

LEATHER BRITCHES

as played by Vivian Williams, transcribed by Kitty Steetle & edited by Josh Larios

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9

13

Notes: The first measure of each part should be replaced by the fifth more often than not.

The tunes **Leather Britches (Breeches)**, **Britches Full of Stitches**, and **Lord MacDonal**d are thought to be variations of each other. Lord Macdonald's Reel was published in **Neil Gow's 3rd Collection of Strathspey Reels** (1792) and may be the source tune.¹ Many believe Sir Alexander MacDonal (1744–1795) wrote the tune himself, but he may have had nothing to do with the composition and his name became associated with it because he played and popularized it.²

Leather Britches most likely emerged in America shortly thereafter and is found in print in **Music for the Piano Dulcimer by Robert J. Rudisill** (New York and Kentucky, 1859).³ Perhaps more interestingly⁴ is that it appears on page 227-228 in **A Tour Through Indiana in 1840: The Diary of John Parsons of Petersburg, Virginia** (New York, 1920):

When we returned to the first cabin we found the young people already dancing, having induced the old fiddler to take his station in one corner, where he played in a most lugubrious fashion the old tune of "Leather Breeches."^{5 6}

The tune's title may refer to leather britches, green snap beans that are strung together with a needle and thread to dehydrate as a means of food preservation.⁷ Or Britches Full of Stitches could refer to actual leather pants stitched together as in the lyrics:

Leather breeches, full of stitches,
Mammy sewed the buttons on.⁸

As a child I remember thinking that Britches Full of Stitches was a warning that if you didn't stop whatever you were doing, you would receive corporal punishment resulting in a sore behind.

—Kitty Steetle

¹The facsimile can be found online in Google Books on page 9: https://www.google.com/books/edition/A_Third_Collection_of_Strathspey_Reels_c/1AnfujL8qjIC?gbpv=1

²[https://tunearch.org/wiki/Annotation:Lord_MacDonald_\(4\)](https://tunearch.org/wiki/Annotation:Lord_MacDonald_(4))

³https://tunearch.org/wiki/Annotation:Leather_Britches I couldn't verify this so let me know if you find this publication.

⁴To me

⁵This can be found online in Google Books on page 227-228: https://www.google.com/books/edition/A_Tour_Through_Indiana_in_1840/gN5CAAAAIAAJ?gbpv=1

⁶I'm impressed that such a spritely tune can be played 'lugubriously'.

⁷I remember seeing this as a child visiting Alabama, but I think it was at a historical society rather than at my Grandparents' house.

⁸tunearch, Samuel Preston Bayard. **Hill Country Tunes; Instrumental Folk Music of Southwestern Pennsylvania** (1945)