

# Natchez Under the Hill

Musical score for "Natchez Under the Hill" in G major, 4/4 time. The score consists of five staves of music. The first staff starts with a boxed **A** and an **A** chord. The second staff starts with a **4** and an **E7** chord. The third staff starts with a **7**, has an **E7** chord, a boxed **B**, and an **A** chord. The fourth staff starts with a **11**, has an **F#m** chord, and an **A** chord. The fifth staff starts with a **14**, has an **E7** chord, and an **A** chord. The music features eighth and sixteenth notes, with a triplet of eighth notes in the first staff.

---

"Natchez Under the Hill" refers to the area along the Mississippi river that once contained all of Natchez. Gradually houses were built on the bluffs above, an "Upper Town" emerged and eventually the center of Natchez shifted.

The "under the hill" area was frequented by gamblers, river pirates, highwaymen and prostitutes and was described, in 1810, as a place such that "...for the size of it, there is not, perhaps in the world, a more dissipated spot". It was also described as the place where "the wild and lawless boatmen knowing no restraint...indulged in their caprices in every kind of rowdyism known to man...thus did those specimens of American freemen spend their leisure hours in drinking whiskey, yelling, fiddling, dancing, and fist-fighting...".

There are many versions of "Natchez Under the Hill", most of them variants of "Turkey in the Straw" or the minstrel song "Old Zip Coon". Alan Jabbour sees the roots of the tune in the English country dance melody "The Rose Tree" while others note the similarities to the English morris dance tune "Old Mother Oxford".

It was first published in this country in George P. Knauff's **Virginia Reels**, volume I (1839).

It was also printed in Beisswenger & McCann's **Ozarks Fiddle Music** (2008), Chase's **American Folk Tales and Songs** (1956), Thede's **The Fiddle Book** (1967), Ford's **Traditional Music in America** (1940), Phillips's **Traditional American Fiddle Tunes** (1994) and Silberberg's **Tunes I Learned at Tractor Tavern** (2002).

My favorite version is the one played by Adam Hurt and Megan Lynch Chowning on their **Inside Out** CD. I haven't been able to track down the sheet music or abc file version of it yet so the version given here is, I think, from John Hartford. It sounds less like "Turkey in the Straw" than most of the others. Somehow, when I think of Adam Hurt's version I also recall "Johnnie Don't Get Drunk".