

## INTRODUCTION

This collection of fiddle tunes was made by William Litten at sea on a vessel, or on two different vessels, of the British India fleet in the years 1800, 1801, and 1802.

Everything that we know about the man is from disjointed material on the inside front and back covers of the manuscript book and from scraps of information on the pages of the book itself and from the music. The notes in the text are difficult to decipher because Litten's handwriting and spelling are both very bad, and in places the paper has bled. On the other hand the tunes themselves were transcribed without too much difficulty, for Litten was a good musician.

The manuscript is in the library of the Dukes County Historical Society in Edgartown, Massachusetts, on the Island of Martha's Vineyard.

Here are some of the facts that we can gather from the scattered notes. The British India fleet sailed from England May 27th, 1800, and arrived in China February 10th, 1801.\*

The fleet consisted of sixteen war vessels. The names of the vessels and of six of the captains of them are listed on the inside back cover of the book. Not all are legible but here are nine of the ships and six of the captains, Litten's spelling: Neptune, Bombay Castle, Dorsetshire, Lady Jane Dundass, Bengal, Royal Bark, Gorgon, Royal Admiral, City of London, and captains Spens, Hamleton, Moreton, Torrington, Ramsay, and Bissette.

We can not be sure which ship Litten was on the voyage out, but on the return voyage he was evidently on H.M.S. *Gorgon*, for he mentions a stop of that vessel at St. Helena on June 3rd, 1802. Litten's duty was that of ship's musician. At that time there was no chauteying on British war vessels, for chauteying was considered much too undignified for His Majesty's service. Instead of a chauteyman all war vessels of any size carried an official fiddle player whose music helped to lighten some of the heavier work. A little after Litten's time the cornet began to compete with the fiddle.

\*John Cumpston, E.D., D. Litt. of Australian National University, says that the fleet visited Australia and may have made other stops during the passage. (Personal communication)

But just as in merchant vessels where the chauteyman had to go aloft to take in sail or reef with the rest of the crew, stand his trick at the wheel and stand watch, so Litten seems to have had other duties in addition to that of musician. Once he speaks of himself as "William Litten waterman." Again in a note that is not entirely clear he says, "Buried 12 men drowned 2 ditto total 14." That was probably on the voyage from England to China and makes one think that perhaps Litten had some of the duties of a surgeon's mate.

In contrast to Litten's terrible spelling and handwriting his musical notation is good. There are mistakes in it but almost all of them seem to be errors of haste or carelessness. A few such very obvious mistakes I have corrected as where Litten has only one sharp in his key signature for a tune in D major.

With one exception I have not put in accidentals where Litten left them out, for I can not be sure that that was carelessness or whether he actually played the tune that way. That one exception is "The Woodford Ship" where Litten has an F sharp and a B flat in his key signature. I just could not make sense of some of his setting and did make some changes, perhaps not enough. A few other difficulties that I encountered will be found in the notes and references.

Thus as nearly as possible I have tried to leave the tunes exactly as Litten recorded them. However in a few instances I have put a tune in 4/4 time where Litten had it in split time, because it seemed better that way. I have also put a few in 2/4 time. But neither of those two really changes anything. I did hesitate a long time before leaving the accidentals out of "Collage Hornpipe." But so Litten had it, and so he may have played it and so I have left it.

Some of Litten's incidental notes in the pages of the manuscript are interesting if not very helpful or instructive in getting a better picture of the man and his duties. Above "Kissing and Flirting" he says "This was wrote by my own blood Cut my Thumbb with a Panknife Blood Blood of Litten." His blood seems to have made pretty good ink for the appearance of that tune is indistinguishable from the rest of the music. In another place Litten gives us a laundry list, but it is not clear if it was his own laundry or whether he was doing it for an officer. And there is a very unclear list of ingredients for some sort of a drink. But mostly Litten stuck to his music.

A few of the tunes in the book are by someone other than Litten, one whose spelling and handwriting are better, but whose music is not. His name may have been Matthew Torbet, for that name is under one of the tunes. Also there are a few tunes and tune fragments in pencil but in which the notes are not given a value, making it impossible to reconstruct them.

The manuscript was brought home to the Vineyard by Allen Coffin of Edgartown. His name appears on the inside cover of the book. Allen Coffin must surely have been younger than Litten. But they may have been shipmates, if not on that voyage perhaps on a later one. Coffin was born in 1788. But many boys did go to sea at twelve or thirteen in those days, and many Americans were serving in the British navy, usually because they had been pressed into the service.

James Coffin, Allen's father, had been a seaman and then a shipmaster. But by 1800 he had retired from the sea and was an Edgartown merchant and a man of real wealth for the period. He had a fleet of small merchant vessels that sailed to all parts of the world. Such men as James Coffin often did send their sons to sea at an early age to learn the business.

We can not be sure that Allen Coffin played the fiddle but he probably did or why would he want Litten's book? Also there were a great many

more fiddle players a hundred and seventy-five years ago than there are today. We do know that Allen's family was a musical one, two of his daughters played the violin and played it well. It could be just that fact that accounts for the book's survival.

Allen Coffin is mentioned several times in Jeremiah Pease's diary for the early years of the 19th century. Jeremiah was a singer and he and Allen were friends. They used to go fishing and eeling through the ice together. Perhaps they made music together, too.

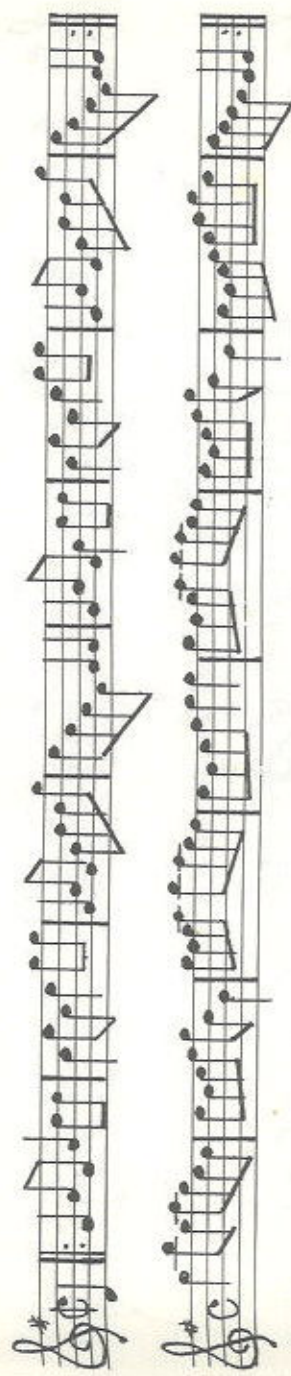
But about William Litten, we do not know even whether he was English, Scottish, Irish or American. There are some very good Irish tunes in the book and some equally good Scottish and English ones. However Litten did not seem to care too much for the typically Scottish dotted eighth and sixteenth note combination. In fact, some of his Scottish tunes play like Irish versions of them. There are even some almost American tunes in the book. That "almost" is because American fiddle tunes were rare in those days and even some tunes that we think of as American had their origin in the British Isles.

So here is the fiddle tune repertory, or probably just part of the repertory, of a long ago sea-faring fiddle player. And we can be thankful that Allen Coffin brought the book home with him.

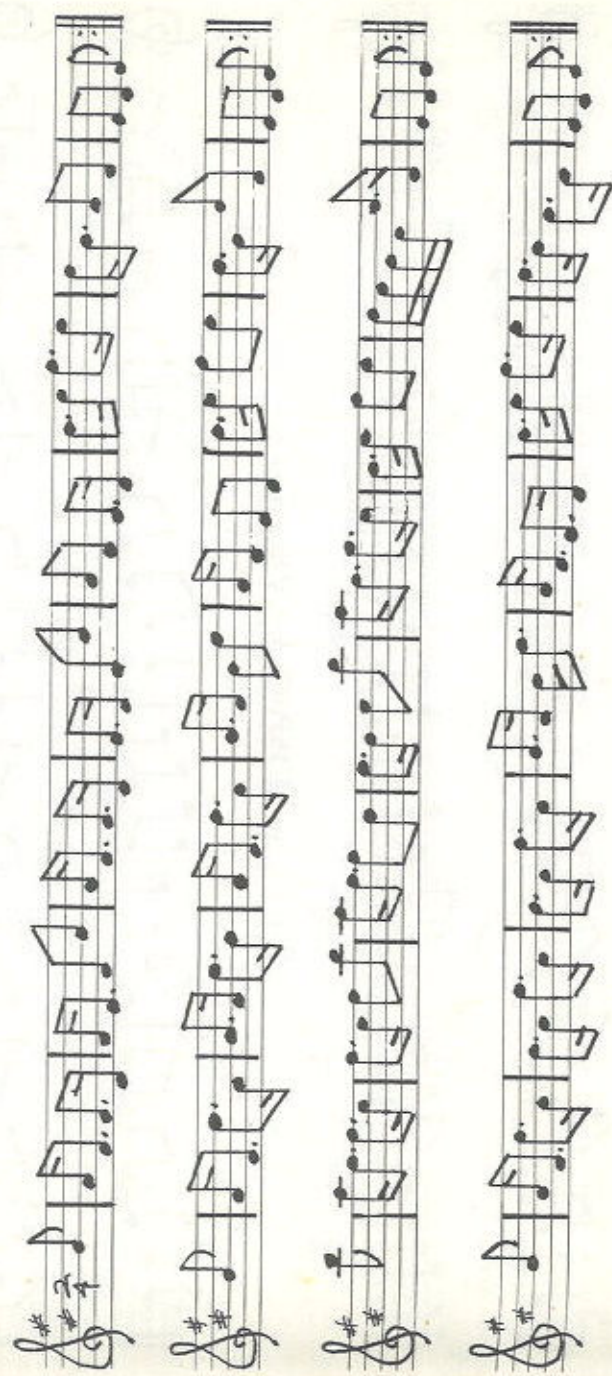


## REELS, STRATHSPEYS AND HORNPIPER

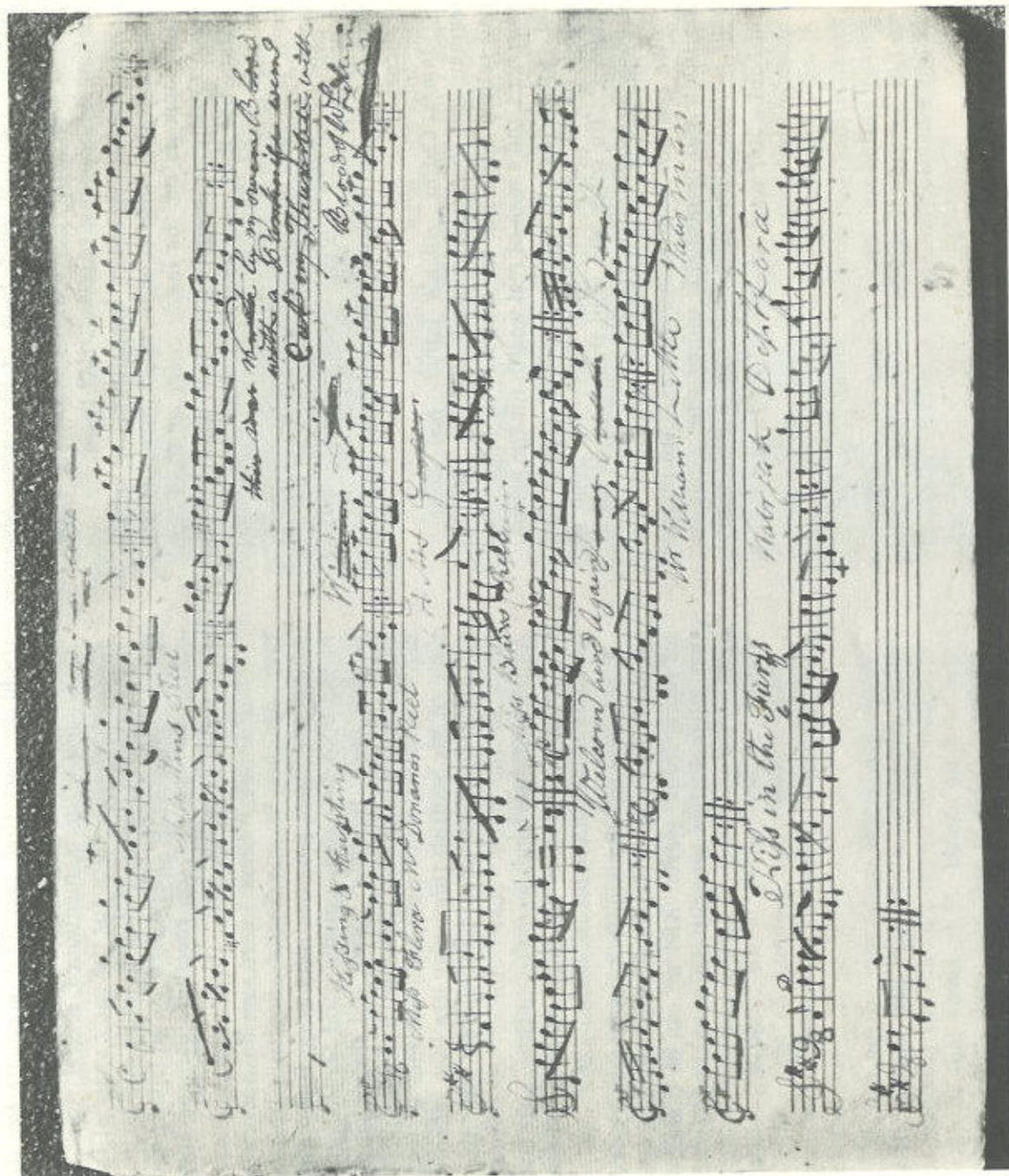
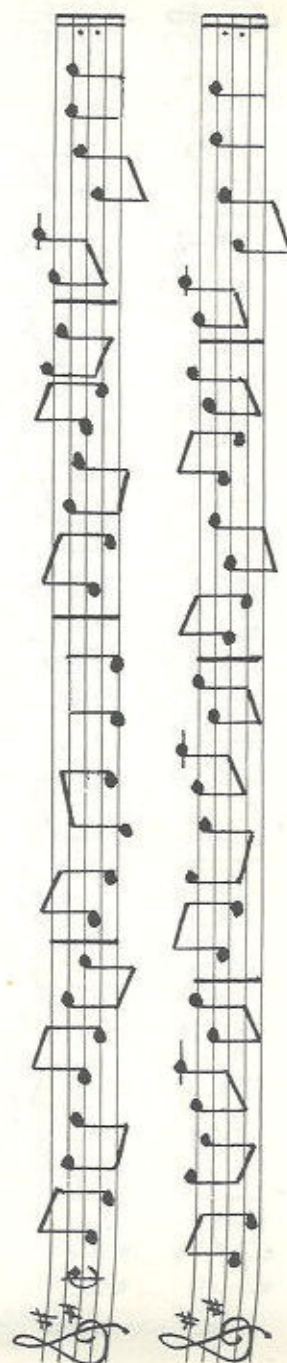
**ST. CATHERINES LANE AT FIVE**



## THE RUFFIANS RANT



## THE ROYAL HUNT

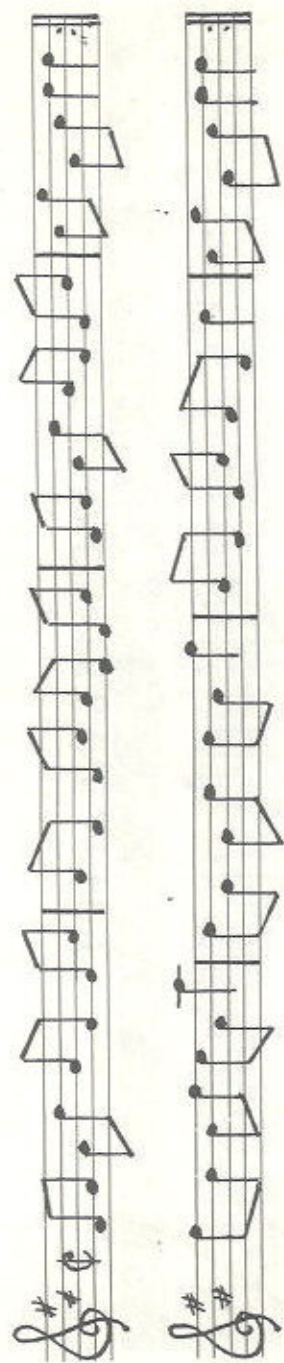


Photograph by Alison Shaw

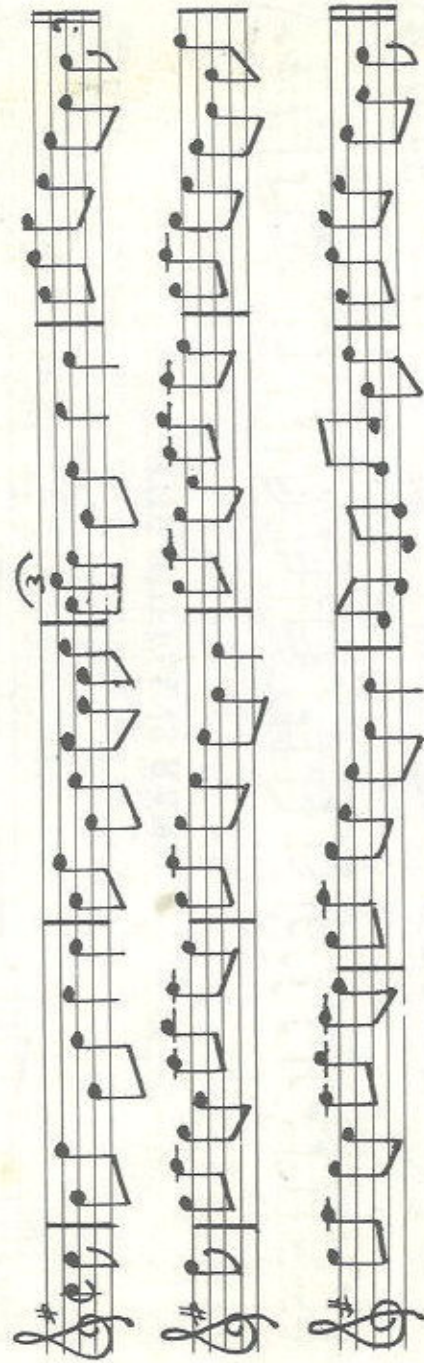
### A Page from William Litten's Manuscript



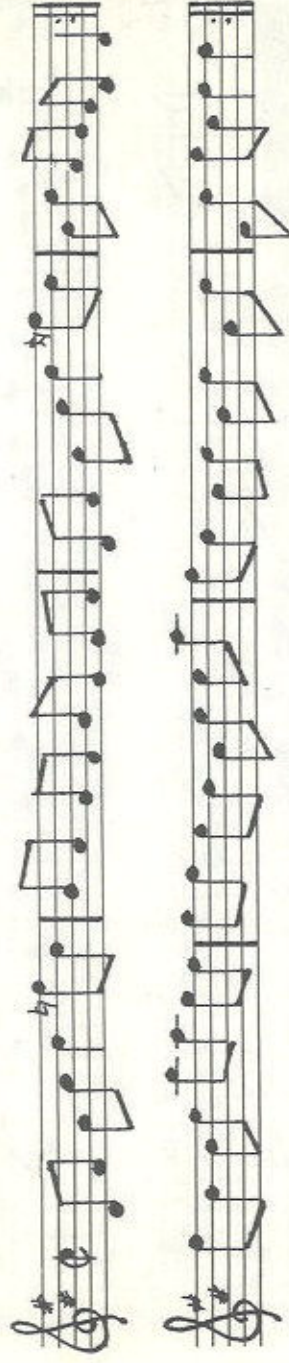
# ROYAL REVIEW



# OVER YOUNG TO MARRY



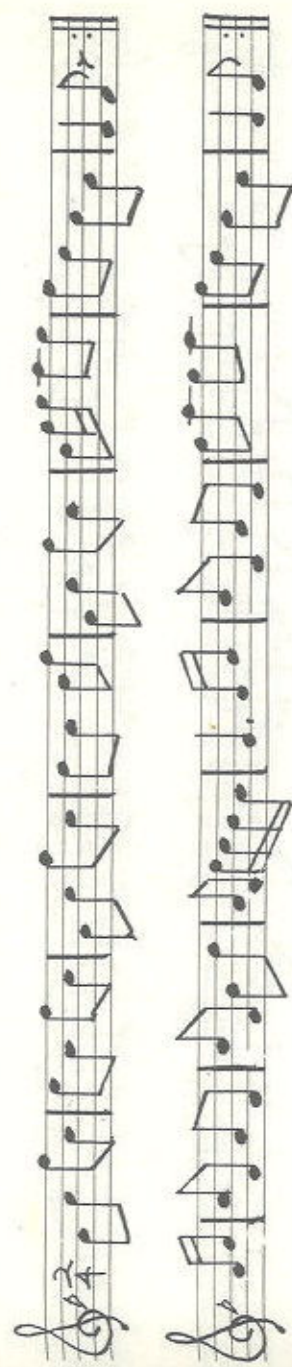
# NAVY DANCE



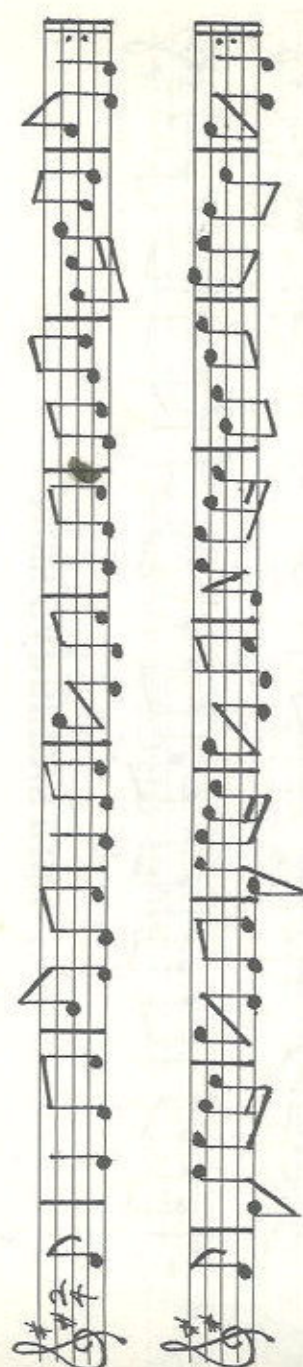
# MISS MANNS REEL



# MRS. MURRAYS REEL



# MISS FLORA McDONALDS REEL



# JAMES BAILEY IN BOMBAY

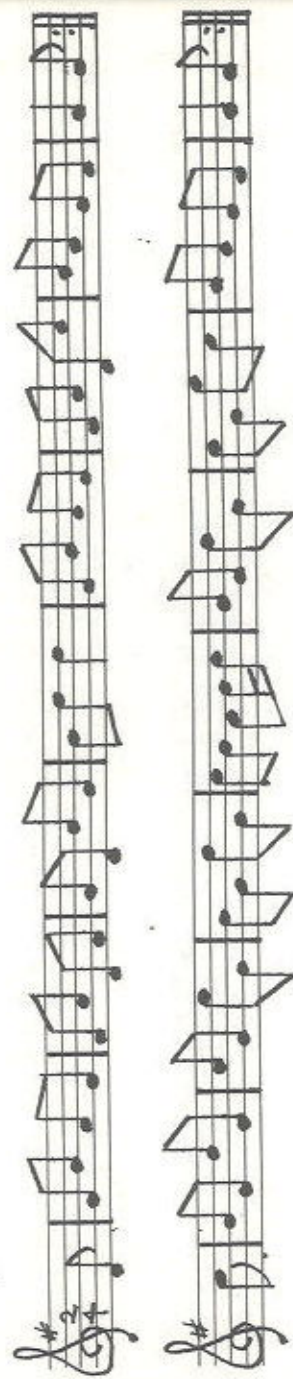


# THE HIGHLAND MAN

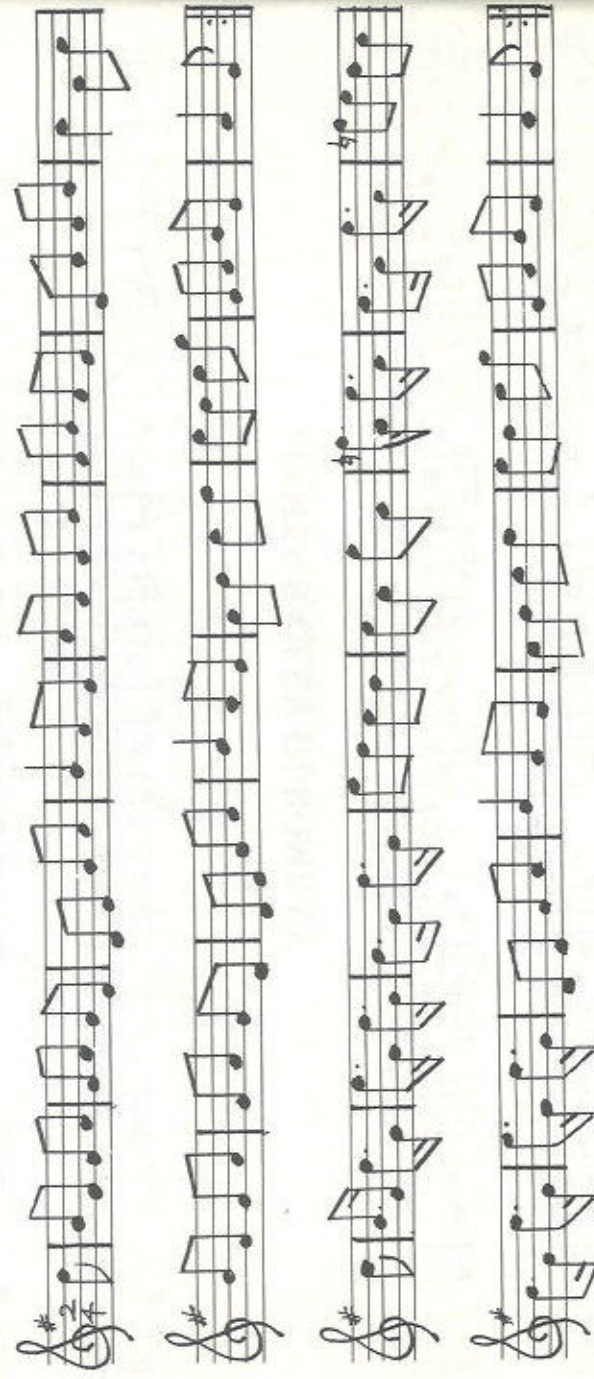




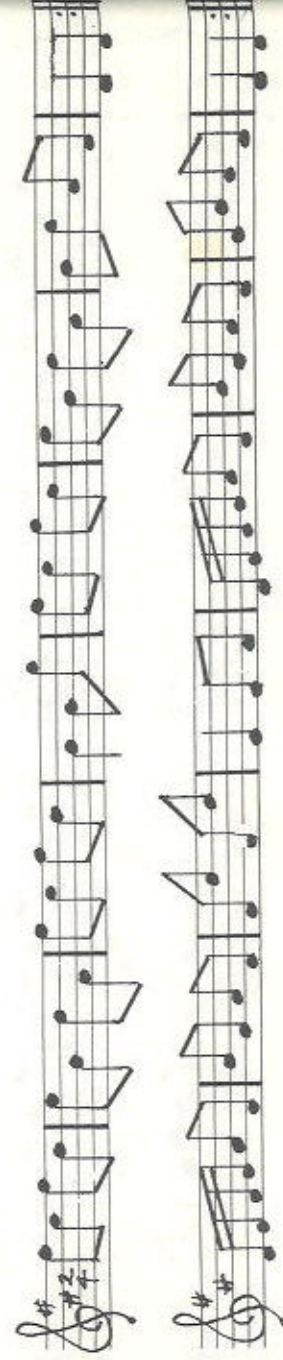
GARISSON FROLICK



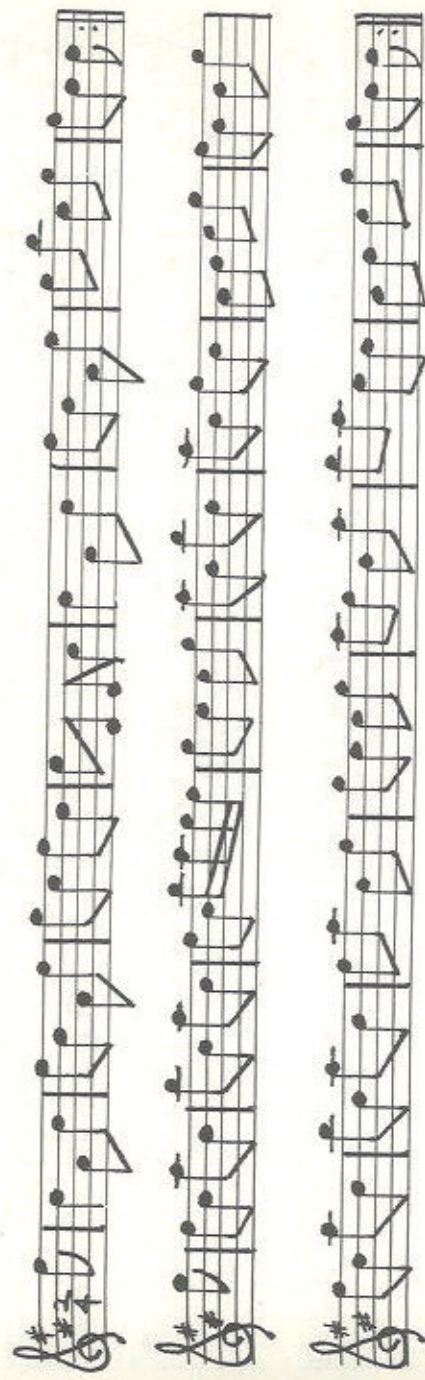
MISS CARBERYS REEL



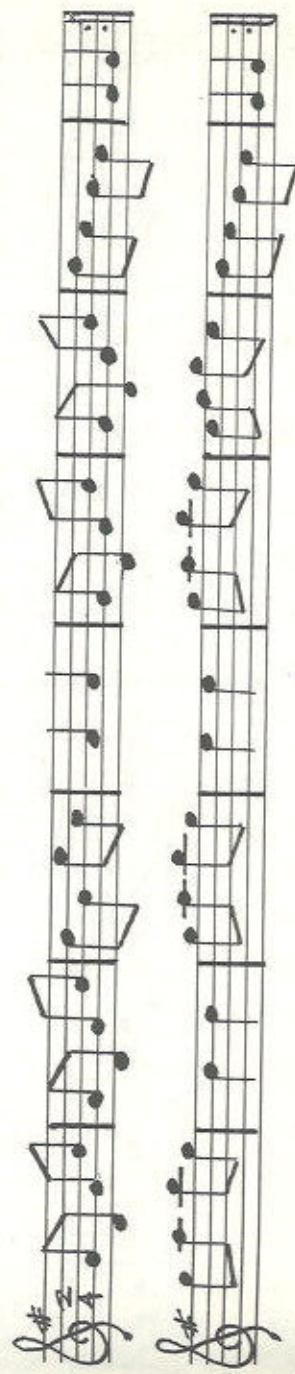
MISS BLAIRS REEL



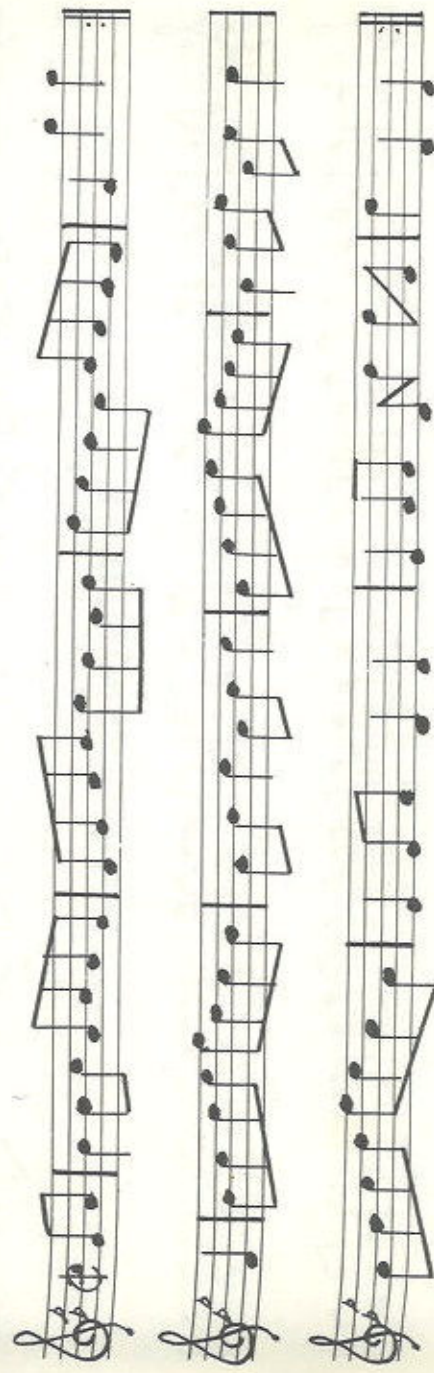
MISS CAMPBELLS REEL



DUKE OF GORDONS REEL ✓



DOWNEYS LOCK

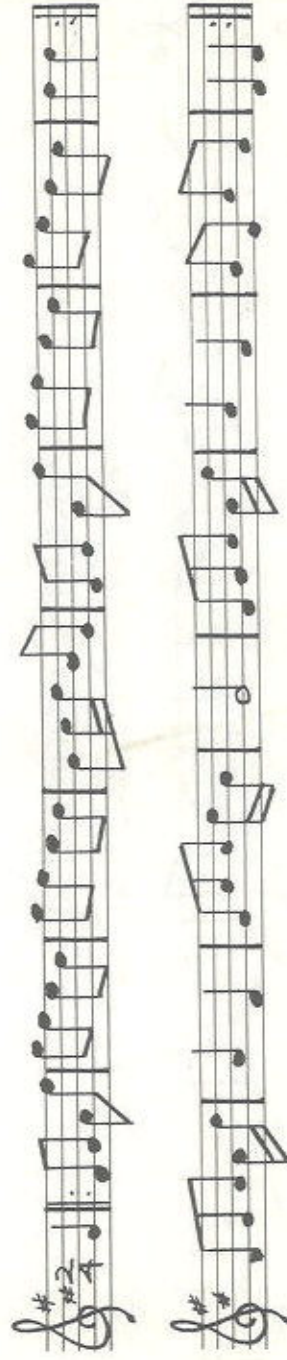




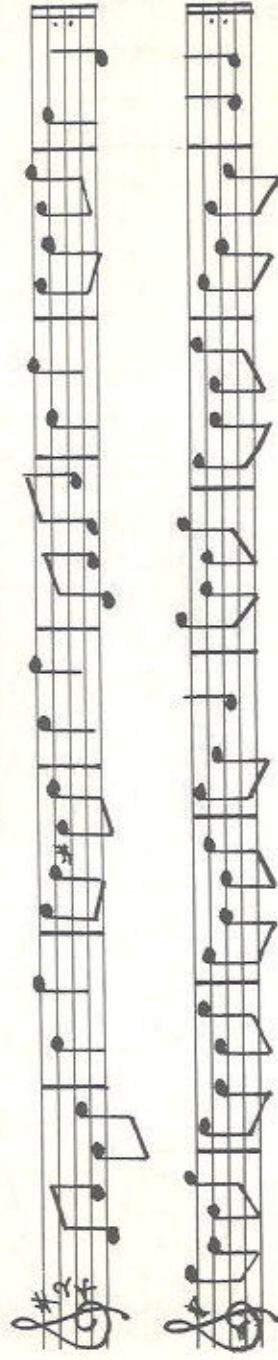
MISS BAIRDS OF NEW BYTHE STRASPEY



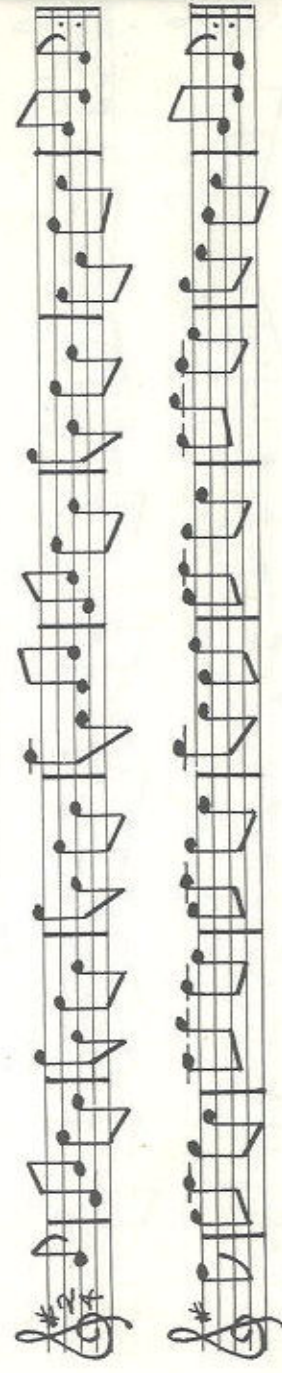
DIVEL AMONG THE TAYLORS



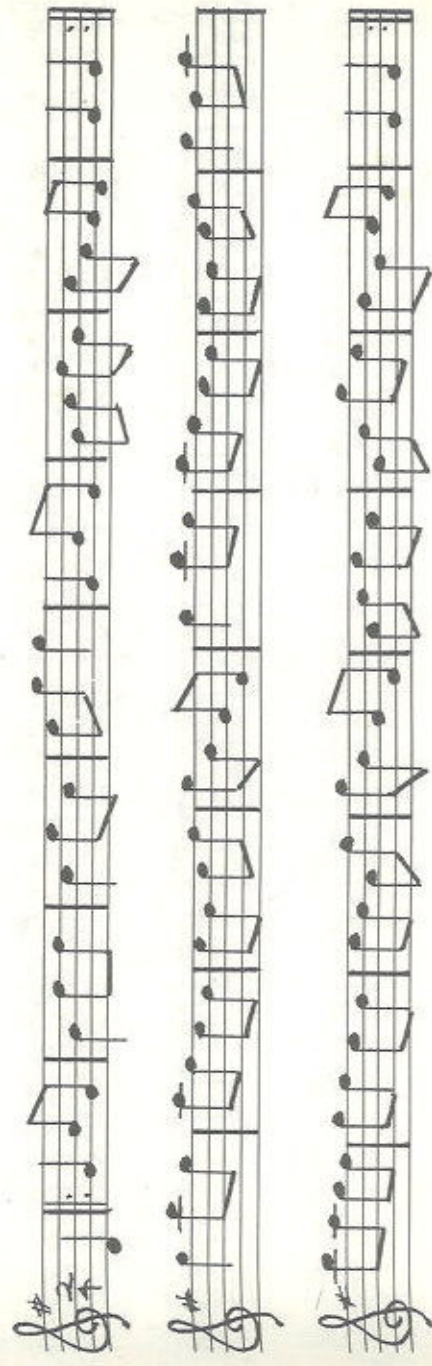
MGO AND DAGA



LIGHT HORSE REEL



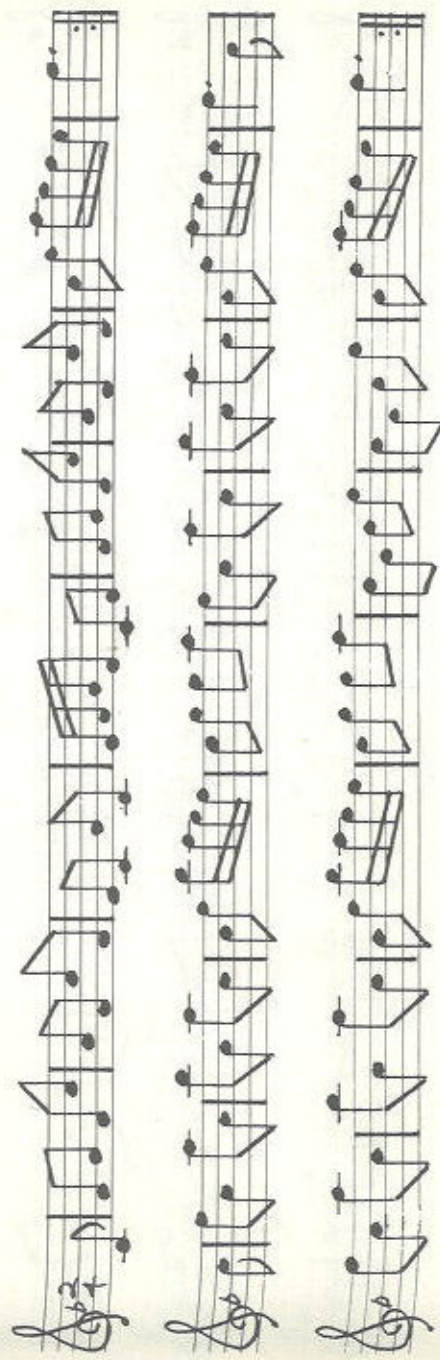
LORD SUMMERS REEL



THE NYPH

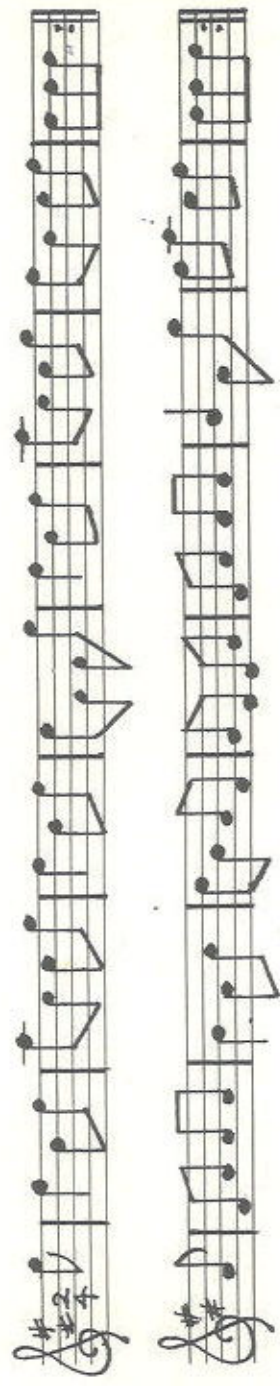


LADY GARNERS TROOP

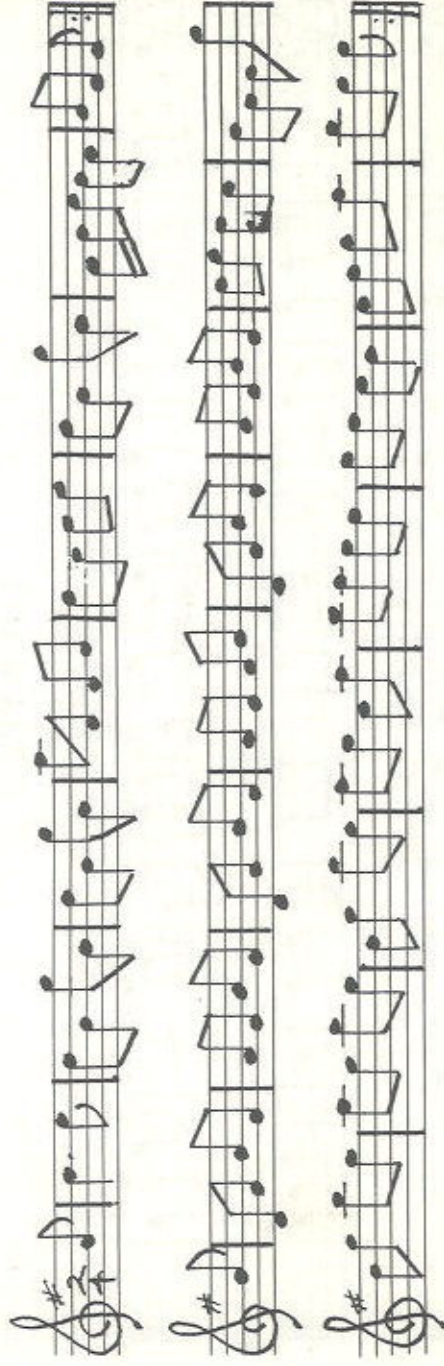




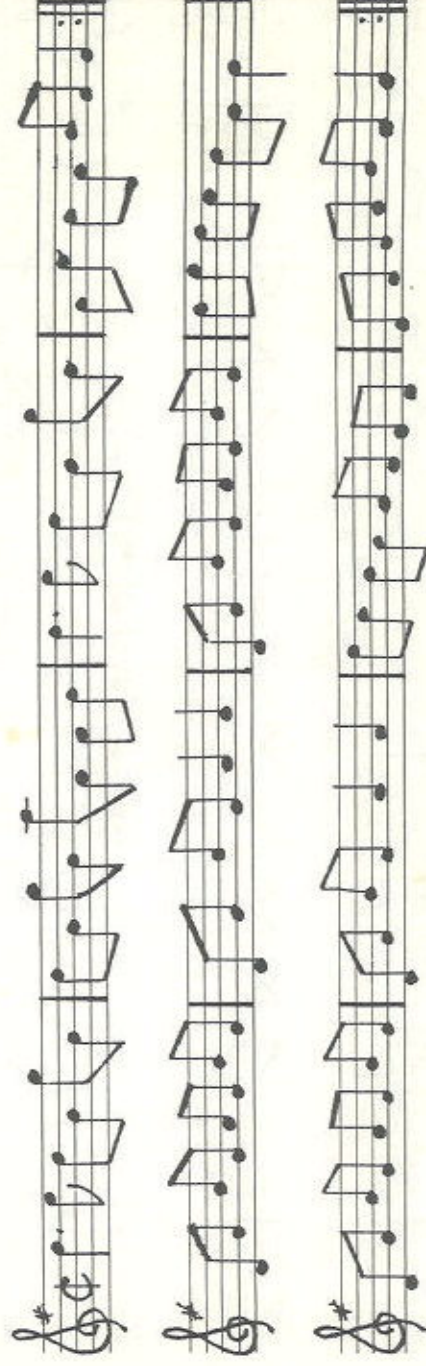
LADY HARDWICKS REEL



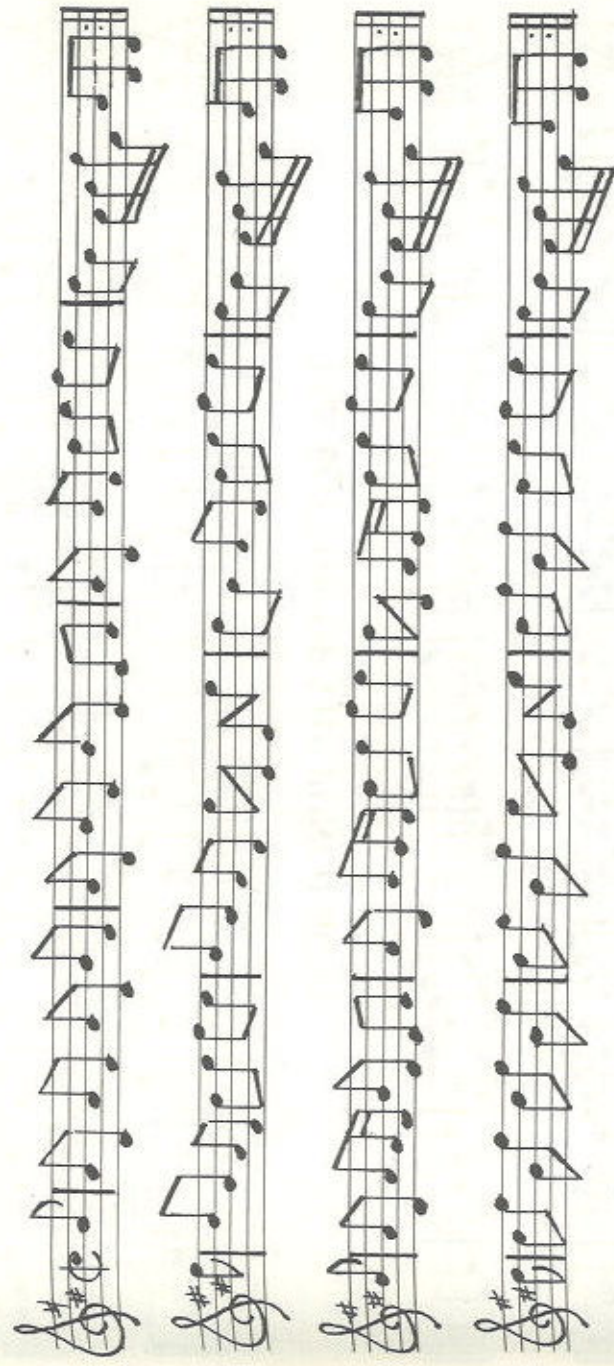
LORD McDONALDS REEL



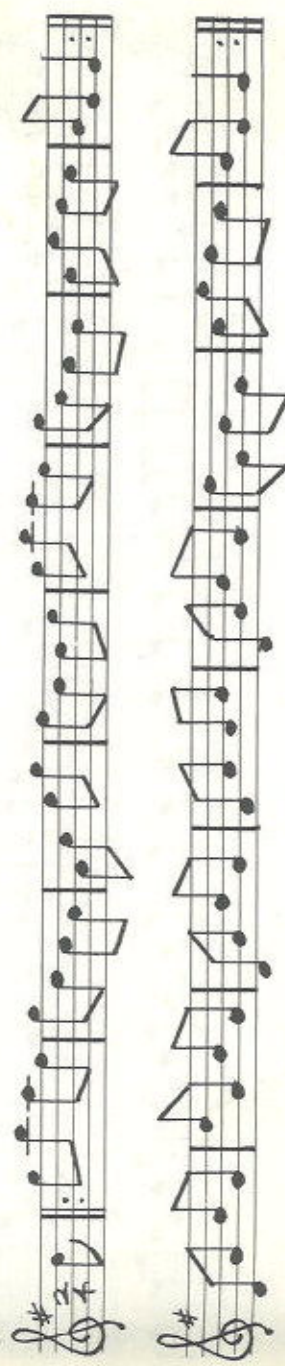
LORD McDONALDS REEL (Second Setting)



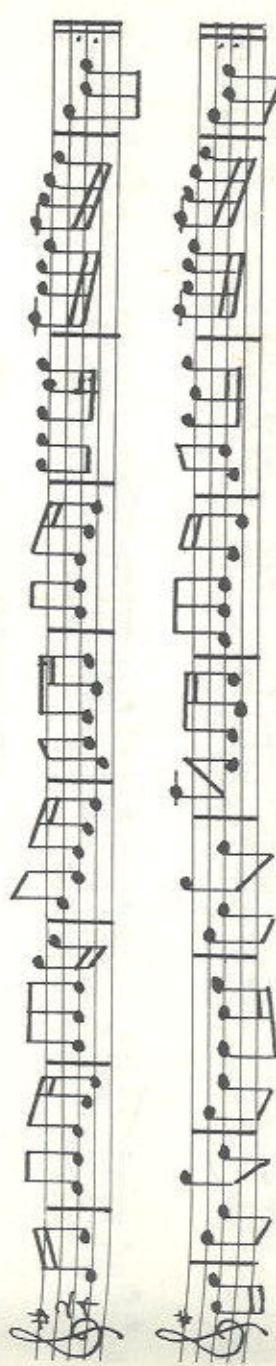
LADY CAMPBELLS DELIGHT



LADY BRUCES REEL

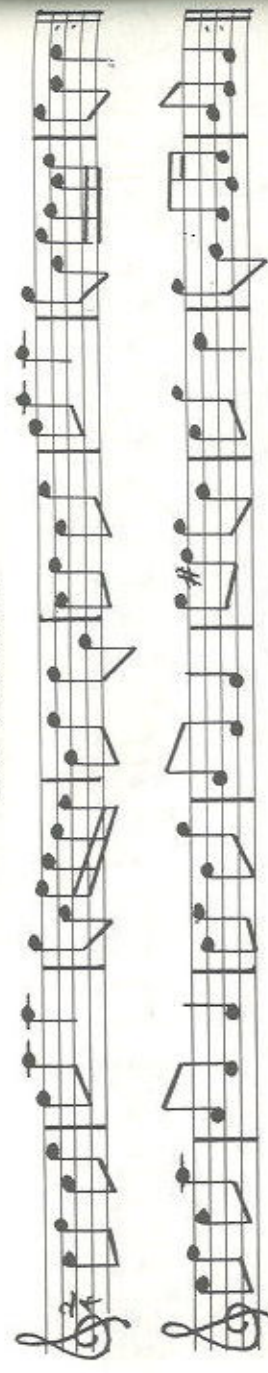


THE WHITE COCHHEAD

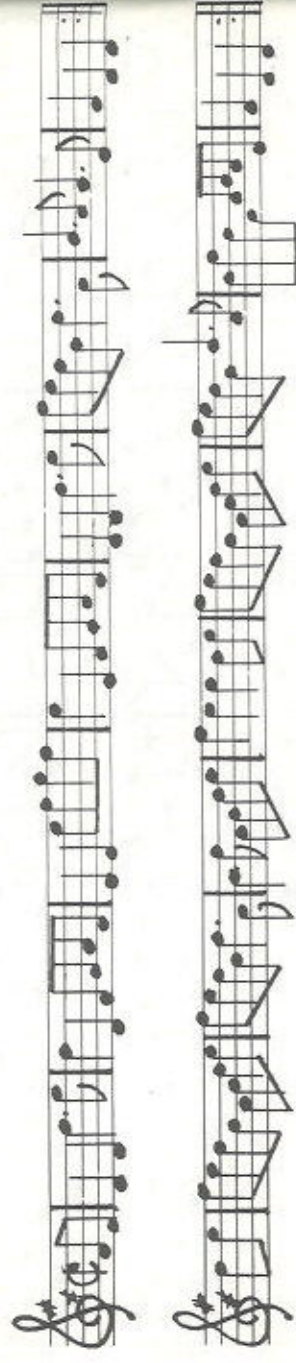




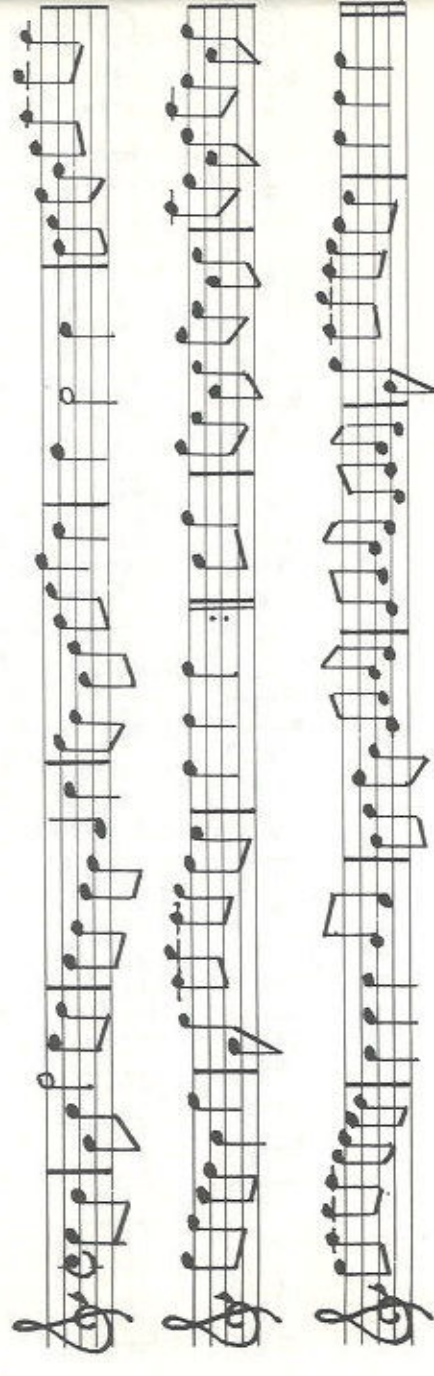
LA VIRITY



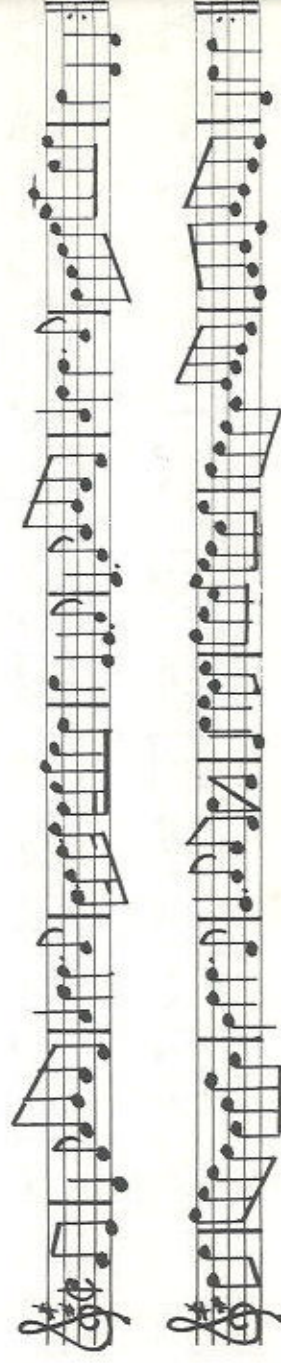
THE BOTTOM OF THE PUNCH BOWL



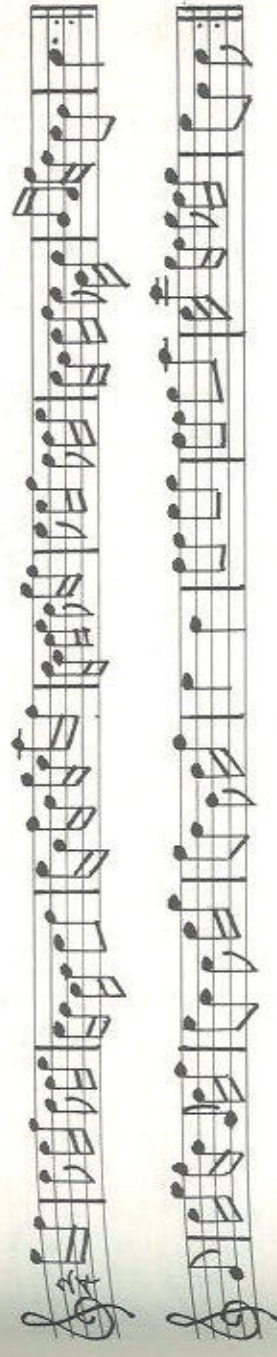
LITTEN HORNPIPE



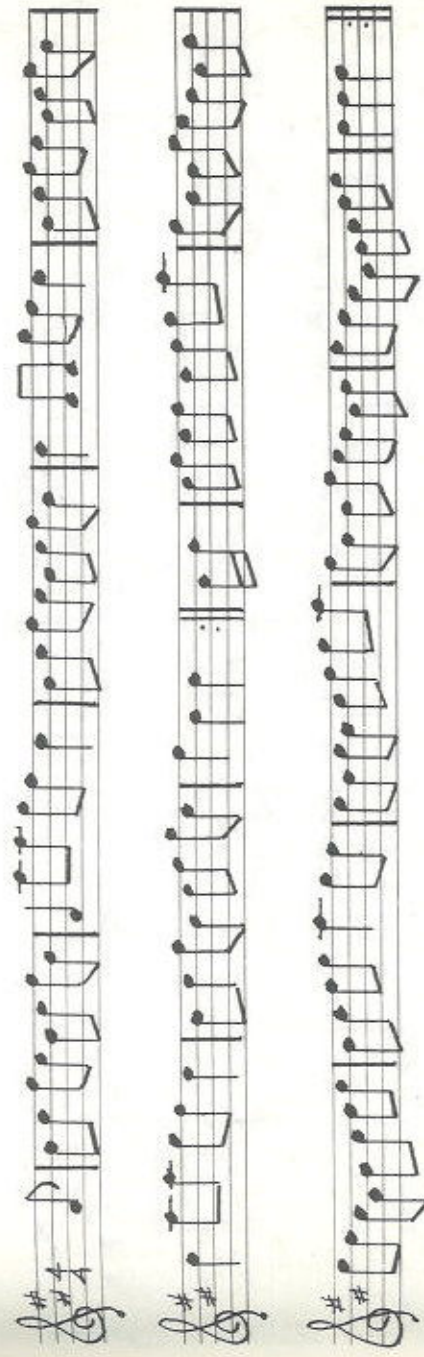
HORNPIPE



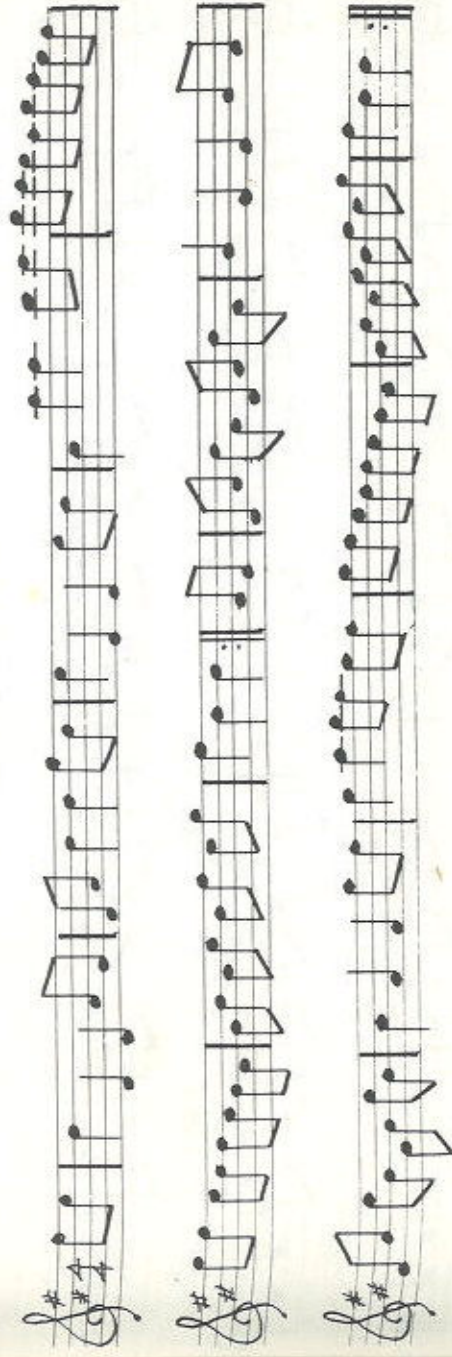
DEL CAROS FANCY



LAURAL AND LINDSAY

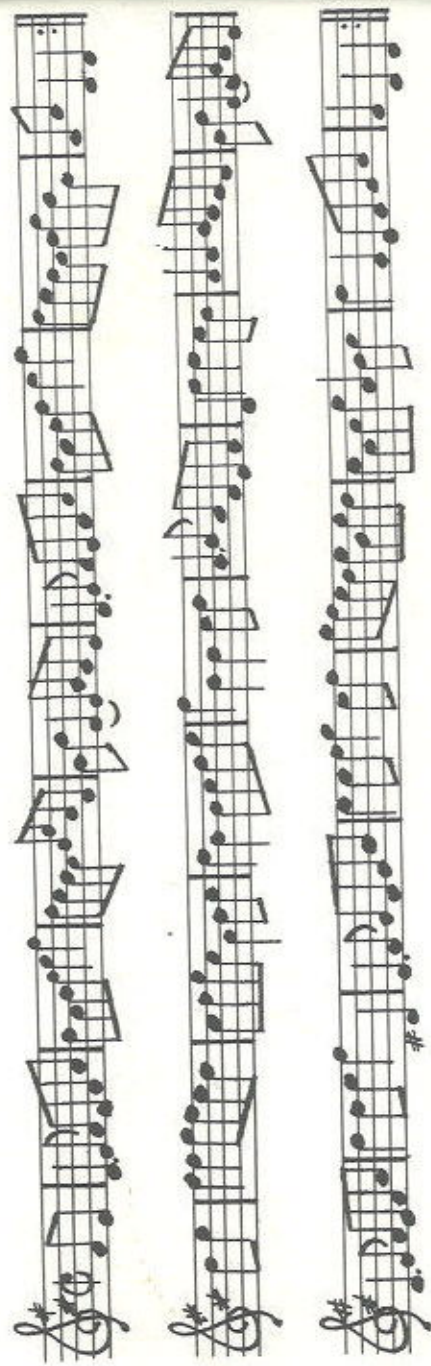


THE COLLAGE HORNPIPE

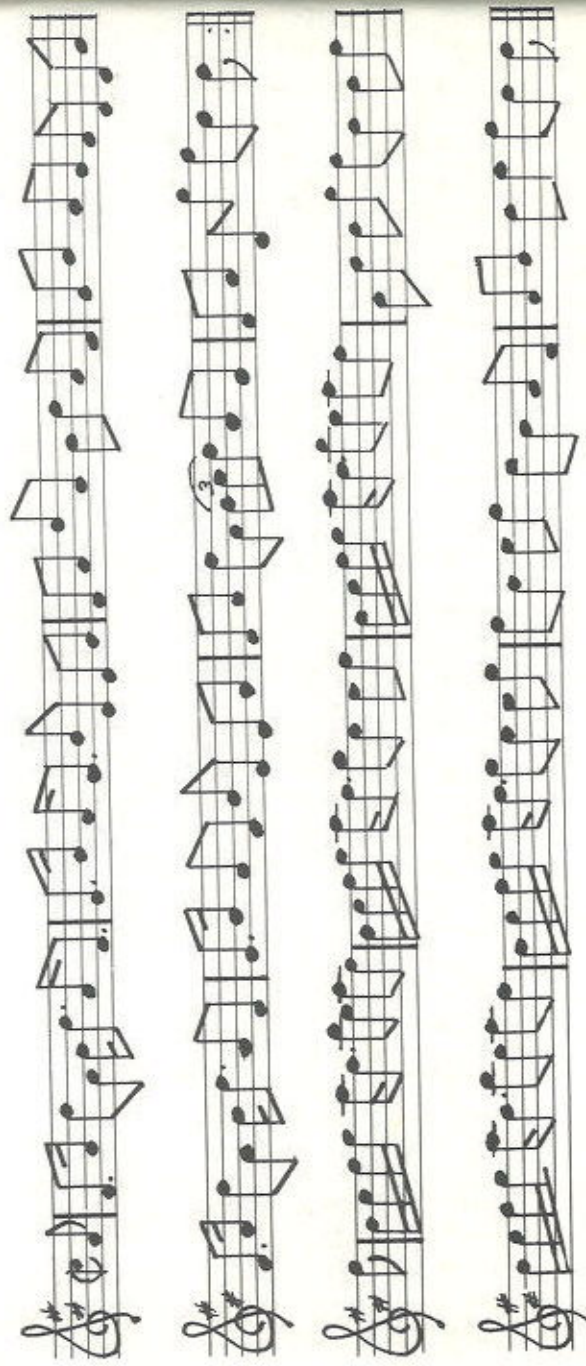




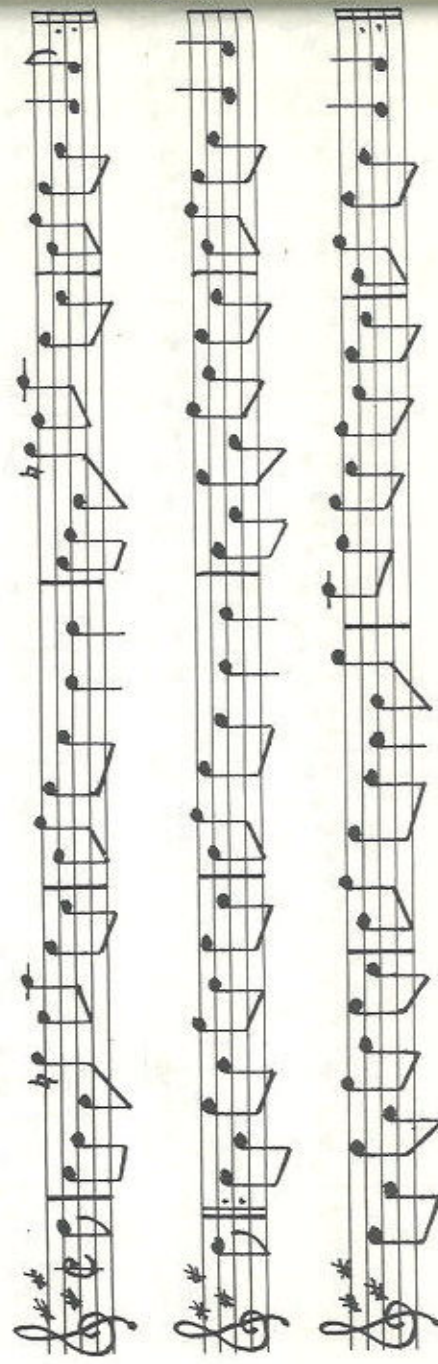
THE CALEDONEAN LADDIE



THE CALEDONEAN HUNT



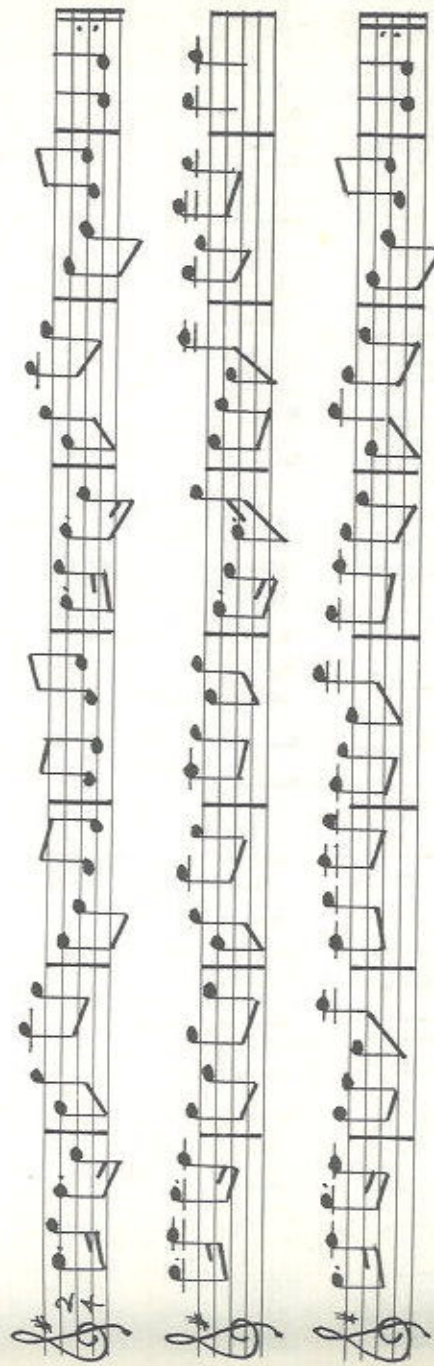
BONEY LADS



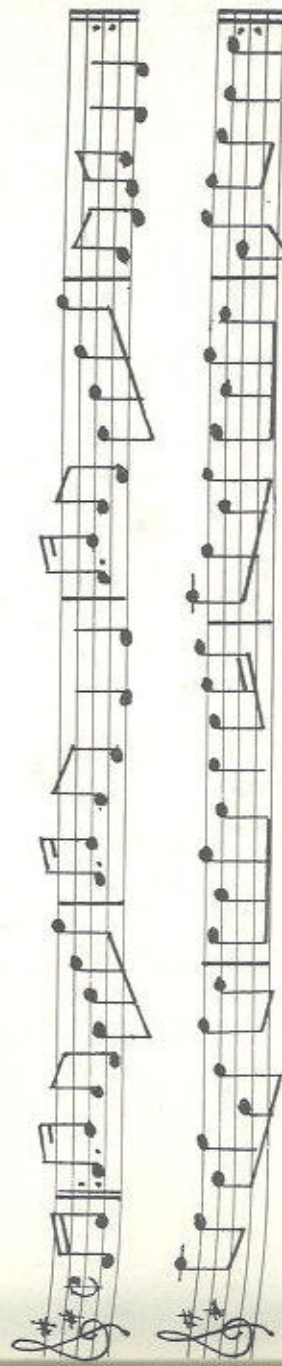
WILD IRISH MAN



LITTLE FANNYS LOVE

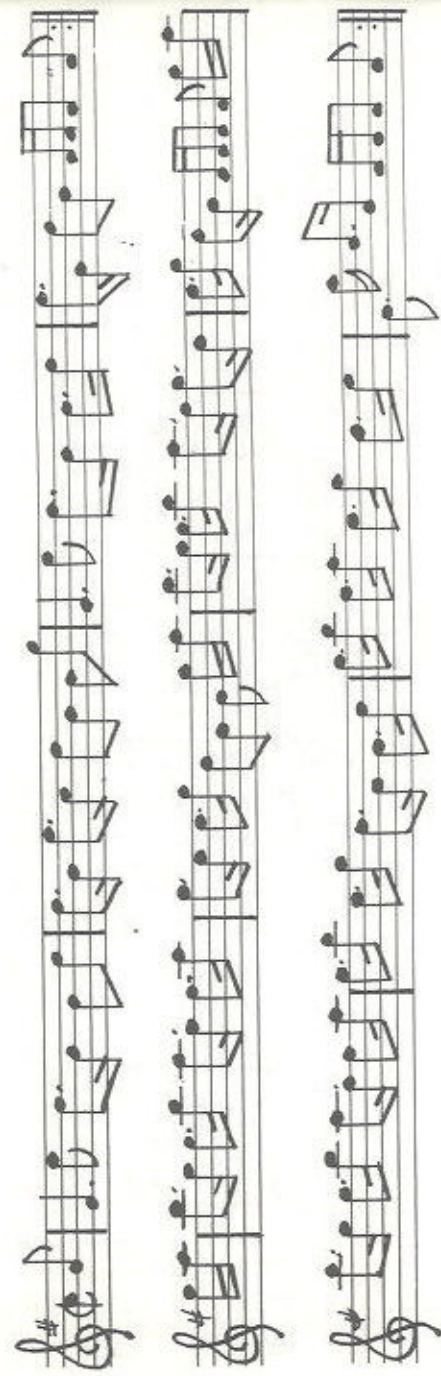


THE BANKS OF GRAY

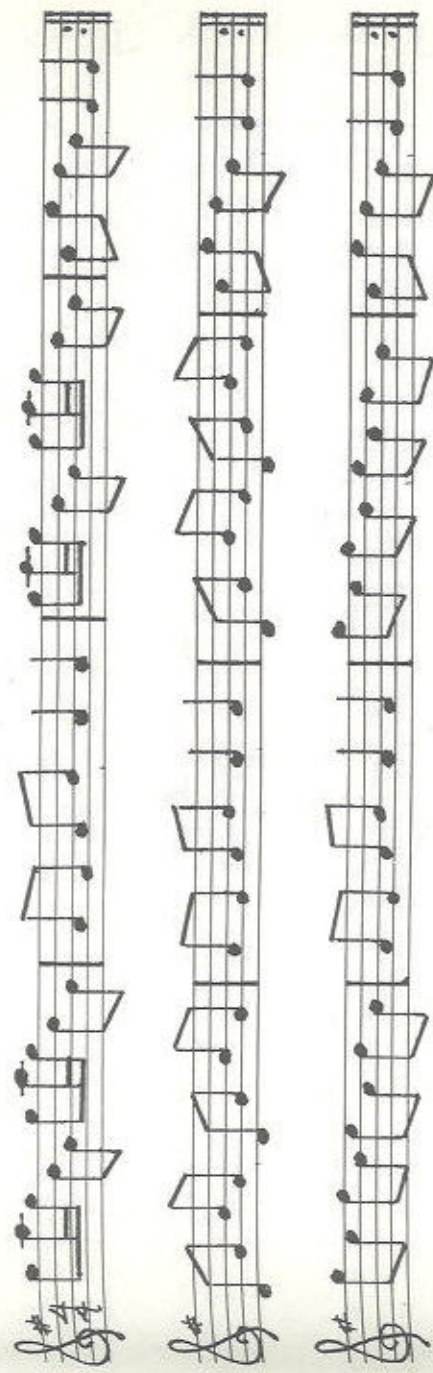




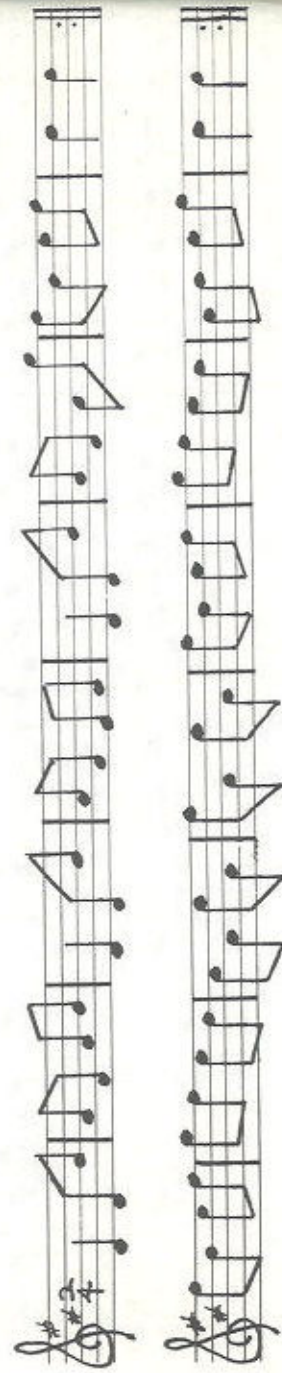
# LADY RAMSEY



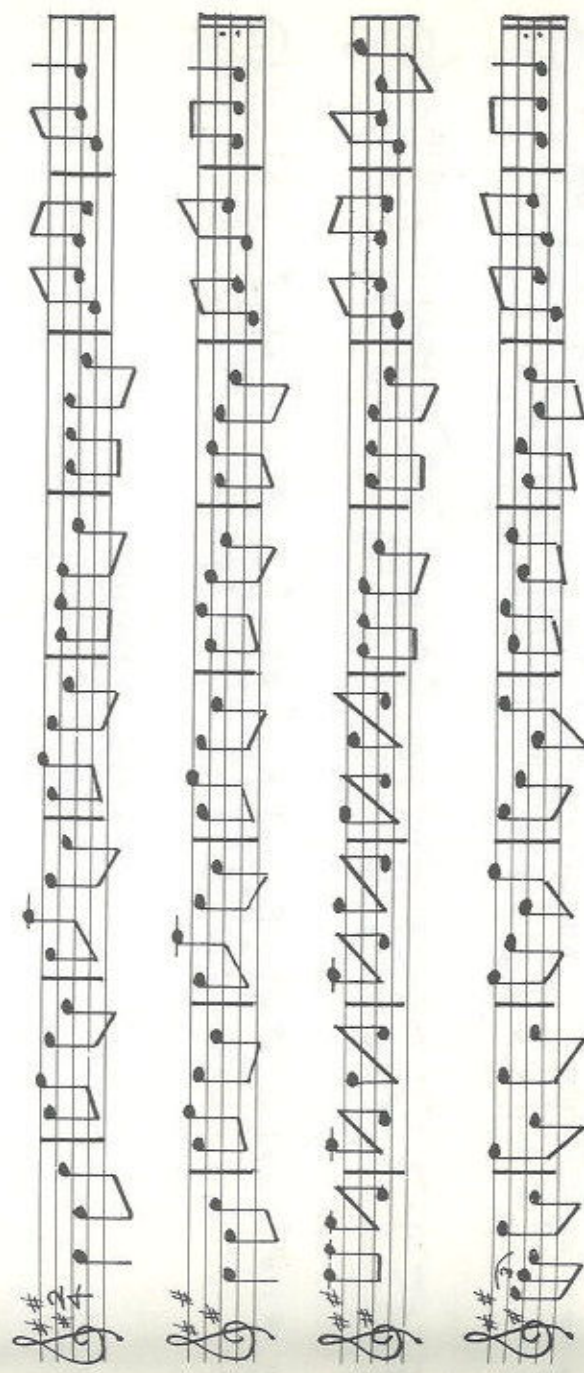
# THE BUFF AND BLUE



# WELCOME HERE AGAIN



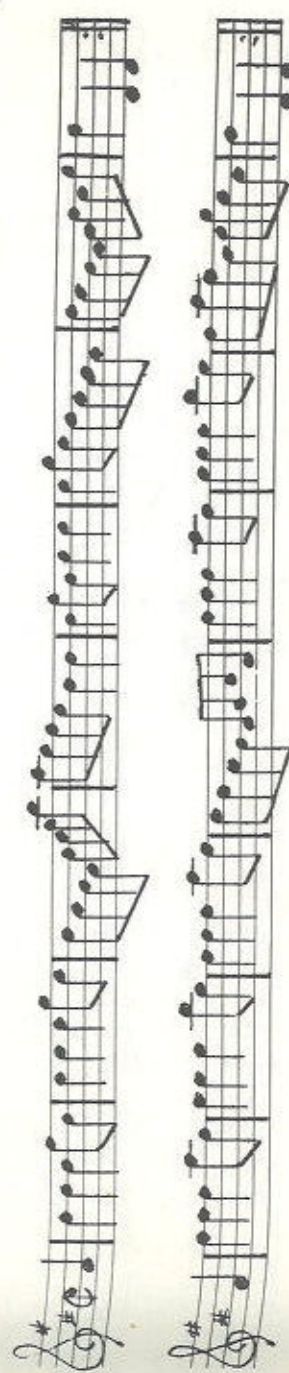
# SPEED THE PLOW



# PATRICKS HILL

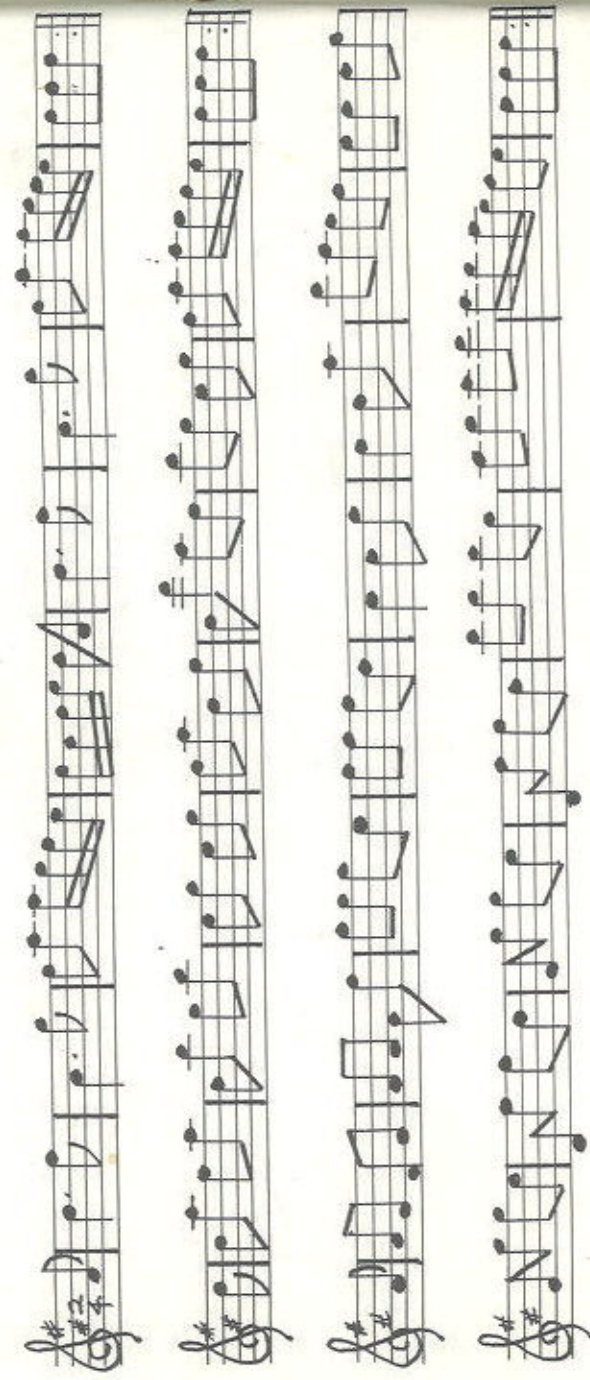


# ASHLEYS RIDE

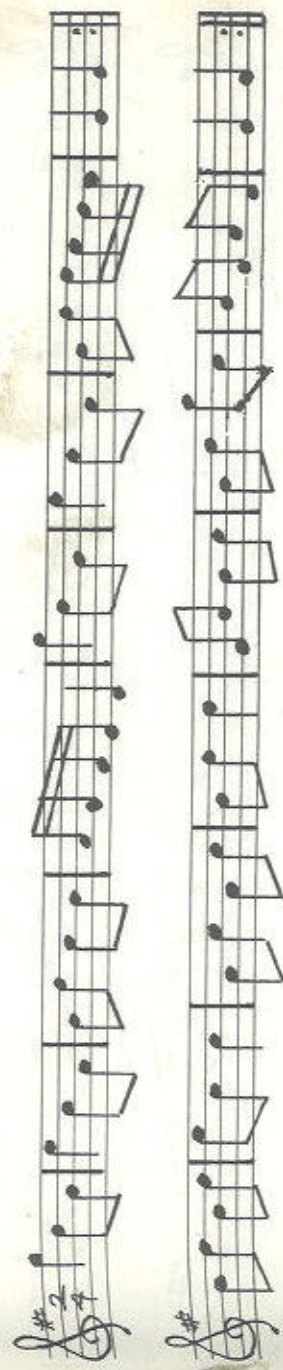




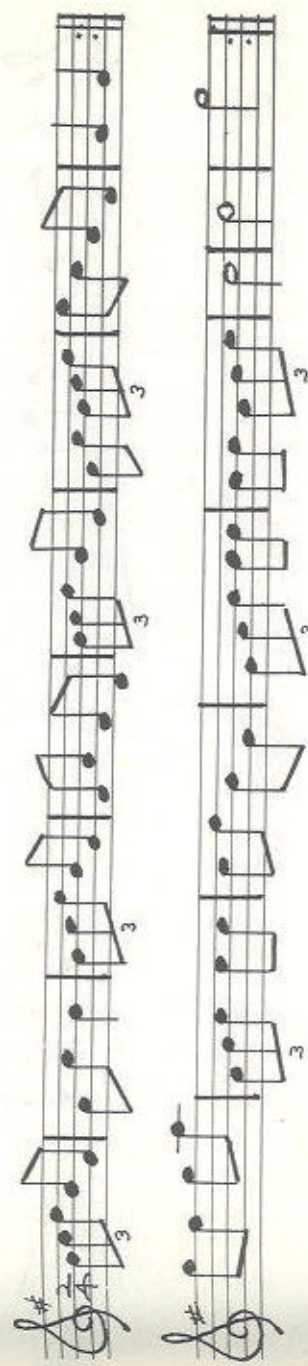
# KISS MY LADY



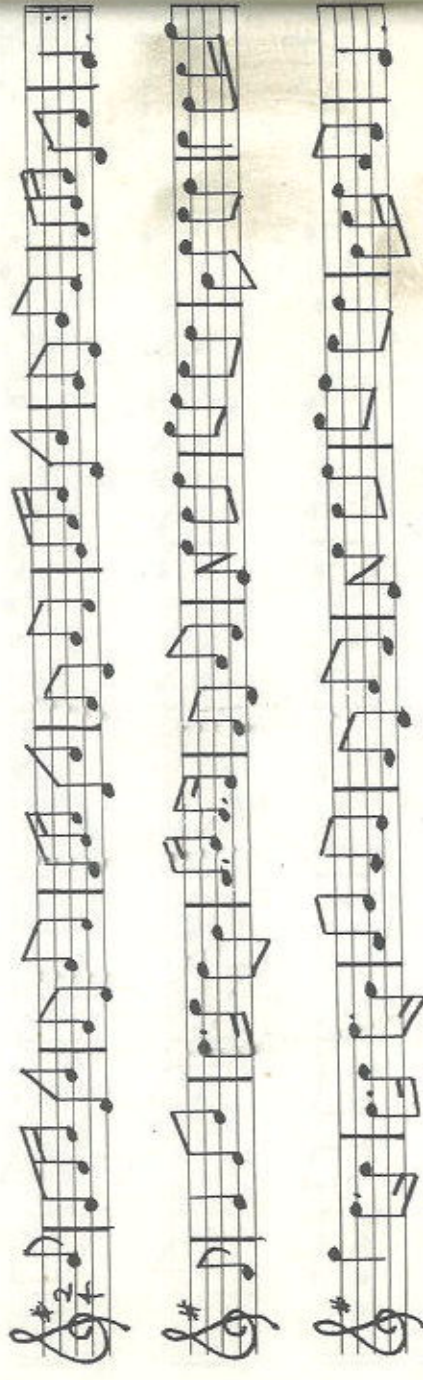
# ALL WELL



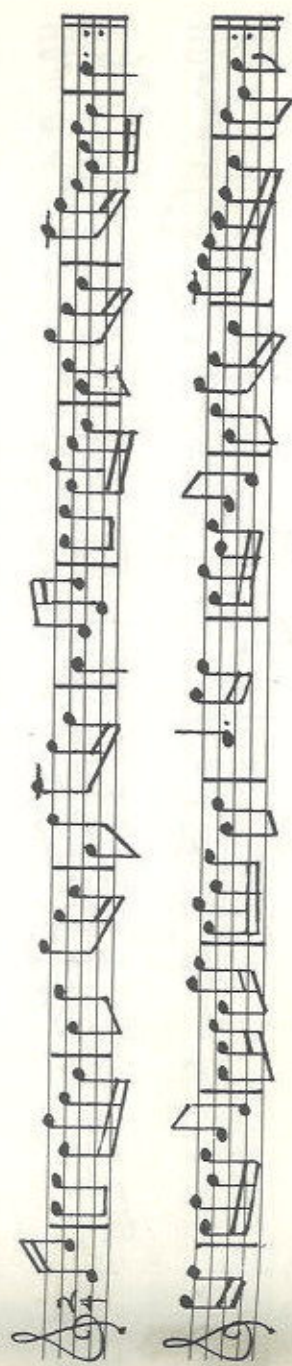
# PRINCE WILLIAM OF AUGUSTER



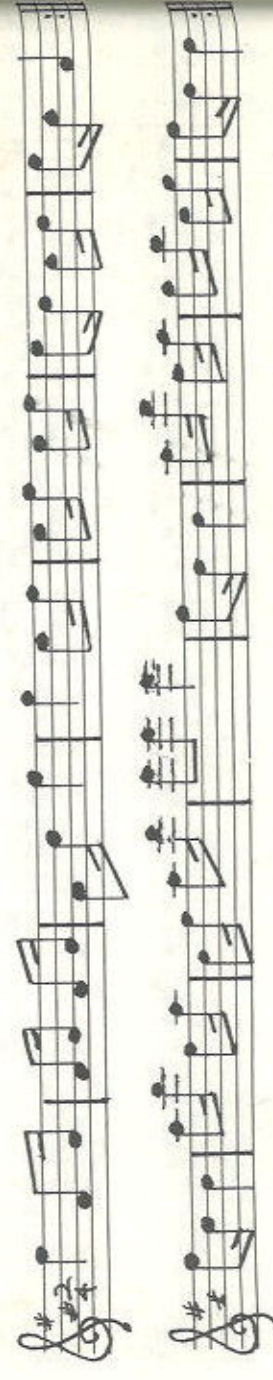
# SCOTTS REEL



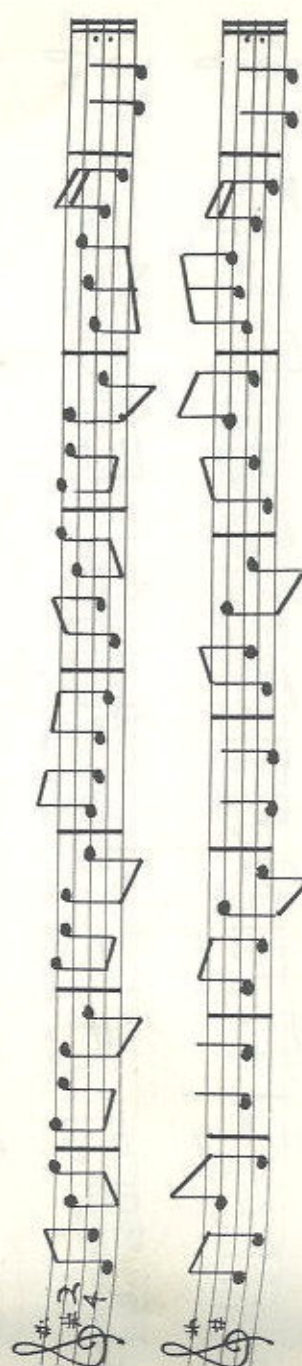
# HUN HAYDN



# SIR DAVID HUNTER BLAIR

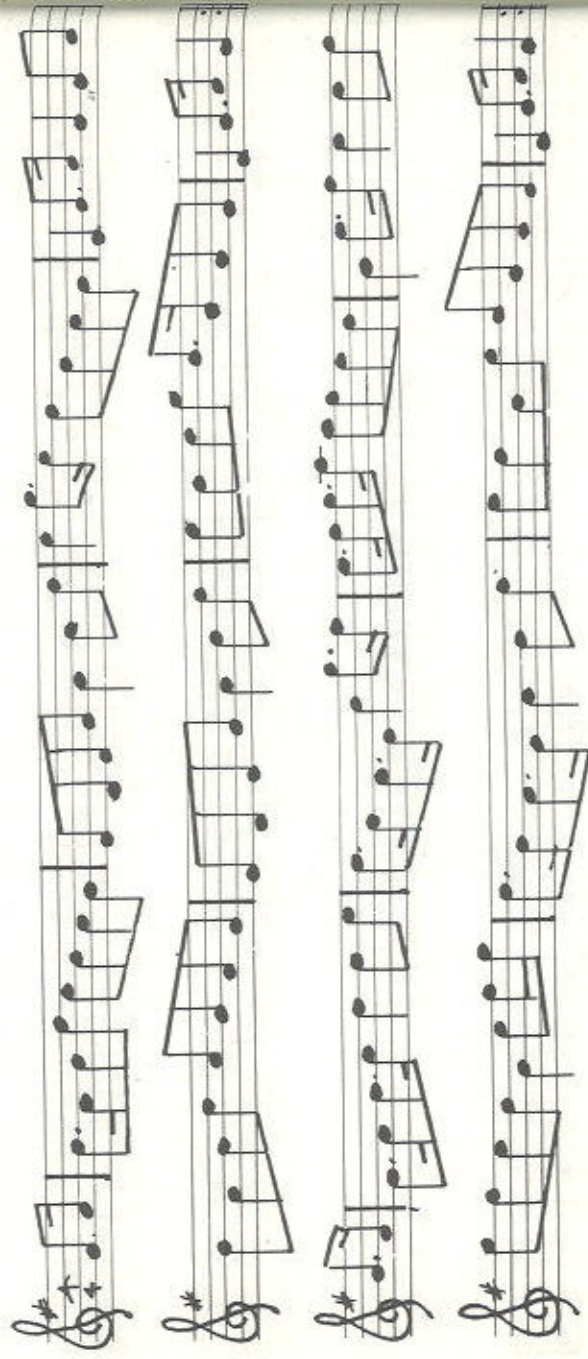


# WARRENS VICTORY

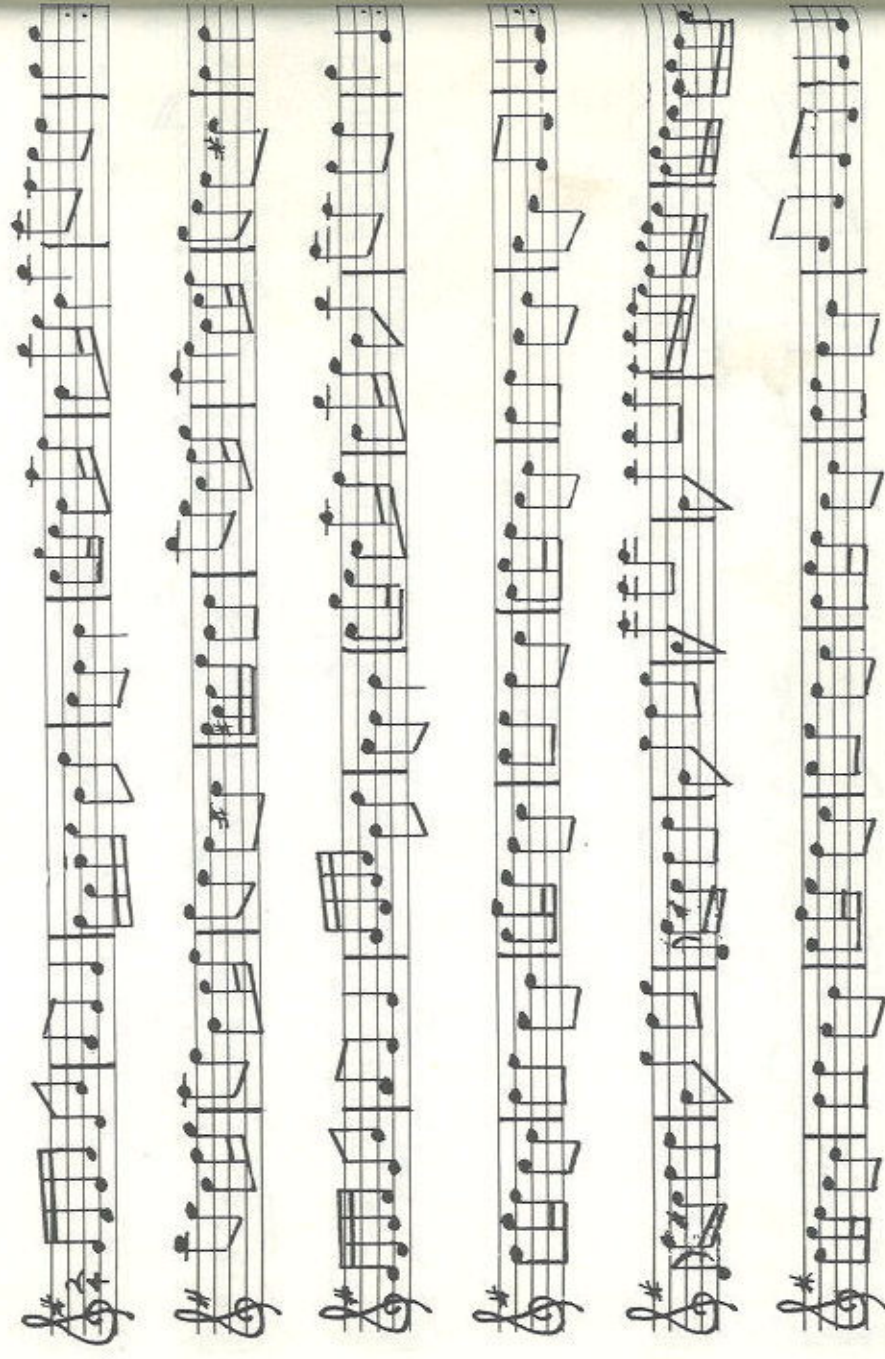




CUMBERLAND HOUSE



✓ THE VILLAGE MAID



SIR ROGER DeCOVERLYS REEL



I AM A BRISK AND SPRIGHTLY LAD



YANKEE DOODLE

