

Fiddle Contest, Brenham, Texas February 9, 1900

clippings compiled and transcribed by Steve Green

Houston Daily Post ~ January 13, 1900

An "old fiddlers contest" is being arranged to take place at this place in the near future for the benefit of local charity. Mr. Lee Wilson, who has considerable experience with matters of this kind, is at the head of the enterprise. The contest will be open to all comers and three of the prizes have already been selected. They are a gold watch for the best fiddler, a silver watch for the second best and a gun metal watch for the third best.

Houston Daily Post ~ January 16, 1900

Much interest is being manufactured in the "old fiddlers' contest" which will be held here in March for the benefit of local charity. Among the most celebrated of the fiddlers who have been asked to enter the contest are Governor Bob Taylor who is announced to lecture here; Judge V. W. Grubbs of Greenville, chairman of the State committee of education, who will also lecture at this place about that time; ex-Governor James Stephen Hogg; General John R. Baylor, a former resident of this county, and now one of the most distinguished citizens of El Paso. Present indications are that the old fiddlers' convention will overshadow all other conventions ever held here.

Houston Daily Post ~ January 20, 1900

Mr. Lee Wilson, secretary of the "old fiddlers" convention which will be held in this city February 9, has received the following letter from Hon. V. M. Grubbs of Greenville, member of the legislature and chairman of the State committee of education:

"Please accept my thanks for the invitation to take part in the prize fiddling contest which is to take place in your city February 9. I shall endeavor to be there and, if not barred under the rules excluding scientific performers, I hope to take the gold filled chronometer. My favorite tune is "Leather Breeches," of which I claim to be the original and only composer. I shall be in Austin on February 9 and if the special session should not break up in a row over the commission tax bill the prospects are that I will be with you on the 9th also."

Here are some of the tunes that will be played at the contest of old fiddlers which will be given in this city on February 9 for the benefit of local charity:

"Black Jack Grove," "Jenny on the Railroad," "Jenny Put the Kettle On," "Billy on the Low Ground," "Nancy Rowland," "Arkansaw Traveler," "Tom and Jerry," "Leather Breeches," "Irish Washwoman," "Gray Eagle," "Kitty is the Gal for Me," "College Hornpipe," "Sally [Hamlin?]," "Miss Sawyer," "Sugar in Coffee," "Sugar in the Gourd," "Soldier's Joy," "Pretty Polly Ann," "Money Musk," "Sally Gooden," "Black Eyed Susie," "Devilish Mary," "Brindle Steer," "Old Gray Horse," "Methodist Preacher," "Wagoner," "Tailor in the Loft," "Walk Along, John," "Cake All Dough," "Hop Light, Ladies," "Chicken in the Bread Tray," "Cheatem," "Camels Are Comin'," "Killy Cranky," "Ringtail Coon," "Coonie on the Ground," "Walk Along, Jawbone," "Stump Tail Dog," "Cinda, Fare You Well," "Drunken Hiccough," "Farewell, Whisky," "Bonaparte's Retreat," "Downfall of Paris," "Rye Straw," "Lost Indian," "Gal on the Log," "One-eyed Riley," "Two-eyed Jane," "Old Muse and Pups," "Buffalo Gals," "Fuss in the Family," "Hog-eyed Man," "Eighth of January," "Saddle Old Spike," "Sally Johnson," "Sandy Land," "Natchez Under the Hill," " Soap Suds Over the Fence," "Dixie Land," "Dan Tucker," "Old Uncle Ned," "Molly Hare," "Get Up in the Cool," "Pop, Goes the Weazel," "Catfish and Minnow," "Brannigan's Pup." "Devil's Dream," "Black Cat's Foot," "Bull Frog's Eye," "Rareback Davy," " Possum Up the Gum Stump," "Ryan's Buck Scrap." [*Backstep? –SG*]

Houston Daily Post ~ February 8, 1900

Cheap Santa Fe Rates

To Brenham—Old fiddlers' contest, February 9, agents Temple to Rosenberg, inclusive, and Somerville to Navasota, inclusive, may sell round trip tickets to Brenham at rate of one and one-third fares. Date of sale February 9. Limit tickets to February 10 for return.

Houston Daily Post ~ February 11, 1900

OLD FIDDLERS CONTEST

Isaac Jackson of Caldwell, Aged 74, Was Awarded the First Prize

THERE WERE SOME PLEASANT EPISODES

The Winner of the Contest Is a Native Texan and His Friends Are Congratulating Him

*Backward, turn backward, oh, Time in your flight,
And make me young again, just for tonight,
Fiddlers, come back from the echoless shore,
And play the old tunes again, just as of yore.*

Brenham, Texas, February 9—At the Grand opera house tonight was witnessed the greatest musical event of several seasons, when forty old-time fiddlers rosined their bows and tuned up for the big contest for

glories, honors and prizes that have been so much heralded abroad of late. With every seat in the opera house sold, besides 100 additional chairs that were provided expressly for the occasion, the crowd in attendance may very properly be reckoned at 1000 thousand [sic] people in round numbers. Many more came, but they neither saw nor conquered, for they had to return home disappointed at not finding "standing room only," all that the management has been able to promise them for the past three days. The entries for this unique musicale were made up exclusively of "fiddlers." Violinists were not allowed, and the music was of that variety that was popular in ante bellum days when the boys and girls danced all night till broad daylight on the old puncheon floors. Those good old days are gone never to return, but memories of the pleasures they brought were revived for the time and the old boys and girls were young again for a few brief hours.

In fiction and tradition there are many stories of the hospitality of the plantation home and the gay assemblages of guests that made ancestral hall echo with laughter, music and dancing. There were retinues of servants and bounties dispensed with a lavish hand. These things must have been uppermost in the minds of many of the old Texans who came from far and near to hear this old fiddlers' contest. Our people of today cannot expect to maintain these goodly precedents, sufficient unto the day is the fashion thereof. Every phase of Southern life must be adapted to new conditions, but reconstruction does not imply decadence. There is ever something compensating about well-earned pleasures that pampered ease cannot give.

The most celebrated fiddle that the contest discovered was the one from which Uncle Johnny Brophy drew so much melody. This fiddle was presented to Charles Henslee by a celebrated Frenchman named Kazette after the latter had drawn a black bean with the prisoners of the ill-fated Meir expedition which undertook the conquest of Mexico. Before it came Henslee's time to draw a bean he enlivened the spirits of his fellow prisoners by playing "Puss Thompson" and those of the auditors who lived to tell the story, along with Henslee, declared that never before and never afterward did he play the piece quite so well as on this occasion. Henslee lived thirty years after this adventure in a little 12x14 cottage located on Little Sandy on the Brenham and Independence road, making a living entirely by the use of his bow and historic fiddle. When he died he willed the fiddle to Mr. Brophy and the latter cherishes it as among the greatest of his treasures.

A fiddler who attracted a great amount of attention during the entire contest was Mr. R. Phares of Weimar; Mr. Phares lost his right arm from a gunshot wound received with Walker's Gray Hounds at the battle of Mansfield, just over the border in Louisiana. With the bow strapped to his right leg, Mr. Phares plays by using the fiddle in the same way that an ordinary fiddler does.

Colonel Bones McKay, the "Sage of Kuykendal," was the cynosure of all eyes and ears when, attired as "Uncle Sam," he played "Yankee Doodle."

The programme was interspersed with a violin selection by Miss Ada Becker of this city, several "coon songs" by Mrs. John Lockman, accompanied on the piano by Mrs. Frank Lumm of Houston, and on a vocal selection by Mr. E. Spence Wilson, also of Houston.

The fiddlers and tunes were as follows:

Tunes— "Black Jack Grove," "Jennie on the Railroad," "Jennie, Put the Kettle On," "Billy in the Low Ground," "Nancy Rowland," "Arkansas Traveler," "Tom and Jerry," "Leather Breeches," "Irish Washwoman," "Gray Eagle," "Kitty is the Gal for Me," "College Hornpipe," "Sallie Hamilton," "Miss Sawyer," "Sugar in the Coffee," "Sugar in the Gourd," "Soldiers' Joy," "Pretty Polly Ann," "Money Musk," "Sally Gooden," "Black Eyed Susie," "Devilish Mary," "Brindle Steer," "Old Gray Horse," "Methodist Preacher," "Wagoner," "Tailor in the Loft," "Walk Along, John," "Hop Light Ladies," "Chicken in the Bread Tray," "Cheatem," "Campbells Are Comin'," "Killy Cranky," "Ringtail Coon," "Coonie on the Ground," "Walk Along Jawbone," "Stump Tail Deer," "Cinda Fare You Well," "Drunken Hiccough," "Farewell Whisky," "Bonaparte's Retreat," "Downfall of Paris," "Rye Straw," "Lost Indian," "Gal on the Log," "One Eyed Riley," "Two Eyed Jane," "Old Muse and Pups," "Buffalo Girls," "Fuss in the Family," "Hog-eyed Man," "Eighth of January," "Saddle Old Spike," "Sally Johnson," "Sandy Land," "Natchez Under the Hill," "Soap Suds Over the Fence," "Dixie Land," "Dan Tucker," "Old Uncle Ned," "Molly Hare," "Get Up in the Cool," "Pop Goes the Weasel," "Catfish and Minnow," "Brannigan's Pup," "Devil's Dream," "Black Cat's Foot," "Bull Frog's Eye," "Bareback Davy" [*Rare Back Davy?*], "Possum Up the Gum Stump," "Ryan's Buck Setup" [*Ryan's Buck Step?*], "Shoo Fly," "Forked Ear," "Fine Time at Our House," "Getting Upstire" [Getting Upstairs], "Young Gal So Deceiving," "Give the Fiddler a Drain [Dram]," "Suwanee River," "Massa in the Cold, Cold Ground," "Cotton-Eyed Joe," "Clear the Track," "Nigger in the Woodpile," "Ficher's Hornpipe" [*Fisher's Hornpipe*], "Ricker's Hornpipe," "Faulkey Deer" [Forky Deer], "Black Satin," "Green Brier," "Rocky Road to Dublin," "Liza Jane," "Old Hen Cackle," "Old Straw Bonnet," "Bonnie Blue Flag," "Big Sis," "Off to Georgia," "Want to Go to Meetin', But Got No Shoes," "Little More Cider," "John's Got a New House," "Walls of Jericho."

The fiddlers played in the following order:

Kit Adkinson of Ledbetter, John R. Alexander of Washington, S. F. Alexander of Giddings, F. C. Baker of Ledbetter, D. G. Bowers of Brenham, J. R. Brophy of Brenham, O. N. Cocke of Chappell Hill, Albert Czinnazlooski of Brenham, Christian Anstin of Brenham, J. Dotson of Dime Box, William Emshoff of Brenham, J. W. Earlywine of Earlywine, F. Fischer of Brenham, John W. Foster of Bellville, W. Gryder of Independence, V. W. Grubbs of Greenville, H. Gardner of Brenham, Claude

Henslee of Lyons, Ed Hughes of Whitman, Eli Hanks of Spring, Dr. J. S. Holland of Brenham, Sam Honarie of Brenham, A. J. Horton of Needville, Ike Jackson of [Caldwell], Sam R. Kenada of Austin, George A. Kruger of New Ulm, A. W. Mitchell of Madisonville, D. C. McLean of Salado, Colonel Mackey of Kuykendall, Charles [Marable] of Kenney, Jas. Marable of Brenham, Frank Myatt of William Penn, Frank Middleton of Brenham, Yancy Myatt of William Penn, J. J. Pressley of Caldwell, J. G. Phegley of Caldwell, R. Phares of Weimar, J. R. Rice of Hempstead, D. E. Styers of Brenham, William R. Sapp of Caldwell, Hermann Siebel of Burton, William Sample of Dime Box, L. D. Stewart of Caldwell, J. H. Teague of Navasota.

Prizes in the fiddling contest of ye old time fiddlers were awarded in the following order: First prize, gold watch, won by Isaac Jackson of Caldwell, who is 76 years old; second prize, silver watch, awarded to Kit Atkinson of Ledbetter; third prize, gun metal watch, James Marable, Brenham. The doll named "Eula" that has been the property of the ladies of the Episcopal church since the public failed to guess her name at the contest for that purpose, held during the holidays, was awarded to Miss Hazel Childress for selling the most tickets to the concert. Her record was 230 tickets. Miss Blanche Wilson came next on the list of ticket sellers and received a handsome pin. After the concert and the awarding of the various prizes, the old fiddlers were tendered a reception and dance at Lusk's hall. In the latter more than one hundred couples participated in the polkas, quadrilles and cotillions.

One of the prettiest little episodes that ever occurred to illustrate the generous impulses of mankind took place when Mr. R. Phares of Weimar had finished his numbers. Mr. Phares is a one-armed Confederate soldier who lost his right arm while serving the Confederacy at the battle of Mansfield. He plays the fiddle by fastening the bow beneath his right leg and using the fiddle like other performers do the bow. As the old man started to leave the stage some big-hearted individual in the gallery threw a dollar at him, and this was the signal for a downpour of coins, such as probably never overtook the old man before. This was accompanied by shouts from all over the house of "Old man, go buy you a watch, and buy you a good one." R. L. Christian, a crippled soldier fiddler from Austin, was also treated to a shower of coins during his performance.

One of the most distinguished fiddlers in attendance [at] the contest was Hon. A. W. Mitchel of Madisonville, who is doorkeeper of the house of representatives.

Judge V. W. Grubbs of Greenville, who had entered the contest, telegraphed that he missed the train just three seconds.

The judges of the contest were Hon. J. A. Wilkins, mayor of Brenham, R. M. Perdue of Caldwell and P. H. Barnhill of Brenham, all of them "old-time fiddlers." Uncle "Ike" Jackson of Caldwell, who won the first prize, played a fiddle that had been in his family more than one hundred years.

The gross receipts of the entertainment amounted to \$350, which amount, after deducting expenses, will be turned over to the ladies of the Episcopal church.

Houston Daily Post ~ February 20, 1900

Following the pace set by Brenham there are going to be a number of "old fiddlers'" contests held at various places in Texas during the next few weeks. A number of the contestants in the Brenham concert have been offered free transportation to visit Galveston, April 17, and engage in a contest as a prelude to the annual charity ball. The following from this vicinity have agreed to go: Kit Adkinson, Ledbetter, who received the second prize in the Brenham contest; William Sample, Dime Box; I. J. Jackson of Caldwell, who carried off the first prize at this place; S. T. Alexander, Giddings; C. C. Marable, Kenney; James Marable, Brenham; the latter won the third prize in the Brenham contest. Parties here are in receipt of letters from Dallas and Rockdale stating that similar entertainments are to be held in those places, and requesting that programmes of the Brenham entertainment be sent them. The Dallas entertainment will be for the benefit of the local Confederate camp, and the one at Rockdale will be given under the auspices of the fire department there.

Houston Daily Post ~ April 19, 1900

James Marable of this city, who won third prize in the old fiddlers' contest at this city on February 9, was advanced to first place at the old fiddlers' contest held at the annual charity ball in Galveston Tuesday night.

Houston Daily Post ~ April 27, 1900

Cameron, Texas, April 26—The old time fiddlers' contest was held in the district court room last night before a crowded house under the auspices of the Cameron band.

Seven fiddlers entered the contest and the first prize was awarded to A. B. Henson of Hearne, playing the old-time pieces, "Mollie, Put the Kettle On," "Fisher's Hornpipe," and "Mississippi Sawyer;" Jim Marable won second prize with "Arkansas Traveler," "Ella Johnson," and "Sally Gooden;" Mr. W. A. Sampler of Dime Box, Lee county, came out with third prize with "Cowboy's Pride," "Daddy's Fannie," and "Tom and Jerry."

The audience was well entertained at intervals by a splendid string band.

Houston Daily Post ~ May 27, 1900

The concluding entertainment of the Maifest was a return engagement from the old fiddlers, who first appeared in Brenham on the night of February 9. The audience that assembled to hear the great "sawing contest" was a very large one and judging by the applause, a very happy

one. Hon. D. C. Giddings, Jr. acted as stage manager and announced the names of the contestants as they appeared and their selections. Mr. Giddings stated that the rules governing the contest would be the same as those adopted by the East Tennessee Fiddlers' association, of which Governor Bob Taylor is a member. These rules declared that no man who could read a note was eligible for membership and that any fellow caught running his finger along the strings would be expelled.