

Old-Time Fiddle for the Complete Ignoramus!

by
Wayne Erbsen



"He could neither kill a bear, play the fiddle, nor shoot a gun." Unknown, 1860

Order Number: NGB-105

ISBN 978-1-883206-48-2

Come visit us on the web at www.nativeground.com

Contents

	Book Page Number
Parts of a Fiddle(r).....	5
Who This Book Is For	6
A Word to the Fiddlers	7
What is Old-Time Fiddling?	8
Checking Out Your Fiddle	9
Fiddle or Violin?	9
Strings	10
Tuning Pegs	11
Poor Man's Peg Dope	11
Fine Tuners	12
Bridge	12
Seams	13
Tailgut	13
Cracks	13
A Poor Man's Humidifier	13
Soundpost	14
Checking Out Your Bow	15
Buying a Fiddle or a Bow	15
Getting Equipped	16
Tuning Your Fiddle	17
How to Hold the Fiddle	18
How to Hold Your Left Hand	19
How to Hold the Bow	20
How to Use the Bow	21
The Fear of Reading Music	22
Tablature or "Tab" for Ignoramuses ..	23
How to Read Music for Ignoramuses ..	24
Your First Scale	28
Finger Placement Help	29
Joy to the World	29
What a Typical Page Looks Like	30
Ida Red	31
Say, Darling Say	32
How to Shuffle	33
Improvising	34
Lynchburg Town	35
Shortening Bread	36
Run Johnny Run	37
Cumberland Mountain Deer Chase	38
Camptown Races	39
Sugar Hill	40
Polly Put the Kettle On	41

Photo by Bob Linsey



Rilla Ray

CD	CD
Track Number	Track Number
Regular Speed	Slow Speed
.....1	
.....2, 3	
.....4	5
.....6	7
.....8	9
.....10	11
.....12	13
.....20	21
.....22	23
.....24	25
.....26	27
.....28	29
.....30	31
.....32	33

Contents

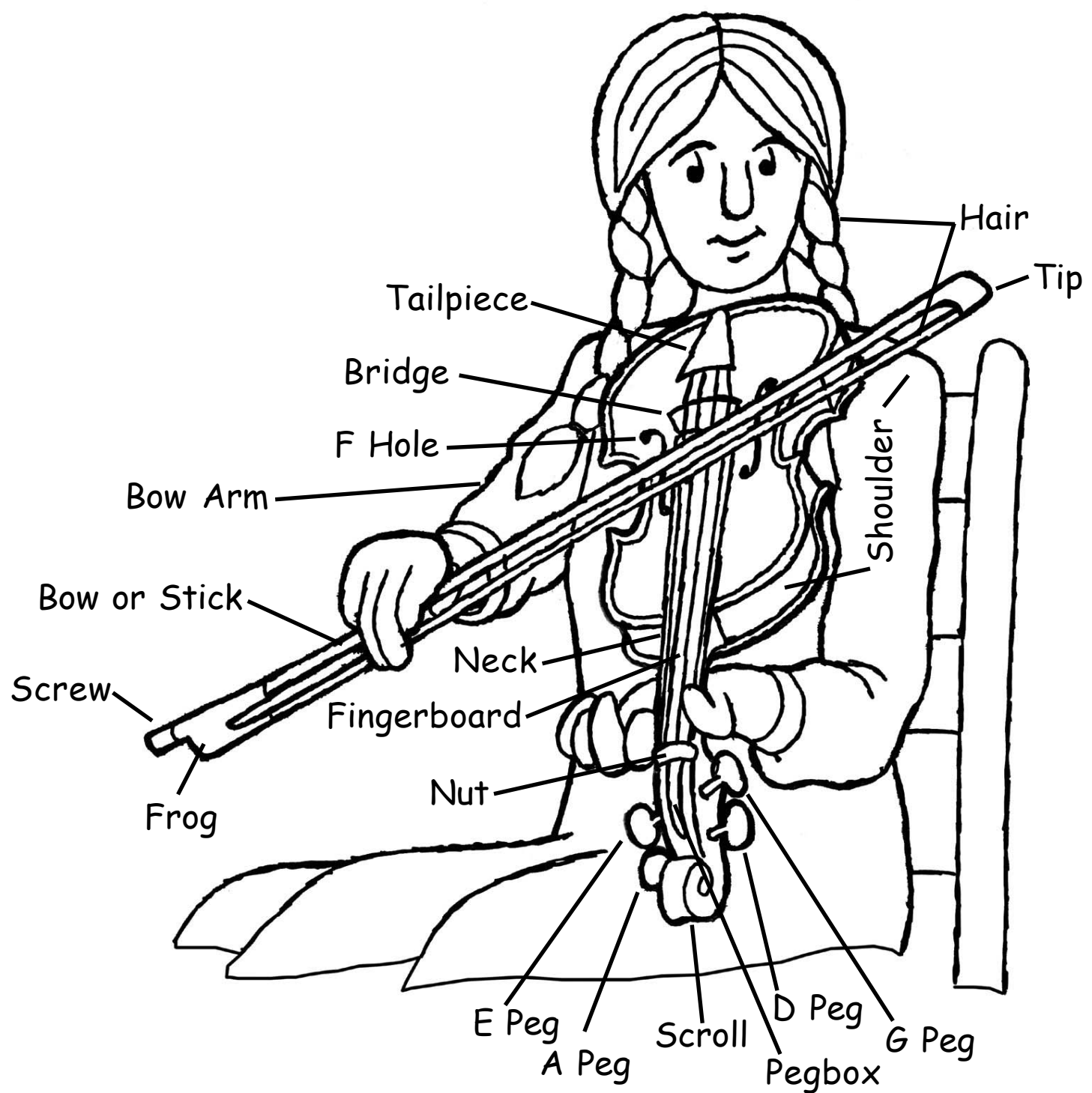
	Book Page Number	CD Track Number Regular Speed	CD Track Number Slow Speed
Sail Away Ladies	42	34	35
D Dorian Mode	43	36	
In the Pines	44	37	
Gospel Plow	45	38	
Don't Let Your Deal Go Down	46	39	
Muley's Daughter	47	40	
East Virginia	48	41	
Darling Corey	49	42	
Rain and Snow	50	43	
How to Jam	51		
Playing in the Key of A	52	44, 45	
Cripple Creek	53	46	47
Buffalo Gals	54	48	49
Liza Poor Gal	55	50	51
Cotton-Eyed Joe	56	52	53
Old Joe Clark	57	54	
Playing in A Minor	58	55, 56	
Charley He's a Good Old Man	59	57	
Cluck Old Hen	60	58	
House of the Rising Sun	61	59	
The Key of G	62	60, 61	
Amazing Grace	63	62	
It Ain't Gonna Rain No Mo'	64	63	
Red River Valley	65	64	
Old Molly Hare	66	65	
Rye Whiskey	67	66	
Blackest Crow	68	67	
Wagoner's Lad	70	68	
Willie Moore	71	69	
Groundhog	72	70	
The Key of C	73	71	
Wildwood Flower	74	72	
Little Birdie	75	73	
And What Now?	76		
Fiddle Slang	77		
Tune & CD Index	79		
Native Ground Books & Music	80		



Courtesy of Joe Bethancourt

"A guy ought to step up and play by letter - just let her fly." Fiddler Johnny Gimble

Parts of a Fiddle(r)



Who This Book Is For

Maybe the title says it all: *Old-Time Fiddle For the Complete Ignoramus!* But in case there's any lingering doubt, let's just poke it with a stick for a second to see if it wiggles.

This book is for the
total & absolute beginner.

The only prerequisite to learning to play from this book is to know nuthin'. You don't even have to suspect anything. If you don't already own a fiddle, I'll walk you through checking out your old hand-me-down fiddle, or I'll make suggestions for purchasing a new one. You'll soon learn how to tune it, take care of it and play your first scale. You don't even have to know how to read music, because the tunes you'll be playing are written out in a simple and unique system called "tab." For those who read music the tunes will also be written in standard musical notation. If you don't read that stuff, but want to, I'll teach you that, too.

Before you know it, you'll be playing a variety of old-time, bluegrass, gospel and folk tunes. For your learning pleasure, I've picked out tunes that are really easy to play. Hopefully, you will have heard some of the common tunes in the book. But even if you've never heard of any of them, the instructional CD will let you know what they sound like.

What age fiddler is this book for? Any age. If your young child expresses the urge to play the fiddle, let him or her try it. You may have to learn how to play too, but hey, all the better! Think you're too old? Hogwash! Better late than never. Many of my students have carried within them the thirst to play the fiddle for forty years or more. And once they learn the basics, it all comes bursting out.

Did you play the violin as a child and now as an adult you want to play the fiddle? Great! Come on in, the water's fine. The transition will be easy. Never touched one before? Even better! You won't have to "un-learn" anything.

Do You Have What it Takes to be An Ignoramus?

I can count on a hundred fingers the times I've told someone about my series of books for the complete ignoramus, and they say, "That's me." If you picked up this book when you saw the title and thought to yourself, "That's me," then you've got the right book. You are a certified and bonafide ignoramus. Congratulations!

How to Hold the Bow

I've got good news and bad news for you. The good news is that the bow is the greatest invention since sliced bread. It can do things a pick never dreamed of. The bad news is that the bow will "seem" a little awkward at first.

Curl your fingers around the bow, and try to make your fingers look similar to this photo of my hand on the kitchen table. Be sure to spread your fingers out along the stick.



Just for a minute, turn your hand over so the tip of the bow is pointing to your right side. The end of your thumb should be sticking straight into that little space on the end of the frog right under the silver-looking ferrule that helps to hold the hair in. (See the photo, below). Now here's the kicker.

Your thumb should be bent.

"My thumb should be bent?" I can hear you asking yourself. Yes! I put this in the box, above, so you'll you know that I mean business about this. You can make up your own way to hold the fiddle or the bow, and you can play standing on one foot, but don't neglect to keep your thumb bent. And why is this, you might ask? If you keep your thumb bent, your bow arm will be more relaxed.

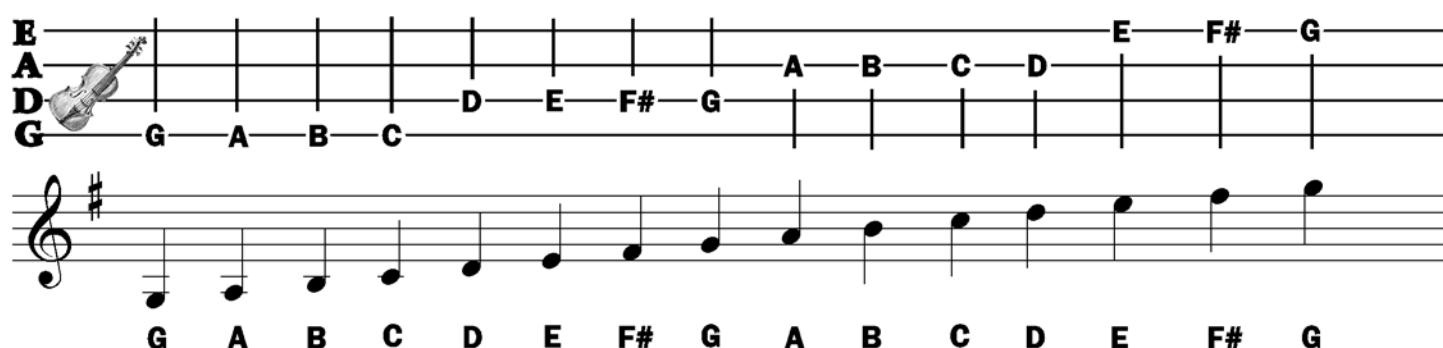
For those of you who are skeptical, let me give you a little exercise to demonstrate this. Begin by taking your bow out of your right hand. With your right thumb straight, push your thumb and right index finger together as hard as you can. As you are doing that, feel the muscles of your right forearm with the fingers of your left hand. If you are pushing with all your might, your right forearm should be hard as a rock. Now bend your right thumb and again try pushing against your right index finger. Again test the hardness of your right forearm with your fingers. It's not as hard or tense, right? I rest my case. In order to fiddle, your right forearm and wrist needs to be loose as a goose. The only way for that to happen is to have your thumb bent. End of story.



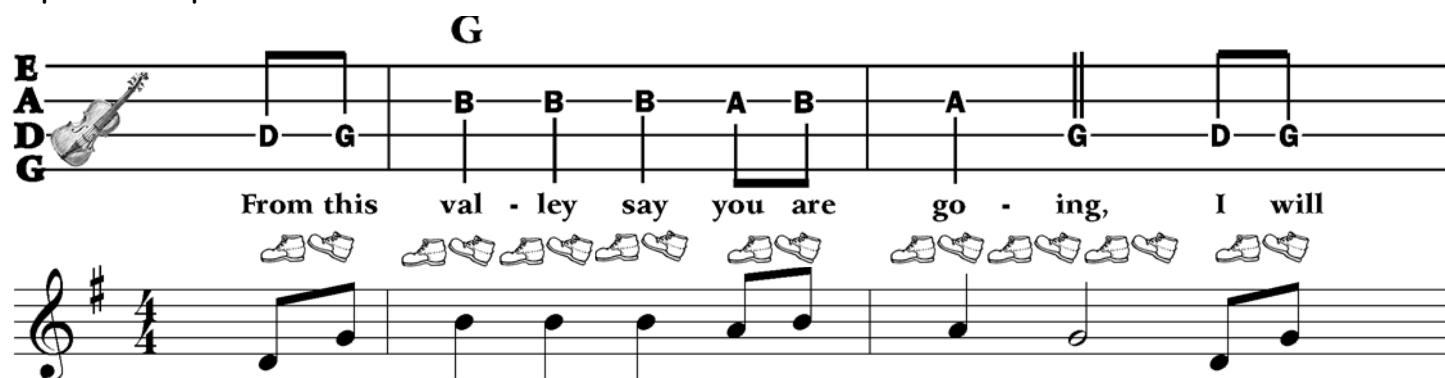
Tablature or "Tab" for Ignoramuses

For those of you who don't read music, all the tunes are written out in an easy-to-read tab system that I designed for this book. A line of tab will be right above a corresponding line of music, so if you sorta read music, you can look both at the tab and the music.

The tab consists of four horizontal lines which represent your four strings on the fiddle. The E or highest string is toward the top of the page and the G or lowest string is toward the bottom of the page. You'll notice in the example below that each string is marked on the left with its name. A letter on the string tells you the name of the note to play on that string.



TIMING: The timing in the tab matches the timing of the music. If you don't read music, here's all you need to know. Each measure gets four beats, or four taps with your foot. The tab is written out using just four kinds of notes: eighth notes, quarter notes, half notes and whole notes. In the example below is the first line of our old favorite, "Red River Valley." The two notes tied together at the beginning are both eighth notes. Your foot would go DOWN on the first eighth note and UP on the second. Then you'll see three notes with a single line hanging down. Those are quarter notes and they get one beat each. For each quarter note, your foot would go "down up." At the end of the word "going," you'll see a G with two lines sticking up. That means the G note gets two beats, which is the same as two quarter notes. For this half note, your foot will go "down up, down up."



Above the tab is a "G," which stands for G chord. Chords are provided as a little present for your future guitarist or band to play along with you. We fiddlers can ignore them.

Your First Scale

Enough music theory! It's time to play your first scale, the D scale.



D Scale:
D, E, F#, G, A, B, C#, D



Before we start, take a look at the chart of the fingerboard to the right which shows you where to find the notes you'll be playing. Begin by playing the D string open (no fingers). Play a nice long stroke. Next you'll play a low E note with your index finger. On the same string, you'll then play the low F# with your middle finger. The last note you'll play on the D string will be the G, which you'll play with your ring finger. Try these four notes over and over: D, E, F# and G.

	Index	Middle	Ring
A	B	C#	D
D	E	F#	G

Georgia Department of Archives & History



After you've practiced the 1st four notes of the D scale, you're ready to tackle the rest of the D scale: A, B, C#, D. As you can see on the chart, all four of these notes will be on the A string. First, play the A string open. Then play a B on the A string with your index finger. Following the B will be a C# with your middle finger. Finally, you'll play the D with your ring finger. Keep in mind that you'll finger the B, the C# and the D in the same place on the fingerboard as you played the E, F# and G, only you'll be on the A string.

As you practice the D scale over and over, here are some tips to remember: 1) Use long SLOW strokes at first. 2) Make sure you're using the correct finger. 3) When you're going from F# to G or C# to D, your fingers should be right next to each other with no space in between. 4) Keep your bow ON the strings. 5) Practice the D scale both forwards and backwards.



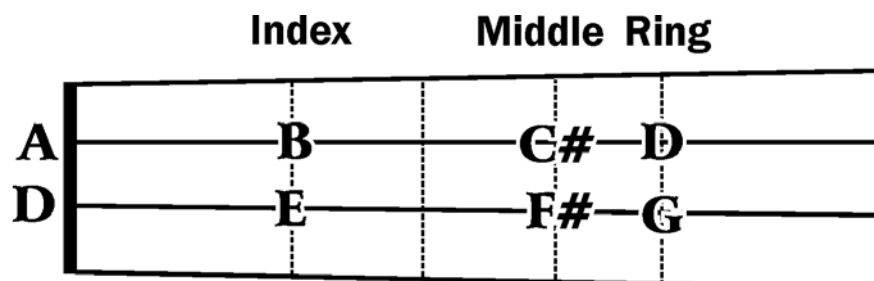
Open D Index Finger Middle Finger Ring Finger Open A Index Finger Middle Finger Ring Finger

E
A
D
G

D — E — F# — G — A — B — C# — D

Finger Placement Help

Having trouble knowing where to place your fingers? In that case, here is a handy chart that's drawn to scale to help you. We'll call this finger placement "standard position."



I suggest you photocopy this page and cut out around the finger chart above with a pair of scissors. Be sure to trim off the A and D on the left side. Lay the cut-out on top of your fingerboard, and tape it lightly in one or two spots under your strings. This should help you become accurate with your finger placement. Since you certainly don't want to keep the paper cut-out on your fingerboard, you can take a dull #2 pencil and lightly make three lines on your fingerboard where your fingers would go. If you find it hard to see the pencil lines you can lay a narrow piece of white tape across the fingerboard in the appropriate places, as in the photo. One piece of tape will work for each of the three finger positions: index, middle and ring.



Let's put your D scale to work. Begin by playing the D scale (bottom of page 28) backwards, starting on the high D using your ring finger. Play it over and over until you can play the scale backwards without looking at the book. Now, change the timing to sound like the first line of "Joy to the World" but keep the notes the same. Since you already know the tune, don't even look at the confusing tab or music below. Just play the first line of "Joy to the World" so it sounds right to your ears. Now you're playing by ear!



E							
A							
D	D	C#	B	A	G	F#	E
G							D

Joy to the world the Lord is come.

What a Typical Page Looks Like

On each page of the book that has a tune written out there are a number of common elements. In the upper right hand corner will be a phonograph with one or two numbers inside that represent the track numbers on the instructional CD. When there's two numbers, the first number is the track number of the melody played at normal speed. This will help give you the flavor of the tune. On this track, I'll first play a simple version and then I'll play it again adding some shuffles (page 33). On the next track, I'll play the tune very slowly to allow you to play along. I'll begin each track with my big foot tapping on a hardwood plank to let you know the tempo. **IMPORTANT:** I strongly recommend that you listen to each tune on the CD before attempting to play the tune using the tab/music.

Under the phonograph on each tune page will be a chart of the notes you'll need for that particular tune. Before you play the tune, practice the notes that will be used. On the chart for "Ida Red," for example, you'll be using A, B, D, E and F#. At the top left or center of each page it will tell you the key of the song. If it's the key of D, for example, you will use the D scale.



Marcus Martin

Of course, the main thing on each page is the tune presented both in tab and standard musical notation. Any strange symbols in the tablature of a tune will be explained at the time as it applies to a particular tune. To help you get the phrasing of each song, the lyrics have been included under the notes.

As you play through the tunes in the book, you'll soon realize that most of the tunes have been simplified down to the bare-bones melody. Many of the little or nonessential notes have been left out and all that remains is the skeleton of the tune. Beneath each tab/music, you'll find the first verse and chorus of the song. The underlined words were omitted from the tab/music above. **NOTE:** If you'll pop the instructional CD into your computer, you'll discover the complete lyrics to each song in the book.

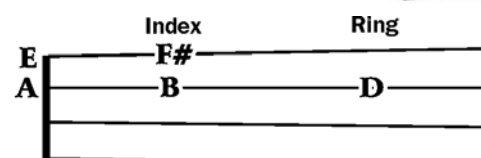
Any tune in the book that has more than one part will be labeled "A," "B" or "C" for the various parts. Most of the tunes will have two parts. On these tunes you generally play the A part twice and then play the B part twice. Each tune is arranged in the book by the key you will play it in. The first few tunes in each key tend to be the easiest, and they gradually get a bit harder as you go along. Above each line is a letter like D, A or G. These are chords for other instruments to play along with you. Ignore them.

Key of D

Ida Red



The tune "Ida Red" is similar to the bluegrass song "Down the Road," as done by Flatt & Scruggs, and it resembles the old-time tune called "Over the Road I'm Bound to Go." You'll find this tune easy to play because the first line is played entirely on the A string. Line two starts with the high F# and then goes easily down the scale.



Before you try the tune, listen to the recording and go over the notes on the chart above. As you play the tune, use nice long strokes on each quarter note. The notes connected with a "beam" are 8th notes and should each be played with a different bow stroke. On "Ida Red" you will ONLY be using your ring and index fingers. NOTE: Remember that any note left out of the lyrics under each note will be underlined below.

First line of the tune:

Chords: D, Bm, D, A, D

Notes: D, D, D, B, D, D, B, A, B, D

Lyrics: Ida Red, Ida Red, I'm crazy 'bout Ida Red.

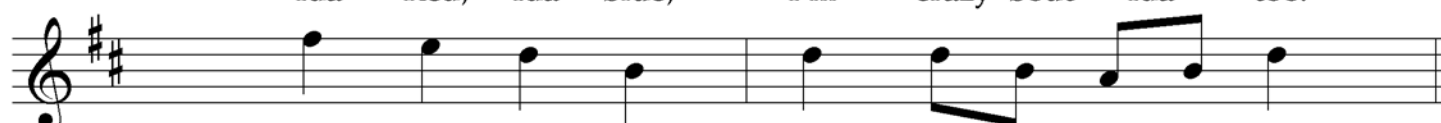


Second line of the tune:

Chords: D, Bm, D, A, D

Notes: F#, E, D, B, D, D, B, A, B, D

Lyrics: Ida Red, Ida blue, I'm crazy 'bout Ida too.



Ida Red, Ida Red,
I'm going crazy about Ida Red.

Ida Red, Ida blue,
I'm going crazy about Ida too.

Order of the Tunes to Play

The tunes that are the easiest to play tend to be the ones you've heard before, so feel free to play them in any order that works for you.



Courtesy of Joe Bethancourt

Key of A

Cripple Creek

At least three states have argued that the creek and the tune named "Cripple Creek" belong to them: Colorado, Virginia, and North Carolina. Since I live in North Carolina, I naturally think that's where the tune originated. But regardless of its origin, "Cripple Creek" was a popular tune even before it was first recorded by Sam Jones on August 8, 1924.



	Index	Middle	Ring
E	F#	A	
A	B	C#	D
	E	F#	

You'll find "Cripple Creek" quite easy to play. This peppy tune needs lots of shuffles to give it that lively bounce. "Cripple Creek" would be a good one if you want to be brave and try cross tuning your fiddle to cross A. You will raise the D string to an E and the G string to an A. Then you can alternate playing the tune first on the high E and A strings and then on the low E and A strings. By the way, it's not a good idea to keep your fiddle tuned in cross tuning for days on end because tuning two of the strings to a higher pitch puts more strain on the neck of the fiddle.

Many banjo players play "Cripple Creek," but they usually play it in the key of G. You can politely ask them to play it with you in the key of A by using a capo on the second fret. If they don't have a capo, you'll have to play it in the key of G if you want to play it with them. All you do is substitute these notes: A=G, E=D, C#=B, D=C, F#=E, B=A.

A

E A D G

A E C# D F# E C# B A E F# A

I've girl at head of creek, go see her twice a week.

B

E A D G

C# B A C# E C# B A E F# A

Goin' Cripple Creek goin' run, goin' Cripple Creek have little fun.

I've got a girl at the head of the creek,
Go up to see her 'bout twice a week.

Goin' up Cripple Creek, goin' in a run,
Goin' up Cripple Creek to have a little fun.



Beautiful Violin, good size, richly polished wood, ebony finished finger board and tail piece, full set of strings, also a fine bow and INSTRUCTION BOOK Free for selling 24 Jewelry Novelties at 10 cents each. Write for them. COLUMBIA NOVELTY CO., Dept. 414, EAST BOSTON, MASS.

Key of G

Amazing Grace



You're familiar enough with this venerable old hymn that you should barely have to look at the book to play it. In fact, let's try that. Take a peek at the chart and you'll quickly see where all the notes are. To play "Amazing Grace" you'll only need two fingers, your index and ring fingers. Before you try to play it by ear, you can fudge a little by looking at the first nine notes over the words, "Amazing Grace how sweet the sound." Play that line over and over until you can play it without looking at the book. Then try to figure out the rest of the tune by ear. How do you find the notes? Play the first nine notes of the song while humming or singing along with it and try to find those notes on the fiddle. Decide if the note you're trying to find is higher or lower. If you need to, consult the chart to see where to find a higher or lower note. Struggling to play "Amazing Grace" by ear will eventually pay off big, I promise.

	Index	Ring
A	B	D
D	E	G

A - maz - ing grace how sweet the sound, that saved a

wretch like me. I once was lost, but now am

found, was blind but now I see.

Amazing grace how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost, but now am found
Was blind, but now I see.

"Country people play their feelings and feel their playing." Clarence Tom Ashley