

# Fiddle Tune History

By Andrew Kuntz

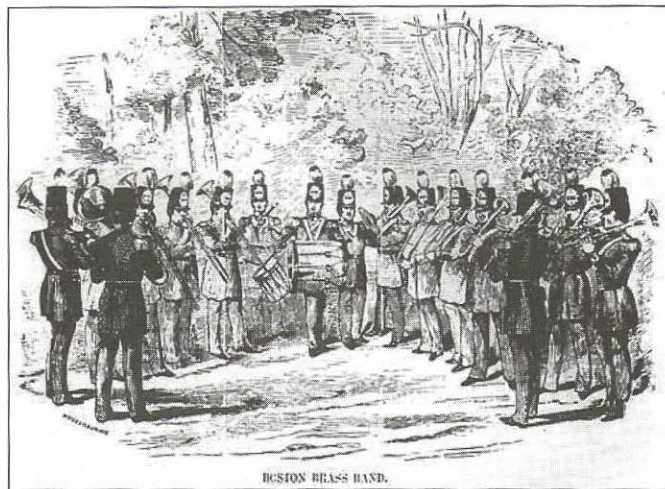
## Oh, Ned!

*May 17. the band played tonight. father made me go to bed at nine but i cood hear it becaus my window is jest acros the road. they are playing a new peace. it is the woodup quickstep, they say Ned Kendall cood play it on a bugle better than ennybody. old Robinson cood and Mister Ashman can play it splendid. it goes ta-ta tata, ta-ta tata, ta-ta tata tatatatatata. ta-te-ta-te-tiddle iddle-a ta-te-ta-te-tiddle iddle-a ta-te-ta-te-tiddle-iddle-a tiddle-iddle-iddle-iddle-ata it is the best peace they play except departed days. that always makes me feel like crying it is kinder sad like. i hope i can get my cornet some day.*

[From the comic volume *Real Diary of a Real Boy* by Henry A. Shute, c. 1903. Purported to be the diary of a mid-19th century boy from Exeter, New Hampshire.]

Collecting old music manuscripts is an interest of mine, the contents of which often send me scurrying to the library and the computer in an attempt to unearth background or further detail about certain melodies and their historical context. Recently I happened on an old copy of *White's Unique Collection* (1896), one page of which caught my fancy. It was labelled "Six Favorite Reels" and one might surmise that the tunes listed were indeed among the most popular of the late 19th century, for four of the six are still quite familiar to modern fiddlers, perhaps in the category of "old chestnuts" — "Miss McLeod's Reel," "Arkansas Traveller," "Devil's Dream," and "Old Zip Coon" (Turkey in the Straw). Two were not so instantly recognizable. "Lady Walpole's Reel" is a New England tune still occasionally recorded and played for contra dances, however, the final melody on the page, "Ned Kendall's Favorite" seems all but forgotten. That's the one that piqued my interest — who was Ned, and why was he or his hornpipe once so popular?

*White's Unique Collection* was one of the latter publications of material essentially derived from the Elias Howe publications of the mid-19th century, whose most modern development is the now-venerable Cole's *1000 Fiddle Tunes*, printed in 1940. Howe was a Boston publisher and many of the tunes in his volumes are attributed to popular musicians and composers of the era, particularly those who resided or had connections with Massachusetts. Ned Kendall (1808-1861) was indeed a Massachusetts-based musician. He played several instruments, including the clarinet, but his reputation was made on the keyed-bugle, an instrument akin to the coronet but played with a keyed mechanism rather than valves. His father was a military man, and Kendall was early involved in playing martial music. One elderly individual, formerly a Captain of Maine militia, long-ago remembered to a reporter: "Yes; I distinctly recollect seeing Ned Kendall at a general muster at the foot of Long Pond...where he played the clarinet, with Fifer Bill Harmon, for Capt. Jacob Dingley's company from Raymond (Maine), and my officers engaged them to play our company into the field to form in regimental line. This was in 1823. I was told at the time that Ned was 15 years old..." Kendall came to fame as principal



The Boston Brass Band. Woodcut, published in *Gleason's Pictorial Drawing Room*, c. 1850s.

soloist and founder of the first regular brass band in Boston, the Boston Brass Band, established in 1835. He led it until 1842, passing along leadership when he left the area for a time. It is known he toured with Spaulding & Rogers' circus, leading the band and starring as principle soloist.

In 1849 Kendall returned to Boston and took over leadership of the Boston Brigade Band, establishing a friendly rivalry with his earlier and still very popular Boston Brass Band. The two bands met at the fireman's muster held in September, 1849, in Lynn, Massachusetts. Years later musician Richard D. Blanchard, who was with the Boston Brass Band that day, remembered: "Both bands were at the pinnacle of their glory, with high but well-deserved reputations. We of the Boston Brass band did our level best, but when Ned Kendall seized his bugle and led the Boston Brigade, while on the march, through a difficult polonaise in three-four time for a quickstep, why he just carried the crowd like leaves before the tempest. The enthusiasm was tremendous. It seemed as if the crowd would never stop their cheering and clapping of hands. It was a proud day for Ned. Aye, and for Jim [ed: Kendall's brother, a noted "clarinet" player and principal with the band], too, as to that matter. The two Orphean kings were radiant with joy, and in my heart of hearts I felt proud of them."

Why this type of band became popular in the first place has to do in part with technological innovation. At the turn of the 19th century, bands included oboes, clarinets, bassoons and drums, but brass instruments in the early years of the century were limited to the notes of the overtone series, as, for example, a simple bugle might play for a bugle call. Innovations added in the first decades of the 1800s resulted in brass instruments that were able to play chromatic and diatonic scales, opening up a range of music theretofore inaccessible. An instrument known as the Kent Horn (dedicated to the Duke of Kent) was one of the first of these innovations, and looked like a cross between a saxophone and a bugle, but the keyed bugle was one of the best of the early innovations, recorded in use in America at the military academy at West Point as early as 1816. It caught on enormously in the succeeding decades but was eventually subsumed by another refinement when valves, developed in the 1830s and 1840s, replaced keys. The development might be likened to the impact of the electric guitar in the 20th century, for simple horns were transformed into loud, agile, sonorous



instruments perfect for demanding soloing performances in the days before amplification. Kendall himself remained a key-bugle player all his life. Coinciding with these developments was the rise in martial activity in both Europe and the United States as both a civic duty and recreation. Local units sprang up all around the United States, often with colorful names and uniforms, and paraded in public as much for performance value as for military instruction. Often these units had bands attached to enhance both booted measure and élan, and thus skilled musicians were much in demand and well-regarded.

Ned Kendall was one of the best. His playing is said to have been stunning, and he had a gift for improvisation and spontaneous elaboration of themes he heard only once. A surviving bandmate, Dr. Joseph Chase, was interviewed for the *Boston Globe* in 1908 and spoke of him with great tenderness. "Poor Ned," said the old gentleman, "there were none like him as a bugle player and few like him as a man." Chase had the following tale to relate, perhaps apocryphal, for similar tales are told of exceptional musicians, including Scots fiddler Niel Gow.

When Ned Kendall was at the height of his popularity a noted New York bugle player had heard so much of Kendall's playing and had heard comparison of his own execution so frequently made with that of the Musician, to the favor of the latter, that he came to Boston for the express purpose of meeting his rival. On the day of his arrival he accepted an invitation to join a sleighing party. After several hours' enjoyable sleighing the party drove to the Norfolk house and found the ball room all lighted up for the grand dance that was being given by an association of marketmen of Quincy and Faneuil Hall markets. The New York musician stepped into the side parlor to warm himself at the open fire, before which sat three men, who courteously made room for him. On a table nearby lay a key bugle beside a case from which it had been taken.

"Ah!" said the New Yorker, having warmed his fingers into flexibility as he toyed with the keys of the instrument. "Any of you gentlemen play on this?"

"Yes, I do a little," replied a dark-complexioned man at the fire.

"Play for parties, I suppose?"

"Now and then, when I get a job," said the other, his eyes twinkling, "do you?"

"Oh, I do a little in my way," remarked the New Yorker with assumed indifference, and taking up the bugle he ran over the scale, gave a few strains and pretty snatches of melody that brought a dozen listeners to the half open door. The dark man opened his eyes wider. "You are an excellent player," said he.

"Oh, only so-so," was the gratified and rather pompous reply. "I suppose you don't go into much except dance music?"

"Well, yes, a little. I'm pretty good at imitating a thing I hear played once or twice." And the dark man took up the instrument and played the same strains the other had, but awkwardly and with several hitches and omissions.

"Pretty good," said the New York bugler, "but you need practice and accent, especially in solo playing."

"No doubt of it," said the dark man.

"Now even in dance music there can be a great deal of ornamentation," the New York man remarked loftily, warming up with a desire to show off his skill before what he thought an inferior player, and the gathering group that the notes of the instrument had attracted. "The 'Fishers' Hornpipe' is a lively tune, but see what can be done with it." He put the old country dance through a series of variations that made the nerves of every foot whose owner was within hearing distance tingle with electric thrills.

"You can hardly follow that as well as the scales, I suppose," said the performer, laying down the instrument amid a buzz of applause from his now large audience.

"Well, I don't know about following anybody, but I may give you my idea of it," spoke up the dark man as he took the bugle and began playing.

If the first few bars of the music made the other player start, the succeeding ones transfixed him as the performer executed strains with a correctness, skill and beauty that he never before heard extracted from a bugle. The variations, trills, tones and melody of the familiar old dance tune was rendered as never dreamed of by that New Yorker, as the music flowed from the bell of the bugle under the skillful manipulation and never failing wind of the performer, who, at the conclusion of his performance, amid a roar of applause, remarked, with the same twinkle in his dark eyes:

"What do you think now?"

"Think!" exclaimed the New Yorker, as he stood with his eyes staring in astonishment. "Think! Why, that no loving man could have done that. You must be either the devil or Ned Kendall!"

"Ned Kendall and no devil," quietly replied the dark man.

The new brass bands were the equivalent of a popular rock music act of today, and cults of personality rose among the principal soloists of the time. Another such band was the Salem Brass Band, attached to the Salem Light Infantry of Salem, Massachusetts, established in 1837, a familiar sight at militia drills, parades and public gatherings. In 1854 its vacant leadership position was filled by twenty-three year old Patrick Sarsfield Gilmore, a native of County Galway, Ireland. Gilmore had been trained in Ireland in one of the British military bands, joined up, and was stationed in Quebec. In 1848 he made his way to Boston and formed both a minstrel group and a militia band, quickly garnering a reputation as a stylish coronet player. By 1857 his notoriety was such that he was invited to play at the inauguration of U.S. President James Buchanan, a rare honor made much of by the out-of-town press. The honor, however, enraged the band's rivals, and a group of Boston men resolved to ambush Gilmore's group as they emerged from the Boston train depot upon their return from Washington, bent on destroying their instruments (not to mention the player's lips!). By chance, Gilmore's group took an earlier train home and thus the plot was foiled, however, when Gilmore next played in Boston he had to hire a bunch of Salem thugs armed with blackjacks and brass knuckles to protect them. Indeed, they were still set upon by a hostile crowd when next they disembarked in the big city, requiring the Salem thugs to rush down the platform to earn their pay. Gilmore was eventually lured back to Boston to take over the Boston Brigade Band, all forgiven then, and he continued in that post for three decades, establishing a reputation in American band music second only to John Phillip Sousa's.

Kendall and Gilmore met onstage at least once. In December, 1856, a contest was arranged in Salem between Gilmore on the valved coronet and Kendall with his keyed bugle. The rival soloists played sections of John Holloway's "Wood Up Quickstep" one after the other, each adding variations and virtuosic elaborations. The contest was adjudged a draw, at least publicly, but it marked the zenith of keyed-bugle playing in the United States, and the instrument was completely supplanted by the coronet in succeeding years.

Ned traveled to England in later years and is said to have played before Queen Victoria, receiving a silver bugle from her in praise (this also sounds like an apocryphal story). In 1859 his health



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began to decline and he died just at the start of the Civil War, although his memory was venerated for years. Just after the war, when minds could turn again to civilian memorializing, a group of musicians and friends took up a subscription for a handsome tall grave monument with a keyed bugle carved into it, along with the inscription:

*To perpetuate the memory of one who did so much to elevate the profession which he himself adorned, this monument, procured by the volunteer contributions of those who admired his genius as an artist, was erected by a few of his personal friends, who knew and appreciated him, not only as an artist, but as a man. December, 1866.*

As late as 1908 musicians would gather at his gravesite at Forest Hills in Boston to lay wreaths on fireman's memorial day, the first of June.

What has all this to do with fiddling? It has been well-documented that the boundaries between music heard in higher social circles, music played for martial purposes, and the music of the people, often were quite permeable over time, and that music in one setting might easily be put to another use. Although Kendall's reputation was as a brass band performer of primarily martial music, his band also played popular and dance music of his era, which dovetailed with the less formal country dancing going on at the same time (note the reference above to "Fisher's Hornpipe," heard at both society and country dance venues of the era). It should not be surprising that some of the same tunes appear as vehicles for different genres; 6/8 quickstep marches also make nice jigs, and vice-versa, for example. It should be remembered that the specific printed connection of the large Howe/Ryan volumes with the fiddle did not occur until Cole's *1000 Fiddle Tunes*, and that originally they were general collections for any melody instrument. Cementing this notion is the fact that an 1860s census gives the Boston Brass Band's business address as the same as that of Howe's music store and publishing premises, indicating that Howe was actively involved with the brass band movement in the city. It is likely he derived more of his "fiddle" tunes from their repertory than perhaps was previously suspected.

"Ned Kendall's Hornpipe" and "Ned Kendall's Favorite" both appear in Ryan's/Cole's, although not attributed directly to Kendall. The only tune I could find that lists him as the composer is from a fife and drum collection by Bruce and Emmett, as "Ned Kendall's Quickstep." A Québec version of "Ned Kendall's Hornpipe" was recorded in the 1830s by fiddler Joseph Allard, with the parts reversed from Ryan/Cole, under the title "Reel du Chauffeur." A "Ned Kendall's Hornpipe" appears in R.P. Christeson's *Old Time Fiddler's Repertory, Vol. 2*, collected from Missouri fiddler Jack Croy, with a version of that tune appearing in modern times in Susan Songer's *Portland Collection*. These old time tunes are recognizably cognate in the first parts with the Ryan/Cole tune. Kendall's old rival G.S. Gilmore even has his tune in Ryan's/Cole's, the "Salem Hornpipe," but in fact the Howe publications contain several tunes that honor the great performers of mid-19th century northeast United States.

A final connection: Kendall played clarinet in Ostinelli's orchestra in Boston's old Tremont Theater, the same Louis Ostinelli who, after immigrating from Italy in 1818, formed one of the premier music organizations of the mid-19th century in that city. Ostinelli, a violinist, is remembered with two tunes in Ryan's/Cole's: "Ostinelli's Reel" and "Souvenir of Venice" — the former has some currency with modern Texas-style fiddlers after an influential recording by Benny Thomasson, while the latter is similar to the popular "Banks Hornpipe" (Ostinelli's variations have been used as a finale to the "Banks"). It is ironic that Ostinelli's name should be remembered by his appearance in a fiddle tune collection, however, for he himself was no fan of fiddle music. As Michael Broyles references in his book *Music of the Highest Class: Elitism and Populism in Antebellum Boston*:

(Ostinelli) was keenly aware of the reputation the violin had as a vernacular instrument in New England. According to several anecdotes, he was furious when his violin was referred to as a fiddle or when he was requested to play dance music. Once when asked by a lady if he was to play for a dance following a concert, he deliberately cut his violin strings and said 'Veree sorry, veree sorry, madam, you see I can no play.'



# Ned Kendall's Hornpipe

White's Unique  
Collection (1896)

The musical score for "Ned Kendall's Hornpipe" consists of four staves of music. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (B-flat), and a 2/4 time signature. The melody is characterized by eighth and sixteenth notes, often beamed together. The second staff continues the melody, ending with a double bar line and repeat dots. The third and fourth staves feature a more complex rhythmic pattern with frequent triplet markings (indicated by a '3' below the notes) and dotted notes. The piece concludes with a final double bar line and repeat dots.

[Ed note: Notes with dotted markings should be played with staccato bowing.]

# Ned Kendall's Favorite

White's Unique  
Collection (1896)

The musical score for "Ned Kendall's Favorite" consists of four staves of music. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (B-flat), and a 2/4 time signature. The melody is primarily composed of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some slurs indicating phrasing. The second staff continues the melody, featuring a sharp sign (F#) on the second line of the staff. The third and fourth staves show a more intricate rhythmic pattern with frequent slurs and eighth-note runs. The piece concludes with a final double bar line and repeat dots.

[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 Fiddler's Companion*" (<http://www.ceolas.org/tunes/fc>). When not

researching tunes, he spends as much time as possible playing fiddle in Irish music sessions.]

# Ned Kendall's

*Bruce and Emmett's Drummer's and Fifer's Guide (1862/1882), E. Kendall*

Musical score for 'Ned Kendall's' in G major (one sharp) and 2/4 time. The score consists of six staves of music. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 2/4 time signature. It features a triplet of eighth notes marked with a '3' above the first three notes. The melody is primarily eighth-note based with some sixteenth-note runs. The second staff ends with a double bar line and repeat dots. The third staff begins with a repeat sign and contains two measures marked with a '2' above the notes, indicating a second ending. The fourth and fifth staves continue the melody with similar rhythmic patterns and some chromatic alterations. The sixth staff concludes the piece with a final melodic flourish and a double bar line.

# Salem Hornpipe

*White's Unique Collection (1896)  
Patrick S. Gilmore*

Musical score for 'Salem Hornpipe' in G major (one sharp) and 2/4 time. The score consists of four staves of music. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 2/4 time signature. The melody is characterized by a steady eighth-note pattern. The second staff continues the melody and ends with a double bar line and repeat dots. The third and fourth staves continue the piece with consistent eighth-note rhythms and some melodic variation. The fourth staff concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots.