

# Old Dan Tucker

Informant/Performer:  
Mrs. Leslie Beall  
Versailles, IN, 1915

Source:  
Leah Jackson Wolford  
*The Play-Party in Indiana*  
Indianapolis, Ind.: The Indiana  
Historical Commission, 1916



2. Old Dan Tucker's a fine old man  
Washed his face in the fryin' pan.  
Combed his hair with a wagon wheel,  
And died with a toothache in his heel.

## Game Directions

Circle Dance for an uneven number of players...over 4.  
Partners, with boy at left of girl, and extra player in center.

1. All circle left (4 beats)
2. Each boy turns right to his partner and swings her. (4 beats)
3. Then boy turns to left and swings his corner lady. (4 beats)
4. Swings partner again. (4 beats)
5. Boy faces partner and takes her left hand and passes on in same direction, taking the right hand of the next lady and so on grand right and left around the circle and back to original positions. During this time, center player tries to break in and get a partner, or get into the game. (12 beats)
6. Partners swing. The one left out goes to the center. (4 beats)

Background Information

"Sometime around 1840, Dan D. Emmett wrote 'Old Dan Tucker' as a minstrel song . . .

It seems quite probable, however, that Emmett based his minstrel song upon an older and highly variable Negro folksong. At any rate, the chorus of Emmett's version, whether wholly his own or traditional, . . . can be found in oral circulation even today used as a nursery and 'knee bouncing' song if not as a dance call.

'Old Dan Tucker' perhaps owed its popularity to its liveliness and to its amorphous nature. John and Alan Lomax quote an informant as saying, 'Old Dan Tucker was adjustable--you began singing it where you chose and could play both ends against the middle, or sing it backward, or forward, or improvise topical stanzas according to your mind and skill. It was a fine dancing tune, and the black fiddlers often sang it as they fiddled, the prompter meanwhile racking his wits to find new figures yet keep the proper rhythms.'

Lomax, Alan. *American Ballads and Folk Songs*.