

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FA 2473 STEREO

The Iron Mountain String Band

An Old Time Southern Mountain String Band

Eric Davidson-banjo Caleb Finch-fiddle Peggy Haine-guitar



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STEREO

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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

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IRON MOUNTAIN STRING BAND

Eric Davidson - 5-String Banjo
Caleb Finch - Fiddle
Peggy Haine - Guitar

Original Old Time Appalachian Songs,
Ballads, and Dance Tunes.

Introduction

It is fitting to begin these notes with a brief comment on why we have undertaken this recording. Having published over the last ten years six albums of field recorded old time music from Southwest Virginia and surrounding areas of Appalachia (see below for citations) it may seem superfluous for us now to offer our own performances of this music. Indeed, we have previously declined to be recorded, since until quite recently it has been possible to find and record old time musicians in the field. However, active musicians familiar with the pre-bluegrass traditions are increasingly rare. By and large, these old musical traditions have disappeared among younger people in Appalachia, and are preserved only to a certain extent on some local college campuses and in the repertoires of a few well-known performers. No more than remnants of the traditional agrarian culture out of which this music grew now survive. Having learned to play the music first-hand from field sources, we feel it is now appropriate for us to attempt to recreate the extraordinary music of this bygone era.

About the Music on this Record

The field tapes which have served as the source for most of the selections on this album date back as far as 1956. Beginning then Eric Davidson, later joined by Paul Newman, a former guitar player with the Band, and Caleb Finch carried out an intensive field study of the traditional music of two Counties in Southwestern Virginia and in adjacent areas of North Carolina. Though small, this region turned out to be enormously rich in old time music of all kinds. As a result of these efforts, a large and diverse collection of field recordings were accumulated, only a small fraction of which has been published. The Band's material is drawn mainly from this unique resource.

Extensive discussion and analysis of the old time music of this area of Appalachia can be found in the Notes accompanying the various record albums deriving from this project. These are:

- 1) "Traditional Music of Grayson and Carroll Counties". 1962. Folkways, FS 3811.
- 2) "Music of Roscoe Holcomb and Wade Ward". 1962. Folkways, FA 2363.
- 3) "Band Music of Grayson and Carroll Counties, Virginia". 1967. Folkways, FS 3832.
- 4) "Ballads and Songs of the Blue Ridge Mountains". 1968. Asch (Folkways), AH 3831.
- 5) "Uncle Wade" (a memorial to Wade Ward). 1973. Folkways, FA 2380.
- 6) "Glenn Neaves and the Virginia Mountain Boys". 1973. Folkways, in press.

The musical traditions represented in the present record may be briefly characterized as follows. The "earliest phase" includes co-existent traditions of ballad singing and instrumental dance music. The ballads were mainly (but not exclusively) sung by women and were often unaccompanied. Initially, these ancient ballads were transplants from the British Isles, but in time ballads based on American themes were incorporated. The dance music was played by a banjo and a fiddle. The guitar was virtually unknown in the mountains of Southwestern Virginia until the turn of the century. The intricate banjo-fiddle band music attained an unusual level of development here and represents one of the most remarkable achievements of traditional American culture. The banjo was played exclusively in the "claw-hammer" style. The music of the earliest phase may sound strange to modern ears because much of it is based on pentatonic or on the Myxolidian hexatonic scales. Examples of the earliest phase style on this record are "Merry Golden Tree" (Side I, Band 8), "Sally Goodin" (Side II, Band 2), "Little Sparrow" (Side II, Band 4), "Omie Wise" (Side II, Band 6), "Cluck Old Hen" (Side II, Band 10), and "Cumberland Gap" (Side II, Band 11).

A majority of the other selections on this record are played in the "old Galax band" style, current in Southwest Virginia ca. 1920-1940. However, nearly all of the songs themselves originate in the "earliest phase"

*By "earliest phase" we refer in this brief characterization to music of the "early American phase" as well as the "earliest phase" proper of the ballad tradition. [See notes accompanying "Ballads and Songs of the Blue Ridge Mountains", Asch (Folkways), AH 3831, and "Band Music of Grayson and Carroll Counties, Virginia", Folkways, FS 3832].

traditions. The "old Galax band" style is a synthesis, the result of the addition of stylistic innovations of the previous 30 years, though firmly based on the old "earliest phase" string band traditions. The flat-picked, bass-line guitar is now completely integrated into the string band music and supplants the banjo as the basic source of rhythm. However, the traditional banjo and fiddle parts remain more or less unchanged. Vocals are mainly solo, the only exception being choruses in a few songs, and this, too, is as it was in the "earliest phase". The remarkable "old Galax band" style was a completely indigenous development, the last to occur which was basically independent of commercial recorded music. Examples of this style are "Western Country" (Side I, Band 1), "Lonesome Day" (Side I, Band 5), and "Train on the Island" (Side I, Band 6).

A third and later phase of string band music is represented on this record by "Lewis Collins" (Side II, Band 3) and "Short Life of Trouble" (Side I, Band 7). These songs emphasize part singing, slow tempo, and lead guitar, all innovations which became popular in the mountains with the widespread distribution of recordings by the Carter Family. These musical developments were antecedents to the appearance of bluegrass styles.

The Iron Mountain String Band

In contrast to the bluegrass bands playing country music of a later era, the Iron Mountain String Band includes neither mandolin, harmonica, dobro, or bass. We are strictly an old-time String Band, and our ambition is to recreate as accurately as possible, in the old style, the Appalachian songs, ballads and dance tunes which no longer can be heard live. An important influence in the development of the Band has been the music of the "Grayson County Bog Trotters", the greatest of the Old Galax String Bands (see Notes to "Band Music of Grayson and Carroll Counties" and "Uncle Wade" for discussions of this significant Band). Eric Davidson, the banjo picker for the Iron Mountain String Band, has been playing the banjo for 17 years. He learned to claw-hammer the banjo from the late Uncle Wade Ward, who had been the banjo picker for the Bog Trotters. In 1964-1966 Uncle Wade was brought together with Fields Ward, his nephew who had played guitar and sung for the Bog Trotters as well, and an outstanding fiddler from the area, Glen Smith, to effect a recreation of the Bog Trotters. (The fragments of music which resulted can be heard on the "Band Music of Grayson and Carroll Counties, Virginia" and "Uncle Wade" records cited above.)

Caleb Finch, old time fiddler for the Iron Mountain String Band, has been playing fiddle for 11 years. He learned many of his pieces, such as "Lone Prairie" (Side II, Band 9) from Uncle Wade as well. Most of the rest he learned from Glen Smith.

Peggy Haine joined the Band in 1966, an already accomplished flat-pick guitar player and ballad singer. She too has been playing for 11 years.

The Iron Mountain String Band was formed in the early 60's, in Manhattan. It has given performances in numerous bars, clubs, and weddings, and at various colleges, such as State University of N.Y. at Stony Brook and Sarah Lawrence. The Band has played over the air many times, presenting a series of broadcasts produced by Tom Whitmore and Wm. Vernon (WBAI). The Band has performed concerts at the Town Hall in Provincetown, Mass.; at the UFO in Columbia, S.C.; at concert-locations in New York, etc. The Band is at present located in Southern California.*

The Individual Selections

Side I

Band 1. "Western Country". In D. banjo, fiddle, guitar; vocal, E.D., banjo tuning, 5th A, EADAD; fiddle tuning, EADA. A famous old-time dance tune.

I wish I were in the Western Country
Sitting in an old armchair
One arm round my liquor jug
The other one round my dear.

Fly around my pretty little miss
Fly around my daisy
Fly around my blue-eyed gal
Damm near drive me crazy.

Whiskey by the barrel
And sugar by the pound
Great big bowl to mix them in
Pretty girl to stir them round.

I wish I had a needle
As fine as I could sew
I'd sew them pretty girls to my tail
And down the road I'd go.

I wish I were in the Western Country
Sitting in an old armchair
One arm round my liquor jug
The other one round my dear.

Band 2. "Skip to My Lou". In G. Fiddle tuning, EADG; vocal, C.F. A fast fiddle tune played in the manner of Glen Smith.

Lou, Lou, skip to my Lou
Lou, Lou, skip to my Lou
Lou, Lou, skip to my Lou
Skip to my Lou, my darling.

*The Band may be contacted via Eric Davidson, 2256 Brambling Lane, Pasadena, California.

Fly's in the buttermilk, shoe, shoe, shoe
Fly's in the buttermilk, shoe, shoe
Fly's in the buttermilk, shoe, shoe, shoe
Skip to my Lou, my darling.

Lost my partner, what'll I do
Lost my partner, what'll I do
Lost my partner, what'll I do
Skip to my Lou, my darling.

Can't get a bluebird, a red one'll do
Can't get a bluebird, a red one'll do
Can't get a bluebird, a red one'll do
Skip to my Lou, my darling.

Band 3. "Sail Away Ladies". In A. banjo, fiddle, guitar. Vocal by all. Banjo tuning, 5th A, EC#AE; fiddle tuning, EAEA. Song derived originally from a sea chanty.

Ever I get my new house done,
Sail away, ladies, sail away,
Give my old one to my son,
Sail away, ladies, sail away.

Chorus: Don't you rock Daddy-o
Don't you rock Daddy-o
Don't you rock Daddy-o
Sail away, ladies, sail away.

Come on boys, come along with me
Sail away, ladies, sail away,
All run down to Tennessee,
Sail away, ladies, sail away.

Chorus:

I got a gal at the head of the holler,
Sail away, ladies, sail away,
She won't come and I won't foller,
Sail away, ladies, sail away.

Chorus:

Ever I get my new house done,
Sail away, ladies, sail away,
Give my old one to my son,
Sail away, ladies, sail away.

Chorus:

I got a gal, she ain't half grown,
Sail away, ladies, sail away,
Jumps on the boys like a dog on a bone,
Sail away, ladies, sail away.

Chorus:

Band 4. "Louisville Burgler". In D. banjo and guitar; banjo tuning, 5th A, EDAD. Vocal by P.H. "Badman" song of American origin.

Raised up in Louisville, a city you all
know well
Raised up by honest parents, the truth
to you I'll tell
Raised up by honest parents, and raised
most tenderly
Till I became a burglar at the age of
twenty-three.

My character was taken and I was sent
to jail
My people found it all in vain to get
me out on bail
The jury found me guilty, the clerk he
wrote it down
The judge he passed the sentence and
sent me to Frankfurt town.

They put me on an eastbound train one
cold December day
And as I passed the station you could
hear all the people say
Oh yonder goes a burglar of some great
crime, I know
For some great crime or other to Frankfurt
town must go.

I saw my aching father a-pleading at the
bar
I saw my dear old mother a-tearing out
her hair
O tearing out those old grey locks, the
tears come streaming down
She said, my son, what have you done, to
be sentenced to Frankfurt town.

I had a girl in Louisville, a girl that
I loved well
If ever I get my liberty, a life with her
I'll dwell
If ever I get my liberty, bad company I
will shun
Playing cards and gambling and also
drinking rum.

To you who have your liberty, pray keep
it while you can
Don't walk about the streets at night
or break the laws of man
For if you do you surely will you'll
find yourself like me
Serving out your twenty-one years in
the stato penitentiary.

Band 5. "Lonesome Day". In A. banjo, fiddle, guitar. Banjo tuning, 5th A, EC#AE; fiddle tuning, EAEA; vocal by P.H. A lament probably of Negro origin, made popular throughout the Blue-Ridge by the Carter family.

Today has been a lonesome day
Today has been a lonesome day
Today has been a lonesome day
And I fear tomorrow'll be the same old way.

They carried my mother to the burying
ground
They carried my mother to the burying
ground
They carried my mother to the burying
ground
And I watched them pallbearers let
her down.

Did you ever hear that church bell tone
Did you ever hear that church bell sound
Did you ever hear that church bell sound
It's another poor boy's in the ground.

It's dig my grave with a silver spade
Dig my grave with a silver spade
It's dig my grave with a silver spade
You may mark the place where I was laid.

Band 6. "Train on the Island". In A. banjo, fiddle, guitar. Vocal by E.D.; banjo tuning, 5th A, EC#AE; fiddle tuning, EAEA. A popular Galax area tune played by the Bog Trotters; a closely related instrumental version is called "June Apple".

Train on the island
She's heading for the west
Me and my gal, we fell out
Maybe it's for the best.

Train on the island
Now don't you hear her blow
Me and my love, we fell out
Darling, you'd better go.

Now hand me down my rifle
Hand me down my gun
Me and my love, we fell out
And we ain't gonna make it on.

I'll make you a bet we're out of corn
I see we're out of wine
Every little thing I should have took
Went with that gal of mine

I went up on the mountain top
I got out on the swing
Now I went down the other side
To hear my true love sing.

Band 7. "Short Life of Trouble". In A. banjo, fiddle, guitar. Vocal by P.H. and E.D. Banjo tuning, 5th A, EC#AE; fiddle tuning, EAEA. This song is well known to Blue Grass bands, although the song predates that style.

Remember what you told me
Not many weeks ago
You promised that you'd marry me
A-standing in your papa's door.

Chorus: Short life of trouble
A few more words to part
Short life of trouble, dear girl
Poor boy with a broken heart

Now you've broken your promise
Go marry whom you please
I'd give my gold and half of this world
If you would marry me.

Chorus:

Now you've broken your promise
Go on with whom you may
This old world's so big and so wide
I'm gonna ramble on back someday.

Chorus:

Band 8. "Merry Golden Tree". In A. Banjo.
tuning, 5th A, EDAD; vocal by E.D.
An archaic derivative of a British
ballad, alleged to refer to the
era of the Spanish Armada.

There was a little ship in the Southbury
Sea
Cryin' O the land that lies so low
There was a little ship in the Southbury
Sea
And she went by the name of the Merry
Golden Tree
As she lay there in the low and lonesome
low
As she lay there in the lowland, so low.

O she hadn't been a-sailing more than two
weeks or three
Crying O the land that lies so low
She hadn't been a-sailing more than two
weeks or three
She come upon the side of that Spanish
vanity
As she lay there in the low and lonesome
low
As she lay there in the lowland, so low.

Up spoke a little cabin boy
Crying O the land that lies so low
Up spoke a little cabin boy
O what will you give me for the ship
that's now ahoy
If I sink her in the low and lonesome low
If I sink her in the lowland, so low.

I'll give you gold, the captain said he
Crying O the land that lies so low
I'll give you gold, the captain said he
And the fairest of my daughters that has
sailed upon the sea
If you sink her in the low and lonesome
low
If you sink her in the lowland, so low.

He bared his head and overboard jumped he
Crying O the land that lies so low
He bared his head and overboard jumped he
Swam to the side of that Spanish Vanity
As she lay there in the low and lonesome
low
As she lay there in the lowland, so low.

He had a little instrument all tucked up
for the use
Crying O the land that lies so low
Well, he had a little instrument all
tucked up for the use
He bored nine holes with every single push
And he sunk her in that low and lonesome
low
Sunk her in the lowland, so low.

Some were playing cards and some were
playing dice
And some of them were busy with the
devil's own advice
But he sunk her in the low and lonesome
low
But he sunk her in the lowland, so low.

And he turned upon his back and back
swum he
Crying O the land that lies so low
He turned upon his back and back swum he

He swum til he come to the Merry Golden
Tree
As she lay there in the low and lonesome
low
As she lay there in the lowland, so low.

Captain, O Captain, O take me on board
Crying O the land that lies so low
Captain, O Captain, take me back upon
board
And do unto me as good as your word
I have sunk them in the low and lonesome
low
I have sunk them in the lowland, so low.

O I'll never take you back on board
Or do unto you as good as my word
I shall leave you in this low and
lonesome low
I shall leave you in this lowland, so low.

And he turned upon his head and down
swum he
Crying O the land that lies so low
Well he turned upon his head, down swum
he

He swam till he come to the bottom of
the sea
And he lay there in the low and lonesome
low
And he lay there in the lowland, so low.

Side II

Band 1. "Black Eyed Susie". In D. banjo,
fiddle, guitar. Vocal by E.D. and
P.H.; banjo tuning, 5th A, EDAD;
fiddle tuning, EADA. An archaic
banjo-fiddle dance tune from the
earliest phase.

Up red oak and down salt water
Some old man's gonna lose his daughter.

Chorus: Hey little black-eyed Susie
Hey little black-eyed Susie
Hey little black-eyed Susie
Hey Hey Hey

Black-eyed Susie ain't half grown
Jumps on the boys like a dog on a bone.

Chorus:

Black-eyed Susie went a-huckleberry
pickin'
The boys got drunk and Susie took
a-lickin'.

Chorus:

Some got drunk, some got boozy
I went home with black-eyed Susie.

Chorus:

Black-eyed Susie ain't half grown
Jumps on the boys like a dog on a bone.

Chorus:

Band 2. "Sally Goodin". In A. fiddle tuning, EAEA; vocal by E.D. An old-time dance tune with typical, two-line whimsical verses, which is known to all traditional musicians in this area.

Blackberry pie and huckleberry puddin'
Give it all away just to kiss Sally Goodin.

I'm a man, I'm not wooden
Crazy 'bout a gal what they call Sally Goodin.

Look'd upon the hillside, seen my Sally comin'
Cross from the saw I seen a-body comin'.

Always trouble, owes alot of money
That's my gal, she's my honey.

Blackberry pie and huckleberry puddin'
Give it all away just to kiss Sally Goodin.

Band 3. "Lewis Collins". In A. banjo, fiddle, guitar. Vocal by E.D. and P.H.; banjo tuning, 5th A, EC#AE; fiddle tuning, EAEA. Probably of "Blues" origin; if so, it is of later vintage than most other songs on the record.

Miss Collins wept, Miss Collins moaned
To see her son Lewis leave his home
Angels laid him away.

Chorus: Angels laid him away
They laid him six feet under the clay
Angels laid him away.

Tom shot one and Lewis shot two
They shot poor Collins, through and through
Now Angels laid him away.

Chorus:

When the women heard that Lewis was dead
They all run home and reragged in red
Now Angels laid him away.

Chorus:

Band 4. "Little Sparrow". Vocal by P.H. An example of an earliest phase ballad which is descended directly from British Isle's sources.

Come all you fair and tender ladies
Take warning how that you love young men
They're like a star in the bright summer morning
They do appear and then are gone.

They'll sit by your side and tell you many stories
They'll tell you all the love they have for you
And away they'll go and court another
That shows the love they have for you.

Once I had an old true lover
Indeed I thought he was my own
Away he went and courted another
And left me here to weep and mourn.

I wish I was a little sparrow
And had a wing that I could fly
When my true love was courting another
I guess I'd be somewhere close by.

But I am not a little sparrow
And have not wings that I can fly
So I'll sit down in grief and sorrow
And sing and pass my troubles by.

Band 5. "Johnson Boys". In D. banjo, fiddle, guitar. Vocal by P.H. and E.D.; banjo tuning, 5th A, EDAD; fiddle tuning, EADA. A dance tune with words referring to the Civil War.

Have you heard the many stories
Told by old and young with joy
Of the many deeds of daring
That was done by the Johnson Boys.

Chorus: Jump up pretty girls, don't be afraid
Jump up pretty girls, don't be afraid
Jump up pretty girls, don't be afraid
Jump up pretty girls, don't be afraid

Johnson Boys they're the fellers
They know how to court them girls
They know how to hug and to kiss them
Jump up pretty girls, don't be afraid.

Chorus:

They were men of skill and courage
And they traveled near and far
And they joined their country's service
In that awful civil war.

Chorus:

They were scouts in the rebel army
And they traveled far and wide
When them Yankees seen them a-coming
They threw down their guns and hide

Chorus:

Band 6. "Omie Wise". In D. fiddle tuning, EADA; vocal by P.H. An ancient American ballad belonging to the "murdered sweetheart" genre. This rendition illustrates the use of the fiddle to accompany the ballad singer.

I'll tell you a story about Omie Wise
And how she was deluded by John Lewis'
lies
He promised to meet her at Adam's Spring
He said he'd bring her money and some
other fine thing.

He brought her no money but flattered
the case
Saying we will get married, and will be
no disgrace
She got on behind him and away they did go
He took her to the deep woods where
nobody would know.

John Lewis, John Lewis, please tell me
your mind
Will you marry me or will you leave me
behind
Omie, O Omie, I'll tell you my mind
My mind is to drown you and leave you
behind.

Have pity, John Lewis, have pity, she cried
 I'll go away a beggar and never be your
 bride
 He kicked her, he cuffed her, he threw
 her to the ground
 He threw her in the deep water where he
 knew that she would drown.

Two boys was a-fishin', a-fishin' that day
 They saw poor Omie's body come a-floating
 down the bay
 A debt to the devil John Lewis must pay
 For killing pretty Omie and running away.

Band 7. "Groundhog". In D. banjo, fiddle,
 guitar; vocal by E.D.; banjo tuning,
 5th A, E D A D; fiddle tuning, E A D A.
 One of the best known animal songs.
 Versions of this tune have survived
 until the Blue-Grass period.

Yonder come Sally with a snicker and a grin
 Yonder come Sally with a snicker and a grin
 Groundhog grease all over his chin.

Chorus: Groundhog.

Old Aunt Nance with a walkin' cane
 Old Aunt Nance with a walkin' cane
 Swore she'd have that Groundhog's brain.

Chorus:

Pick up your gun and whistle for your dog
 Pick up your gun and whistle for your dog
 Goin' up the holler to catch a groundhog.

Chorus:

Grab a pole and twist him out
 Grab a pole and twist him out
 Good God-a-mighty that groundhog's stout.

Chorus:

Yonder come Sally with a snicker and a grin
 Yonder come Sally with a snicker and a grin
 Groundhog grease all over his chin.

Chorus:

Band 8. "Pig in a Pen". In A. banjo, fiddle,
 guitar. Vocal by E.D.; banjo tuning,
 5th A, E C # A E; fiddle tuning, E A E A.
 A widely known song which is also
 played by contemporary Blue-Grass
 bands.

Yonder come my honey
 I'll tell you how I know
 I know by her curly hair
 Hanging down so low
 Hanging down so low.

Chorus: Corn hog lordy in the pen
 Corn to feed him on
 All I want is a pretty little girl
 To feed him when I'm gone
 To feed him when I'm gone.

Yonder come my honey
 She hang her head and cries
 She says yonder goes the meanest man
 That ever lived or died
 That ever lived or died.

Chorus:

All I want is a pig in a pen
 Corn to feed him on
 All I want is a pretty little girl
 To keep me good and warm
 To keep me good and warm

Chorus:

Band 9. "Lone Prairie". In A. Fiddle
 tuning, E A E A. This version was
 learned from Wade Ward, who in
 turn learned it from his older
 brother Crocket Ward; a classic
 example of the early Southwest
 Virginia fiddle style.

Band 10. "Cluck Old Hen". In A. banjo and
 fiddle. Vocal by E.D.; banjo
 tuning, 5th A, E D A E; fiddle tuning,
 E A E A. A striking rendition of a
 well-known archaic tune as played
 by Wade and Crocket Ward.

My old hen's a good old hen
 She lays eggs for the railroad men
 Sometimes eight, sometimes ten
 Sometimes enough for the railroad men.

Old hen cackle, cackle in the lot
 The next time she cackles, she'll
 cackle in the pot
 Old hen cackle, cackle in the lot
 The next time she cackles, she'll
 cackle in the pot.

My old hen's a good old hen
 She lays eggs for the railroad men
 Sometimes one, sometimes two
 Sometimes enough for the whole damned
 crew.

Old hen cackle, cackle for corn
 Old hen cackle cause her chickens all
 gone
 Old hen cackle, cackle for corn
 Old hen cackle cause her chickens all
 gone.

Band 11. "Cumberland Gap". In C. banjo and
 fiddle. Vocal by E.D.; banjo
 tuning, 5th C #, E A # E C; fiddle
 tuning, E B F B. Played in a
 tuning not used for any other
 song; the Cumberland Gap to
 which the song refers was the
 early route through the mountains
 into Kentucky.

It ain't too far to Cumberland Gap
 Sixteen miles up there and back.

Chorus: Cumberland Gap, it ain't my home
 Goin' leave old Cumberland alone.

Lay down, boys, take a little ease
 Have a little battle with the chiggers
 and fleas.

Chorus:

Drove my mule to Cumberland Gap
 She went up there and she won't come back.

Chorus:

First white man in the Cumberland Gap
 Me and Dad, my old grandpap.

Chorus:

Lay down boys, take a little nap
 You'll all wake up in the Cumberland Gap.

Chorus:

Daniel Boone on the pinnacle rock
 Shootin down the Injuns with his old
 flintlock.

Chorus:

design: r/wasserman