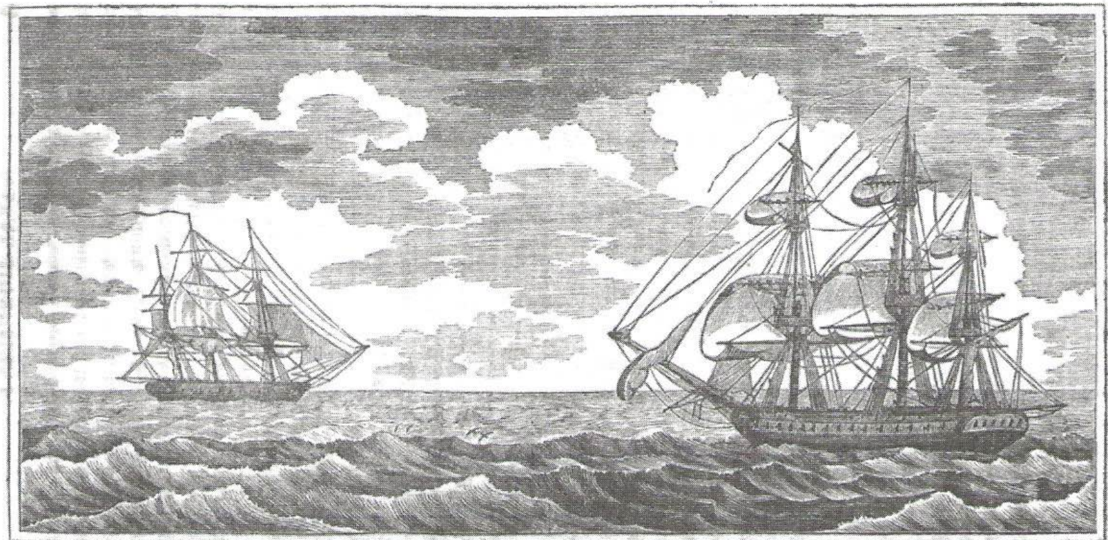
Fiddle Tune History

By Andrew Kuntz

1812



THE CONSTITUTION BEARING DOWN FOR THE GUERRIERE.

As I write this, it is but a few days since the 200th anniversary of our second declaration of war against Great Britain, on June 18, 1812. The conflict was to last two and a half years, until the Treaty of Ghent on December 24, 1814. News of peace did not reach the shores of the United States until some two months later, and not in time to prevent the Battle of New Orleans, fought January 9, 1815, a victory celebrated not only for the decisive defeat of a British invasion, but a vindication of American land arms, which had until then been woefully ineffective and even inept.

Reasons for the conflict were several. They included the impressing of American merchant sailors into the Royal Navy, ravenous for seasoned seamen needed to serve the fleets that protected Great Britain's far-flung empire in the climactic struggle with France. American ships were stopped on the high seas and searched for "deserters" or British seaman serving in the American merchant fleets. In fact, there were a good number of British sailors on American ships, including some deserters and many others who claimed naturalized citizenship, for the simple reason that American merchant pay was considerably better, while the conditions on British warships were comparatively harsh and repressive. Another contributing factor to the war was a fairly constant British intrigue on the northwest American frontier in which Native American tribes, stressed by the constant pressure of expanding white settlements and numerous treaty violations, were encouraged to be restive. Finally, Great Britain instituted trade restrictions on neutral shipping to the Continent, as a consequence of its death struggle with Napoleon. In an effort to contain the Emperor, all European ports controlled by France and her allies were blockaded by the Royal Navy, who prohibited trade even by neutral parties. Heightening pre-war tensions were several humiliating incidents on the high seas in which heavy-handed treatment by the powerful Royal Navy proved intolerable and occasionally lethal.

The fourth President of the United States, James Madison (1751-1836), did what he could to avoid war, but the slowness of communications undid his efforts. After years of lobbying against the most severe of the trade restrictions, called the Orders of Council, Great Britain seemed inclined to relax them, although news of this did not reach America until after war had been declared. Anti-British sentiment ran strong in parts of the county, although in other regions, notably New England (which maintained strong ties with Britain), war sentiment was tepid at best, and at times vocally anti-war. The United States was ill-prepared for war, having a tiny standing army and a nascent navy that consisted of but six modern frigates, albeit well-constructed, powerfully armed, and competently crewed.

The war took place in three theaters: on the high seas and coastal regions, on the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence, and in the deep South; however, hostilities commenced first at sea, with the tiny American navy stinging the mighty Royal Navy in a series of hard-fought engagements. These early victories gave American pride a huge boost, and were exuberantly celebrated throughout the country. In October 1812, the United States fought and captured the frigate HMS Macedonian. The Constitution sailed to disrupt British shipping and captured numerous merchant ships, and in the course of the war defeated four British warships: HMS Guerriere, HMS Java, HMS Cyane, and HMS Levant. The Congress also sailed to disrupt enemy merchant operations and, in several voyages captured a number of merchant ships, although did not engage in pitched battles with warships. The President similarly hunted merchantmen, sailing to within a day of the English Channel before returning to port in Boston. She was eventually captured after a fight with the HMS Endymion, a pyrrhic victory by famed Captain Stephen Decatur, as the American ship was so damaged that she was easy prey for other lurking British warships. The Chesapeake was captured on June 1, 1813 by HMS Shannon, and was absorbed into the Royal Navy.

Engagements were celebrated or mourned in the press and popular culture, including song and instrumental music. The first volume of Edward Riley's *Flute Melodies* was published in New York in 1814 in the midst of the war. While it is a collection of mostly British and Irish airs and dance tunes, it contains a smattering of topical American tunes as well. One such was composed in honor of Captain Stephen Decatur (1779-1820), "Decatur's Hornpipe" (p. 33), while another is the solemn air "The Death of Lawrance" [sic] (p. 18). The former honors the hero of the battle between the United States and HMS Macedonian, who is also known for proclaiming the patriotic toast, "Our Country! In her intercourse with foreign nations may she always be in the right; but our country, right or wrong." The latter title remembers Captain James Lawrence (1781-1813) who died (along with a goodly portion of his

Captain Isaac Hull

crew) in the short, violent action against HMS Shannon in June 1813.

Riley was certainly not the only music publisher to honor Decatur. Charles P.F. O'Hara published his *Gentleman's Musical Repository* in New York in 1813, a volume of over fifty traditional Irish melodies of his own composition, including marches in honor of New York Governor Daniel D. Tompkins (1774–1825, later Vice President of the United States) and New York City Mayor DeWitt Clinton (1769—1828). O'Hara also composed "The Macedonian Hornpipe," recording this note with the tune: "Composed on the surrender of the British Frigate Macedonian, Capt. Carden, to the United States Frigate United States, Capt. Decatur." Also included in the volume is "The Gurriere [sic] Dance," similarly inscribed: "Composed on the surrender of the British Frigate Gurriere, Capt. Daeres, to the United States Frigate Constitution, Capt. Hull."

Captain Hull was also honored with a hornpipe or reel that has maintained currency through the years, "Hull's Victory," which must have been composed soon after his victory off the coast of Nova Scotia in August 1812. The melody is similar to an old English drinking song and a Scottish dance tune, according to Simon Bronner (*Old Time Music Makers of New York State,* 1987), and started life as a ballad, though soon entered enduring popular tradition as a dance tune, which he insists is one of the earliest contra dance melodies composed in America. The tune was in general circulation among amateur musicians in the ten years following Hull's victory, as evidenced by its appearance in printed song sheets and musicians' manuscripts such as H. Canfield's copybook of music for his flute (Hartford, Conn., 1823) and fifer Ebenezer Bevens' commonplace book (Middletown, Conn., 1825). Paul Wells, of the Center for Popular Music/Middle Tennessee State University, has found an untitled version in a fife manuscript begun in 1807 (entered later than that date).

"Hull's Victory," both tune and contra dance, can be traced through the years quite nicely in print. Dance instructions were recorded in the *Essex Manuscript* of c. 1830, and in Elias Howe's *American Dancing Master* (Boston, 1862), while the melody was printed in Howe's *Musician's Companion, Part 1* (Boston, 1842). Elizabeth Burchenal printed the dance and tune in her *American Country Dances* (1918), and Eloise Hubbard Linscott (*Folk Songs*

Hull's Victory

of Old New England, 1939) confirms the popularity of both. Contra dance maven Ralph Page reported it was a favorite dance in New Hampshire until the early 1900s, and still was being danced in Washington County, Vermont, in the mid-20th century. Page himself led its revival among new generations of New England contra dancers. Henry Ford's champion fiddler, Mellie Dunham, of Norway, Maine, had a different, but very danceable, tune he called "Hull's Victory," which he recorded in 1926.

Although strongly associated with New England, "Hull's Victory" managed to escape regional boundaries. The title appears in a list of traditional Ozark Mountain fiddle tunes compiled by musicologist/folklorist Vance Randolph, published in 1954. Lloyd Shaw, in his book *Cowboy Dances* (1943), writes:

> *It would shock my New England friends to hear an old Colorado rancher ask me if I ever danced Hell's Victory. From his description I was sure of the dance and told him it was Hull's Victory, not Hell's—Hull's Victory with his famous ship The Constitution. "No, no!" he says, "it's Hell's Victory! Called it that ever since I was a boy!"*

New York publishers Edward Riley and Charles P.F. O'Hara are of some interest, although information about Riley and (particularly) O'Hara is sketchy; but they do share a few similarities, from what little is known. O'Hara was a recent immigrant to the United States, prior to which he "resided many years in the west of Ireland." He was aged thirty-one at the time of his arrival, and was a multi-instrumentalist and a "teacher of music." He quickly established himself in New York, and (as the preface of his volume declares) did business from "his new music store" at No. 70 William Street, New York, "where may be had a great variety of the most ancient and modern single songs. Also a general assortment of flutes, violins, tambarines [sic], drums, and all other musical instruments." Whether he was successful in New York we do not know, but he did not stay there long. His name appears on a list of subscribers to a volume on mythology published in 1816 and records he was living in Baltimore at the time. He married Phebe Elam Carlton at Powhatan County, Virginia, on August 22, 1816, after which he seems to drop from recorded history.

Edward Riley (1769–1829) was also an immigrant, from England, where he learned the trade of music-engraving. He came to the United States around 1805, and, like O'Hara, settled in New York City where his skills as an engraver led to employment by publishers such as Paff. However, beginning around 1811 Riley ventured out on his own and established his own business, engraving for himself and others, building a business as a leading publisher of music in the city. He is best known today among traditional musicians for his *Flute Melodies,* a several-volume compilation that included traditional dance music from Ireland, Great Britain, and the Continent, but also included popular songs, theater works, classical pieces, as well as American melodies. One of his own compositions (which are not well marked) may have been "The Celebration March on the Peace of 1815," in Riley's *Flute Melodies,* volume one, conditionally dated 1814 (but may have been published anytime between that year and 1816, or else in various editions, as the reference to a treaty of 1815 will attest).

At the same time Riley continued freelancing for others, and his

AUGUSTA
HERITAGE CENTER
of Davis&Elkins College, Elkins, WV
Celebrating our 40th year of keeping traditions alive

October Old-Time Week
& Fiddlers' Reunion
October 28 - November 4

Dave Bing - Fiddle
Chance McCoy - Fiddle
Clare Milliner - Fiddle
Walt Koken - Banjo
Bob Heyer - Guitar
John Rossbach - Mandolin
Anna Roberts-Gevalt - Banjo
Phyllis Gaskins - Mountain Dulcimer
Gerry Milnes - Appalachian Culture
Special Guest Artist:
Lester McCumbers
with Kim Johnson

Fiddlers' Reunion
November 2-4

Friday, November 2
Halloween Square Dance
8:00pm, $8
(costumes optional)

Saturday 10am-6pm
Old-Time Fiddlers' Reunion
Fiddle performances all day long
Freestyle Flatfooting & Clogging
Dance Contest Instrument vendors

Sunday, 10:00-11:30am
Gospel Sing

304-637-1209
www.AugustaHeritageCenter.org

name appears as engraver on a number of War of 1812 period songsheets, including the aforementioned "Death of Lawrence" (words by Mrs. Piller of the New York Theatre, music by J. Braham"– "Mourn, mourn, Columbia, mourn your Hero slain…"), "Elegiac Verses to the Memory of Captn. James Lawrence," and "The Pillar of Glory; A Naval Song" (words by Edwin C. Holland, music by Charles Gilfert – "Hail, hail to the heroes whose triumphs have brighten'd the darkness which shrouded America's name"), all of which can be viewed at the Lester S. Levy Collection of Sheet Music [http://levysheetmusic.mse.jhu.edu/].

Like O'Hara and others involved in music as a trade, Riley did not limit himself to one activity (such as engraving or publishing), but made his living by selling (and perhaps making) instruments, teaching, and playing. Some instruments still exist that bear the imprint of his name, in particular flutes; one particularly handsome specimen is an eight-key instrument with an ivory head joint. Riley may also be the same Edward Riley who was the founder of the New Church (often called Swedenborgian) in New York, where he published hymnals and held services in his home. By 1811 this group had grown into a Society that held meetings in a schoolhouse on James Street.

Both were fairly recent immigrants to the United States who brought skills honed in the Old World, to secure their progress in the New World. Both men taught music, and dealt in musical instruments, and both included a few of their own compositions in their published collection(s). Some of O'Hara's compositions seem (to my ear) to retain something of an Irish character, and one wonders if he might have spoken Irish Gaelic (likely if he did "reside in the west of Ireland" at the beginning of the 19th century). Their compositions have not survived, however, and several of O'Hara's are particularly pedestrian or infused with an awkwardness that makes one pause before a repeat playing. Both men also were fairly recent residents of a country that was at war with their new country, yet published (and wrote) enthusiastically patriotic pieces. If it is not simply pandering to the public in hope of increasing sales, then it needs be considered that the immigrant experience of the time led to a rapid severance of allegiance with Great Britain. We do know that O'Hara was from Ireland, and it may be that Riley was as well, and if so allegiance with Great Britain may have had a degree of ambivalence, for, after all, the Irish rebellion of 1798 was still fresh in the minds of many, and if that were not enough, a more recent insult could be found in the American sailors impressed by the British (a majority of whom were native Irish).

Unlike O'Hara, who drops from sight after the war, Riley went on to a long and productive career, and established a publishing and music business that his sons and sons-in-law continued successfully after his death.

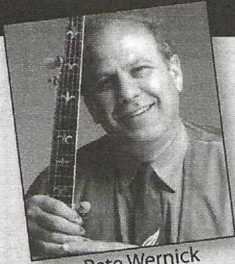
Reference: Much of the information on Edward Riley can be found in:
Dobbs, Wendell, "An Early American Family of Flutists" (2008). Faculty Research. Paper 1. http://mds.marshall.edu/music_faculty/1

[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.]

Like many of today's top professionals, bring out the
Grace & FIRE
in your playing with the L.R. Baggs Violin Pickup
"I've been using a Baggs pickup recently and I can't believe how nice it sounds. I've had people come up to me after shows wondering how I mike my fiddle. That's encouraging, because they don't even know I'm using a pickup." Alison Krauss
"I outfitted each of the top brands of violin pickups onto my favorite violin and recorded the same tune on different tracks of my 24 track tape recorder. The L.R. Baggs was simply the best!" Mark O'Connor
L.R. Baggs
Enhancing Your Passion for All to Hear™
Call or write us at:
483 North Frontage Road,
Nipomo, California 93444
(805) 929-3545

MANDOLIN Magazine
The Magazine for Mandolin Players & Enthusiasts
Bluegrass • Celtic • Jazz • Basics • Rhythm & Chords
Texas-Style Fiddle Tunes • Classical & Much More
Features on Builders – Repair – Product Review
Mandolins Around the World – CD, Video & Book Reviews
Subscribe Now ... Don't Miss Another Issue!
Send U.S. check or money order payable to *Mandolin Magazine,*
PO Box 142, Powell Butte, OR 97753
Ph 503-364-2100 Fax 541-923-8826
Email: MandoMag@teleport.com
Include your name, address, phone and email address
Visa & MasterCard accepted,
include card type, number & exp. date
One-year USA subscription (4 issues) $27
Ask about Overseas/Canada Delivery – requires additional shipping
See us online at **www.mandolinmagazine.com**

Learning to jam is EASY & FUN with The **Wernick Method**



YOU CAN JAM!

No experience needed! Learn the ear skills used in real bluegrass, in coached small groups. You will be jamming in your very first session!

STUDENTS SAY:

"I did things for the first time that I've been trying to do for years."

"So much more fun than sitting on the couch playing alone."

WERNICK METHOD CLASSES:

Weekly with teachers certified in the ***Wernick Method***

Mar-Apr • Boulder CO
Mar-Apr • Cambridge MA
Mar-Apr • Pumpkintown SC
March • Lake Havasu, AZ
March • Elizabethtown PA
March • Gippsland VIC (Australia)
Mar-May • Bowling Green KY
April • Boomer NC
May • Gettysburg PA
May • Sunshine Coast QLD (Australia)

TEACHERS: Run jam classes for fun and profit. Dr.Banjo.com, click Teachers.

LEARN AT HOME:

Pete's Best-Selling **How-to-jam DVDs!** Learn to play along at your own pace. 56 songs!

Wernick Method

• Play along with easy classic songs
• Gentle tempos!
• Easier than you think!

Visit **BGjam.com**

"I have been waiting to start playing real bluegrass with people ... and now I can."

"I feel that it is the beginning of a whole new world for me."

melody. Some Canadian fiddlers picked up the tune as well, but again, it has been sourced to print. Manitoba fiddler Grant Lamb played the tune, which he learned from his parents, who were musicians who played dances in Ontario for many years. They read music, and, as Grant remarked in liner notes to his album, the tune was available in old printed collections; the family probably learned it from a page. Lamb was a character, says Vivian Williams, who communicated this reminiscence:

He was born in 1915, and was Manitoba fiddle champion in 1953, 1954, and 1955. He was a friend of Don Messer, and wrote "Grant Lamb's Breakdown," which Don played and published. He was quite a character. As a farmer in Manitoba, there wasn't much that could be done on the farm in the early spring, so after we met him in the 1970s, for a number of years he would appear on our doorstep in Seattle sometime in the middle of March. We would ask him how long he planned to stay, and he would reply "No plans, no plans!" and stay with us for a couple of weeks. Needless to say we played a lot of music in that couple of weeks! He was an excellent piano player as well as a fiddler.

Vivian herself learned the tune by ear from Grant's playing, and so the process of aural transmission again comes into play, distancing the written page.

"Mountain Hornpipe" was recorded on sound recordings fairly early. At the beginning of the 78 RPM era, in 1923, it was recorded by fiddler John Baltzell for the Edison company (51236) and can be heard as the last tune on the "Durang Hornpipe Medley" (a surprising coincidence with the Beemer manuscript, where the tune actually appears as "Durangs"). Baltzell (1860-1940) hailed from Mt. Vernon, Ohio, and was a student there of the by-then elderly blackface-minstrel Dan Emmett, who had returned to the town in 1888 after a life on the road. Baltzell was the son of a shoemaker, who was born and raised in a log cabin, and whose first instrument was the proverbial corn stalk fiddle. Henry Ford's Dance Music Orchestra, an assemblage of musicians largely from Michigan, recorded the tune as well, fronted by a hammered dulcimer player named L.P. Baxter (the recording can be found on the Library of Congress's LBC4, *Dance Music: Reels, Polkas and More,* where it can be heard in the cut "A Medley of Reels"). Relatively modern old time recordings of the tune include Melvin Wine (*Cold Frosty Morning,* a 1976 recording on Poplar Records), and James Bryan (*First of May,* Rounder 0215, 1986). Canadian versions can be heard by the great Ontario fiddler Graham Townsend (*Down Home Fiddling,* a 1960s recording on the Audat label), and Manitoba fiddling farmer Grant Lamb (*Tunes from Home,* Voyager VRLP-312, 1974).

[The author is grateful to Vivian Williams and Drew Beisswenger for their contributions to this column.]

[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.]