

# OLD JOE CLARK

Traditional Old-Time and Bluegrass Song; **DATE:** Late 1800's, Journal of American Folklore 1912; **CATEGORY:** Early Country and Bluegrass Songs; **RECORDING INFO:** Fiddlin' John Carson 1923; Carter Family; Dillards; Kentucky Colonels; Clark Kessinger; Kingston Trio; **NOTES:** Bayard thinks it was originally a song tune that later became a fiddle standard and play party tune. Mike Seeger relates the local story of the origins of the tune where he lives in Rockbridge County, Va.: Joe Clark's father settled around Irish Creek, near South River, in the early 1800's. Joe Clark had a daughter, and a jilted beau is said to have written the song, out of jealousy, in the late 1800's. The Clarks have been family-style string musicians right down through the years. Another investigation determined the source of the tune to be the murder in Maryland of a traveling salesman named Herbert Brown by Joe Clark and Brown's wife Betsy sometime after the Civil War. Joe and Betsy attempted to cover up the crime by asserting that Brown was on a trip up North. This perhaps explains the verse: "Old Joe Clark killed a man/Layed him in the sand" and the chorus which includes "goodbye Betsy Brown." Virginia family band "Fiddlin'" Cowan Powers and Family's recording of the piece was the third best-selling country music record of 1924, while the Skillet Lickers (north Georgia) 1926 recording was the fourth best-selling for that year. Typically it is played A B B form.

Old Joe Clark was a good old man Nev-er did no harm said he would not  
 hoe my corn might hurt his fid-dl-ing arm Fare thee well Old Joe Clark Fare thee well I  
 say Fare thee well Old Joe Clark I am going a - way.

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**G** **F**  
 Old Joe Clark was a good old man, Never did no harm  
**G** **D** **G**  
 Said he would not hoe my corn, Might hurt his fiddling arm.

I went down to Old Joe's house, Never been there before  
 He slept on a feather bed, And I slept on the floor.

**G** **F**  
**Chorus:** Fare thee well Old Joe Clark, Fare thee well I say  
**G** **D** **G**  
 Fare thee well Old Joe Clark, I am going away

I went down to Old Joe's house, Old Joe wasn't home  
 Ate up all of Old Joe's meat, And left Old Joe the bone.

I went down to Old Joe's house, He invited me to supper  
 Stumped my toe on a table leg, And stuck my nose in the butter. *Chorus*