

Winds of Shiloh

Winds of Shiloh is a rare gem I like to call a “lyrical tune” with its flowing melody that seems to tell a story. J.P. Fraley (1923 - 2011), the hospitable Kentucky fiddler of Carter County who began a long-running festival on his property, composed several tunes. In the liner notes of his “Maysville” CD it states, “The Winds of Shiloh was actually composed after visiting the solemn landscape of the Gettysburg battlefield, with casualties of 51,000. But J.P. Felt that ‘Shiloh’ somehow sounded better in the title.” Not knowing why and how the name Shiloh came to J.P.’s mind, I began researching “Shiloh.”

I began with biblical history, as that’s where I first heard of Shiloh, a town whose location was in the region of Samaria now in present day Israel. According to the Bible and the Talmud, Shiloh was the town where the Tabernacle once stood for 369 years -- the original structure which housed the Ark of the Covenant which contained the Ten Commandments-- built as per Moses’ instructions. At one point the Ark was taken from Shiloh into battle by the Israelis and then captured by the Philistines. Israel lost 30,000 soldiers in that battle. You can read about it beginning in [1 Samuel, Ch. 4](#) and research the archeological finds. The Philistines released the Ark after it caused major and mysterious havoc in the foreign temple and was attributed to curses and plagues upon the local people wherever it was kept. The Ark was at last put on a cart with oxen and without a driver, but somehow found its way back to the Israelites and back to Shiloh.

This is probably not what occurred in J.P.’s mind when he created the title. It turns out that in actuality there was a Battle of Shiloh in Pittsburgh Landing, Tennessee -- a crucial victory for the Union during the Civil War on April 7, 1862. At that point in the war the battle was the bloodiest so far, with more than 23,000 dead and wounded. There was a nearby church named Shiloh, which actually means “place of peace” or “messiah,” and it became the name given that battle, though peace was not to come any time soon.

My real impression of the tune is that Shiloh has a melody you’d associate with Native American music. The drawn-out melody in G and Cm and its cascading notes sing out mournfully, yet beautifully.

There isn’t too much to find as far as on-line recordings. Notably, Erynn Marshall and Chris Coole recorded an album together called “Meet Me in the Music,” with tunes from Kentucky, West Virginia, and Virginia. [The Winds of Shiloh](#) is included. On Fiddle Hangout you can hear a nice duet featuring fiddler [Terry Thatcher](#). On Banjo Hangout we have [Steve Jones](#).

I recorded it several years ago and was happy then to have memorized the rather tricky cascading run down the neck. I played in sawmill tuning and ranged from the open fourth string to the 13th fret of the first string. I figured that to play along with J.P. I would need the lower tuning of my cello banjo to match his fiddle. Years later I recorded it again for the recent 2023 Online Old-Time Banjo Contest. The fact that I don’t win or place in three years of competition isn’t a concern. The fellowship of competitors, as well as the hosts, is unbeatable and the banjo playing of many contestants excellent, plus I can do it all from my rocking chair at home.

If you read music, here is [musical notation](#).

Have a listen and see if the tune entrances you, too:

[J.P. and Annadeene Fraley](#)