TUNE OF THE WEEK – 11/20/15

CAMP CHASE

The Tune of the Week title – *Camp Chase* -- is associated with a fiddling soldier whose American pioneer and musical roots are legendary in West Virginia: Solomon Carpenter. You’ve probably heard of many a last and final tune played by a fiddler before dying, but very rarely do you hear about a tune that changed a fiddler’s fate as this one did.

The fascinating story behind the tune is that it won the freedom of this Confederate prisoner held in Camp Chase, Ohio during the Civil War. This man, Sol Carpenter, is also said to have been born under a “shelving rock” as his family was attempting to escape hostile Indians. (The tune Shelvin’ Rock is said to have been composed by “Solly’s” fiddling father, Jeremiah Carpenter.)

My curiosity piqued upon reading the story, I listened to versions of *Camp Chase* and found what I consider to be as close to the source as possible -- Sol’s grandson, David Frank “French” Carpenter (1905 – 1965). Click on the link to hear [French Carpenter's version on Slippery Hill website](http://slippery-hill.com/M-K/AEAE/CampChase-Carpenter.mp3). I was also able to hear French play on a CD he recorded in 1964, “Elzic’s Farewell,” with legendary West Virginian banjo maker and player Jenes Cottrell. He tells the story of his grandfather’s fiddle contest at Camp Chase, how he won, and the subsequent release.

 It’s said that Sol Carpenter and four other captured fiddlers were allowed to compete in the prison camp (where over 2,200 Confederate soldiers eventually died and were buried) and the winner would receive his freedom. They played the same tune, but Carpenter won and it’s said that was because of *two notes* he added that captured the admiration of the judging commandant. You’ll hear these notes towards the end of the B part of Camp Chase. If you watch and listen to West Virginian master fiddler [Mark Campbell's Camp Chase](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZDnvChoxP8M) you’ll see him raise his eyebrows playing those two notes at 1:11 in the video. Listen also to [West Virginia governor Bobby Taylor with Kim Johnson](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5iscmTDq7uI) telling the story and performing Camp Chase. And here’s [Wilson Douglas with Kim Johnson](https://www.youtube.com/watch?t=2&v=kBeawrlkH2Y).

Upon release, although Sol Carpenter supposedly signed an agreement that he would no longer fight against the Union, he continued to fight as a Confederate soldier.

Another version has become an inspirational learning source: [Burl Hammons' Camp Chase recorded by BHO member Brendan Doyle](http://www.banjohangout.org/myhangout/media-player/audio_player2.asp?musicid=11904&archived=%20%20%20). I find Adam Hurt’s rendition as touching as the story itself: [Adam's Camp Chase from the Burl Hammons version](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5LioOrHlKEg). It’s not one I’ve worked on yet and would welcome more information and a tab.

The tune played at the contest at Camp Chase during the Civil War is said by Alan Jabbour to have actually been titled George Booker, which he learned from the playing of Henry Reed. Have a listen here: [Henry Reed playing George Booker](http://www.loc.gov/item/afcreed000132/%20%20%20%20).

The actual history of the site called Camp Chase is quite interesting and is a listed historic landmark. I recommend reading the first link below, especially the “Lady in Gray.” It sounds like a tune should have been written about this ghostly apparition said to haunt the Camp Chase Cemetery looking for her lost love. More information and music can be found at these sites:

 [Wickipedia article on Camp Chase, Ohio](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Camp_Chase)

[Fiddler's Companion](http://www.ibiblio.org/fiddlers/CAMP_CAPR.htm)

 [Appalachian Lifestyles blog from a descendant](http://appalachianlifestyles.blogspot.com/2010/01/camp-chase.html)

 [West Virginia encyclopedia article](http://www.wvencyclopedia.org/articles/981)

 [BHO discussion on French Carpenter and Burl Hammon's versions](http://www.banjohangout.org/archive/139071)

 [Erynn Marshall's 3rd place Clifftop, 2015, performance of Camp Chase](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qAnW8sEo3hs)

 [BHO and Fiddle Hangout member Cyndy fiddling Camp Chase](http://www.fiddlehangout.com/myhangout/media-player/audio_player2.asp?musicid=7645&archived=%20)

 [Emory Bailey on Slippery Hill](http://slippery-hill.com/M-K/AEAE/CampChase-Bailey.mp3)

 [Dan Levenson's Camp Chase and crooked tunes discussion](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VaHg5FM-9HU)

As you might have heard, it’s a crooked tune in more than one place. In French Carpenter’s version there’s one measure in the middle of the A part with three beats. I found it to be a surprisingly appealing and natural lead-in to the next musical phrase. Crooked measures often need getting used to, but that particular three-beat measure has a certain charm. The B part is also crooked with three half-measures – two before the famous two notes and one afterwards. French doesn’t play it exactly the same way each time through, so I had to choose what to arrange.

Hope you enjoy and give Camp Chase a try.

 

Camp Chase, Ohio