

## TOTW Yearlings in the Canebrake/Cattle in the Cane

There's a musical intensity in Yearlings in the Canebrake that ropes you in. The tune's history leads to the southwest, known well for its cattle country. As you listen can you imagine frisky young bull calves and heifers held in by a natural fence? Captain Moses J. Bonner recorded the tune in 1925 at age 78. He lived from 1847 – 1939, was born in Franklin Co., Alabama and lived in Fort Worth, Texas. He was a Confederate veteran who played on the very first radio barn dance broadcast in Fort Worth on Jan. 4, 1933.

Yearlings in the Canebrake also goes by Cattle in the Cane (or Canebrake) and has been called a bluegrass/Irish mixolydian tune. Anyone who knows its Irish roots might enlighten us as to its origins. I first heard Gerry Milnes' Cattle in the Cane (learned from Glen Smith) and arranged it for clawhammer banjo. Upon listening to Capt. Bonner, I heard similarity. When I first posted Cattle in the Cane six years ago, Don Borchelt had this astute comment: "I recently learned a closely related tune called Yearlings in the Canebreak. The A parts are almost identical, but where the B part of Cattle goes to mixolydian, the B part of Yearlings goes to major; where the Cattle melody goes from the A to the G chord, Yearlings moves from A to D. Interesting."

The tune is found from coast to coast, as well as places in between. A 1968 Cattle in the Cane recording with fancier fiddling comes from Bill Northcutt (1935-1992) of the Houston region of Texas. It made the bluegrass circuit with players such as Tony Rice and Richard Green. Both Art and Charlie Stamper from Kentucky knew it. It's been recorded in the old-time style by Greg Canote of Washington state all the way to Mary Z Cox in Florida. When you listen to them all you hear the variations and individual expression that keep a tune alive and evolving.

An interesting description of [Yearlings in the Canebrake](#) is found in the Traditional Tune Archive with a quote by President Theodore Roosevelt describing canebrakes in Louisiana: *The canebrakes stretch along the slight rises of ground, often extending for miles, forming one of the most striking and interesting features of the country. They choke out other growths, the feathery, graceful canes standing in ranks, tall, slender, serried, each but a few inches from his brother, and springing to a height of fifteen or twenty feet. They look like bamboos; they are well-nigh impenetrable to a man on horseback; even on foot they make difficult walking unless free use is made of the heavy bush-knife. It is impossible to see through them for more than fifteen or twenty paces and often for not half that distance. Bears make their lairs in them, and they are the refuge for hunted things. You can see why pioneers may have used canebrakes as their fencing. The link also has a photo of Captain Bonner with his sons.*

Here are several recordings of both Yearlings in the Canebrake and Cattle in the Cane. If you search on-line there are bluegrass versions, too, with players such as Tony Rice, Norman

Blake, Foghorn Stringband and Monroe fiddler Richard Green. My arrangement portrays Captain Bonner's Yearlings in the Canebrake, then Gerry Milnes' Cattle in the Cane.

[Captain M. J. Bonner, 1925 recording](#)

[Bill Northcutt, 1968 recording](#)

[Mary Z Cox with Kerry Blech, Yearlings in the Canebrake](#)

[Lew Hendrix, Cattle in the Cane](#)

[Charlie Stamper and J.D. Wilkes, Cattle in the Cane](#)

[Col. J.D. Wilkes, Cattle in the Cane](#)

[Deseret String Band, Yearlings in the Canebrake](#)

[Kerry Blech and Bob Blaham, Yearlings in the Canebrake](#)