

# Old Dan Tucker

As sung by  
Preston Willis

Originally in E  
08-22-1946 Linden, WI

Old Dan Tuck-er was a fine old man he washed his face in a fry - ing pan, he

3  
combed his hair with a wag - on wheel and he died with a tooth ache in his heel;

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out the way for ol' Dan Tuck - er he's so late to get his sup - per.

## Lyrics

Old Dan Tucker was a fine old man  
He washed his face in a frying pan,  
He combed his hair with a wagon wheel  
And he died with a tooth ache in his heel;

## (Refrain?)

Out the way for ol' Dan Tucker  
He's so late to get his supper.

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## Critical Commentary

Transcriptions by MB, HST.

### HST notes:

In the Professional Papers series:

*Sung by Preston Willis, age 64, Linden, 1946*

*Folks who for a century or more have found Old Dan Tucker a favorite may find interest in the question of its origin. In Lomax, American Ballads and Folk Songs, the original Old Dan Tucker is credited to Dan Emmett, popular early negro minstrel and composer of Dixie. The Lomax volume discredits the claim advanced by Martha McCulloch-Williams in writing to the New York Sun (quoted in the above-mentioned volume) that the true and proper version of Old Dan Tucker was derived from the folk of North Carolina. Spaeth, in his volume, Popular Music of America, states that Old Dan Tucker published in 1843 may be "safely credited to Emmet." However, it is my opinion that Old Dan Tucker may have been such a character in folk lore as lent himself to popularization on the stage of the white men's minstrel shows, as well as in the darkies' cabins. I base my opinion on an incident told by John Parsons of Virginia in "A Tour through Indiana in 1840."*

*Parsons camped between Conceord and Crawfordsville for the night with a family which was changing location in Indiana and had come two years before, from North Carolina. Telling of the evening around the camp fire, Parsons wrote: "Presently our talk turned into lighter channels - we told jokes, we sang. The young man who told the wolf story had a fiddle ..... and to its accompaniment we sang homely songs, 'Old Virginy Never Tire' and 'Old Dan Tucker,' songs which I have heard from my cradle up, in the darky cabins on my father's plantation." It is a matter of regret that Parsons did not quote some of the verses of Old Dan Tucker.*

*Perhaps Emmett too had heard Old Dan Tucker since childhood and adapted the song to stage use. The verse sung by Mr. Willis is one of the six stanzas in the Dan Emmett version as found in the Lomax collection.*

*References [no page numbers given for above quotations]: Lomax, American Ballads and Folk Songs, pp. 258-262; Owens, pp. 39-40; Spaeth, Popular Music in America, p. 94; Parsons, pp. 261-266.*

*Folk dance song - can't remember dance - ring - sing verse once for each new partner.  
Mrs. Ory [?] Whifflin [?] - write to for folksong dance tunes. Ref. - Mr. Preston Willis.*

*In a mutilated copy of an old songster I have found words of "De Bran New Old Dan Tucker (as sung by the Virginy Minstrels)." An undated Christy's Nigga Songster contains "Old Dan Tucker (New Version)." These are entirely different sets of verses.*

### Sources:

Lomax, John A. and Alan Lomax, colls. and comps. *American Ballads and Folk Songs*. New York: Macmillan, 1934.

K.G.