

This diagram shows the names of notes sounded when the strings are fretted up the neck while in G tuning.

The notes seen on the standard sheet music staff lines correspond to the open and fretted notes on the tab lines directly below those sheet music lines. *Ledger lines* are the small horizontal lines placed above standard music staff lines as the notes get higher in pitch.

The diagram illustrates a guitar neck in G tuning. The strings are labeled as follows: D (top), D (second), G (third), D (fourth), and G (bottom). The fretboard is shown with frets 0 through 19. Below the neck, five sets of musical notation and tablature are provided for each string, showing the notes and their corresponding fret numbers.

D or first string: Notes: D, D[#]/E^b, E, F, F[#]/G^b, G, G[#]/A^b, A, A[#]/B^b, B, C, C[#]/D^b, D, D[#]/E^b, E, F, F[#]/G^b, G, G[#]/A^b, A. Tab: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19.

B or second string: Notes: B, C, C[#]/D^b, D, D[#]/E^b, E, F, F[#]/G^b, G, G[#]/A^b, A, A[#]/B^b, B, C, C[#]/D^b, D, D[#]/E^b, E, F, F[#]/G^b. Tab: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19.

G or third string: Notes: G, G[#]/A^b, A, A[#]/B^b, B, C, C[#]/D^b, D, D[#]/E^b, E, F, F[#]/G^b, G, G[#]/A^b, A, A[#]/B^b, B, C, C[#]/D^b, D. Tab: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19.

D or fourth string: Notes: D, D[#]/E^b, E, F, F[#]/G^b, G, G[#]/A^b, A, A[#]/B^b, B, C, C[#]/D^b, D, D[#]/E^b, E, F, F[#]/G^b, G, G[#]/A^b, A. Tab: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19.

G or fifth string: Notes: G, G[#]/A^b, A, A[#]/B^b, B, C, C[#]/D^b, D, D[#]/E^b, E, F, F[#]/G^b, G, G[#]/A^b, A. Tab: 0 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19.

EXERCISE VIII: Advanced Left-Hand Techniques

Put your banjo back into G tuning by raising the fourth string C up to the note D. Before moving on to some advanced left-hand techniques, try playing two variations of a reverse roll where the "M" of TIM immediately becomes the "M" of MIT.



TRACK 34

Play many times

Play many times

When you can play the above patterns smoothly, move on to the two patterns below and play them over and over until they become second nature to you.

The slide movement with the follow-up notes is an often-used *lick* or *riff* that can lead up to a break or fall at the end of breaks within a song. Note that as the left-hand middle finger finishes making the slide from the second fret to the fourth fret, the right-hand middle finger is simultaneously picking the first string:



TRACK 35

Play many times

Play many times

As a review, practice sliding while playing the alternating thumb pattern over and over:

Play many times

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MY LIFE AND TIMES

THEY SAY THAT TIME FLIES BY. "They" are right. Sometimes it's hard for me to believe that I've been playing banjo for over seventy-five years.

I grew up in the southwestern Piedmont section of North Carolina, and for some reason that region was a hotbed for 5-string banjo pickers. I've never heard of any other place in the world at that time where so many banjo players were picking two- and sometimes three-finger styles like they were in that one remote area of the United States.



The old home place

I began learning to play banjo at the age of four. I learned to pick with two fingers, using my thumb and index finger. As I grew older I dreamed of playing three-finger style, which I had heard from time to time. The year was 1934, and I was ten years old on the day my dream finally came true.

My brother, Horace, and I had been arguing as kids will sometimes do. I grabbed a banjo and took it into another room. I was angry and wanted to be left alone. I sat down and began to pick, hoping to get the argument out of my mind.

Anyway, I was sitting there in the room picking the tune "Reuben" in D tuning and daydreaming at the same time. I remember looking down at my right hand and waking up from the daydreams. My eyes must have gotten bigger than baseballs—I was picking with three fingers!

I had never felt as excited in all of my ten years of life as I did at that moment. I just kept staring at my right hand as I picked because I wanted to remember exactly what it was that my fingers were doing. It was then that I started shouting, "I got it! I got it!" I always took the banjo very seriously.

I was born into a musical family on January 6, 1924. We all lived and worked on a forty-acre farm in a little community called Flint Hill, North Carolina. There are more areas than one called "Flint Hill" in North Carolina, and the one I'm referring to isn't found on any map that I've ever seen. It's located a few miles southwest of Shelby, North Carolina in Cleveland County.

The community had a two-room school, a church, and a grocery store, so there really wasn't much to do there as far as entertainment was concerned. My family didn't even have a radio for years, but we did have a lot of fun by entertaining ourselves with all the music we made. It's hard to imagine a family enjoying playing music and singing together any more than we did.



Brothers Horace on guitar and Earl on banjo

We all played music except for my younger sister. My father, George Elam Scruggs, played fiddle and banjo. He died when I was four years old. He had been sick for the eight months leading up to his death, so I don't remember him playing any music; but I do have a few good memories of him. My mother, Lula Ruppe Scruggs, played pump organ. My older brothers, Junie and Horace, both played guitar and banjo as did my two older sisters, Eula Mae and Ruby. I learned to play banjo and guitar and every now and then I would play my father's fiddle. An old Autoharp was there for anyone who wanted to take the time to tune it.

12 A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE 5-STRING BANJO

By Louise Scruggs

THERE IS NO MUSICAL SOUND MORE DEEPLY rooted in American history than that of the five-string banjo. It was played by many thousands of people all across America in the last half of the nineteenth century, and yet by 1940, the national interest in the instrument was virtually non-existent.

The five-string banjo is a unique instrument in the way it is strung, having four long strings and one short "drone" string. It also has a unique history. The direct ancestor to the banjo originated in Africa and has been referred to by several different names, including "banjar." The body of the banjar was most often an open gourd with a skin head stretched over it. The body was extended with a wooden neck, and the earliest banjars had as few as one string and as many as three. Some of the instruments were plucked, and some were even bowed. Strings were made from gut or hemp.

Africans brought it to colonial America during the days of slavery. By the end of the eighteenth century the banjo had evolved into a four-stringed instrument. Thomas Jefferson made mention of the strange instrument in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, published in 1785. Jefferson wrote "The instrument proper to them (*the slaves*) is the Banjar, which they brought hither from Africa."

Joel Walker Sweeney is widely credited for an innovation made in 1831 to the four-string banjos of Jefferson's era. He added another string, and the five-string banjo was born.

He was also an entertainer and did much to popularize the five-string banjo. Sweeney was born in Appomattox, Virginia in 1810, and at an early age, organized his own Appomattox band. He composed many songs based on the melodies created by the slaves he knew.

Billed as the "Banjo King," Sweeney was a hit on the New York stage after a wagon tour through the South. He eventually toured England where he appeared before Queen Victoria for a command performance.

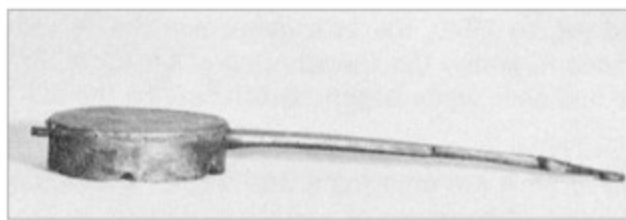
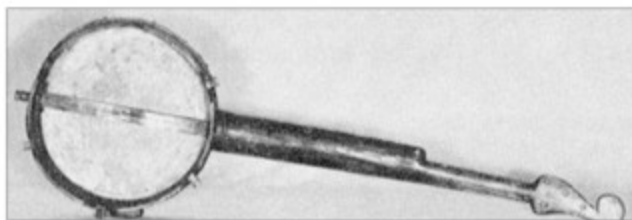


Joel Walker Sweeney

Courtesy of the History Division of the Los Angeles County Museum

In the 1840s, Sweeney is said to have encouraged a drum maker in Baltimore, Maryland, called the Boucher Company, to begin manufacturing banjos with a drum-like wooden rim as the body. One of those Sweeney banjos is now in the possession of the Los Angeles County Museum in California.

That banjo was still a far cry from today's five-string banjo. It was fretless, open-backed, and made before the advent of metal strings, which would not come along until the late 1850s. The banjo head, of course, was made of skin.



Photos of the Sweeney banjo

Courtesy of the History Division of the Los Angeles County Museum.