

Fiddle Tune History

By Andrew Kuntz

Ryan's Mammoth Collection, Part II

Boston and New York: All Around the Town

In the Tune History column in the last *Fiddler Magazine* I gave an overview of *Ryan's Mammoth Collection* (and its direct descendent, *Cole's 1000 Fiddle Tunes*), printed in 1883 by the Boston publisher Elias Howe. To briefly recap: I stressed the bifurcate nature of the collection, which seems to have been built on a base of older material collected and previously printed by Elias Howe, interspersed with what was then much more topical and modern pieces, presumably the collecting work of William Bradbury Ryan, Howe's employee. I also pointed out that much of this latter material, at least judging by the titles of the tunes, seems to have come from Reconstruction era sensibilities, and I pointed out references to period presidents, politicians, and political structures and events following the Civil War. This issue I'd like to highlight Ryan's references to the urban centers of New York and especially Boston of the period following the Civil War and into the early 1880s.

Remember, a "Ryan's Band" was listed during the Civil War era as one of several headquartered at Howe's business establishment in Boston. As Pat Sky has pointed out, the bands there fell into two categories, brass bands and quadrille bands (Howe published music for both). It seems likely that William Bradbury Ryan was the leader or an associate of Ryan's Band, and, if so, he was in a unique position to chronicle the "modern" dance tunes of the mid-to-latter 1800s. Judging by the number of bands that were connected with Howe's establishment, and his position as the primary supplier of instruments and music in the area, it strongly suggests that Howe's was a hub of Boston dance music, and it is no wonder that many of the tune titles in *Ryan's Mammoth* reference aspects of the city. It is also easy to recognize that there was already an established commercial corridor linking the northeastern seaboard cities, and the trade had developed so that journeyman composers for the popular market could finally earn a full-time living. Ryan drew on many of them for his collection.

Before getting into the specifics of *Ryan's Mammoth* and its city references, it may be useful to outline the Boston and New York of the 1870s, for there were of course similarities and differences. In terms of population, Boston sheltered 350,000 people in 1875, representing a doubling of the population from just fifteen years before; growth occurred not only because of immigration — which accounted for approximately a third — but because of the annexation of Dorchester, Charleston, Brighton, and West Roxbury through the 1870s. The land mass of Boston had increased dramatically with the filling in of coastal terrain, although the huge Backbay Landfill begun in 1857 would not be completed until 1894. The Museum of Fine Arts was founded in 1870, one year after Boston University came into being. Mary Baker Eddy founded the Christian Science church in 1879, and in 1881 the Boston Symphony Orchestra played their first concert. Boston also survived a devastating 1872 fire that left 800 buildings burned on 65 acres of the city.

New York in 1880 was the only American city to have a population of over a million — 1,206,299 to be exact (Boston was the fifth largest city) — however, Brooklyn, Queens, a portion of the Bronx and Staten Island had not become boroughs yet, and remained independent. New York's immigration rate was even greater than Boston's; a whopping 40% of the city was foreign-born at the time. True to form, New York boasted the tallest building in the United States in 1880, the 284-foot spire of Trinity Church.

Similarities included immigration. Boston and New York, both port cities, drew many of the German (691,813), British (548,043) and Irish (436,871) immigrants of the 1870s; the German language was heard on the streets as ubiquitously as Spanish today. The cities both suffered from a national five-year depression in the middle of the decade, following the Panic of 1873 induced by the collapse of the Northern Pacific Railroad. Despite this, the country had entered a second industrial revolution and industrialization was strong, marking the beginning of the Gilded Age in the 1870s.

There are several tunes in *Ryan's* that are associated with Boston and environs, Ryan's primary collecting-ground. We have the reels/hornpipes "Boston," "Boston Boys," "Humours of Boston," "New Boston Sicilian Circle" (referencing a dance formation), and "Boston Rattlers." The latter title probably refers to exuberant dancing, along the lines of "a rattling good time," but the melody originated with Scots composer William Marshall, who titled it "Miss Abercrombie's Reel." Then there's the reel "Belle of Boston" and hornpipe "Belles of South Boston," the latter honoring the women of a part of the city that has been strongly associated with the Irish, although that ethnic group only began moving there from the Fort Hill area of the city around 1859 (by 1882, the year *Ryan's* was published, South Boston resident Patrick Collins had become the first Irish-born United States congressman). "The North End" refers to a historic section of the city, one of Boston's oldest neighborhoods and the location of both Paul Revere's home and the Old North Church (of Longfellow's — "one if by land, two if by sea" — fame). The reel is credited to one "J. Hand," probably one of two Boston-area performers, fiddlers and perhaps brothers, named James ("Jimmy") and John Hand. Their "North End" melody is essentially the same tune as another in *Ryan's Mammoth*, called "Betty Pringle's Pig," which is credited in *Ryan's* to the famous Scots fiddler Niel Gow! (Not the first time that two nearly-identical tunes have been credited to different composers in the same collection). A jig, "Boston Caledonian Club," is credited by Ryan to Edwin Christie, who is not, as is often assumed, the Edwin P. Christie of black-face minstrel fame (who died a suicide in 1862), but rather a younger, "respected if not particularly successful, composer who probably worked in the Boston area" in the second half of the 19th century. The Boston Caledonian Club held its first Scottish games in 1853 in Boston, including a three-mile running race and other track and field events like caber tossing.

Boston regional titles also are frequent. The reel "New Bedford" is named for the second-largest Massachusetts port city, an important rail and seacoast hub, and "Duxbury Reel" for a coastal section south of the city, selected as the terminus of the third transatlantic telegraph cable (laid by the huge ship "Great Eastern" — the name of another reel in *Ryan's* (see *Fiddle Tune History, Fiddler Magazine*, vol. 10, No. 2, Summer 2003). "Cape Cod Reel" is self-explanatory, although it should be noted that prior to 1887,

when the railroad was built, summer visitors came only by boat, cart or stagecoach, and thus tourism was limited at the time *Ryan's* was published. Nearby Salem, Massachusetts, another port town, had its namesake reel by bandleader P.S. Gilmore included in *Ryan's Mammoth* (also one of the subjects of a previous Fiddle Tune History column in *Fiddler Magazine*, vol. 10, No. 4, Winter 2003/04). The "Old Granite State Reel" is the nickname for nearby New Hampshire, and "Portsmouth Reel," honors the major port of that state, although the Portsmouth tune is better known as the familiar "Off to California." The former is credited to "O. Densmore" in *Ryan's*, probably, believes Michael McKernan, referring to O. Densmore from Chelsea, Vermont. Densmore was the leader of a dance band in the 1840s and 1850s who was mentioned in period newspapers at least once as playing the "clarionet" (clarinet). McKernan finds further reference to the "Messrs. Densmore" from Chelsea who joined more than two dozen musicians who played at a Musicians' Annual Ball in Lebanon, New Hampshire, in 1847. Zeke Backus' "Charter Oak Reel" is named for Connecticut's famous tree, in which was defiantly hidden the treasured charter when its return was demanded by King James in the 1660s — the stately oak was felled by a storm in 1856, but the symbol remains. "Massasoit Hornpipe" is named for the famous Wampanoag chief who remained a friend of the Pilgrims until his death in 1661.

New York area titles are also common, if less numerous than Boston ones. They include the "Manhattan Hornpipe," and reels "New York" and "Brooklyn Lasses," although at the time of *Ryan's* publication Brooklyn was not a borough but a separate city, the fifth largest in the entire country. "Staten Island Hornpipe" is included in the collection, although that tune is not one of the new *Ryan* tunes but rather an older tune from British Isles repertoire, probably not named for the island-borough in New York harbor but rather takes its name from the Staten Island off Cape Horn — a welcome sight to sailors, as it marked the end of that difficult passage. "The Croton Hornpipe" perhaps honors the construction of the dam on the Croton River in the then-tiny Westchester County village of the same name, just above New York City, which fed an

aqueduct system first completed in 1842. There were severe droughts in 1880-81 in the Northeast, and, just before the publication of *Ryan's* collection, a decision had been made to build a huge new reservoir at Croton. The hornpipe "Belle of Claremont" was perhaps named after the famous mansion on the Hudson, Claremont, whose most famous belle was Katherine Livingston, later the wife of Robert Fulton, inventor of the first steamship (named in her honor The Clermont, or, according to one account, Katherine of Claremont). The old time standard "Wagonner" (or any of its variant titles, "Wagner," "Tennessee Wagonner," "Texas Wagonner," etc.) seems to have derived directly from the "Belle of Claremont."

"Passaic" and "Pomona" hornpipes name New York environs, both across the Hudson, in New Jersey and Rockland County, New York, respectively, although the former is also called the "Trafalgar Hornpipe" and forms the first strain of Texas fiddler Eck Robertson's "Brilliantcy." It is tempting to include *Ryan's* "Idlewild Jig" in this group, a name associated with the huge airport in Queens now renamed John F. Kennedy International Airport. The airport originally got its name from the Idlewild golf course, on which it was partly built, but in fact the name "idlewild" has been applied to a great many rural retreats over the years. "Jersey Lightning" is a "straight" jig, and though categorized with familiar 6/8 time jigs in *Ryan's Mammoth*, it is actually one of numerous duple-time, syncopated late 19th century dance tunes in the collection. The name could refer to a dance step, however, "Jersey lightning" has been a name for applejack or hard cider since Colonial times.

Several titles could belong to either city. The "Cosmopolite" reel, with its light touch of "modern" syncopation, and the "City Life" clog were perfect musical accompaniment to the beginning of the Gilded Age in both cities. The curiously-titled "Downfall of Water Street" could refer to the Water Streets in either New York or Boston. Boston's Water Street had long been removed from waterside due to municipal landfills, but it once led to a drawbridge over a small harbor inlet; New York's Water Street, on the other hand,

Vendome Hornpipe

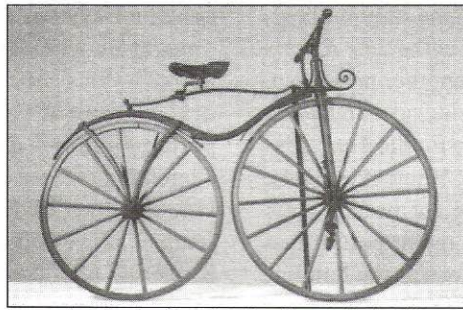
was created by landfills, and forms the shoreline of the East River in lower Manhattan. The Manhattan's street ran by the wharfs in the 19th century, and could be a very rough place indeed. It was not far from the infamous Five Points neighborhoods of early gang fame, and sheltered its own criminal element; thus a "downfall" of some sort was likely indeed for the unwary. "Yacht Club Reel" may have been named for The Boston Yacht Club, the longest continually-operational yacht club in Boston, established 1866; or perhaps for the older New York Yacht Club, which inaugurated its first transatlantic race in the very same year. In fact, the New York Yacht Club's gaff-rigged sloop *Mischief* had just won the America's Cup race in 1881 (the previous race had been in 1876 — also won by the club). A "straight" jig called "The Old National Theatre" is perhaps named for the old Boston theatre on Portland and Traverse Streets, dating from the 1830s, or possibly for the Old National Theatre on the corner of Leonard and Church Streets in New York.

"The Apollo Club" honors the 19th century societies after New York City's Apollo Society, which was one of the first organizations to devote itself to musical culture. Over time Apollo Clubs, often devoted to the sponsorship of male choruses, sprang up in many cities, including Boston, Brooklyn, Chicago, and Minneapolis, all in existence when *Ryan's Mammoth Collection* was published. Ryan's "Hiawatha Hornpipe" may be associated with the 1880 opera *Hiawatha*, by Edward E. Rice, a scene of which was produced by the Apollo Club of Boston in 1886, for male chorus, solo, and orchestra.

Technological marvels of the era get their due in *Ryan's Mammoth*. The "Electric" and "Telegraph" are hornpipe titles, while "the Telephone" gave its name to both a hornpipe and a reel (otherwise unrelated melodies, although the reel is usually known under the title "Paddy on the Turnpike") in the collection. The telegraph had been a fixture since Civil War times, and remained the primary long-distance communication device throughout the 19th century; it was both tool and impetus for the industrialization and business growth taking place in the 1870s. Alexander Graham Bell's telephone was invented in 1876, patented in Boston, and was first publicly exhibited in the Centennial Exposition held in Philadelphia. A curiosity, it initially did not catch on, but Bell persevered and eventually won broad acceptance for his device through his idea of giving frequent public demonstrations. In February, 1877, the first news dispatch was made over the telephone between Boston and Salem, Massachusetts.

One of the new ways to get around either town was by bicycle, although the 1870s vehicle was primitive by today's standards. The machine, called a velocipede, had pedals attached to the front wheel and was nicknamed the "boneshaker" — descriptive of the experience of riding the contraption. Ryan's "Velocipede Hornpipe" is perhaps reminiscent of the ride with its interval leaps of thirds and fourths.

The triplet-laden hornpipe "Vendome" has been a popular name for hotels in imitation of the famous Place Vendôme, a Paris square



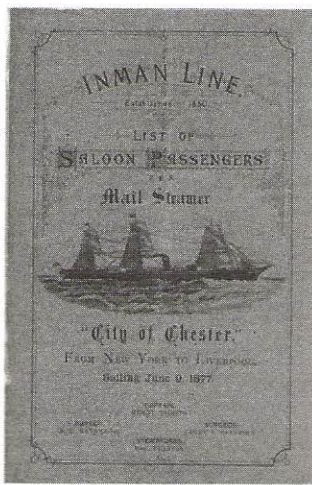
A velocipede, aka the "boneshaker"

with residences for the wealthy along the sides, and its luxurious Hôtel de Vendôme. The first section of Boston's Vendome Hotel was built in 1871, with a second section by architect J. F. Ober completed in 1882, at which time an independent power plant designed by Thomas Edison was installed for Boston's first electrically-lit commercial building. Irish musicians are familiar with the tune under the title "The Independent," as recorded by piper Leo

Rowsome and flute player Matt Molloy. "Castle Garden," a jig attributed to journeyman composer Harry Carleton, was the name of one of the forts built to defend New York harbor during the War of 1812. Five years later it was renamed Fort Clinton in honor of DeWitt Clinton, Mayor of New York, but soon the fort, situated at the tip of Manhattan Island (now "The Battery"), ceased to have any defensive purpose and was leased to the city in 1823. It was a valuable piece of land, and a restaurant and entertainment center were developed on the site — renamed once again as Castle Garden — and later an opera house and theatre were added. From 1839 it was a concert venue and played host to early minstrel troupes, and it was at Castle Garden that the great showman P.T. Barnum arranged the American debut performance of "The Swedish Nightingale," Jenny Lind, in May, 1850. As an entertainment center it had passed its hey-day by that time, and was supplanted by the numerous uptown attractions in the rapidly expanding metropolis. In 1855 Castle Garden became an immigrant landing depot, serving as the main entryway to the United States for European immigration for the next thirty-four years. "Oakland Garden," another "straight" jig, also by the aforementioned Edwin Christie, takes its name from a short-lived Boston theatre managed by Isaac B. Rich in the mid-1880s.

Other *Ryan* tunes may be associated with popular venues. The "Alhambra," a reel, may refer to New York's Alhambra Theatre at 124-125 West Twenty-seventh Street. It was investigated by the conservative Society for the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency in the early 1880s, as part of a campaign to clean up the numerous variety houses and concert saloons of the city which ran the gamut from the legitimate to the decidedly seedy and sometimes criminal. "Oriental Hornpipe" may possibly have associations with Frank Burns' Oriental, a variety house on Broadway between Bleeker and Bond, where piano and violin were featured. Francis O'Neill printed the tune as "Boys from the East" in his 1903 *Music of Ireland*, perhaps his little joke on Ryan's "oriental" title, although the Captain was not particularly noted for this kind of humor. The Oriental's counterpart was the New York concert saloon The Occidental (c.f. Ryan's "Occidental Hornpipe"), regarding which Brooks McNamara, in his book *The New York Concert Saloon: The Devil's Own Nights* (2002, pg. 43), says:

In 1864, the Occidental may well have had both music and waiter girls, who spent at least part of their time performing. The veteran William Allen had both a piano and violin at the Occidental. "Taking a look around the internal arrangements," wrote the Clipper [an entertainment periodical], "we noticed a piano fixed plumb up against the windows facing the street — rather a cold place in the winter time — with a very nice looking girl seated thereat; and by her side sat a violinist. While the latter fiddled the former played upon the grand pianner."



Boston and New York, as port cities, are associated with maritime titles in *Ryan's Mammoth*. The "Inman Line" reel commemorates the highly competitive steamship transatlantic line in the second half of the 19th century, founded originally as the Liverpool and Philadelphia Steam Ship Company in 1850. In 1878 the line made sixty-eight voyages, landing 44,100 passengers, more than any of its rivals. Although the line was eclipsed in the next decade by the White Star and the Cunard operations, the Inman

maintained good passenger loyalty. The aforementioned "White Star" is also the name of a reel in *Ryan's*. The steamship company for which it is presumably named was launched in 1870, officially called the Oceanic Steam Navigation Company. The Titanic was a White Star ship, as were many other ships whose names ended with "-ic" (like the Celtic and Adriatic). They were known for their comfortable, often luxurious accommodations, and, although this compromised speed, the ships were the favorites of the leisured classes. Perhaps the earliest recording of "Inman Line" is from 1913 by violinist Charles D'Alamaine, born in 1871 in England, who died in 1943. D'Alamaine immigrated to the United States in 1888, and by 1890 had established himself as "instructor on violin" in Evanston, Illinois; by 1910 he had removed to Yonkers after which he made a number of recordings. (Ten years later, however, he was a chiropractor in New York City, so he may have found his career as an early recording star disappointing). "Old Ironsides," a Lancashire clog, can only refer to the U.S.S. Constitution, a relic of the War of 1812. The honored Old Ironsides was, at the time of publication of *Ryan's Mammoth*, laid up in Portsmouth, New Hampshire's, Navy Yard, employed as a receiving ship for new recruits and yet to be restored to her former glory (she can be seen today as a magnificent floating museum in Boston harbor).

"The American Rifle Team" is yet another tune composed by Edwin Christie. It honors an American rifle team that won an interna-

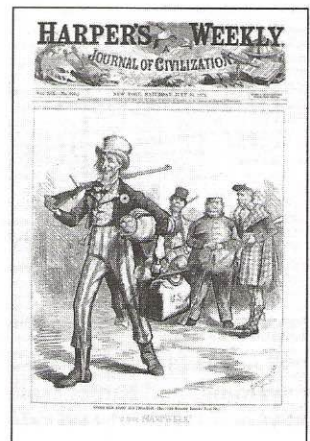
tional match in 1874 held at the Creedmore Range, Long Island, finds Don Meade, who notes that a number of melodies were inspired by the feat. The Americans, led by Major Leech, won by only the slimmest of margins so a return match was held the following year at Dollymount, Ireland (the team sailed on the Inman Line's City of Chester). Again the Americans were victors, and a final match in 1876 was held between the teams of Ireland, Scotland, Canada, Australia, and the U.S., for a final American victory. A silver trophy called the Wimbledon Cup was presented to the 1875 winners by Princess Louise on behalf of the riflemen of Great Britain, and has ever since been the honor for the annual long range shooting match. Americans were ecstatic about the triumph, and with a surge of national pride they treated the members of the team as conquering heroes upon their return.

"The American Rifle Team" was revived by New England fiddler Frank Ferrel on his 1991 *Yankee Dreams* recording, and is currently getting a bit of play in bluegrass circles. Cape Breton fiddler Carl MacKenzie recorded "Vendome Hornpipe" on his 1977 album *Welcome to Your Feet Again*. "Boston Boys" was played by fiddler Eugene O'Donnell, accompanied by Mick Moloney, on their 1978 Green Linnet LP.

¹ *Music for the Nation* (<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/smhtml/audioidir.html@7102334>)

[The author wishes to acknowledge once again the numerous contributions of New York musician, writer, and researcher Don Meade in researching *Ryan's Mammoth* connections. Thanks also to Michael McKernan, PhD, whose interesting remarks regarding northern New England musicians were eagerly read on the Fiddle-L list.]

[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 spends as much time as possible playing in Irish music sessions.]



The American Rifle Team