

LAZARUS BOOKS PRESENTS:

**getting
started**
with
**CLAWHAMMER
BANJO**



BY AARON and
NICOLE KEIM



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1-4
<u>LESSON #1</u> : The Basic Clawhammer Stroke	5-6
<u>LESSON #2</u> : Reading Tablature	7-8
<u>LESSON #3</u> : Using Other Strings	9-10
Old Joe Clark	11
Groundhog	12
Little Liza Jane	13
Wildwood Flower	14
<u>LESSON #4</u> : Embellishments	15-17
Shady Grove	18
Shortnin' Bread	19
Sail Away Ladies	20
Sourwood Mountain	21
Little Brown Jug	22
Johnny Booker	23-24
Cripple Creek	25
Reuben's Train	26

GETTING STARTED with CLAWHAMMER BANJO

Hello banjo friends!
Let's begin with
the question:
"What is
Clawhammer?"

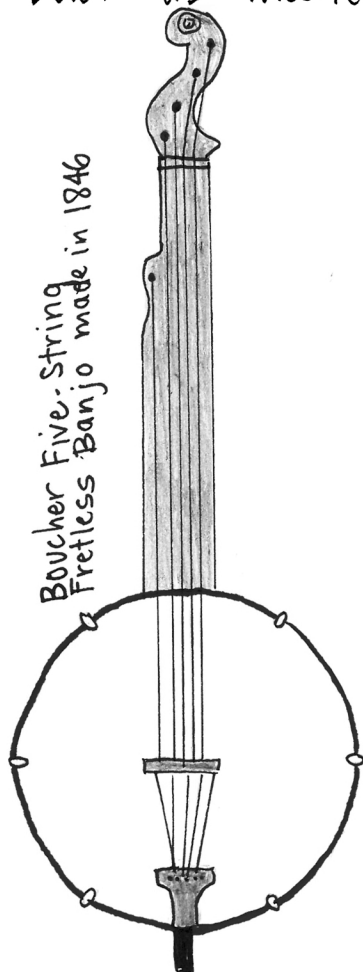
Clawhammer is a banjo style developed in 19th century Appalachia. It is a down picking style, popular for playing fiddle tunes and accompanying songs in what people now call the "old time" style. Primarily played for home entertainment and social dancing, "old time" is a predecessor to commercial styles like country and bluegrass.

A banjo is a simple thing: a skin head stretched over a gourd or frame and a neck with a few long strings and a short one. It has roots in the Caribbean where enslaved people from Africa developed it as an instrument for dance music. They brought the banjo to the colonies where they played for their own pleasure and were also forced to play for their masters.

By the 1830's, the banjo became the favorite instrument of the minstrel show, a type of theater entertainment performed by white men in blackface (now considered a racist and taboo act), singing songs celebrating

a caricature of slavery and southern life. This boosted its popularity and by the 1850's, factory made banjos and instruction books were available via mail order, further spreading the banjo in the United States.

In this same time period people from England, Ireland and Scotland settled the Appalachian region, bringing with them songs and fiddle tunes. The banjo proved to be a good partner to the fiddle and this duo became the preferred dance band in Appalachia by the late 19th century. It was also popular as an accompaniment for ballads and other songs, some of which had roots as far back as medieval times in Europe.

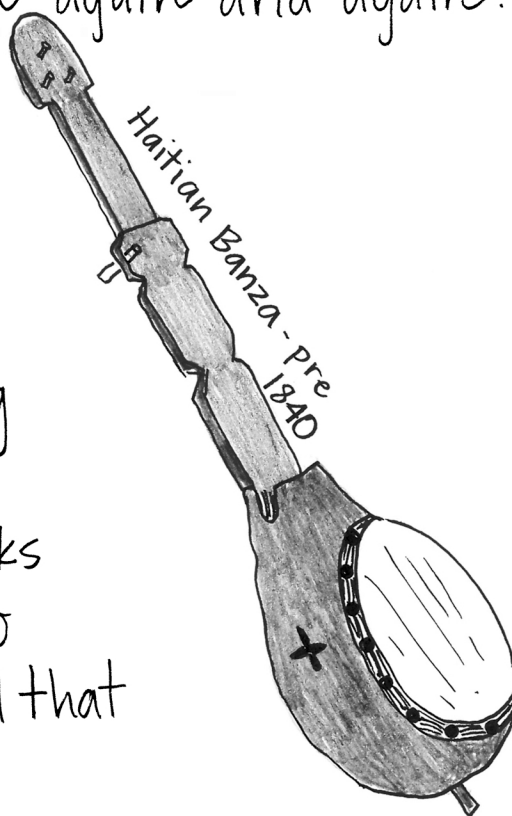


{ This unique fusion of
African and European traditions,
centered on dance music in rural
Appalachia, is the foundation
of Clawhammer Banjo. }

This brings us to the task at hand. I offer you 12 songs/tunes for Clawhammer banjo, suitable for your early days as a player. I've also included a few short lessons to get you started on the basic stroke, reading tablature, making chords and embellishing the basic stroke.

Every page of this book has a link to a YouTube video. Please watch these videos to get the sound in your ears and to gather more tips. It really does help to hear the tune again and again.

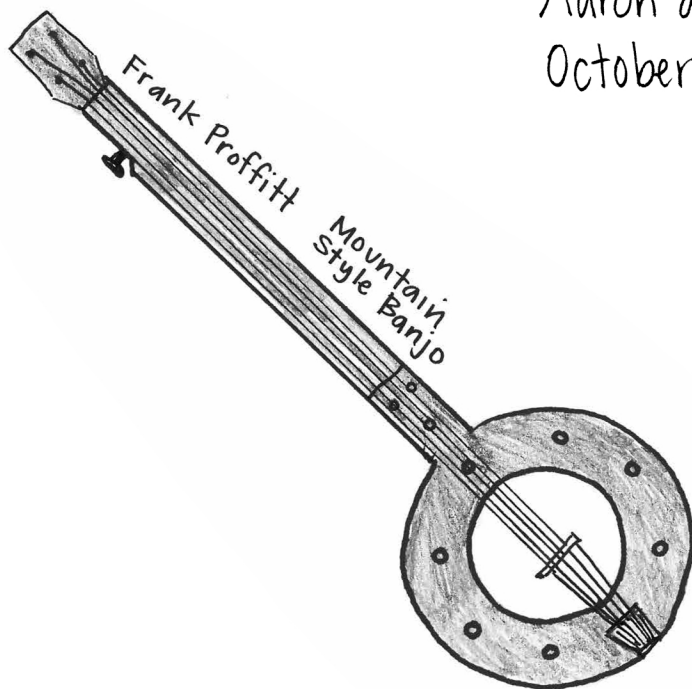
* Many pieces in this book require you to retune your banjo, which is common in old time music. Each tuning is listed in the upper right corner of the page. Some folks like to use a capo to help, so on appropriate songs I listed that option also. *



- HERE IS A LINK TO THE YOUTUBE PLAYLIST FOR THE ENTIRE BOOK: tinyurl.com/BanjoClawPlaylist
- THESE ARE THE BANJOS AND UKULELES WE BUILD:
www.thebeansprout.com
- HERE'S OUR WEBSITE FOR TEACHING & PERFORMING:
www.quietamericanmusic.com
- HERE'S OUR EMAIL: info@quietamericanmusic.com

Please Stay in touch and feel free to ask questions!

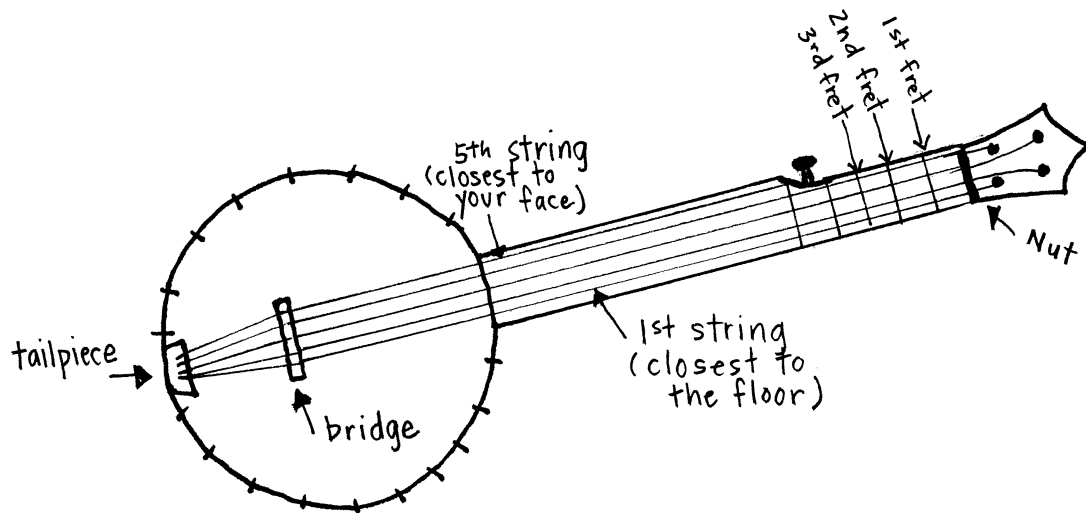
- Aaron and Nicole Keim
October 2020



LESSON #1:

The Basic Clawhammer Stroke

- To get started, let's tune up our instrument! •



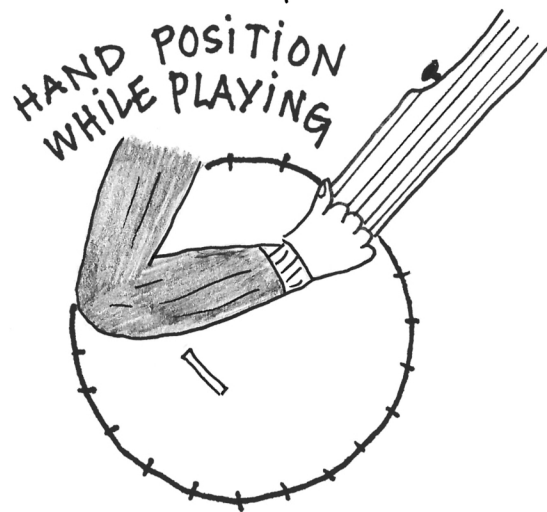
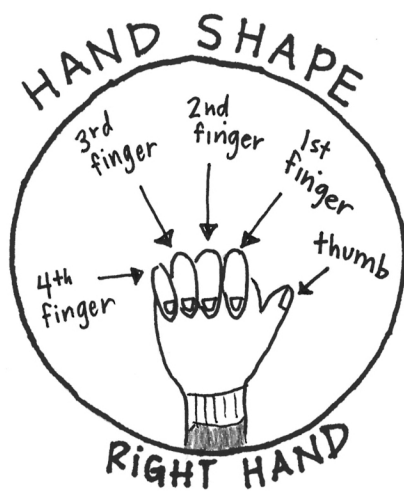
• STANDARD TUNING •

5th string: G	4th: D	3rd: G	2nd: B	1st: D
---------------	--------	--------	--------	--------

The first time I saw someone playing Clawhammer, I couldn't believe that such a small motion could produce so much sound. Although the basic movements are quite simple, endless variations and embellishments make it a fascinating folk art.

To begin, fold your right hand over as if you are going to rap on a door or tabletop. Place it over

the strings of your banjo near the place where the head meets the neck. As you "knock" towards the banjo your first fingernail strikes one string to make a melody note. Pull your hand slightly away and complete the same motion, but this time brush the 1st through 3rd strings. As you take your hand away from the banjo after the brush, your thumb plucks the 5th string and resets to start the pattern over.



These three motions: striking a single note, brushing a few strings and plucking with your thumb make up the basic stroke. (Note-brush-thumb) The basic rhythm is a quarter note followed by two eighth notes

or

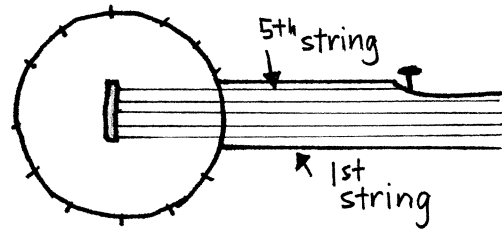
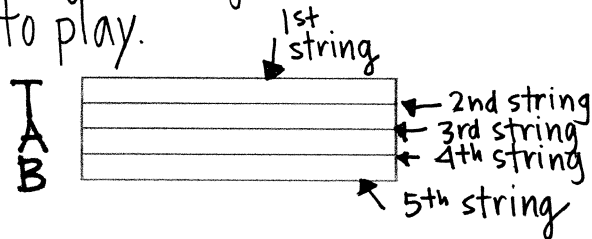
Confused? Please watch this video: tinyurl.com/BanjoClawLesson1

- Before we play any tunes, just practice the basic rhythm over and over. For the "note" or "bum" part of the rhythm, just strike the open 1st string. Soon we'll add other notes and other strings. •

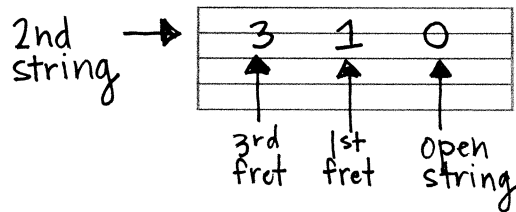
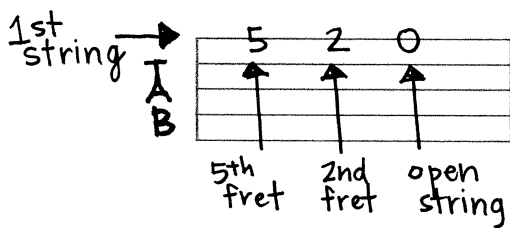
LESSON #2:

Reading Tablature

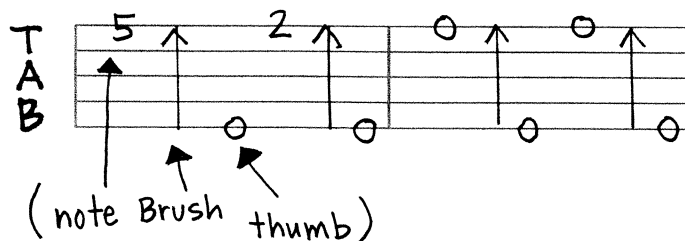
I prefer to write music out for you in tablature instead of a traditional music staff. Tablature is a diagram of the five banjo strings and shows you which frets to press and strings to play.



If a number is written on a line, that refers to the fret number. Press the string down at that fret with your left hand and strike the string with your right. (A "o" means an open string.)

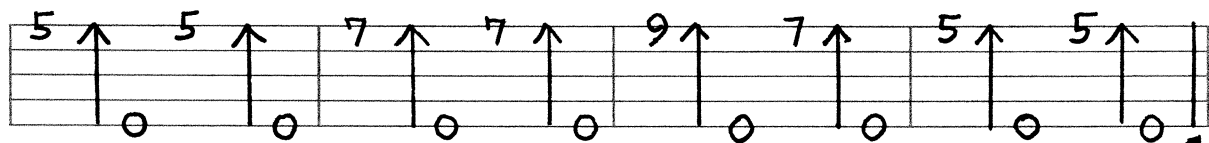
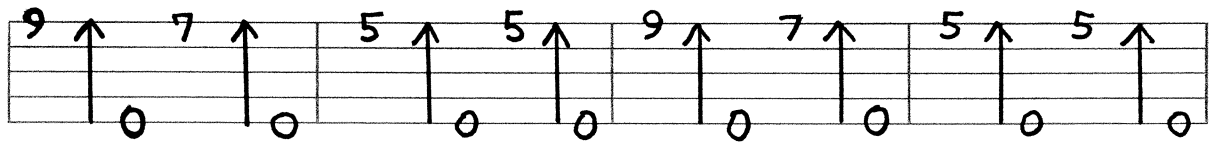


If I intend for you to do a brush, that will be notated with an arrow $\uparrow$. Reminder, the brush is typically the first three strings, but you can do more or less according to your taste. A "o" on the 5th string means you pluck the 5th string with your thumb.



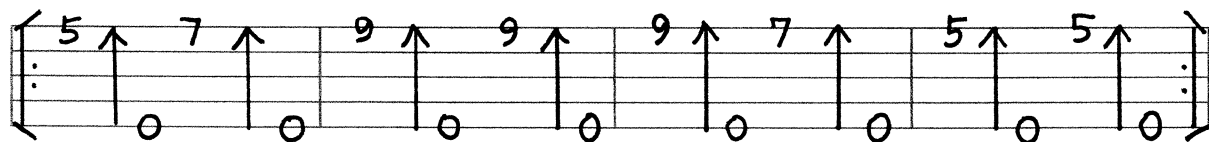
Here are a few simple melodies on the 1st string to get you started. Tip: when you fret a melody note, keep holding it down while you do the brush thumb.

HOT CROSS BUNS

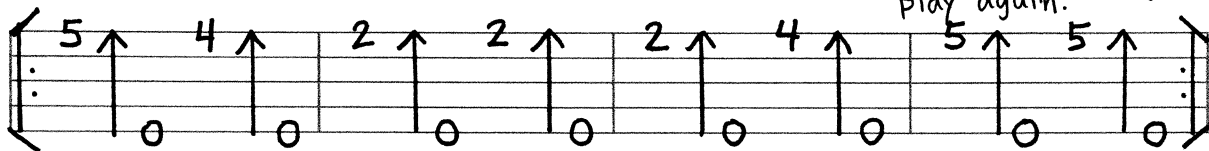


A double bar line indicates the end of the song

PART OF SNOWDROP



A double bar with two dots is a repeat. It means go back to the beginning or other repeat sign and play again.

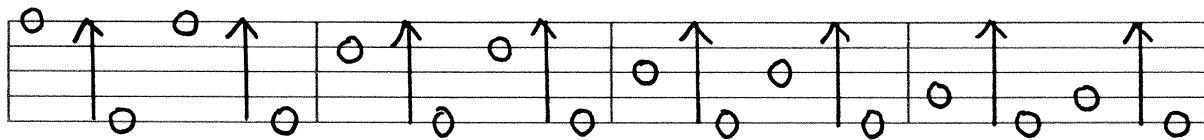


• tinyurl.com/BanjoClawLesson2

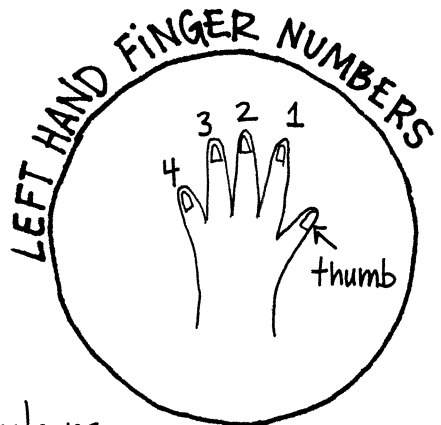
LESSON #3:

Using the Other Strings

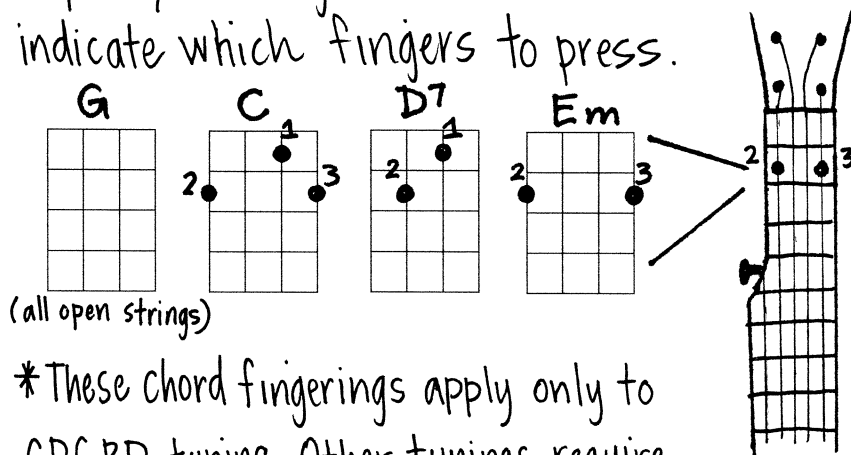
We also need to be able to play single notes on the other strings besides the first. This will take a little practice. I suggest striking through the noted string and resting on the next one before the brush thumb (see YouTube videos for demo). Following through like this makes for the best tone and keeps your hand motions consistent. Try this:



We can also practice this by making some basic chords with the left hand while practicing the clawhammer motion with the right hand.



These diagrams are pictures of where to put your fingers to make chords. The numbers indicate which fingers to press.



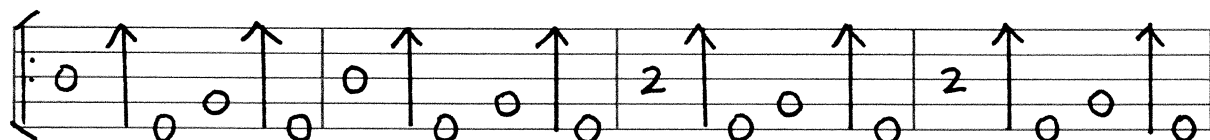
The chord charts are basically a grid of the first four banjo frets.

*These chord fingerings apply only to GDGBD tuning. Other tunings require different fingerings. But don't worry about that now.

Let's play a common chord progression while practicing our clawhammer stroke. Make the chord shape with your left hand at the beginning of the measure and hold down until the next chord happens.

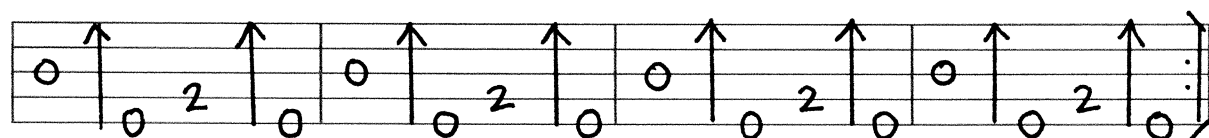
G

D



Em

C



Many pieces in this book have chord names written above the tab. Why?

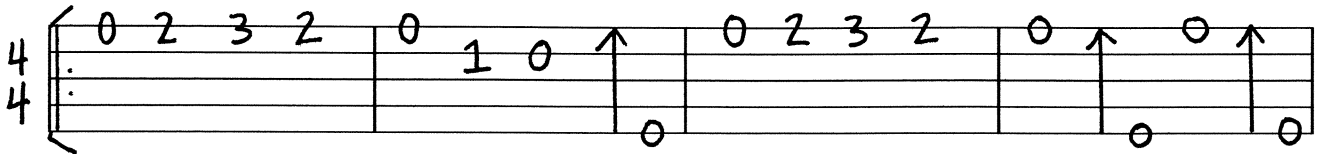
- 1) Your friends can play the chords to back you up while you play the melody
- 2) Sometimes playing the melody is a little easier if your left hand uses the chord shape as a guide. This is not always the case though - I'll make sure to mention it in my videos when it makes sense to use the chord shapes. OK, ready for some tunes?

OLD JOE CLARK

GDGBD tuning

G

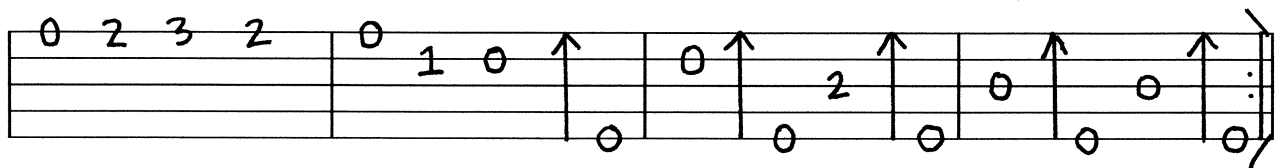
D



G

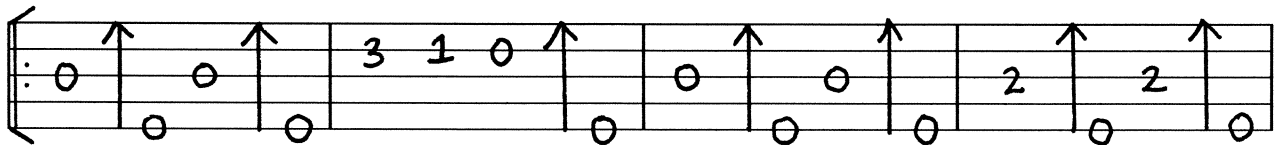
D

G



G

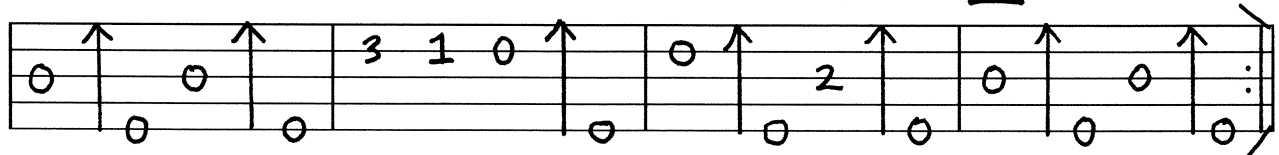
D



G

D

G



Old Joe Clark is a folk song that was collected in Kentucky and Virginia in the late 1800^s as a children's song, a fiddle tune and a play party song. Close to 100 verses have been documented over the years - many of them humorous.

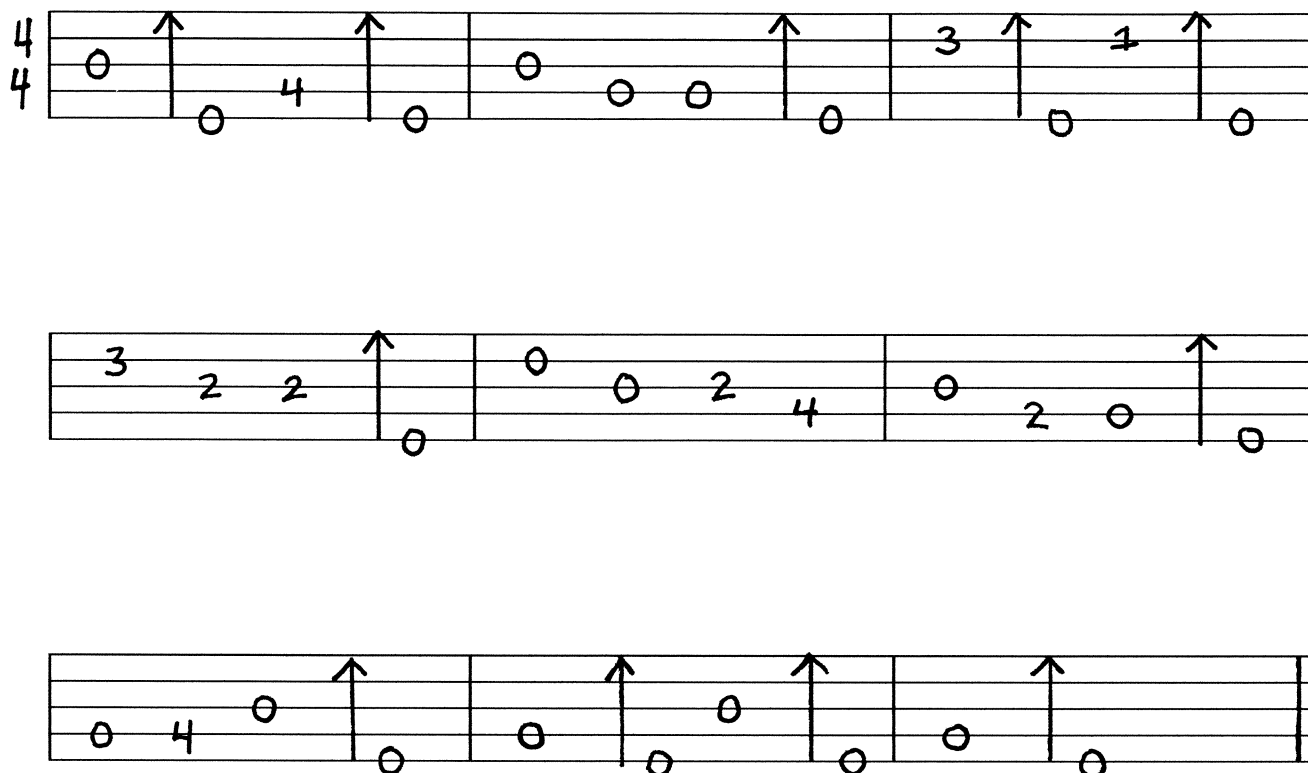
(11)

• tinyurl.com/BanjoClawOldJoe

GROUNDHOG

GDGBD tuning

G

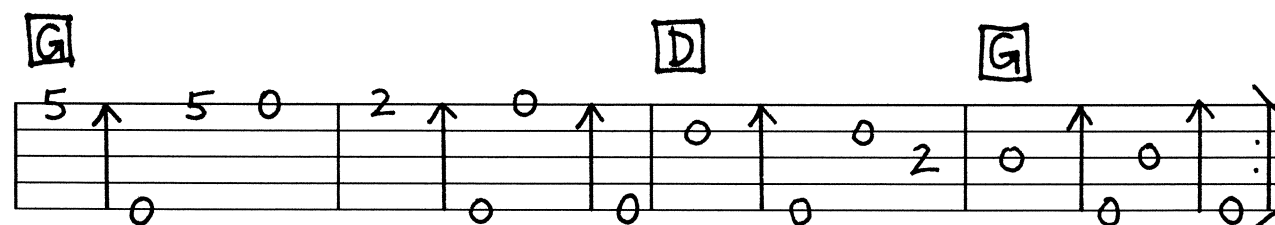
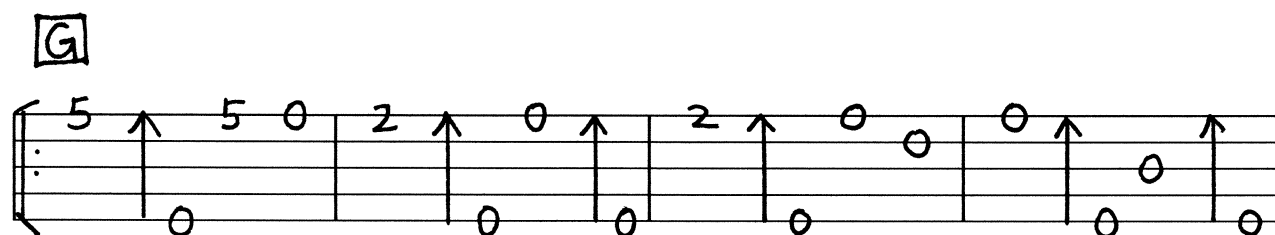
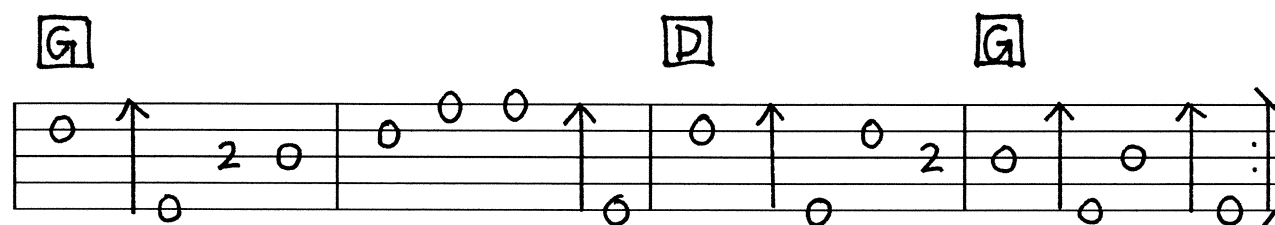
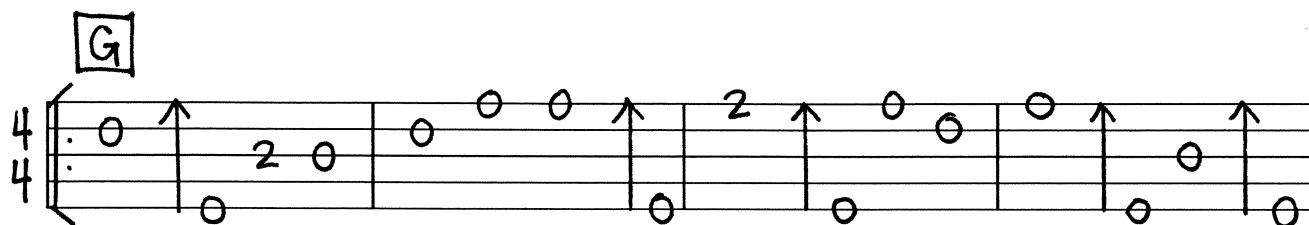


This is one of those simple tunes that I could play all day long. This hypnotic repetition is one of my favorite aspects of old time music. When played over and over, the tune seems to lull the players and dancers into a sort of trance. Check out Frank Proffitt's version played on a homemade dulcimer.

• tinyurl.com/BanjoClawGroundhog

LITTLE LIZA JANE

G D G B D tuning

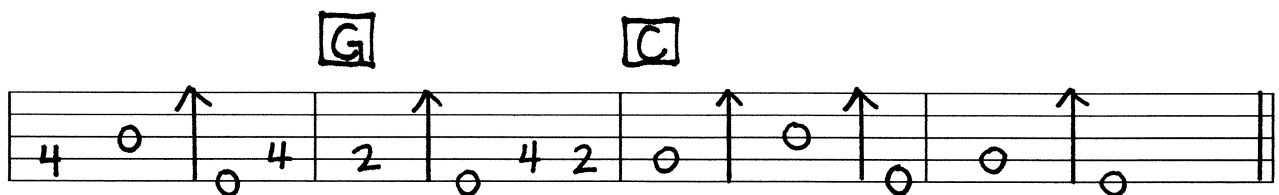
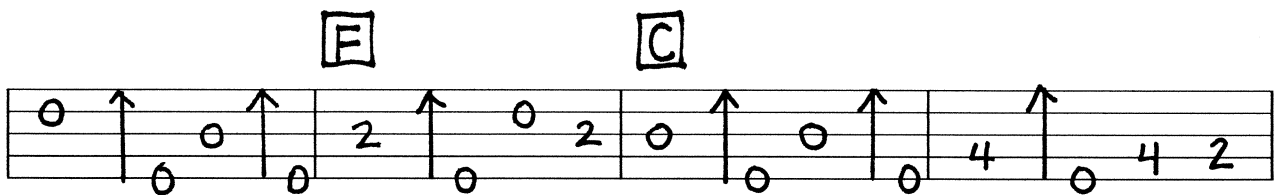
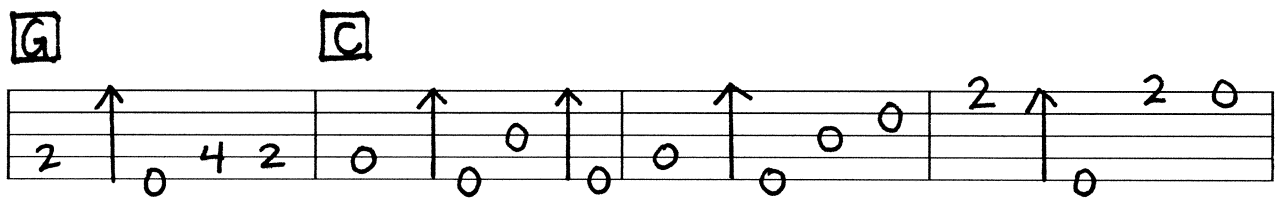
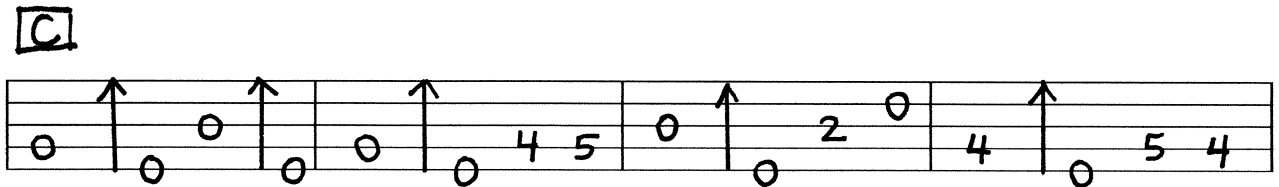
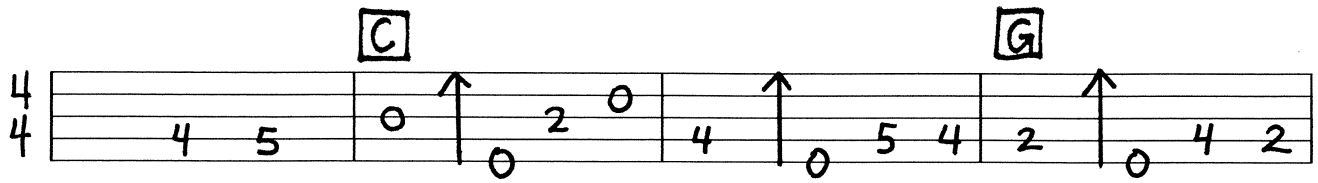


I first heard this tune played by a New Orleans style brass band when I was in High School. Later when I started to study string band music, I was delighted to find out it was a standard with those folks too. An African American folk song, it probably started out as a dancing game dating back to before the Civil War.

(13)

• tinyurl.com/BanjoClawLiza

WILDWOOD FLOWER GCGCD tuning



Maybelle, Sara and A.P. Carter made up The Carter Family, one of country music's most important groups. Wildwood Flower was Maybelle's signature guitar tune, but it also sounds great on the banjo.

• tinyurl.com/BanjoClawFlower

LESSON # 4:

Embellishments

OK banjo friend- you have been playing for awhile now and things have been going pretty well. You can "bum ditty" easily and have learned some simple tunes. It sounds like you are ready for the next step: embellishments. This will make the tunes sound more like professional arrangements.

In this lesson, we will cover three ways to embellish a tune:

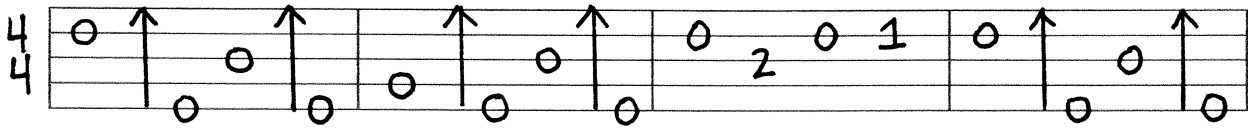
- 1) hammer on ("h")
- 2) pull off ("p")
- 3) slide ("s")

Check out this video:

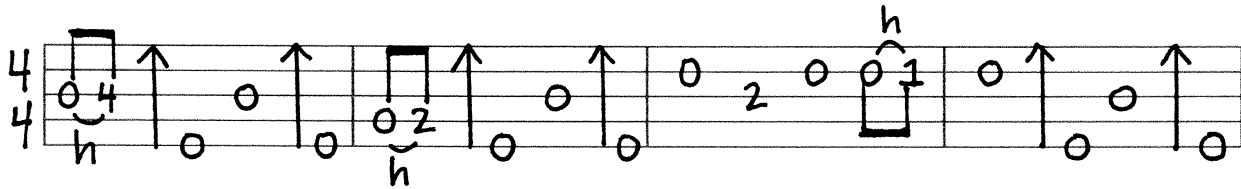
HAMMER ONS

A hammer on is when you strike a string normally with your right hand (the "bum" in the "bum ditty") but before you go on to the brush and thumb (the "ditty") you fret a new note with the left hand. This takes your melody note and adds a second note after it without having to re-strike the string.

* A simple tune without hammer ons:

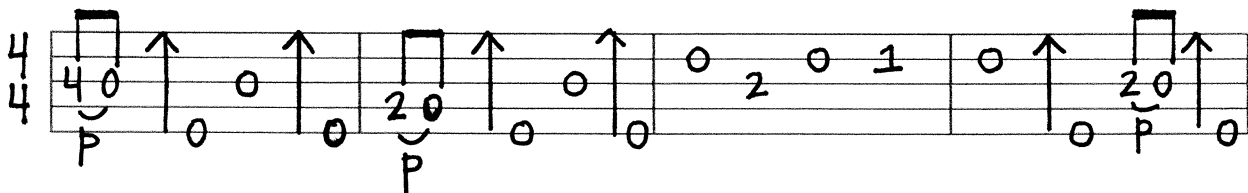


* The same tune with hammer ons:



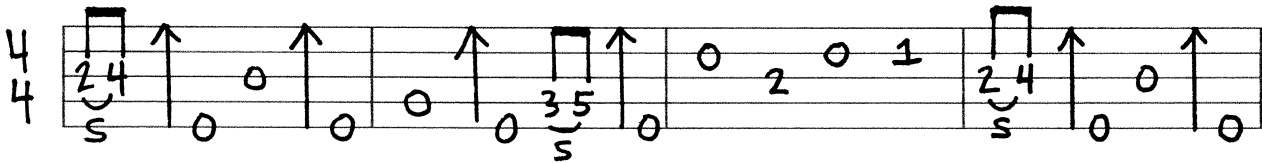
PULL OFFS

A pull off is the opposite of a hammer on. First you strike a fretted string and then you pull your left hand away so it plucks the string. Try this one:



SLIDES

Slides are fun too! For a slide, fret a note lower than the one you intend, strike the string with your right hand and then slide the left finger up to the correct note.

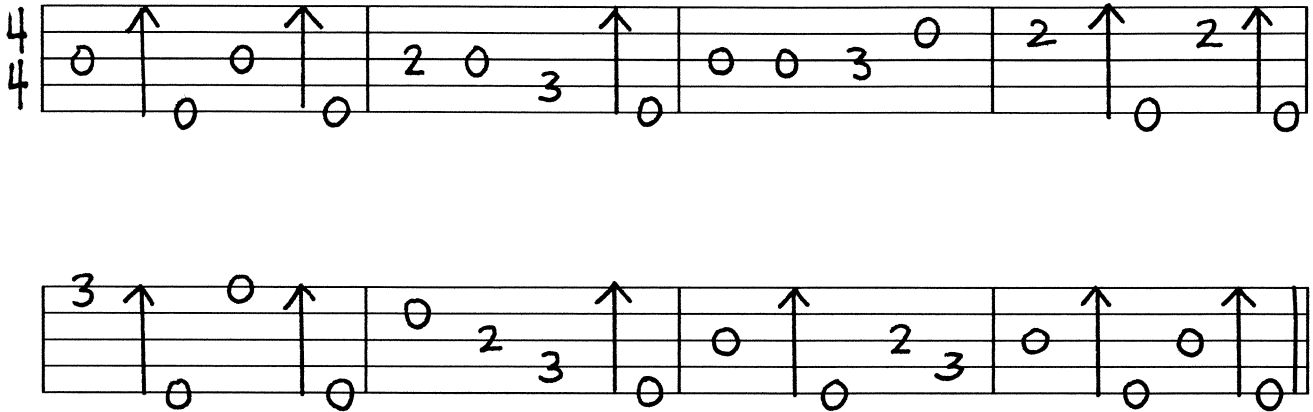


- tinyurl.com/BanjoClawLesson4

SHADY GROVE

GDGCD tuning

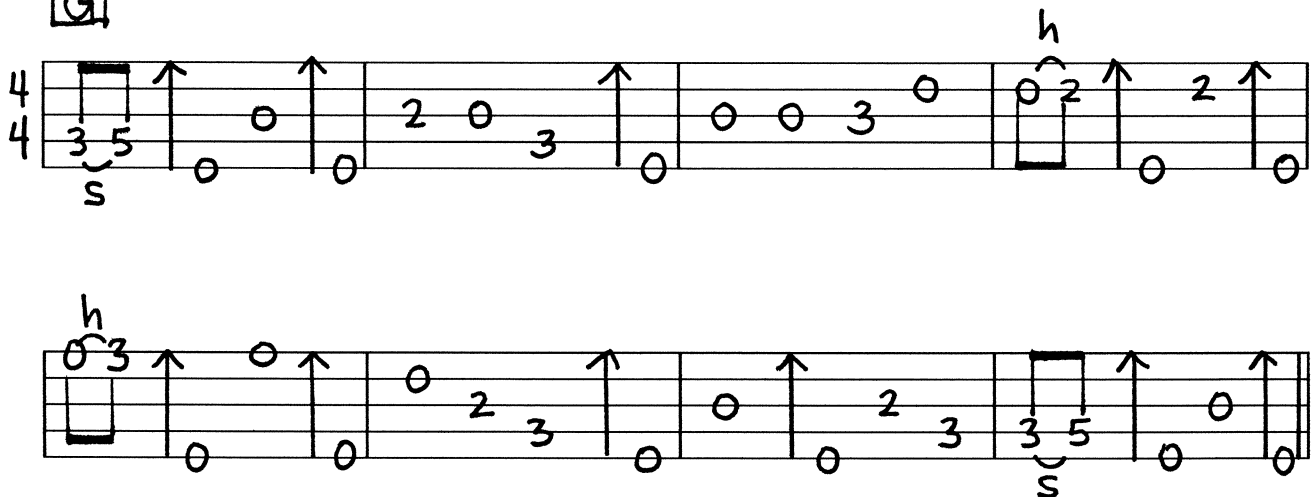
G



SHADY GROVE

with embellishments

G

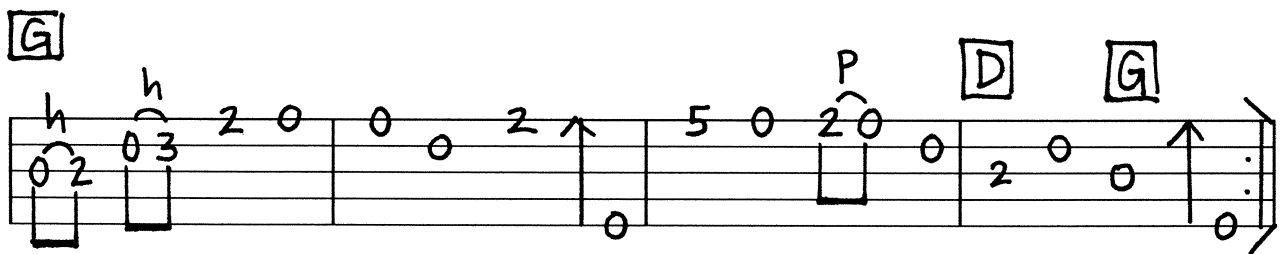
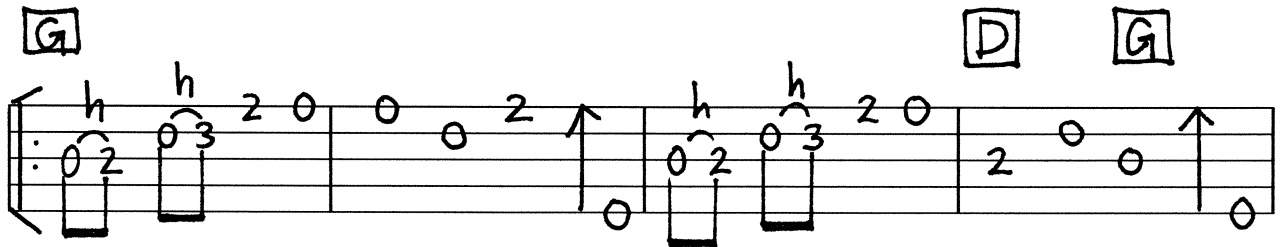
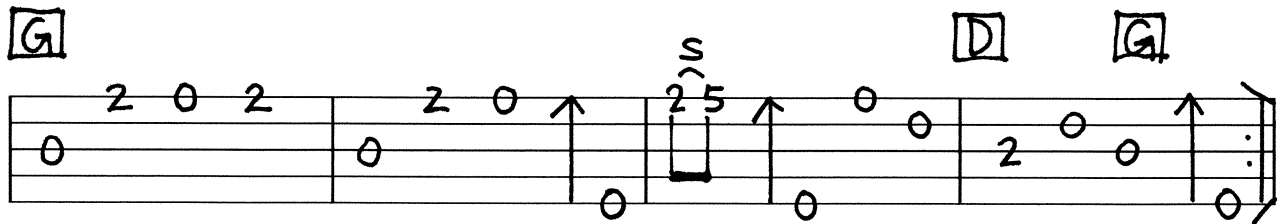
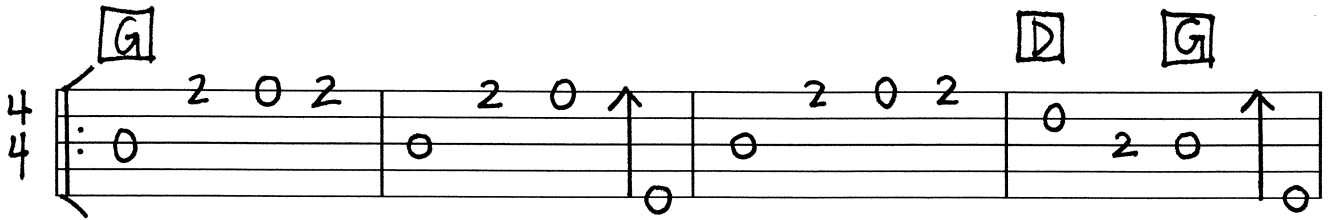


Shady Grove is a traditional courting song from the Appalachian Mtns. In some versions Shady Grove is a person, in some a place, and in some it is both. This is a great example of how oral tradition can be messy! My favorite version is by Jean Ritchie, who sang it in a haunting style while accompanied by the dulcimer.

• tinyurl.com/BanjoClawGrove

SHORTNIN' BREAD

GDGBD tuning



Another African American folk song that has proven to be long lasting, both in string band music and popular culture. I based this on my friend Jere Canote's ukulele version.

(19)

• tinyurl.com/BanjoClawBread

SAIL AWAY LADIES

AEAC#E tuning or
GDGBD capo 2

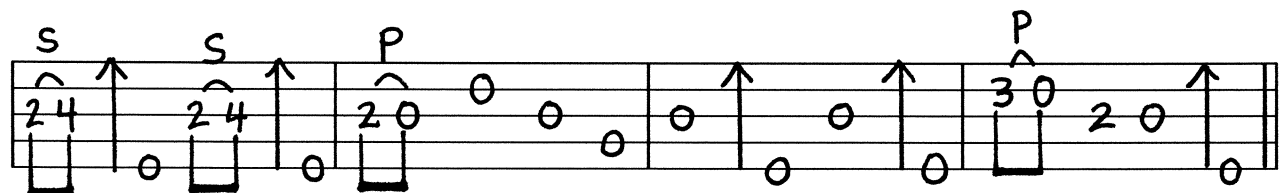
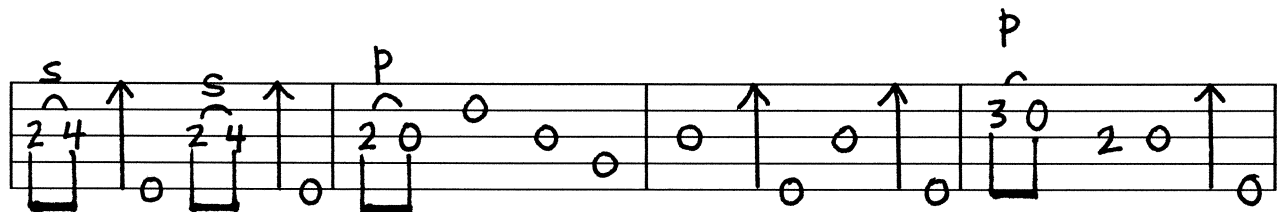
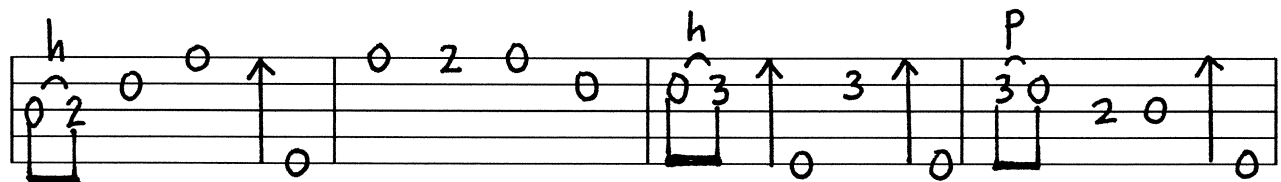
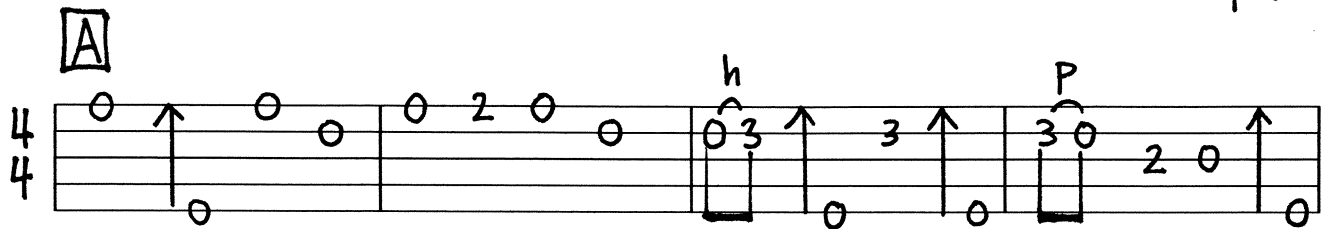
Handwritten musical notation for 'Sail Away Ladies' in 4/4 time. The notation consists of three staves. The first staff has a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. It features a sequence of chords: A, E, and A. The second staff has chords: A, D, and A. The third staff has chords: E and A. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and fingerings.

Although this song is a common standard, my favorite version is by Uncle Dave Macon and the Fruit Jar Drinkers from 1927. Besides his energetic banjo playing, you can also hear him flat foot dancing. Macon, who lived from 1870-1952, was a vital link between older, un-recorded musicians and the modern era of electronic recording and broadcasting.

• tinyurl.com/BanjoClawSail

SOURWOOD MOUNTAIN

AEAC#E tuning or
GDGBD capo 2

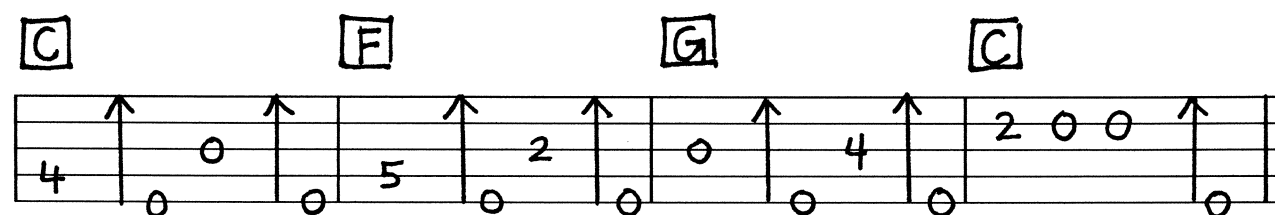
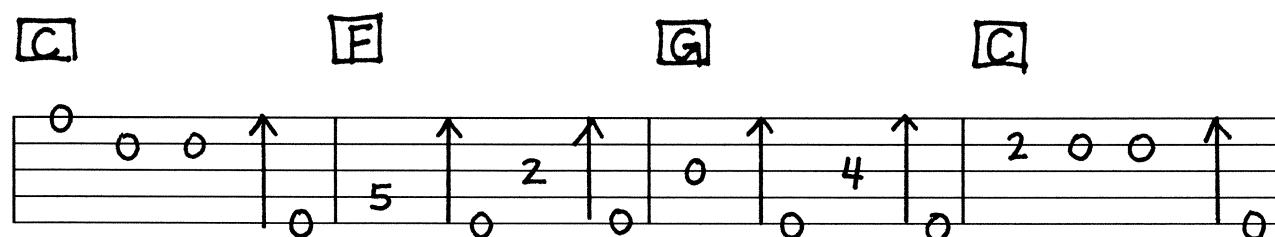
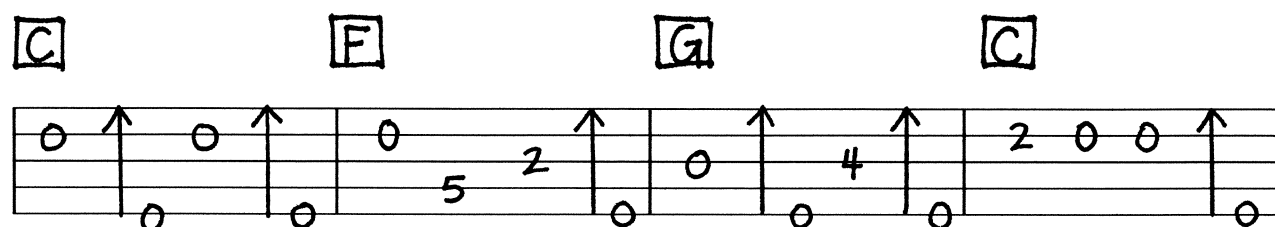
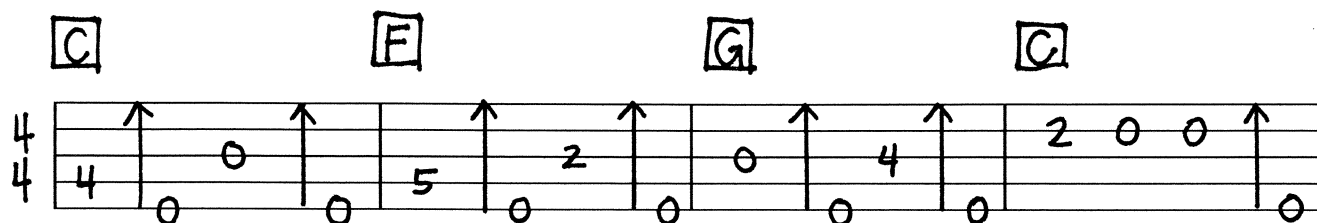


A traditional folk song with hundreds of verses, Sourwood Mountain was first recorded in 1924. The lyrics mainly deal with flirting, courting, love and loss. My favorite version is by Uncle Charlie Osborne, but you should also look up the Frank Proffitt version.

(21)

• tinyurl.com/BanjoClawMountain

LITTLE BROWN JUG GCGCE tuning

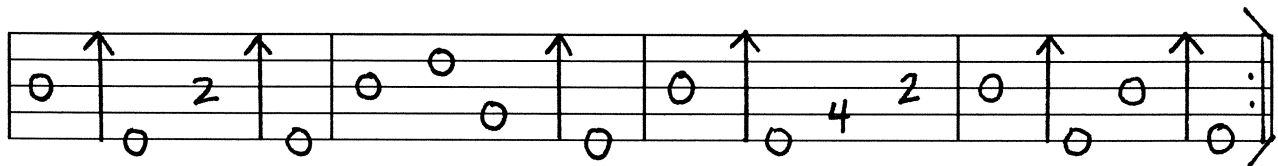
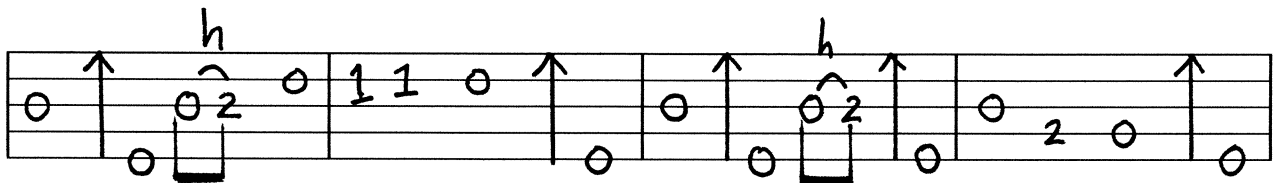
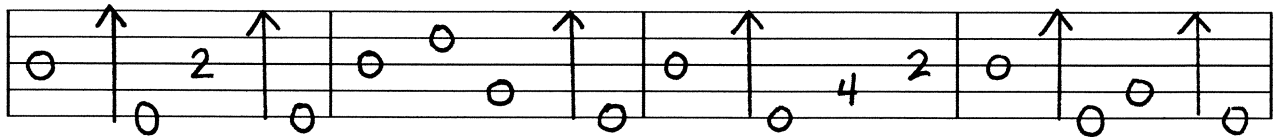
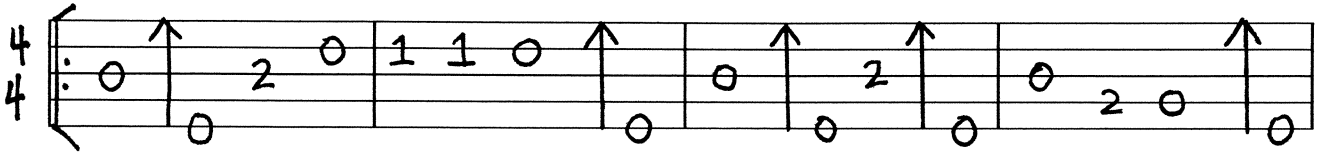


This drinking song was first published in 1869 and was popular through the Great Depression. Our version is based on the 1926 recording by Riley Puckett and Clayton McMichen. They were members of the Skillet Lickers, one of the most influential old time string bands.

• tinyurl.com/BanjoClawJug

JOHNNY BOOKER

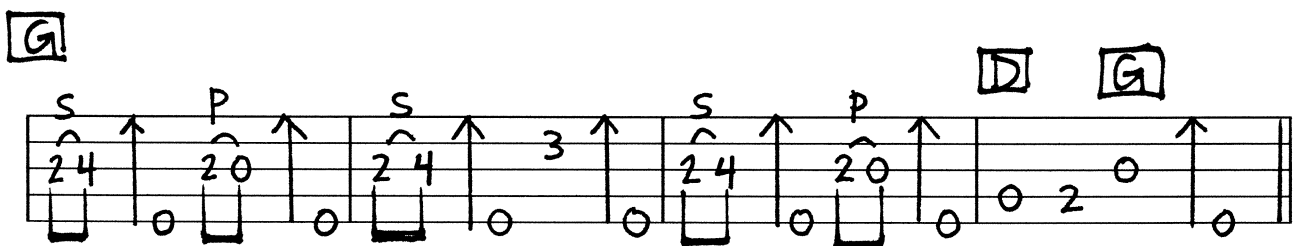
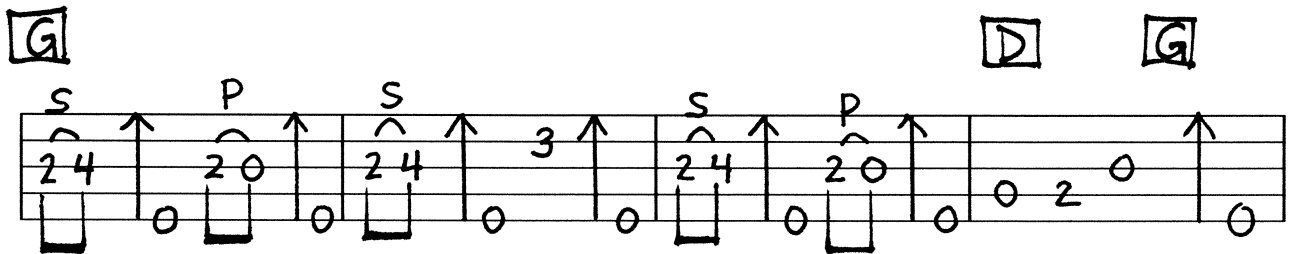
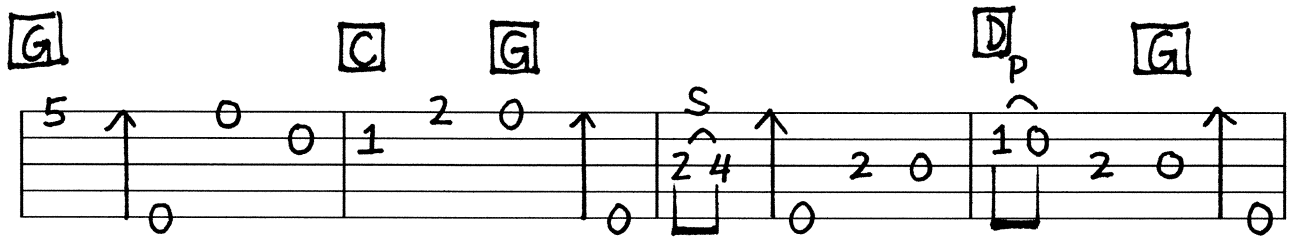
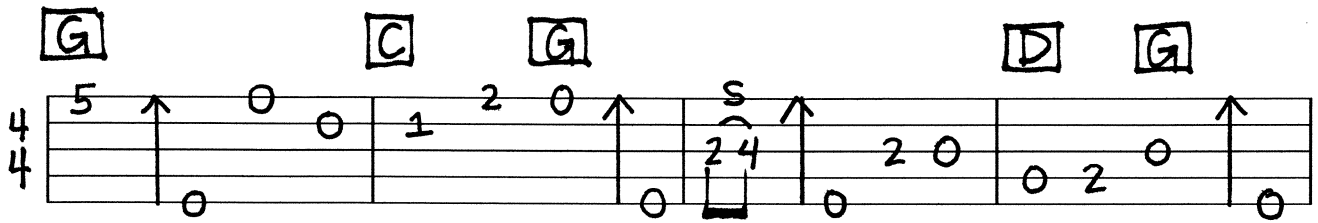
GDGBD tuning



• tinyurl.com/BanjoClawJohnny

Although this was a popular song on the minstrel stage, it was likely a common folk song even earlier. I first heard it on a record by Cousin Emmy (Cynthia May Carver) and the New Lost City Ramblers. Cousin Emmy was an often overlooked musician from Kentucky who recorded her "knockin'" style of banjo starting in the 1940's. The New Lost City Ramblers deserve special mention as my most influential string band. Although their recordings are from the folk revival era of the 1960's, they tried for an authentic traditional sound.

CRIPPLE CREEK GDGBD tuning

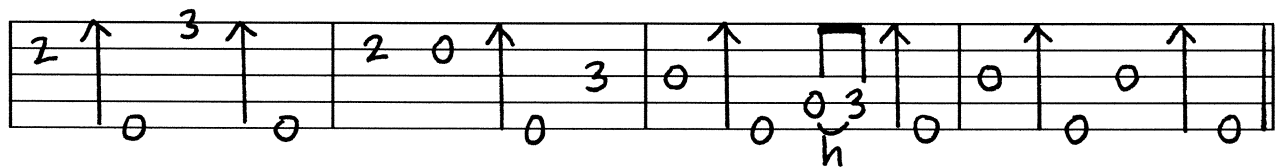
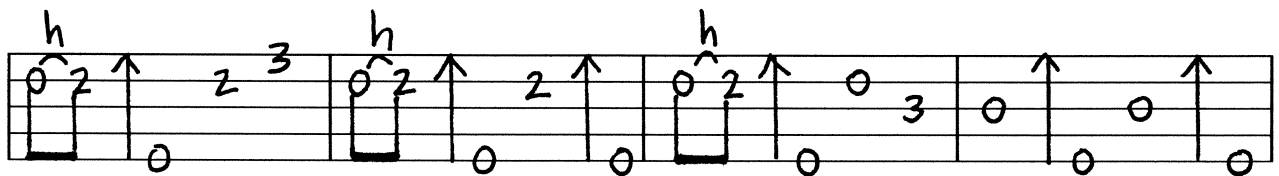
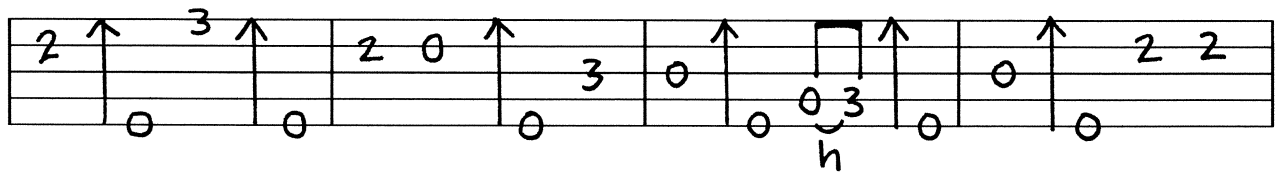
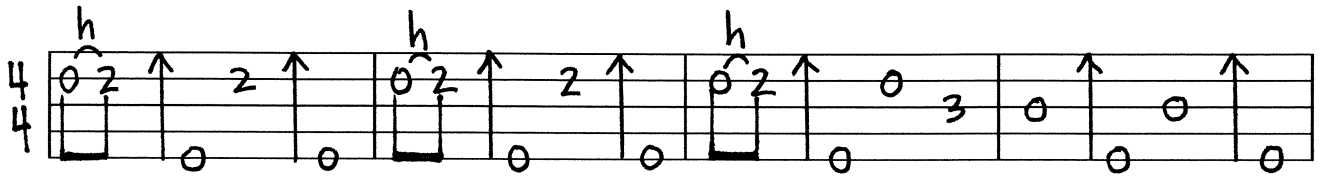


Like many other players, this was the first tune I learned on the banjo. Some think this song is about Cripple Creek in Colorado, others say it's the one in Virginia. Either way, versions of this tune have been collected as far back as 1909. The name "cripple" here means crooked or twisting.

(25)

• tinyurl.com/BanjoClawCreek

REUBEN'S TRAIN GDGCD tuning



First recorded by Grayson & Whitter as "Train 45" in 1927, this is an iconic piece of string band music. Everybody- from beginners to old hands- plays it, but my favorites are Richie Stearns, Dan Gellert and the Holy Modal Rounders.

• tinyurl.com/BanjoClawTrain