TOTW, Last of Sizemore (Hiram Stamper)

Bruce Greene’s CD “Five Miles of Ellum Woods” keeps offering me good tunes for learning.  This time 'round it’s Last of Sizemore, a three-part tune. Though the title belongs to a few other tunes which may be related, this version is distinctively appealing and will be the focus for this Tune of the Week.

It sources to a recording by Bruce Greene of [Hiram Stamper](https://libraryguides.berea.edu/soundarchives/hiramstamper) (1893 - 1992), Kentucky fiddler and father of Art Stamper.  Hiram learned a lot of his solo fiddle tunes from Civil War veterans, and therefore used lots of drones and double stops, according to Bruce. It’s a rather crooked tune in the original recording, which you can hear in the link below. Bruce Greene plays it nicely on Five Miles of Ellum Wood, but I don’t have a link to share here. Below there’s a link of a young fiddler playing similarly to Bruce’s rendition.

A talented fiddler on the scene, George Jackson, originally from New Zealand, who recently became a citizen of the United States, plays the tune artfully. His fiddling helped me arrange it for clawhammer banjo (though I chose to exclude some of the crookedness).  George plays with Tall Poppy Stringband and you can hear the gentle banjo of Cameron DeWhitt.  George’s fiddling reminds one of Stuart Duncan’s fiddling, which is a big complement!  I featured an original tune of his, [Dorrigo](https://www.banjohangout.org/archive/357480), in a past TOTW.

In liner notes from a Jim Taylor civil war CD, according to Hiram Stamper “this tune was connected to a story about a soldier named Sizemore who, for reasons that are now obscure, was taken up a hollow and shot.  Stamper said he learned the tune and the story from Dan Triplett, Shade Sloan, and Silas Terry, who were all Civil War veterans and fiddle players.” (Thanks, Carolan Faubel, for the liner note info.)

Here is a quick mention of the other versions of Last of Sizemore from Luther Strong, Santford Kelly and Asher Boyd:

Luther Strong was recorded by Jeff Titon, nicely played by Rayna Gellert.

Jim Taylor made a CD with several civil war tunes and included Last of Sizemore, based on the Santford Kelly version, recorded by Bruce Greene and Peter Hooven.  This Last of Sizemore has a more cheerful feel to it, with no minor chords.

The Lomax’s recorded Boyd Asher in 1937.  The notes on the Lomax website say it was "played by one of the Sizemore’s on the scaffold before he was hanged," as stated on an “AFS card.”

Three of The Last of Sizemore versions are in Jeff Titon’s book Old-Time Kentucky Fiddle Tunes – Hiram Stamper, Luther Strong, and Santford Kelly.  Titon noted that rather than a hanged fiddler tune, Stamper related that Sizemore was a Civil War prisoner who was brought “up a holler and shot.”  Titon also relates that Santford Kelly claimed that Sizemore was on his deathbed playing the tune and a gardener overheard it, learned it, and named it after him.

No matter what the actual history of the tune, whether it was a hanging or the killing of a prisoner or something else, listening to the three parts, as George Jackson played, lets me imagine somber moments in the A and B parts for the fiddler about to die.  But an energizing C part takes over, where a bugle-like pronouncement is made, as if Mr. Sizemore, in his last moments, is confident in having lived his life rightly.

My arrangement uses gCGCE tuning, allowing for capoing on the second fret for the key of D.  Using a tuned-up first string made fingering much easier. There are several skipped notes and the thumb grabs the first string in some of these to get the highest note in the C part.  Let’s see some other banjos take a crack at this one!

[Hiram Stamper's Last of Sizemore](https://www.slippery-hill.com/content/last-sizemore)

[Tall Poppy Stringband's Last of Sizemore](https://tallpoppystringband.bandcamp.com/track/last-of-sizemore)

[George Jackson solo](https://youtu.be/gp_QYzrt1lc?si=rzRg-FTPUjaX_rdx)

[George Jackson, plus explanation of solo fiddling](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j996m9ix6cs)

[Ben Kiser](https://youtu.be/ArBagnFMKFs?si=EW8HBO1C7rsEQ80q)

[Luther Strong](https://www.slippery-hill.com/content/last-sizemore-3)

[Santford Kelly](https://fieldrecorder.bandcamp.com/track/last-of-sizemore)

[Boyd Asher](https://lomaxky.omeka.net/items/show/939)