

BREAKIN' UP CHRISTMAS

Traditional Appalachian Fiddle Tune;
From the Playing of J. P. Fraley

"*Breakin' Up Christmas*" is a traditional fiddle tune. The name refers both to a period of 12 days of partying, dancing, and music making ending up on January 6th, Old Christmas day, and also a song sung during that period.

Hooray Jake, hooray John, '*Breakin' up Christmas*' all night long!
Santa Claus come, done and gone, '*Breaking up Christmas*' right along!
Don't you remember a long time ago, the old folks danced the doesey-doe!

The "*Breakin' up Christmas*" tradition is credited with originating in Northwest North Carolina and Southwest Virginia during the 1920s. In the days before television – even pre-electricity for many – residents gathered in for house parties. Out came the fiddles, banjos, dulcimers and other favorite instruments, and there'd be music and dancing until late in the evening to commemorate the 10-day period between Christmas Day and Old Christmas. Christmas in Appalachia was not always celebrated on December 25th. Whether because calendar reform in 1752 had removed 11 days, turning December 25th into January 6th, or because January 6th marked the arrival of the three wise men on the 12th day of Christmas—the Day of Epiphany (in Greek, "appearance")—, many Appalachian people celebrated Old Christmas on January 6th. During the '*Breakin up Christmas*' celebrations, party hosts moved furniture out of the house to make way for the festivities and the revelry moved from house to house. The event was said to have included one dance that resembled a cross between the Virginia Reel and a minuet. While the "*Breakin' up Christmas*" tradition waned in the days of World War II, it enjoyed a resurgence of popularity during the 1970s that continues to this day.

The tune is usually associated with the well-known, old-time fiddler, Tommy Jarrell from Mt Airy, NC, although in a 1982 interview, Jarrell indicated he'd learned it from his mentor, Preston 'Pet' McKinney, a fiddler and Civil War veteran from Lamsburg, VA. As the tune bounced back and forth over the mountains between North Carolina and Virginia, local musicians might give it a different name, speed it up, add a new twist, and come up with a 'souped-up' version. The arrangement presented here is based on a version I learned from the late JP Fraley, a master fiddler from eastern Kentucky.

~ Tull