

# WHITESMOKE SUN / COURIER

VOLUME 2 - ISSUE 6 - JULY 2006

## Look Away!

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The composer of "Dixie",  
Daniel Decatur Emmett, ran  
away from home as a young fella  
to join a circus and travel, singing  
and playing the banjo and violin.  
One Saturday night in 1859, the  
manager of the performing troop  
asked Emmett to compose a new  
song; something lively that all the  
bands will play and the boys will  
whistle in the streets. "I'll expect  
it on Monday morning at  
rehearsal," he told Emmett

A cold and wet Sunday  
morning found an uninspired  
Emmett in the kitchen working on  
the song. Apparently his wife  
came in the room and he told her,  
"What a morning! I wish I was in  
Dixie." She then asked, "you  
keep talking about being in Dixie.  
What does it mean?" He replied  
that it meant to yearn to be south  
of the Mason and Dixon line, or  
in Dixie, where the weather is fair  
and mild. When things aren't  
going well where you are, you  
wish you were in Dixie," he told  
her. Suddenly inspired, he wrote  
the song, "I Wish I was In Dixie  
Land," in less than an hour.

But just where is Dixie and  
where did the word originate?  
According to the most common  
explanation of the name, \$10  
notes issued before 1860 by the  
Citizens' Bank of New Orleans  
and used largely by French-  
speaking residents were imprinted  
with "dix" which is French for

as the land of Dixies, or Dixie  
Land, which eventually applied to  
the entire South.

Another legend, which seems to  
make more sense, says that the  
term comes from the Dixon in  
"Mason-Dixon line," the famous  
surveyors' line that separated  
Maryland and Pennsylvania.

Yet a third theory, and possible  
the least likely, is that the term  
refers to a benevolent plantation  
owner named Dixon who was  
legendary among slaves and  
wishing to be in "Dixie" referred  
to his idyllic home.

Adding fuel to the fire is the fact  
that there appear to be no  
published citations of the word  
prior to the appearance of Daniel  
Emmett's song "Dixie" in 1859,  
though the term does appear to  
have been in use, hence Emmett's  
explanation to his wife. Since the  
Mason Dixon Line became  
widely known during the  
Missouri Compromise, it could be  
that "Dixie" is connected to the  
Mason Dixon Line.

According to historian and  
musician, Wayne Erbsen, the  
song became extremely popular,  
not only with the Southern  
soldiers, but also with those of the  
North. In fact, Lincoln said that it  
was the best song that he had ever  
heard and that the Union army  
had "won back Dixie." A further  
testament to it's popularity is that  
when there was grumbling over  
our National Anthem, Teddy  
Roosevelt is reported to have  
suggested the song "Dixie" as a  
replacement! Imagine that!

Whatever its true origin, the  
song is still very popular today,  
especially at reenactments. For  
many, the song conjures up  
thoughts of a "happy place,"  
before Sherman's arrival, where  
beautiful plantation homes  
surrounded by weeping willows  
swaying in the gentle breeze  
symbolized a slower paced life.

in column to the tune, I'm sure  
the spectators are taken back to a  
by-gone antebellum era where  
"ole times they are not forgotten!"