

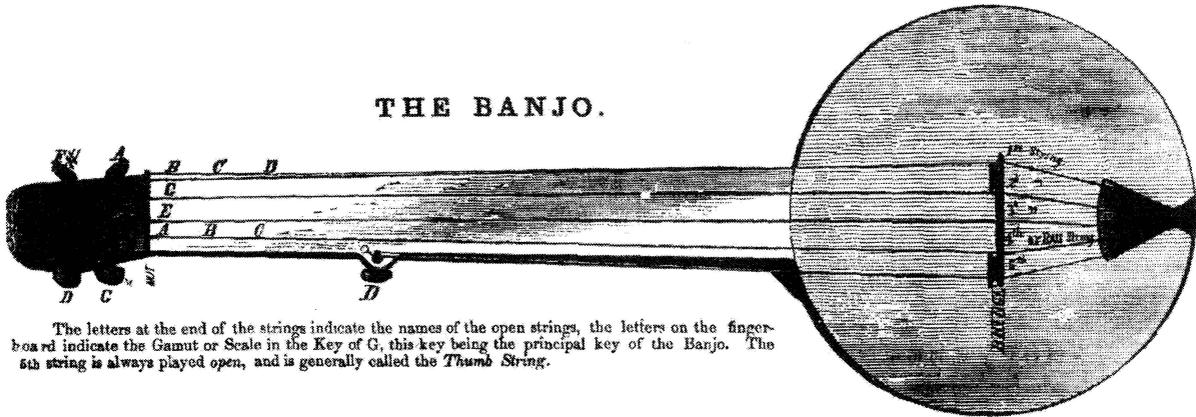
Introduction

This illustration from the cover of Buckley's New Banjo Banjo Book of 1860 is a very fine example of how to sit and hold the banjo. The dimensions should be close to what you have, if you own a 19th Century reproduction instrument. Make any effort you can to have or borrow an instrument with gut or nylgut strings, no frets, a skin head, about a 12" or 13" pot, a 25" to 27" (or close) scale length, and friction pegs. This is the ideal instrument to bring out the best in this music. The technique, sound, and feel are intrinsically bound into the old designs. Tune it low, to the original Briggs' tuning of dGDF#A or the Rice tuning (and thereafter) of eAEG#B which is a step higher. You will feel the growling, low, and haunting tones come to life as you strike the strings and set the old skin head in motion and feel the tone pot vibrate against your body. The simplest melody will bring delight as you experience it in the same way your ancestors heard it. There are a number of fine makers today, and a decent instrument can be had for a reasonable price. You will NOT find an import of a Minstrel style banjo. Appreciate the beauty of the instrument for its aesthetic appeal, and notice the uniqueness from one instrument to the next. No two will be exactly the same.



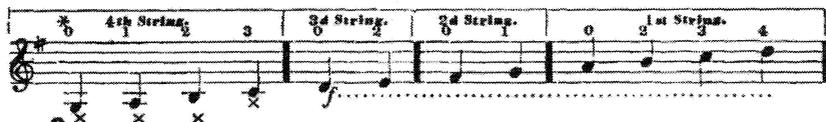
This music can be very easy to play, yet difficult to master. Of course, there is plenty of room in between these two extremes. For maximum enjoyment, please take the time to become proficient at the basic moves and skills. You can play a great deal of the material with no special preparation and enjoy yourself very much. However, many people hit a wall and never stretch beyond that. With patience, discipline, and time, you can reap the rewards of being a competent player and open up the world of Early Banjo in a different way. You will not be limited by your technique or knowledge.

THE BANJO.



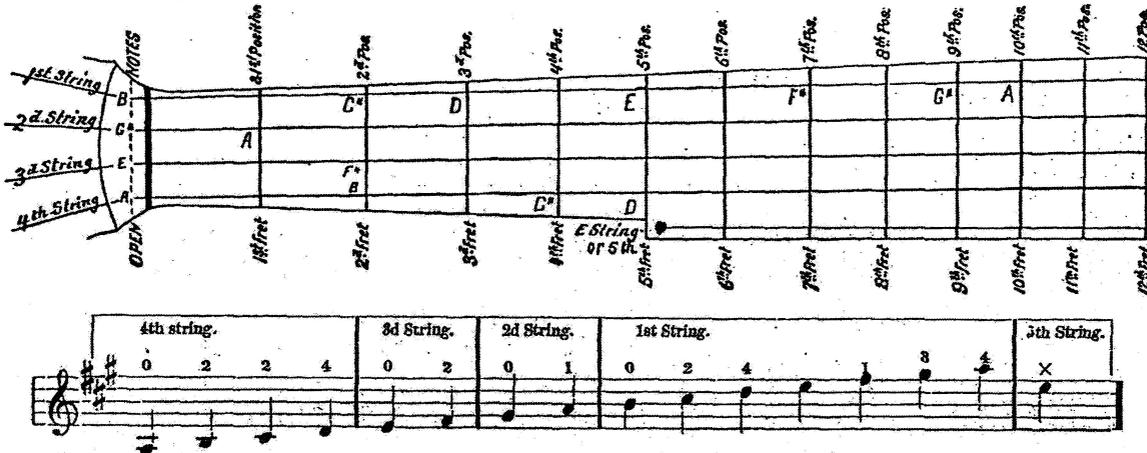
The letters at the end of the strings indicate the names of the open strings, the letters on the finger-board indicate the Gamut or Scale in the Key of G, this key being the principal key of the Banjo. The 5th string is always played open, and is generally called the *Thumb String*.

GAMUT IN THE KEY OF G.



○ Indicates an open string; 1, the first finger of the *left* hand; 2, the second finger; 3, the third finger, and 4, the fourth finger.
 ○ × Indicates the thumb of the *right* hand, and F, the first finger.

THE STANDARD SCALE OF THE BANJO, SHOWN ON THE FINGER-BOARD. TWO OCTAVES.



These diagrams provide a general orientation of the fingerboard, showing where each of the notes will sound their prescribed pitches. The top diagram is from the Briggs' Book, and the bottom one is from a later Converse Book (1886).

Early Banjo Rosetta

Briggs' Rice

The image shows two staves of musical notation. The top staff is labeled 'Briggs'' and the bottom staff is labeled 'Rice'. Both staves are in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The top staff contains a melody of quarter notes: F#4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F#4. The bottom staff contains a bass line of whole notes: G3, F#3, E3, D3, C3, B2, A2, G2.

Juba Briggs' Jig

2

The image shows two staves of musical notation. The top staff is labeled 'Juba' and the bottom staff is labeled 'Briggs' Jig'. Both staves are in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The top staff contains a melody of eighth notes: F#4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F#4. The bottom staff contains a bass line of eighth notes: G3, F#3, E3, D3, C3, B2, A2, G2. The notation includes fingerings (2, 3, 2, 3, 2, 3, 2, 3) and a double bar line with a repeat sign.

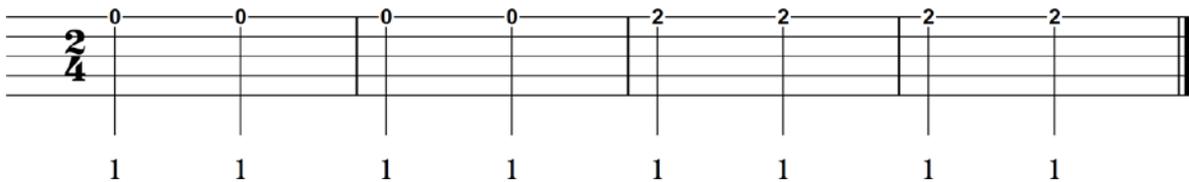
This "Early Banjo Rosetta" may be useful to those of you interested in reading regular notation. Banjo music of the 19th Century was written in two different "keys", or tunings. The Briggs' and Winner's 1864 were written in the G/D tuning shown above, and the Phil Rice of 1858 and almost every book thereafter used the A/E tuning. As you can see, when reading tab, it is not relevant which tuning you use. The intervals and relationships on the fingerboard remain the same. **Therefore, to play tab, use any banjo in any key.** To experience the music as it was, tune down to the designated pitch. Most players today tune to G/D and that is how I referenced all the music you experience in this book.

To begin with, the most basic motion is simply the hand coming down with the first fingernail hitting the first string. The finger should remain in its fixed position as it comes down. The finger is supported by bracing it against the other fingers, creating a relaxed but controlled motion as it comes down to strike the string with the back of the nail. This is called the **Half Strike**, the **Strike** being the complete motion of the finger and thumb.



The Half Strike

Rice 1858

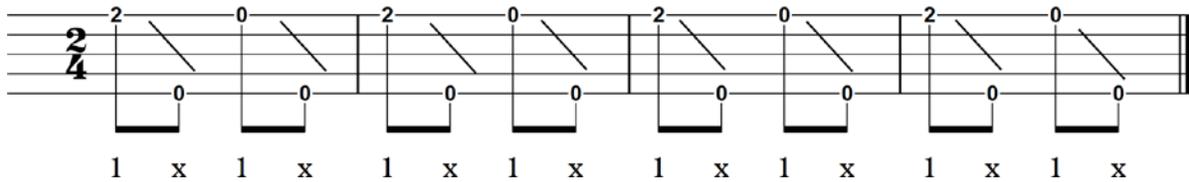


When you see the symbol “1” under the note, this represents the first finger of the right hand. In the Briggs’ notation, this will be replaced by an “F” for “finger”. “X” will represent the thumb. Try to relax, but maintain stiffness in your first finger. This will make guitar players crazy. Take the time to experiment, and make it feel right.

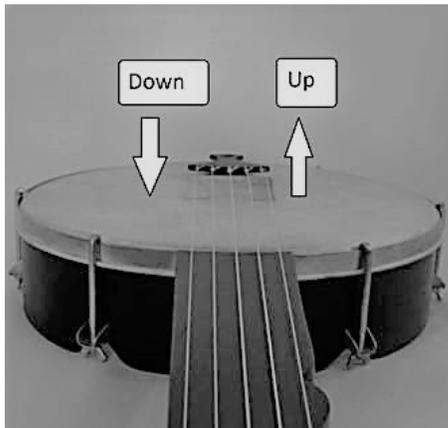
The next motion is called a **Strike**, or a **Full Strike**. This is when the hand comes down onto the strings and the finger will strike the first string with the back of the nail. The thumb comes down with the finger and goes to the fifth string but only makes the string vibrate on the way up as the hand is lifted back into its original position.



A Strike (or Combination)



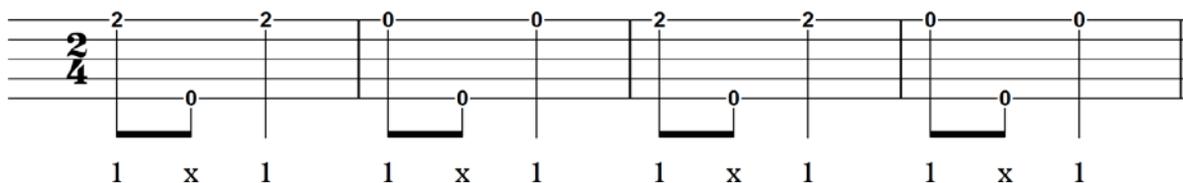
A Strike consists of two notes. **This move is essential.** Work it out well. The same movement is called a Combination by Converse and is signified by a solid line above the notes executing the Strike.



Down is a motion towards the head of the banjo - not the floor.

The hand goes down and up to play this. Although it may initially feel stiff, trust that it will flow and soon feel quite natural. Begin to think of Strikes and Combinations synonymously.

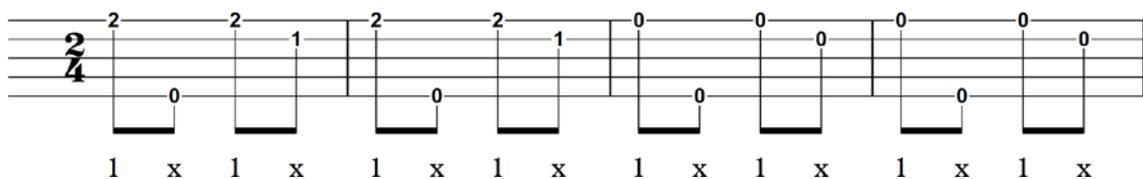
A Strike and a Half



The next movement is called a **Strike and a Half**. You play a full Strike, and then a Half Strike – two eighth notes and then a quarter note. *Short-Short-Long, Short-Short-Long*.

There is one more movement to learn, and then we will apply them to playing **Juba**. The last one is called the Double Strike. As you can guess, this is two Strikes put together with the harmony changing on the second Strike.

A Double Strike



In all these Strike” motions, try to think of the hand as either up or down.

Movements

Briggs' Banjo Instructor

No. 1

Musical notation for No. 1, starting at measure 1. The piece is in 2/4 time. The first staff shows a sequence of notes: 2, 3, 2, 0, 2, 3, 2, 0. The second staff shows a sequence of notes: 1, x, 1, x, 1, x, 1, x, 1, x, 1, x, 1, x. The notation includes a treble clef, a 2/4 time signature, and a repeat sign at the end.

No. 2

Musical notation for No. 2, starting at measure 5. The piece is in 2/4 time. The first staff shows a sequence of notes: 2, 1, 2, 0, 0, 0, 2, 1, 2, 0, 0, 0. The second staff shows a sequence of notes: 1, x, 1, x, 1, x, 1, x, 1, x, 1, x, 1, x. The notation includes a treble clef, a 2/4 time signature, and a repeat sign at the end.

No. 3

Musical notation for No. 3, starting at measure 9. The piece is in 2/4 time. The first staff shows a sequence of notes: 2, 1, 3, 2, 1, 0, 2, 1, 3, 2, 1, 0. The second staff shows a sequence of notes: 1, x, 1, x, 1, x, 1, x, 1, x, 1, x, 1, x. The notation includes a treble clef, a 2/4 time signature, and a repeat sign at the end.

No. 4

Musical notation for No. 4, starting at measure 13. The piece is in 2/4 time. The first staff shows a sequence of notes: 1, 2, 2, 0, 0, 0, 1, 2, 2, 0, 0, 0. Above the first four measures are triplets: 3, 3, 3, 3. The second staff shows a sequence of notes: 1, 1, x, 1, x, 1, 1, x, 1, x, 1, 1, x, 1, x. The notation includes a treble clef, a 2/4 time signature, and a repeat sign at the end.

No. 5

Musical notation for No. 5, starting at measure 17. The piece is in 2/4 time. The first staff shows a sequence of notes: 1, 2, 2, 1, 0, 0, 0, 0, 1, 2, 2, 1, 0, 0, 0. Above the first four measures are triplets: 3, 3, 3, 3. The second staff shows a sequence of notes: 1, 1, x, 1, x, 1, 1, x, 1, x, 1, 1, x, 1, x. The notation includes a treble clef, a 2/4 time signature, and a repeat sign at the end.

Juba

Rice 1858

2/4

1 x 1 x 1 x 1 x 1 x 1 x 1 x 1 x

5

1 x 1 1 x 1 1 x 1 1 x 1

9

1 x 1 x 1 x 1 x 1 x 1 x 1 x 1 x

FIRST LESSON.

JUBA, A JIG DANCE.

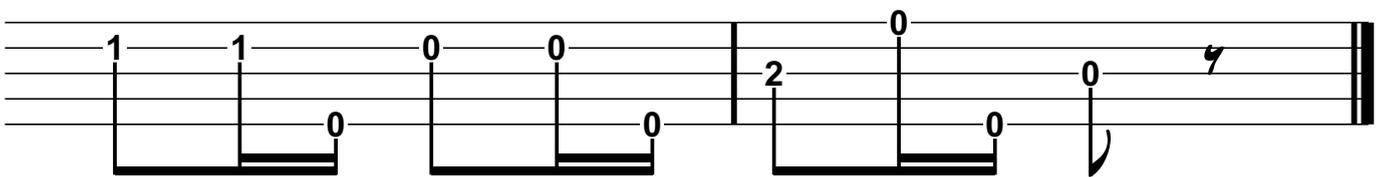
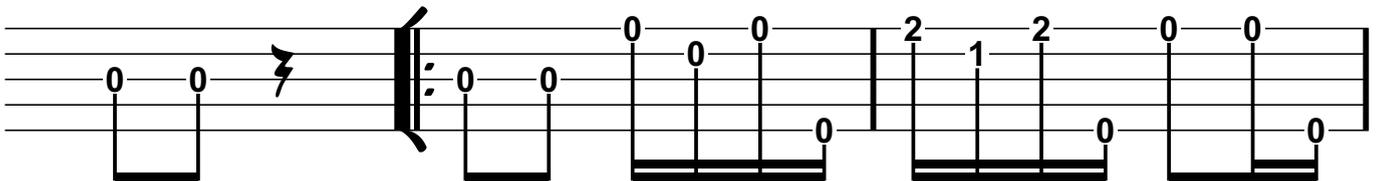
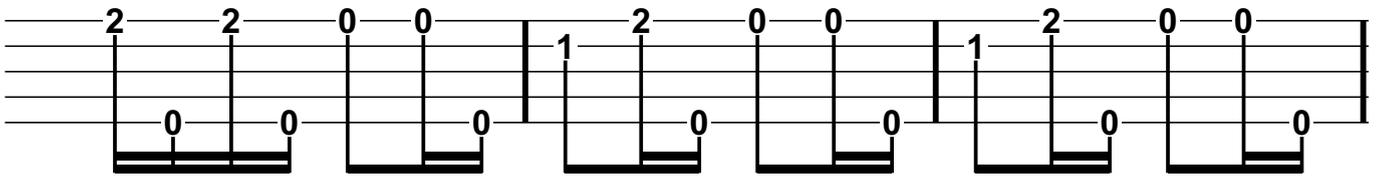
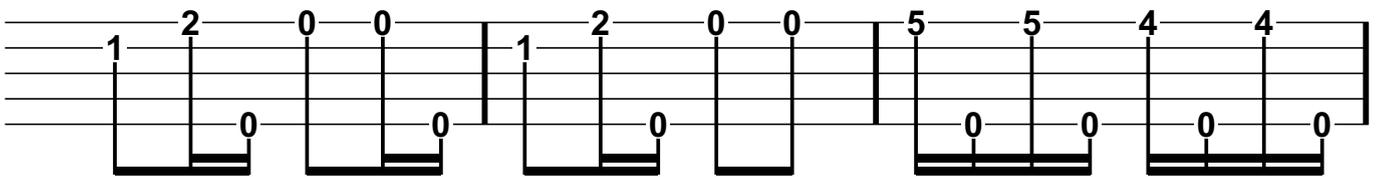
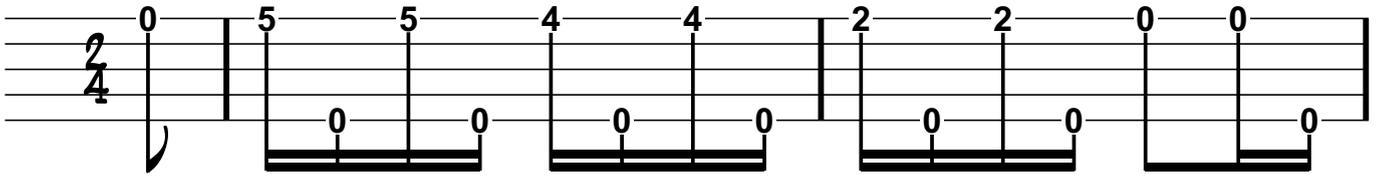
LEFT HAND 1st strike 2d strike Strike Strike Strike Strike Strike Strike
RIGHT HAND 1 x 1 x 1 x 1 x 1 x 1 x 1 x 1 x

Strike and a Half Strike and a Half Strike Half Strike Half
1 x 1 1 x 1 1 x 1 1 x 1

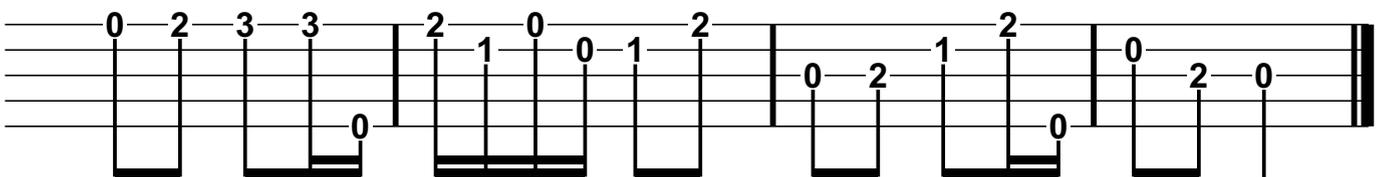
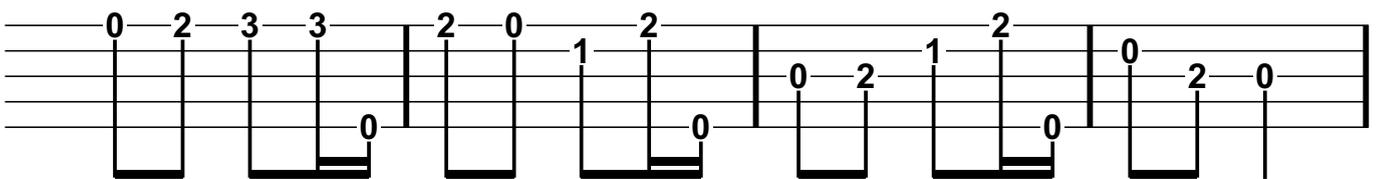
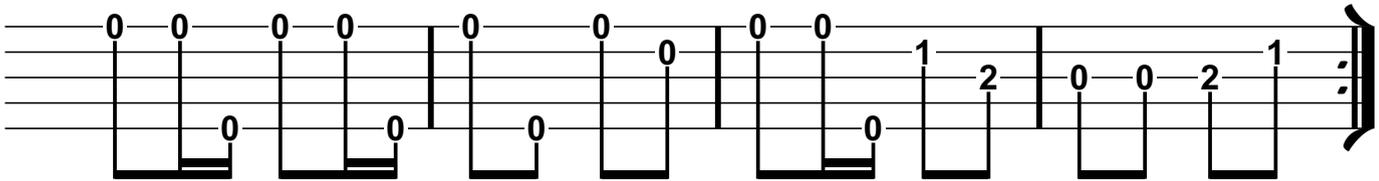
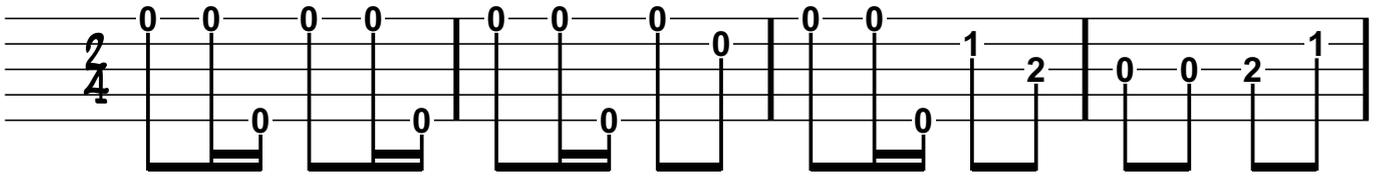
A Juba Fingers Double up Double Fingers Double up
Count 1 x 1 x 1 x 1 x 1 x 1 x

Make "Juba" the very first tune in your repertoire.

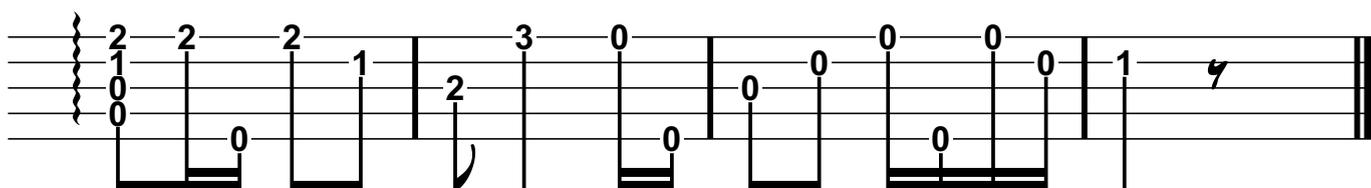
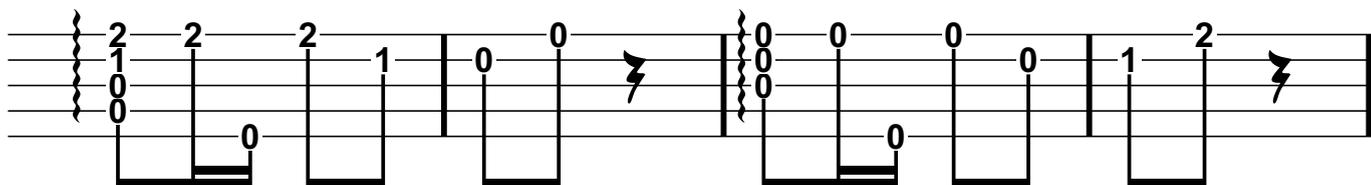
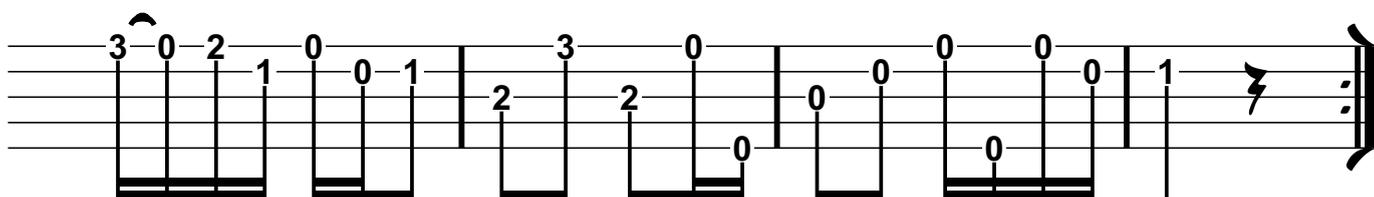
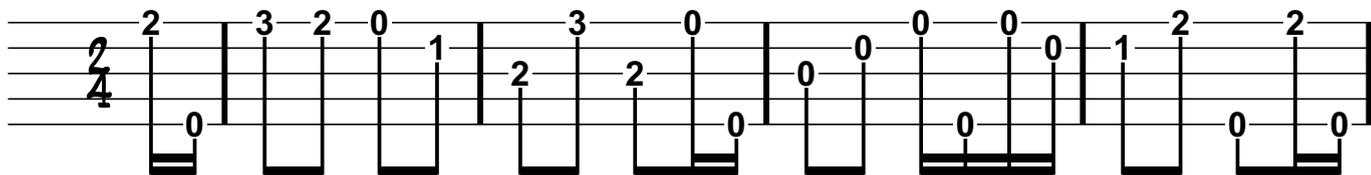
OLD JOE



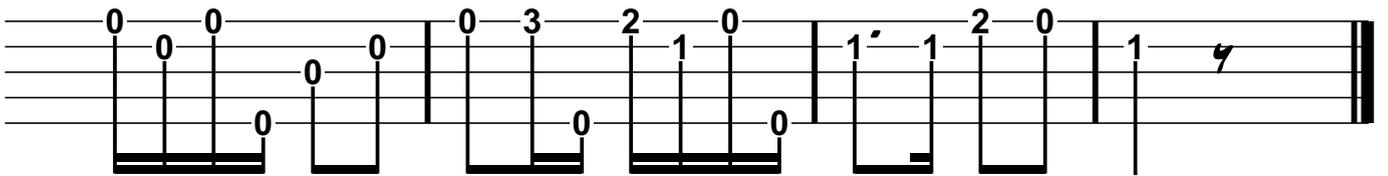
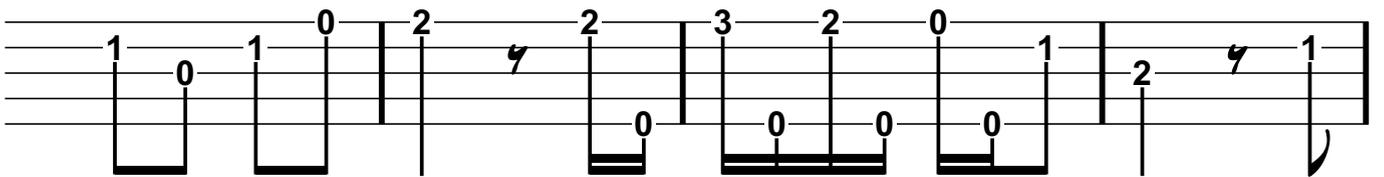
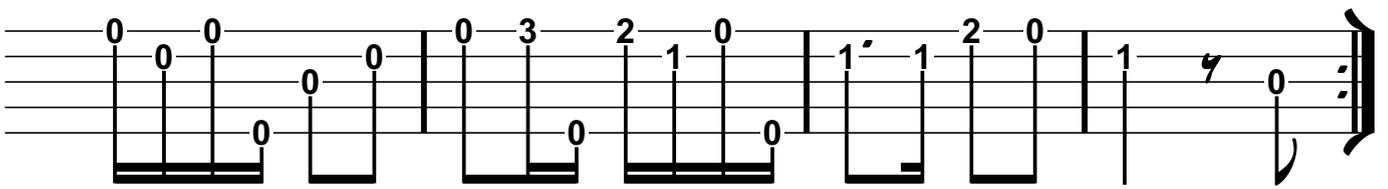
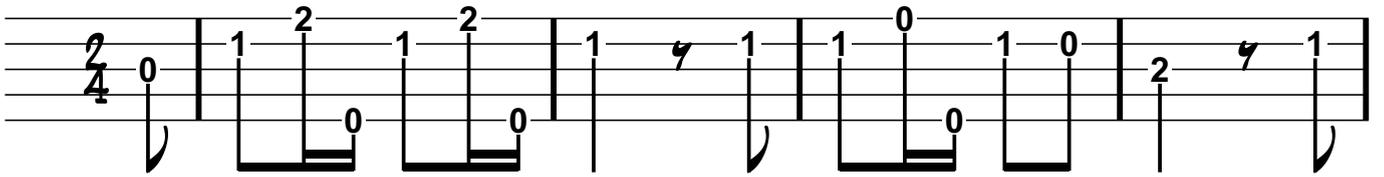
WALK ALONG JOHN



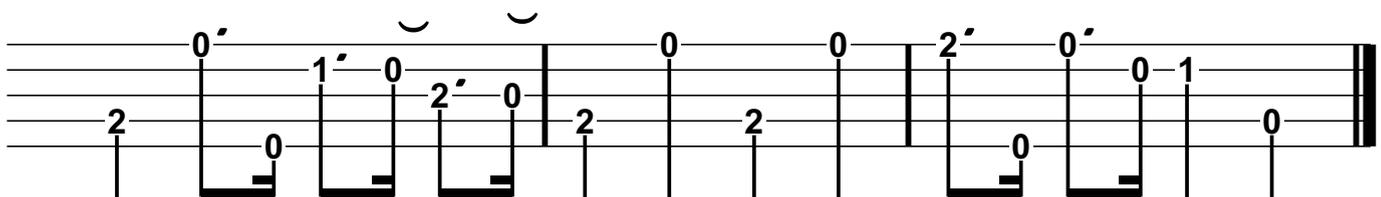
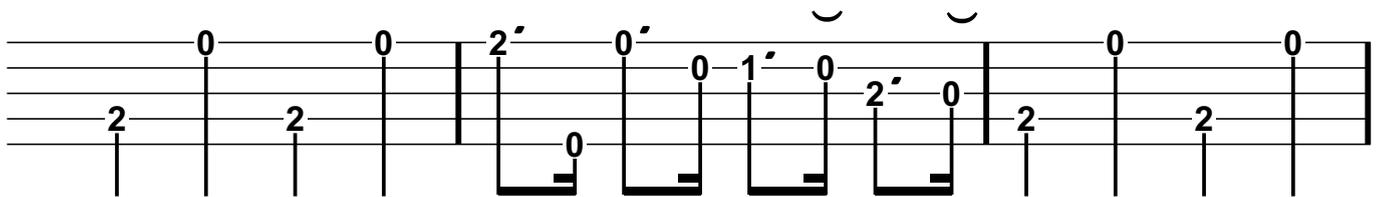
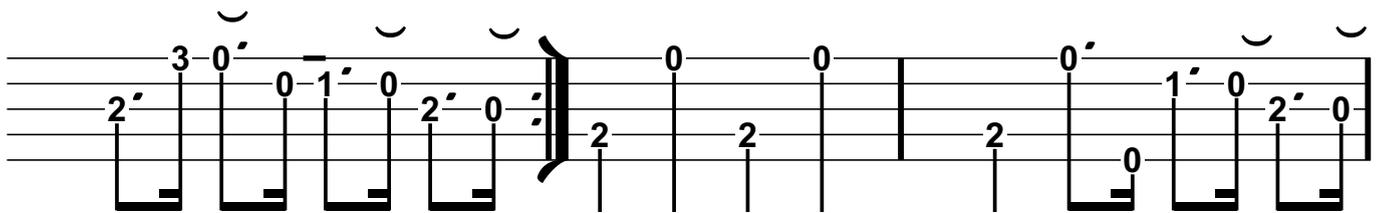
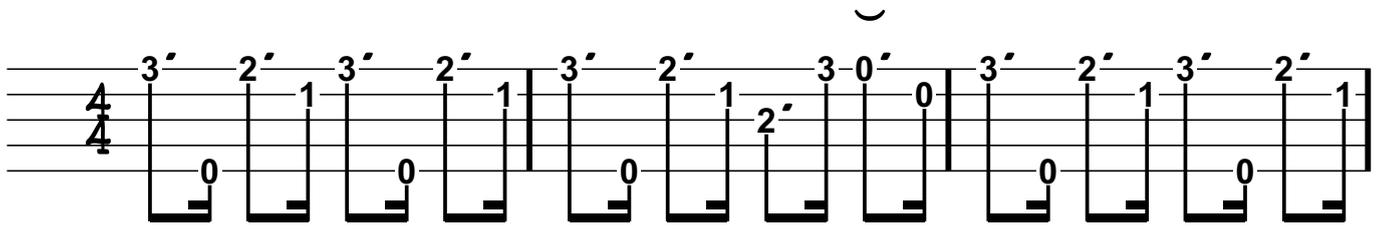
GIT UP IN DE MORNIN



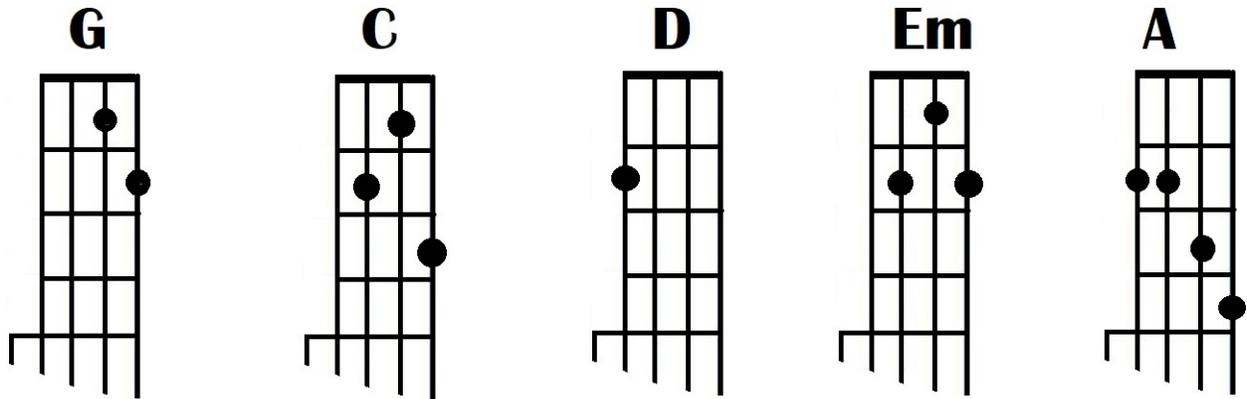
LUCY NEAL



RUMSEY'S JIG



Banjo Chords



Use these chords to strum the banjo for accompaniment.