

TOTW Silver Lake

Sometimes you're just listening to a good CD and a tune grabs your ear. Such was Silver Lake when I heard it on Christian Wig's CD with Mark Ward called "Come Back Boys and Feed the Horses." Christian Wig, also an author, is fascinated with history and this recording has a frontier feeling. It has three parts which descend. It ends on an unresolved chordal sound, though I resolve it the last time around..

Silver Lake was credited to fiddler Moses "Mose" Coffman. From Christian Wig's liner notes: Mose was "born in Greenbrier County, West Virginia on December 12, 1905, died in Lewisburg, West Virginia May 12, 1994. His Mennonite ancestors from Pennsylvania settled in Greenbrier County in 1788. Most of his fiddling he learned from extra family sources, particularly Edden Hammons, Glenn Gillespie and Sherman Hammons. Mose served his country in military service from 1942-1952 and returned to his family farm when his father became ill (Blech). We don't know to which lake the title refers, nor can we trace this tune back into antiquity...We first heard West Virginia's Jimmy Triplett play this tune..."

Jimmy Triplett recorded the tune on his CD "Natural History, Traditional Fiddle Tunes from West Virginia." In liner notes it's written "from Mose Coffman, Greenbrier, Co., who attributes the tune to a left-handed fiddler and horse trader named Tom Cochran."

Listen to the version that captured my attention: [Christian Wig and Mark Ward](#).

Here is Mose Coffman playing Silver Lake: [1992 recordings of Mose Coffman by Gerry Milnes](#). It's at 2:00 in the second row of recordings. The "Old Sledge" fiddle tuning is said to be used.

Another version of Silver Lake is found in the fiddling of a contemporary (nine years older than Mose) West Virginian Emery Calhoun Bailey (1896 – 1960). Listen to [Emery Bailey playing Silver Lake](#) and you can also read the history and view several photographs. The same term "Old Sledge tuning" is discussed in the notes.

Paul Kirk, Jr., with our own Stephen Rapp, plays [Emery Bailey's Silver Lake](#) and gave this written explanation on Aug 12, 2018: "This week I am featuring a tune called Emery Bailey, which I learned from my friend Jake Blount. It is a version of the tune Silver Lake, played by West Virginia fiddler Emery Bailey. Though it utilizes the same tuning, the tune differs quite a bit from the (perhaps) better-known Silver Lake from WV fiddler Mose Coffman (1905-1994). Emery Bailey (1896-1960) was the son of Winfield Bailey and Elizabeth Hicks, and was from Calhoun County, WV. His name is also spelled 'Emory,' but it is spelled Emery on his gravestone, so I went with that spelling."

In discussing tuning, let me explain why I played Silver Lake with my Gold Tone cello banjo tuned down four steps from standard G tuning to cGCEG. The tune is in the key of C. Playing it in standard double C tuning wasn't nearly as easy as playing in the equivalent G tuning, tuned down on the cello banjo to still be in the key of C. The first way goes to the 10th fret and

descends from there. On the cello banjo I go no higher than the 7th fret. I often use the cello banjo that way to ease the fingering required and have it tuned like a baritone banjo, 4-5 steps below, and not an octave below standard as is possible on a cello banjo. It's a treat to play this banjo, with its enormous 14" head, lower pitch and deep tone. The neck is a short-neck and so my left arm doesn't have to stretch very far. Some players like to go way up the neck. What is your preference?

Tater Joe provided [musical notation](#) from the fiddling of a favorite fiddler of mine, Rhys Jones in a CD [All I've Gots Done Gone](#), where you can hear Silver Lake and purchase the CD very reasonably, which I did. You can hear the same version on youtube: [Rhys Jones' Silver Lake](#). He repeats the A part, which I don't do, and the B part has a different chordal feel.

Finally, here is the great Lynn Chirps Smith with a 2004 recording on Fiddle Hangout: [Silver Lake solo fiddle](#).