

SARAH ARMSTRONG'S

OLD REEL

Musical score for 'Sarah Armstrong's Old Reel' in G major, 2/4 time. The score consists of four staves of music. The first staff is marked with a box 'A' and has chords D, G, D, A, D, A above it. The second staff is marked with '5' and has chords D, G, D, A, A, D above it. The third staff is marked with a box 'B' and has chords D, A, G, D above it. The fourth staff is marked with '13' and has chords D, A, G, A, D above it. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 2/4. The music is written in treble clef with a common time signature.

The tune most of us know today as 'Sarah Armstrong's Reel', Sarah Armstrong herself knew as 'Old Reel'. Mrs. Sarah 'Sadie' Elizabeth Gary Armstrong (b. March 18, 1883 Gray Station, PA [now part of Derry, PA] - d. August 12, 1957 Latrobe, PA) played this tune on November 18, 1943, for songcatcher, Samuel Preston Bayard. This tune was included in Bayard's collection, *Hill Country Tunes: Instrumental Folk Music of Southwestern Pennsylvania*, published in 1944, of which Sarah Armstrong ultimately contributed 37 of the 95 tunes.

Sarah started playing fiddle at age 5, learning fiddle by watching and listening to her Uncle Laney. Uncle Laney, Sarah's father Charley, and their 3 brothers, Dan, Joss (Joshua), and Abe (Abraham) were in a band called 'The Gray Boys' and Sarah would join them on cello. In 1910, the band broke up and Sarah shifted to playing dances, radio, and theater productions with her daughter on piano and her son on guitar or banjo. Bayard notes that Sarah was eager to have her tunes recorded as she knew old time tunes were being lost. Unfortunately, there are no known audio recordings of Sarah Armstrong.