

The Swannanoa Gathering

Come join us this summer in the heart of North Carolina's beautiful Blue Ridge Mountains for the 18th edition of our folk music and dance workshops!

Fiddle Instruction:

July 5-11 Fiddle Week

with **Paul Anastasio** (swing), **Joe Craven** (new acoustic)
Brad Leftwich (old-time), **Kimberley Fraser** (Cape Breton)
Barbara Lamb (bluegrass), **David Greely** (Cajun), **Liz Knowles** (Irish)
Sarah-Jane Summers (Scottish), **Andrea Hoag** (Swedish)
Carl Jones (mandolin), **Jeff Hersk** (bass), **Mike Block** (cello)
Dennis Stroughmatt (creole), **Jamie Laval** (technique/ Scottish)
Flynn Cohen (guitar) and **Roger Bellow** (guitar)

ALSO:

- Traditional Song Week, July 5-11
- Guitar Week, July 26-Aug. 1
- Contemporary Folk Week, July 26-Aug. 1
- Dulcimer Week, August 2-8

July 12-18 Celtic Week

with **Martin Hayes**, **Kevin Burke**, **Manus McGuire**, **Liz Knowles**,
Sarah-Jane Summers, **Jamie Laval**, **Kimberley Fraser** & **Jane MacMorran**

July 19-25 Old-Time Week

with **Rayna Gellert**, **Bruce Greene**, **Greg Canote**,
John Herrmann, **Mike Bryant** & **Tracy Schwarz**



The Swannanoa Gathering Folk Arts Workshops
Warren Wilson College, PO Box 9000, Asheville, NC 28815
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Fiddle Tune History

By Andrew Kuntz

The Captain

The easiest military titles to research are, of course, the higher ranks. Generals, admirals, and regimental colonels all are fairly well documented in the historical record, which is less forthcoming in the lower ranks. Many of the military men honored by tune titles were also political and social figures, so that rank alone was not the sole reason for associating their name with a title. For example, one title I recently came across in an old English collection (Thompson's *Country Dances*, vol. 2, London, 1765) was "The Royal Midshipman." A midshipman is the lowliest officer rank in the Royal Navy, and the grade is hardly ever mentioned in tune titles, perhaps because most midshipmen were teenagers — officers-in-training — and just beginning their careers. The adjective "royal" was remarkable, however, and made the title fairly easy to trace. It was a reference to Prince Edward Augustus (1739-1767), the younger brother of King George III, who as a midshipman was also the Duke of York. In the strict conventions of the Royal Navy, sailors thought it exceedingly odd that a lowly midshipman did not doff his hat to captains and admirals who came aboard! (which of course the Duke was not obliged to do because of his political station).

When I became interested in the Irish tune(s) "Captain Rock," I

knew that I might have some difficulty finding out anything about the title, for I assumed he was a lowly captain, with a relatively simple name. A flute player played it in our local session, as a kind of afterthought to our finishing up "The Old Bush," — "it's the same, except for a bit of the second part," she said. It was a refreshing variation from the tune we usually played.

There are actually two melodies known as "Captain Rock," both stemming from the influential recording by fiddler Michael Coleman in duet with flute player Tom Morrison. Coleman was born in County Sligo in 1891 and learned to play from local masters, winning competition prizes in Ireland in 1909 and 1910. He emigrated to the United States in 1914 and earned a living by playing for vaudeville circuits, and by 1917 he was married and living in the Bronx in the huge Irish immigrant community. He first began recording in 1921, producing solo recordings and in various duet combinations, although Morrison was the only flute player Coleman recorded with. Morrison, the "Dunmore Flash," was from Glenamaddy in the Dunmore area of County Galway. Born in 1889, he was of an age with Coleman.

The pair recorded "Humors of Bally Connoll" [sic] and "Captain Rock" in 1925 for the Columbia Record Company in New York (No. 33068), released on a 78 RPM disc. The first melody honors the town in County Cavan and was printed with the title earliest (at least to my knowledge) in the Scottish *Kerr's Merry Melodies*, vol. 4 (c. 1880s) as a three-part reel called "Humors of Ballyconnell." The melody is not new, however, for musicologist Philippe Varlet found a precursor in Daniel Wright's rare *Aria di*

Camera (London, 1725) under the title "Role the Rump Sawny" (meaning "Roll your Rump Sandy").

The second tune of the medley is usually known nowadays under the title "The Bush Reel" or "The Old Bush Reel," although it has also been called, by Brendan Breathnach, "The Long Hills of Mourne." 19th century collector George Petrie obtained it as an untitled tune from a man named Frank Keane and remarked that it was a "County of Clare reel." It is interesting that the melody is today still associated with the playing of famous Clare musicians Paddy Canny, P.J. Hayes, and Peadar O'Loughlin, and was a favorite of Miltown Malbay piper Willie Clancy's. They called it the "Old Bush," which Eamonn O'Doherty (*Northern Fiddler*, 1979) says supposedly derives from the Irish custom of planting a special tree as a gathering place, quoting John Dunton (1674): "hither all the people resort with a piper on Sundays and Holydays in the afternoon, where the young folks dance till the cows come home." The Clare "Old Bush" title has a head of steam on it and has supplanted all other titles in common session play.

Unfortunately, there is a confusion of titles between the two tunes in the medley, as happens sometimes with influential recordings (especially if the label is unclear, obscure, or inaccurate, although the Columbia label was none of those). So it appears with the Coleman/Morrison recording, for the "Captain Rock" title has been attached to both tunes. Both the "Humours of Ballyconnell" and "The Old Bush" have been called "Captain Rock." In the case of the "Old Bush" it appears certain that "Captain Rock" is the

older title. Francis O'Neill printed it as "Captain Rock" in 1903 and there is little evidence to suppose that "The Old Bush" title even coexisted with it. Thus Coleman and Morrison probably knew no other name for it at the time they recorded. The confusion lies more with "The Humours of Ballyconnell." As mentioned, this name was attached to the tune at least by the 1880s, a date secured by its appearance in Kerr's collection, and the marriage of name and tune has survived. The union was under pressure, however, by the title "Captain Rock." The Boys of the Lough maintain that "Humours of Ballyconnell" was the local County Fermanagh name for the tune usually known as "Captain Rock," indicating that, at least in their experience at the time, the name "Captain Rock" was a well-known usurper. The trouble is, the tune does not appear in any collections under the title "Captain Rock" until Bernard Flaherty's 1990 collection of Sligo tunes, transcribed from the playing of fiddler Fred Finn, who called it that. It may be that the confusion stemmed from the Coleman/Morrison recording and that the "Captain Rock" title bled over from the second tune in the medley. Coleman's records were quite influential in County Sligo, and presumably nearby County Fermanagh, and "Captain Rock" may have been the more memorable title, becoming attached to both tunes in the medley.

If that is a plausible explanation for two different "Captain Rock" tunes, we then turn to the question of the Captain himself. Who was Captain Rock? Was his a naval or army rank? Was he Irish? It's a name not quintessentially Irish, but not unknown in Ireland by any means. There must have been many military men named

The Humours of Ballyconnell

Approx.
115 bpm

The musical score for "The Humours of Ballyconnell" is presented in six staves. The key signature is G major (one sharp) and the time signature is 2/4. The first staff starts with a treble clef and a common time signature. The melody begins with a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note B4. A repeat sign follows. The second staff continues with a quarter note C5, a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4. The third staff has a measure rest of 3 measures, then continues with a quarter note F#4, a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note B4. The fourth staff has a measure rest of 3 measures, then continues with a quarter note C5, a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4. The fifth staff begins with a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, and a quarter note C5. The sixth staff continues with a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note G4, and a quarter note F#4. The piece ends with a quarter note G4.

Rock, and it may be that there was such a person. However, a more reasonable explanation for the title is that he is the famous but fictitious Captain Rock, renowned as leader of an Irish rebel group in the agrarian unrest of the early 19th century.

The Whiteboys were a movement begun in County Tipperary in the early 1760s in response to abuses by landlords and authorities. An English traveler in 1776, Arthur Young, remarked about the Irish situation:

A landlord in Ireland can scarcely invent an order, which a servant, labourer or cotter dare refuse to execute. Nothing satisfied him but an unlimited submission. Disrespect or anything tending towards sauciness he may punish with his cane or his horse-whip with the most perfect security; a poor man would have his bones broke if he offered to lift his hand in his own defence... Landlords of consequence have assured me, that many of their cotters would think themselves honoured by having their wives or daughters sent for to the bed of their master; a mark of slavery that proves the oppression under which such people must live. ["Arthur Young's Tour in Ireland 1776-1779," Ed. by Arthur Wollaston Hutton, 1892]

Ireland labored under an oppressive system of absentee landlords and middlemen overseers, who extracted the agrarian wealth of the country and its populace for use in England. This was exacerbated by numerous periods of localized famine and one-crop reliance, common even before the Great Potato Famine of the 1840s, and the system of tithes, in which a part of each crop went to support the Protestant church in Ireland. It is no wonder that agrarian unrest periodically broke out in the form of loosely organized groups called Threshers, Whiteboys, Whitefeet, Blackfeet, Ribbonmen, Terry Alts, and Defenders, who followed fictitious leaders such as Captain Steel and Captain Fearnought. Collectively they have been referred to as the Whiteboys.

One of the last and most serious of the incidents of agrarian unrest occurred between 1818 and 1824 in County Cork. There they followed a leader named Captain Rock, and thus were known as Rockites or Captain Rock's Men. According to the newspaper *The Cork Constitution* of March 24th, 1823, each member of the group took an oath, ending with: "I will plant the Tree of Liberty in as many hearths as I can depend my life on." A similar contemporary group followed a Captain Right, and were called Rightboys. Ambushes and night attacks targeting property and

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individuals supportive of the landowners plagued the authorities, who in the aftermath sometimes found notes left by the "Captains." Several such left around Mallow bore the signature of "John Rock, Commander in Chief of the United Irishmen," a reference to the group that had led the very serious rebellion of 1798, and a name guaranteed to get the authorities' attention. By 1822 there was an active and organized guerilla movement in the uplands of the Limerick, Cork, and Kerry borders, increasingly directed towards civil authority. Though poorly armed, the Rockites fought government troops and local constabulary even in the larger towns and cities of the region. Finally, however, the authorities acted definitively. An Insurrection Act was passed in Cork that augmented the local yeomanry, who began to root out pockets of Rockite activity. Leaders were arrested, and some were executed or transported. By 1824 the movement was suppressed and "Captain Rock" disappeared from the scene. Lyric poet Thomas Moore (1779-1852), author of the beloved *Irish Melodies* (1807-1825, issued in ten parts), wrote his first prose book, called *Memoirs of Captain Rock, the Celebrated Irish Chieftain, with Some Account of his Ancestors, Written by Himself in 1824*, a humorous spoof. Its sympathetic reading of the underlying causes for the unrest endeared him to the Irish population, and helped cement his popularity with the Irish.

[Andrew Kuntz is the author of a book of old time songs and tunes called Ragged But Right (1987) as well as the on-line tune encyclopedia "The Fiddlers' Companion" (www.ibiblio.org/fiddlers). When not researching tunes, he enjoys playing in Irish music sessions.]

The Old Bush

Approx.
115 bpm

