handful of Union soldiers under Major General William "Bull" Nelson were defeated at Lexington, Kentucky. Nelson's Union forces represented the last true semblance of Northern might between the Confederate forces and Ohio. The Union high command, along with federal and



**Drawing of a squirrel hunter (AL06216)**Ohio Bicentennial Commission, The Scotts Company- Founded by a Civil War Veteran, and The Ohio Historical Society

state governments, recognized the horrifying possibility of a Confederate invasion of Ohio. Ohio Governor William Tod issued a call for minutemen to assist in the defense of Cincinnati; the point on the map where Confederate forces in Kentucky seemed to be converging. Union Major General Lew Wallace was put in charge of the city's defense. Wallace ordered freshly mustered Ohio Infantry regiments, with no combat experience, from nearby Camp Dennison to Cincinnati. When residents of Cincinnati awoke on September 3rd, their town had become an armed camp.

At the outset of the war the Oberlin community was divided on the realities of a southern invasion. Vincent A. Shankland, editor of the Lorain County News, wrote in May of 1861, "Every city and village in the land ought to organize a Home Guard immediately...There is little danger of Southern forces laying waste the North at present...But we should be prepared for the worst." Denton Snider, a student at Oberlin College, recalled a professor who warned "of a victorious rebel army surging northward till it reached Oberlin, of which it would not leave one weatherboard unburnt or one brick of Tappan Hall on top of another." Despite the frightening prognostication,

Snider wrote "The sensational forecast created a smile in the early part of the war." Whatever anxiety there was of a southern invasion onto Ohio soil, very little was done for the outfitting and training of local militias as the war went on. While Ohio was a leading northern state in sending troops to the war front, historian Whitelaw Reid has noted it left its home guard "utterly neglected". Just a week before General Kirby Smith's advance on Cincinnati, an article was published



Latitude: 38.745293, Longitude: -83.845345.

in the Lorain County News which implored for an establishment of a local military unit. Shankland insisted on the formation, because “in these times no one knows who may be called to shoulder the musket next.”

Denton Snider remembered hearing the news of the Confederate advances on the day of his commencement exercises, “While we young gentlemen in black frock coats and white vests were making our graduating speeches on that hot August day, word was brought that Lee and Jackson at the head of their victorious legions superbly officered were surging northward.” The reaction to this was compounded when news was brought of a similar Confederate advance through Kentucky in the direction of Cincinnati. Panic struck all of Ohio. On September 2nd, Governor Tod put out his call for armed volunteers to rush down to Cincinnati and aid in its defense. Suddenly the war seemed much closer than Ohioans had felt before. Denton Snider wrote, “the war seemed getting to be a next-door neighbor to every farm house. That was the situation when I reached home and found the so-called **squirrel-hunters** organizing for a quick trip to the front”.

During the first week of September, the height of the crisis, roughly 15,000 men from across Ohio left their homes, schools, farms and stores for Cincinnati. Their quick departure created a vacuum in small towns throughout the state, especially Oberlin. Oberlin College student Sarah Merion wrote to her family on September 8th, “I never saw it as lonely as it is here not many but negro’s left, no one scarcely that I know”. Professor of Theology James Harris Fairchild commented on the diminished number of students in the college during those weeks of turmoil. Years later he recounted “our recitation-rooms were given up almost wholly to the young women, while the young en, upon a few hours’ notice, rushed with such arms and ammunition and provisions as they could gather up, to the point of danger”.



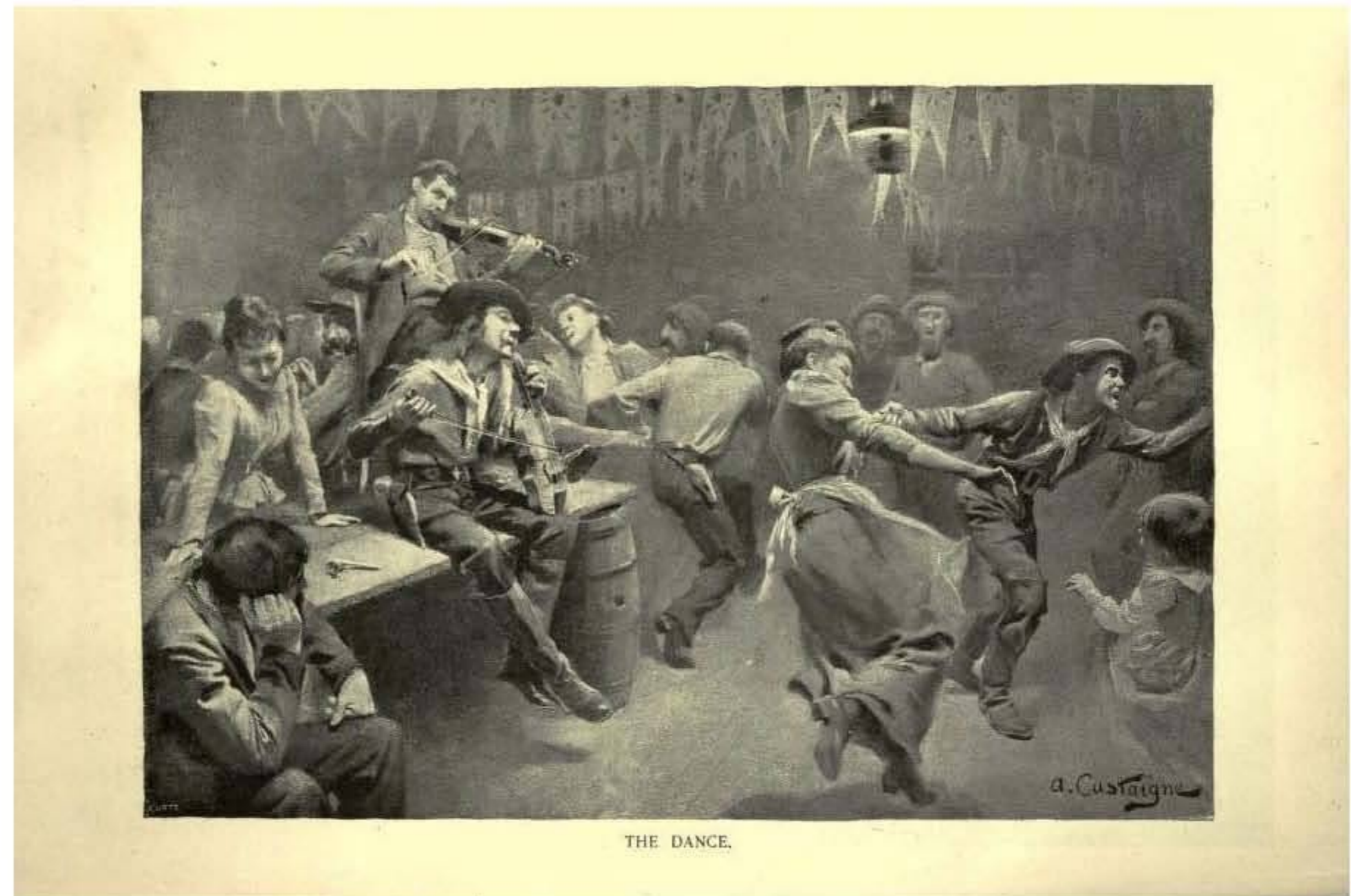
<http://recipetov.net/union-food-recipe-from-the-civil-war/>

Though the massed defenders of Cincinnati were patriotic and eager, they were also poorly equipped and ill-trained in the art of soldiering. It is a military axiom that a soldier fights with more vigor and passion while defending his homeland. It does not necessarily follow, however, that his rifle aim will be more true or that the collective group would act as a cohesive military unit. Whitlaw Reid wrote of the **Squirrel Hunters** as “**crude, unorganized swarms**” and committed “to ready but unsatisfactory service in her [Ohio’s] defense”. This is perhaps why, despite the readiness and fervor with which the men left for Cincinnati, Oberlinians still feared the worst. In another letter written by Sarah Merion she related, “We have very exciting times here as a consequence of the war...we think this place is not out of danger”. Another Oberlin student wrote to her sister of “exciting times” in town as well. The student remarked glumly of the situation, “How the clouds thicken and blacken, where are we going and what is the end to be?”

The mood of the town probably was not helped by the dour tone of Oberlin College’s president Charles Grandison Finney. On September 9th he gave a sermon which framed the invasion crisis in religious and moral terms. Finney believed the invasion, and inevitable ruin that was sure to follow, was a punishment from God for the sin of slavery. He “thought it not improbable that God would destroy the nation if it did not repent”. He went on to say the only hope of salvation for Oberlin and the country was if President Lincoln were to abolish slavery. A letter written on September 9th, later published in the Oberlin Evangelist, said: “No, we shall have no victory while we are so openly against that oppressed race...if he [Lincoln] lets the country be divided and slavery continue to thrive in that great Southern country, his name will be a hissing in the mouths of all lovers of liberty”. For months rumors abounded that Lincoln was planning on releasing a proclamation of emancipation. Finney could only hope that Lincoln would act quickly to save the country from ruin. Denton Snider noticed the religious and apocalyptic overtones circulating around Oberlin as well. He remembered people filled with “crushing anxiety” and that “Oberlin was in Hell that week....and I have to believe that President Finney himself must have gotten some taste of that infernal damnation which he portrayed so luridly to us students”.

As numerous “**Squirrel Hunters**” and Ohio Volunteer Infantry regiments swarmed to the Cincinnati area, Northern numbers swelled against the few thousand Confederates under the command of General Henry Heth. Heth’s own scouts reported over 70,000 defenders faced them in Cincinnati and in the entrenchments dug in Covington, Kentucky. **Nearly 140 men from Oberlin, Amherst and Pittsfield left the Oberlin depot in the first days of the crisis well stocked with “fifteen barrels of substantial food-meats, bread, cheese” provided by the citizens of Oberlin. When they arrived in**

Cincinnati, the Lorain County men were given a dinner by a Mrs. Williamson, a resident of 3rd Street in the city. They stayed the night in her yard. As the next day began, the Lorain County men began to sing and were soon serenaded by a group of young ladies themselves. The men were soon organized into a company in which they elected W.M. Ampt their Captain. The company sent about 5 miles west of Cincinnati where they guarded a ferry crossing on the Kentucky side of the Ohio River. While encamped, the men drilled and went on picket duty. They mainly ate crackers and bacon. Aside from a brief engagement near Covington on September 10th, the Confederate threat to Cincinnati had very little teeth. The Lorain County men did not see any action while they were encamped along the river.



By September 17th, General Heth's Confederates had been found to have completely retreated back to the main force under General Smith. The Squirrel Hunters started for their respective homes. The Lorain County News reported: "They came back a little bronzed, but in the best of humor over their expedition, and ready to return any time when Porkopolis is in danger". With the threat subsided, many in Oberlin felt great relief. The Oberlin Evangelist reiterated Finney's earlier observation that the failure of the government to pursue abolition had brought God's wrath upon the country: "Let it suffice that God reigneth on the throne and 'doeth all things well'. O, if only our national ways pleased Him, how soon would he give us the neck of our enemies, subdued to justice and to peace!"

The **Squirrel Hunters** were instrumental in denying Cincinnati to General Heth's Confederates, thus turning them back deeper into Kentucky to fight General Buell's men. In this way they were also helpful in getting the Emancipation Proclamation issued. Historians have held that the fate of the Emancipation Proclamation was contingent upon General McClellan's success in blocking Lee's intrusion into Maryland. But one can imagine Lincoln would have been hard pressed to issue the Proclamation had one of the Union's major cities been sacked by Confederates who seemed able to strike at the North with impunity.

[http://www.cincinnatiwrt.org/data/ohio%20in%20the%20war/1862%20Defense%20of%20Cincinnati/iii\\_squirrel.pdf](http://www.cincinnatiwrt.org/data/ohio%20in%20the%20war/1862%20Defense%20of%20Cincinnati/iii_squirrel.pdf)

After the grand victory parade back to Cincinnati on September 12th, when the crisis had passed, the **Squirrel Hunters had been most graciously thanked and told to return home. But Smith's report of the 17th evidences that some were still around – in enough number to cause the general concern.**

**Indeed, the Squirrel Hunters were in a festive mood. Many lingered on, taking advantage of the government's meal ticket and the fine fare doled out by the ladies of the area.** No official date of final disbandment is known. It is safe to assume that some of the Hunters, inspired by their brief stint in the "Siege of Cincinnati," joined the incomplete regiments Governor Tod had forwarded posthaste to the scene of impending danger. But for most of them, they simply disappeared back into the woods from whence they came, or back to the untended plow left in a hurry when panic reigned along the Ohio. They undoubtedly departed with plenty tall tales and many very real experiences for respinning around firesides and cracker barrels for years to come.