The melody comes from Bob Taylor, who, along with his brother Alf, was both a fiddler and a Governor of Tennessee. The brothers, who belonged to different parties, were friendly rivals and would even share a bed while out campaigning against each other (they were each in office at different times). The Taylor vs. Taylor campaign of 1886 was so amicable, in fact, that it was called “The War of the Roses.” Bob Taylor’s original name for the tune may have been “Streaking Old Fiddle,” a favorite tune of his.

A story goes that while Bob was Governor he attended a fiddle contest in Memphis and competed with a young Fiddlin’ John Carson. Taylor won, but when time came to award the prize he stepped forward and told the assembly that he believed the judges had bestowed the prize upon him only because he was the Governor of the state. He said he could never hope to play like Fiddlin’ John, and so declined the award. John Carson became a friend of Bob’s and used to campaign with him, fiddle in hand.

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