

# OLD-TIME TUNE OF THE WEEK – 7-22-16

## CHASED OLD SATAN

**Starry Crown** is the title of a Rhys Jones and Christina Wheeler CD and is the memorable phrase in the chorus of *Chased Old Satan*, track 13. The source recording is from the two-sided issue of a 1931 session by the Woodie Brothers with Ralph Peer called *Chased Old Satan Through the Door*. This is the first time I've chosen a song with lyrics for TOTW, as opposed to strictly instrumental. When I first heard Rhys and his wife, Christina, playing twin banjos it was the fiddles that attracted me, but once I heard the lyrics it doubled my enjoyment. The biblical exhortation of "resist the devil and he will flee" came to mind.

### Verses:

*I met old Satan down the lane  
Hit him on the head with a walking cane  
And I'm going to wear that starry crown over there*

*I chased old Satan round the stump  
Gave him a kick for every jump  
And I'm going to wear that starry crown over there*

*I run old Satan through the door  
And hit him on the head with a two-by-four  
And I'm going to wear that starry crown over there*

### Chorus:

*Over there, over there, I'm going to wear that starry crown over there  
For I got no skillet and I got no lid  
But ash cakes taste like shortening bread  
And I'm going to wear that starry crown over there.*

I wondered about ash cakes, thinking they were associated with Native Americans. I discovered they're made around the world, and include "foods such as potatoes, corn, onions, and nuts which can be roasted by burying them in hot ashes for insulation and placing live coals on top of the ashes. Ash cakes were also baked by wrapping dough in cloth, placing them in a cleaned out corner of the fireplace, and covering them with ashes and coals. They were supposed to have a delicious flavor when baked that way, but it was difficult to control the heat, or keep the bread clean. (From 'Don's Spicy Kitchen')." I watched a [video demonstrating ash cake cooking methods](#). Beginning at 4:04 you can see how cornbread is mixed and baked.



I also wondered about the words “starry crown.” *The Starry Crown* (a different song completely) appeared as a hymn as early as 1750, and is also the title of an 1869 Sunday school melody book publication. The phrase appears in the lyrics of *Down to the Valley to Pray* (one of my favorite Doc Watson songs) and in “Oh Brother, Where Art Thou” as *Down to the River to Pray*. The 1897 hymn *Will There Be Any Stars in My Crown* has been sung by Alison Krauss and the Cox Family.

Though starry crown is not a term mentioned in the bible, it’s easy to figure out the meaning – if one resisted evil temptations (chased old Satan), then a heavenly reward was forthcoming (I’m gonna wear that starry crown over there). Financial problems (I’ve got no skillet and I’ve got no lid) can be surmounted by seeking alternatives (ash cakes taste like shortening bread).

The Woodie brothers who recorded *Chased Old Satan* in 1931 were from one of the “lost provinces” of North Carolina – Ashe, Alleghany, and Watauga counties – a reference to this region’s historic isolation from the rest of North Carolina caused by the steep slopes of the Blue Ridge Mountains. There’s a CD with some tracks by Ephraim Woodie and the Henpecked Husbands, as well as other groups who recorded between 1927 and 1931: [Music from the Lost Provinces](#). Their musical heritage was rich, including the likes of G.B. Grayson, Al Hopkins, Frank Blevins, and Albert Hash.

The brothers were Ephraim, Dale, and Lawton Woodie. Ephraim was born in 1906, achieved the rank of colonel, overcoming nearly-blinding cataracts as a child, and died in 1978. He is credited as *Chased Old Satan’s* author, though we know of performers who would make this claim in order to own the song’s copyright. The song is said to have borrowed lyrics from other songs. Lawton played harmonica and Ephraim played a Gibson L-4 guitar – a present from his brother for his high school graduation the year before. They recorded for Ralph Peer, the clever, ambitious A&R (artist and repertoire) man from Okeh records, on May 29<sup>th</sup>, 1931, but only sold less than 900 records.

BHO member Mojo Monk, (Sean Barth) did research and a tab, so check out this information: [Thumb-lead banjo tab and story behind Chased Old Satan](#) You can also learn more here: [Colonel Ephraim Woodie](#).

The Woodie brothers performed with guitar and harmonica, but many recordings include banjo. Some of my favorite performers of *Chased Old Satan* are included below – Rhys Jones, The Carolina Chocolate Drops, and Uncle Earl. Enjoy!

[Original Woodie Brothers 1931 recording](#)

[Rhys Jones and Christina Wheeler](#)

[Carolina Chocolate Drops](#)

[Uncle Earl](#)

[John C. Campbell Folk School](#)

[Stairwell Sisters](#)

[Sail Away Ladies](#)

[Frailin Craig Evans and Deb duet](#)

[My clawhammer banjo version](#)

My arrangement for clawhammer banjo is simple – I basically “play the words.” I’d appreciate hearing others’ banjo styles and hope you’ll give this one a try.