



# Arkansas Traveler Dialog

CHAPTERS OF ARKANSAS HISTORY • A PUBLICATION OF HISTORIC ARKANSAS MUSEUM



words.” We will never know. But we know these words. That’s because the Arkansas Traveler painting is based on one of the most famous conversations of all time.

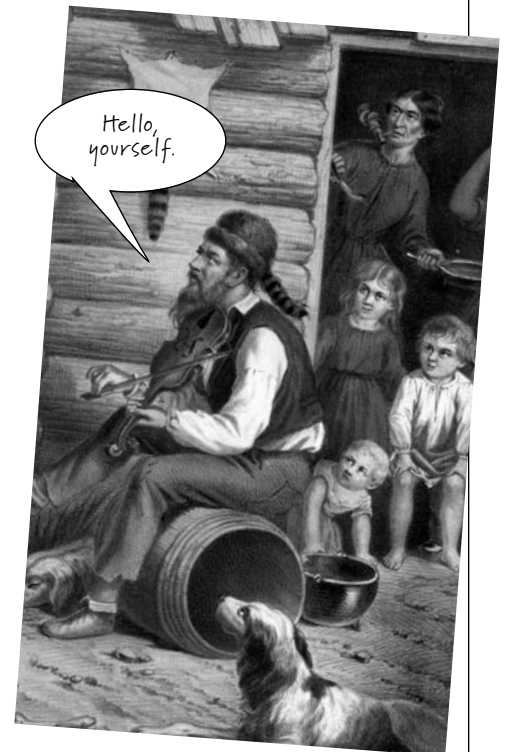
Sandford Faulkner told the story first. Faulkner was an Arkansas farmer and a lawyer in the early 1800s. He was a charming man who could play the fiddle, tell a good story and entertain people at parties.

One time Faulkner started telling a story that he said happened to him recently. He said he became lost on his way home from court. Just when he was about to worry, he heard fiddle music in the distance. He followed the sound and came upon a man and his family in a run down log cabin.

The man didn’t stop fiddling when Faulkner arrived. He kept playing part of a tune over and over and over again. When Faulkner finally interrupted him, to ask a question, the fiddler was no help at all. Not at all.

The two men went round and round in a funny conversation with questions and answers that didn’t really answer anything.

Then the Traveler offered to teach the fiddler the rest of the tune he was playing, and things changed significantly. They changed so much there’s even a different picture to illustrate it. (More about that on page four.)



Listen—  
this painting is talking.

It was made long before film or television, but we know every word that’s being said.

“Halloo, stranger.”

“Hello, yourself.”

“Can I get to stay all night with you?”

“No, sir, you can’t get to.”

There are thousands of paintings from long-ago that may or may not “have





# The Image of the Arkansas Traveler

After telling his story many times, Sandford Faulkner became known as the Arkansas Traveler. He was famous as far away as New Orleans, where they always asked him to tell his story.

Soon others started retelling it. Not too much longer folks were telling it from the stage, like it was stand up comedy.

As you may already know, a story told over and over again begins to change. That certainly happened here. Pretty soon people said the Traveler was the fiddler on the barrel. You and I know he's the gentleman on the horse.

People who knew that the Traveler was on the horse said he was from another state. You and I know he's from Arkansas.

In some versions, the out-of-state Traveler is so frustrated by his experience with the fiddler that he says he'll never go back to Arkansas again.

So this story, that started in fun, ended up making Arkansas look bad. It spread across the country and people were laughing *at* Arkansas—not *with* it.

It became a part of our image\*—what people thought about when they heard our name

That's really too bad. For one thing, they missed how the story was about two people—two fairly smart Arkansas people—who ended up helping each other out.

They missed it as a story of music bringing people together. (More about that on page four.)

They missed that only a very clever fellow could do such clever word play.

*"Sir, can you tell me where this road goes to?"*

*"It's never gone anywhere since I've lived here; it's always thar when I git up in the mornin'."*

I guess we could laugh at the fiddler on the barrel, like we laugh at characters in a TV sitcom. But it's safer to laugh with him. He has a very quick wit. He may even be the smarter of the two.

*"Mister, you're not very smart, are you?"*

*"Well, I ain't lost."*

In many ways, the fiddler controls the whole conversation. He never gives the Traveler a straight answer—at least not until he wants to. That was kind of a tradition back then.

\* **A**bout this image thing... It's still true that some people have an image of people from the South as not very smart—or just plain lazy. They think the Arkansas Traveler story proves that point.

Some of us may have an image of people from other parts of the country as not very kind, or just plain loud and rude.

Are images always true? Do you think we should pay attention to see if we are letting an image get in our way of really knowing someone?

In the 20th century, many Arkansans wanted to turn the bad image of the Arkansas Traveler into a good one. Did it work? Find out in another Chapter of Arkansas History.

There is at least one book full of stories about the way Arkansans and others used to make up stories so they could confuse visitors. It was a way of saying, "We're going to decide when you can really be one of us, and it may take a while."

Vance Randolph collected those stories, and the book is titled We Always Lie to Strangers.





THE  
**ARKANSAS TRAVELLER**  
AND  
**RACKINSAC WALTZ,**  
*Arranged by*  
**WILLIAM CUMMING.**

Lansell, PETERS & WEBSTER — PETERS & FIELD, *in music*  
W. G. PETERS.

**LIVELY.**

**RACKINSAC WALTZ.**

967

Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1872, by W. G. Peters in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of Ohio.

## The Tune...

Sanford Faulkner played a tune to go with his story. Like the story and the painting it is called “The Arkansas Traveler,” and it has traveled around the world. In fact, it’s one of the most often-recorded tunes in American history. Hundreds of people have played and sung it.

At different times people have written words for it, too. Sometimes they’re the words of the dialog.

In the version using the dialog, the music stops and the Traveler asks a question, the fiddler gives a silly answer, and the music starts up again.

In other versions, words are sung with the tune. They range from stories about bears to patriotic words about Arkansas.

The Arkansas Traveler is one of our official state tunes.

Above is an image of one of the earliest printed copies of the notes to the tune.



# The Turn of the Tune...

On two other pages we say “there’s more about that on page four.”

Here is page four. Let’s starting learning more.

Contributing writer: Charley Sandage  
Editor: Starr Mitchell

Historic Arkansas Museum is a historic site museum, interpreting the territorial and early statehood periods of Arkansas.

The museum opens its doors daily for tours of one of the state’s oldest neighborhoods.

For information on other educational materials or for tour information, including special rates for student groups, call (501) 324-9351, or visit our website at [www.historicarkansas.org](http://www.historicarkansas.org).



200 East Third St.  
Little Rock, AR 72201  
(501) 324-9351  
TDD (501) 324-9811



An museum of the  
Department of Arkansas Heritage  
Accredited by the American  
Association of Museums

[www.historicarkansas.org](http://www.historicarkansas.org)

First, look at the picture above.

- Who’s playing the fiddle now?
- Where is the man who was sitting on the barrel?
- What happened!?

Well, like we’ve mentioned before, all through the conversation, the fiddler is playing a tune on his fiddle. He isn’t playing it very well, and he only knows one part of it.

The Traveler finally suggests that he could help the fiddler remember “the turn of that tune.” That means the other part of the tune.

When the Traveler takes the fiddle and plays the rest of the tune, everything changes. All of a sudden, the Squatter recognizes that he and the Traveler have something in common. They both love to play

the fiddle. They have something they share.

From then on, the Squatter can’t do enough to make the Traveler welcome—and the Traveler is happy to be made welcome.

Things are so different between the two men that there is a whole new picture to illustrate the difference. The title is “*The Turn of the Tune*”.

We’re still kind of like this story, here in Arkansas. We have to get past thinking about what people think of us and what we think of other people. But once we do, we make friends quicker than just about anyone.

I like the Arkansas Traveler and I’m glad it belongs to the people of Arkansas.

What do you think?

