Yankee Doodle

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"**Yankee Doodle**" is a well-known Anglo-American song, the origin of which dates back to the Seven Years' War. It is often sung patriotically in the United States today and is the state anthem of Connecticut.[1] It has a Roud Folk Song Index number of 4501.

"Yankee Doodle"

Roud #4501

The first verse and refrain of *Yankee Doodle*, engraved on the footpath in a park.

Music by	Traditional
Lyrics by	Richard Shuckburgh [?]
Published	1770s
Language	English
Form	Nursery rhyme

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History and lyrics

> Yankee Doodle went to town
> Riding on a pony;
> He stuck a feather in his hat,
> And called it macaroni[2]

Traditions place its origin in a pre-Revolutionary War song originally sung by British military officers to mock the disheveled, disorganized colonial "Yankees" with whom they served in the French and Indian War. It is believed that the tune comes from the nursery rhyme *Lucy Locket*. One version of the Yankee Doodle lyrics is "generally attributed" to Doctor Richard Shuckburgh,[3] a British Army surgeon. According to one story, Shuckburgh wrote the song after seeing the appearance of Colonial troops under Colonel Thomas Fitch, V, the son of Connecticut Governor Thomas Fitch.[2]

Etymology

As a term *Doodle* first appeared in the early seventeenth century,[4] and is thought to derive from the Low German *dudel* or *dödel*, meaning "fool" or "simpleton". The *Macaroni* wig was an extreme fashion in the 1770s and became contemporary slang for foppishness.[5] The Macaronis adopted feminine mannerisms, and the men were deemed 'effeminate.' Thus, the British were insinuating that the colonists were womanish and not very masculine[6]

Early versions

The earliest known version of the lyrics comes from 1755 or 1758, as the date of origin is disputed:[7]

> Brother Ephraim sold his Cow
> And bought him a Commission;
> And then he went to Canada
> To fight for the Nation;
>
> But when Ephraim he came home
> He proved an arrant Coward,
> He wouldn't fight the Frenchmen there
> For fear of being devour'd.

(Note that the sheet music which accompanies these lyrics reads, "The Words to be Sung through the Nose, & in the West Country drawl & dialect.")

The Ephraim referenced here was Ephraim Williams, a popularly known Colonel in the Massachusetts militia who was killed in the Battle of Lake George. He left his land and property to the founding of a school in Western Massachusetts, now known as Williams College.

The tune also appeared in 1762, in one of America's first comic operas, *The Disappointment*, with bawdy lyrics about the search for Blackbeard's buried treasure by a team from Philadelphia.[8]

It has been reported[*citation needed*] that the British often marched to a version believed to be about a man named Thomas Ditson, of Billerica, Massachusetts. Ditson was tarred and feathered for attempting to buy a musket in Boston in March 1775, although he later fought at Concord:

> Yankee Doodle came to town,
> For to buy a firelock,
> We will tar and feather him,
> And so we will John Hancock.

For this reason, the town of Billerica claims to be the "home" of Yankee Doodle,[9][10] and claims that at this point the Americans embraced the song and made it their own, turning it back on those who had used it to mock them. After the Battle of Lexington and Concord, a Boston newspaper reported: "Upon their return to Boston [pursued by the Minutemen], one [Briton] asked his brother officer how he liked the tune now, — 'Dang them,' returned he, 'they made us dance it till we were tired' — since which Yankee Doodle sounds less sweet to their ears."

The British responded with another set of lyrics following the Battle of Bunker Hill:

The seventeen of June, at Break of Day,
The Rebels they supriz'd us,
With their strong Works, which they'd thrown up,
To burn the Town and drive us.

There is another version attributed to Edward Bangs, a student at Harvard College, who in 1775 or 1776 wrote a ballad with fifteen verses circulated in Boston and surrounding towns.[11] Yankee Doodle was also played at the British surrender at Saratoga in 1777.[12]

On February 6, 1788, Massachusetts ratified the Constitution by a vote of 186 to 168. To the ringing of bells and the booming of cannons, the delegates trooped out of Brattle Street Church.[*citation needed*] Before many days had passed, the citizens sang their convention song to the tune of "Yankee Doodle." Here are the lyrics to their song...

The vention did in Boston meet,
The State House could not hold 'em
So then they went to Fed'ral Street,
And there the truth was told 'em...
And ev'ry morning went to prayer,
And then began disputing,
Till oppositions silenced were,
By arguments refuting.

Now politicians of all kinds,
Who are not yet decided,
May see how Yankees speak their minds,
And yet are not divided.
So here I end my Fed'ral song,
Composed of thirteen verses;
May agriculture flourish long
And commerce fill our purses!

Full version

A full version of the song, as it is known today, goes:[13]

The Spirit of '76 (aka Yankee Doodle)

Yankee Doodle went to town
A-riding on a pony,
Stuck a feather in his cap
And called it macaroni'.

Chorus:
Yankee Doodle keep it up,
Yankee Doodle dandy,
Mind the music and the step,
And with the girls be handy.

Fath'r and I went down to camp,
Along with Captain Gooding,

And there we saw the men and boys
As thick as hasty pudding.

Chorus

And there we saw a thousand men
As rich as Squire David,
And what they wasted every day,
I wish it could be saved.

Chorus

The 'lasses they eat it every day,
Would keep a house a winter;
They have so much, that I'll be bound,
They eat it when they've mind ter.

Chorus

And there I see a swamping gun
Large as a log of maple,
Upon a deuced little cart,
A load for father's cattle.

Chorus

And every time they shoot it off,
It takes a horn of powder,
and makes a noise like father's gun,
Only a nation louder.

Chorus

I went as nigh to one myself
As 'Siah's inderpinning;
And father went as nigh again,
I thought the deuce was in him.

Chorus

Cousin Simon grew so bold,
I thought he would have cocked it;
It scared me so I shrinked it off
And hung by father's pocket.

Chorus

And Cap'n Davis had a gun,
He kind of clapt his hand on't
And stuck a crooked stabbing iron
Upon the little end on't

Artist	Archibald MacNeal Willard
Year	circa 1875
Type	oil
Dimensions	61 cm × 45 cm (24 in × 18 in)
Location	United States Department of State

Chorus

And there I see a pumpkin shell
As big as mother's bason,
And every time they touched it off
They scampered like the nation.

Chorus

I see a little barrel too,
The heads were made of leather;
They knocked on it with little clubs
And called the folks together.

Chorus

And there was Cap'n Washington,
And gentle folks about him;
They say he's grown so 'tarnal proud
He will not ride without em'.

Chorus

He got him on his meeting clothes,
Upon a slapping stallion;
He sat the world along in rows,
In hundreds and in millions.

Chorus

The flaming ribbons in his hat,
They looked so tearing fine, ah,
I wanted dreadfully to get
To give to my Jemima.

Chorus

I see another snarl of men
A digging graves they told me,
So 'tarnal long, so 'tarnal deep,
They 'tended they should hold me.

Chorus

It scared me so, I hooked it off,
Nor stopped, as I remember,
Nor turned about till I got home,
Locked up in mother's chamber.

Chorus

Variations and parodies

Many other variations and parodies have since arisen, including one taught to schoolchildren today:[14]

Yankee Doodle went to town
A-riding on a pony
He stuck a feather in his hat
And called it macaroni

Yankee Doodle, keep it up
Yankee Doodle dandy
Mind the music and the step
and with the girls be handy!

Father and I went down to camp
Along with Captain Gooding
And there we saw the men and boys
As thick as hasty pudding.

Chorus

And there was Captain Washington
And gentle folks about him
They say he's grown so tarnal proud
He will not ride without them.

Chorus

"Kids Version Yankee Doodle"

Yankee Doodle went to town
A-riding on a pony,
Stuck a feather in his cap
And called it macaroni'.

Chorus:
Yankee Doodle keep it up,
Yankee Doodle dandy,
Mind the music and the step,
And with the girls be handy.

Father and I went down to camp,
Along with Captain Gooding,
And there we saw the men and boys
As thick as hasty pudding.

Chorus

There was Captain Washington,
Upon a slapping stallion,
Giving orders to his men-

I guess there were a million.

Chorus

Popular culture

- President John F. Kennedy, from Massachusetts, bought a pony for his little daughter Caroline while he was in the White House. The family named it "Macaroni", after the song *Yankee Doodle*, although the name refers to the feathered cap rather than the pony.
- Alvin and the Chipmunks covered the song for their 1959 debut album *Let's All Sing with The Chipmunks*.
- The Voice of America begins and ends all broadcasts with the interval signal of "Yankee Doodle."[15]
- The song featured in a famous sequence in the 1942 James Cagney film, *Yankee Doodle Dandy*.
- The title of the song has also been parodied in the Looney Tunes Cartoons *Yankee Doodle Daffy* and *Yankee Doodle Bugs*.
- The title of the song is also parodied in a Tom and Jerry cartoon "Yankee Doodle Mouse".
- At the conclusion of the 1981 Wimbledon Championships, in which American tennis star John McEnroe had defeated his long-time rival Björn Borg, TV commentator Bud Collins took note of the July 4th holiday and also McEnroe's red-white-and-blue attire, and quipped "Stick a feather in his cap and call him 'McEnroe-ni'!"[16]
- The song featured in the 1963 film, *The Great Escape*. The scene also references the painting Spirit of '76 (Yankee Doodle) by Archibald Willard.
- The 1965 children's cartoon *Roger Ramjet* adopts Yankee Doodle as its theme song: "Roger Ramjet and his Eagles/Fighting for our freedom/Fly through in and outer space/Not to join 'em, but to beat 'em/Roger Ramjet, he's our man/Hero of our nation/For his adventures, just be sure/and stay tuned to this station". Ramjet's four child sidekicks, the "American Eagle Squadron", are named Yank, Doodle, Dan and Dee.

Notes

1. ^ STATE OF CONNECTICUT, Sites º Seals º Symbols (http://www.ct.gov/sots/cwp/view.asp?a=3188&q=392608); *Connecticut State Register & Manual*; retrieved on May 23, 2008
2. ^ *a b* Sonneck, Oscar George Theodore. *Report on The Star-spangled Banner, Hail Columbia, America, Yankee Doodle*. New York, Dover Publications [1972]. ISBN 0-486-22237-3.
3. ^ A. Lomax, John; Lomax, Alan. *American ballads and f-28276-3* (http://books.google.com/books?id=Dn0cSe2ecuoC&). p. 521.
4. ^ "doodle", n, Oxford English Dictionary. Accessed April 29th, 2009.
5. ^ J. Woodforde, *The Strange Story of False Hair* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1971), p. 40.
6. ^ Peter McNeil, *That Doubtful Gender: Macaroni Dress and Male Sexualities* (Fashion Theory, 1998), p. 411-448.
7. ^ Carola, Chris (07/05/08). "Wish "Yankee Doodle" a happy 250th birthday. Maybe." (http://wayback.archive.org/web/20110629101536/http://www.ajc.com/metro/content/news/stories/2 cxntlid=inform_sr). Associated Press. Retrieved 2009-09-10.
8. ^ Bobrick, 148
9. ^ The Billerica Colonial Minute Men; *The Thomas Ditson story* (http://www.bcmm.us/yankee_doodle.htm); retrieved on January 31, 2013.
10. ^ *Town History and Genealogy* (http://web.archive.org/web/20090626220816/http://www.billericalibrary.org/main/genealogy/yankee.htm); retrieved on October 20, 2008

11. ^ The Boston Yankee Doodle Ballad; retrieved on July 3, 2010 (http://www.americanmusicpreservation.com/BostonYankeeDoodle.htm)
12. ^ Luzader, John F. (2008). *Saratoga : A Military History of the Decisive Campaign of the American Revolution*. New York: Savas Beatie. p. 335. ISBN 978-1-932714-44-9.
13. ^ Gen. George P. Morris - "Original Yankee Words", *The Patriotic Anthology*, Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc. publishers, 1941. Introduction by Carl Van Doren. Literary Guild of America, Inc., New York N.Y.
14. ^ "Yankee Doodle (Lyrics)" (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FNkcydLzuKk). YouTube. 2008-04-19. Retrieved 2009-09-10.
15. ^ Berg, Jerome S. *On the Short Waves, 1923-1945: Broadcast Listening in the Pioneer Days of Radio*. 1999, McFarland. ISBN 0-7864-0506-6, page 104
16. ^ "ESPN Classic — McEnroe was McNasty on and off the court" (http://espn.go.com/classic/biography/s/McEnroe_John.html). Espn.go.com. Retrieved 2009-09-10.

Further reading

- Bobrick, Benson (1997). *Angel in the Whirlwind*. Simon & Schuster, New York. ISBN 0-684-81060-3.

See also

- Yankee Doodle Dandy
- The Yankee Doodle Boy

External links

- Library of Congress *Yankee Doodle* music website (http://www.loc.gov/teachers/lyrical/songs/yankee_doodle.html)
- The Boston Yankee Doodle Ballad (http://www.americanmusicpreservation.com/BostonYankeeDoodle.htm)
- The free score on www.traditional-songs.com (http://www.traditional-songs.com/download_score.php?name=Yankee%20Doodle)

Writings

- Report on "The Star-Spangled Banner," "Hail Columbia," "America," "Yankee Doodle" (http://www.archive.org/details/reportonstarspa00sonngoog) by Oscar George Theodore Sonneck (1909) 2 (http://www.archive.org/details/reportonthestars000689mbp) 3 (http://www.archive.org/details/reportonthestars00sonniala) 4 (http://www.archive.org/details/reportonstarspa00divigoog)
- Famous American songs (http://www.archive.org/details/famousamericanso00kobbrich) (1906)

Historical Audio

- Yankee Doodle (http://www.archive.org/search.php?query=yankee%20doodle%20AND%20%28date%3A%5b1850%20TO%201945%5d%20OR%20collection%3A%2878rpm%29%20OR%20mediatype%3A%2878rpm%29%20OR%20collection%3Acylindertransfer%29%20AND%20mediatype%3Aaudio) (archive.org)

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