

Almost any time a group of musicians gets together to play sea shanties someone will break out with "The Drunken Sailor." It is one of the best-known shanties.



Bob Bob Zentz Playing a Sea Shanty on his Concertina

Here is the refrain...and three popular verses:

What shall we do with a drunken sailor?  
What shall we do with a drunken sailor?  
What shall we do with a drunken sailor?  
Earl-eye in the morning!

Hooray and up she rises

Hooray and up she rises  
Hooray and up she rises  
Earl-eye in the morning!

Put him in a longboat 'til he's sober  
Put him in a longboat 'til he's sober  
Put him in a longboat 'til he's sober  
Earl-eye in the morning!

Hooray and up she rises  
Hooray and up she rises  
Hooray and up she rises  
Earl-eye in the morning!

Shave his belly with a rusty razor  
Shave his belly with a rusty razor  
Shave his belly with a rusty razor  
Earl-eye in the morning!

Hooray and up she rises  
Hooray and up she rises  
Hooray and up she rises  
Earl-eye in the morning!

Give 'im a hair of the dog that bit him  
Give 'im a hair of the dog that bit him  
Give 'im a hair of the dog that bit him  
Earl-eye in the morning!

Hooray and up she rises  
Hooray and up she rises  
Hooray and up she rises  
Earl-eye in the morning!

According to Wikipedia, "The shanty was sung to accompany certain work tasks aboard sailing ships, especially those that required a bright walking pace. It is believed to originate in the early 19th century or before, during a period when ships' crews, especially those of

military vessels, were large enough to permit hauling a rope whilst simply marching along the deck.”

The earliest mention of this song dates to 1841, but many researchers believe it is as old as 1820, or even earlier. The verses suggest various ways to punish a drunken sailor. Many verses are simply created on the spot as the song is performed. One particularly intriguing verse is “Give 'im a hair of the dog that bit him,” usually attributed to Burl Ives in his 1956 LP “Down to the Sea in Ships.”

I was aware that the “hair of a dog that bit him” refers to an alcoholic drink taken to cure a hangover, but I wondered where that expression originated. Then, not long ago, I read this passage in “The Adventures of John Nicol [b. in Edinburgh, 1755], Mariner, During Thirty Years at Sea”:

“I was on shore for a good while at Wampoa [Pazhou Island, China], making candles, for our voyage home.... After the candles were made, I [proceeded] to repair the cooper work, and screen sand and dry it, to pack the tea-boxes for our voyage home. One day, a boy was meddling rather freely with the articles belonging to me. Neptune [Nicol’s dog] bit him. I was extremely sorry for it, and...dressed the boy’s hurt, which was not severe. I gave the boy a few cass [small brass coins] who went away quite pleased. In a short time after, I saw him coming back, and his father leading him. I looked for squalls; but the father only asked a few hairs out from under Neptune’s fore leg, close to the body; he would take them from no other part, and stuck them all over the wound. He went away content. I had often heard, when a person had been tipsy the evening before, people tell him to take a hair of the dog that bit him, but never saw it in the literal sense before.”

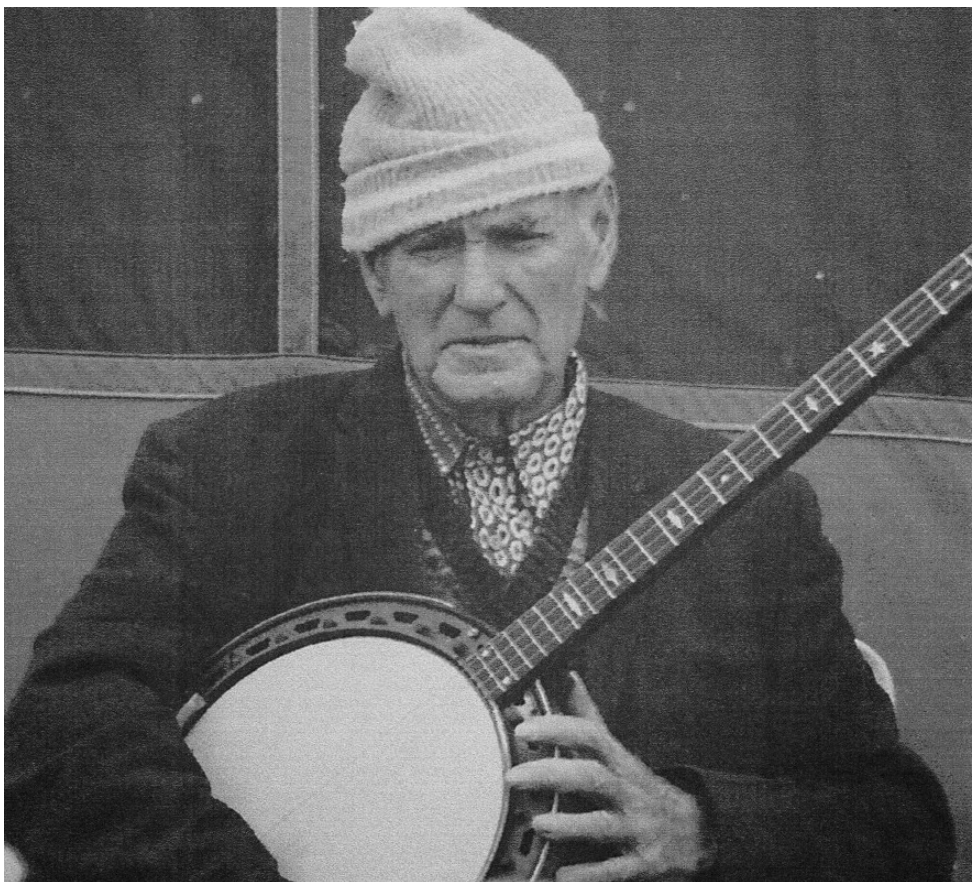
A little research led me to “Four Thousand Years of Concepts Relating to Rabies in Animals and Humans, Its Prevention and Its Cure,” published by the [National Institutes of Health](#), where I learned that “the first edition of *Medicina Curiosa*, the first English-language journal wholly dedicated to medicine [published on 17 June, 1684], describes post-exposure prevention [of rabies]...after a [dog] bite [was] based...on applying hair of the biting dog (‘hair of the dog’) to the wound.”

Another [NIH article](#) notes that “[t]he widespread practice of using dog hair to heal wounds and to avoid rabies infection...has...been reported in studies carried out in [Spain and] other European countries: Albania , Italy and Portugal.

The NIH rightly describes this “‘hair of the dog’ cure” as “fanciful” and “ineffective.”

Likewise, reputable health care practitioners describe drinking alcohol to cure a headache as “completely ineffective,” and “causing dehydration which may make some hangovers worse.”

Nevertheless, sea shanty enthusiasts continue to sing with gusto “What shall we do with the drunken sailor? Give 'im a hair from the dog that bit him...give 'im a hair from the dog that bit him! Earl-eye in the morning!”



Ocracoke Native, Edgar Howard, with his Banjo

It would be much better to “put him in a longboat ‘til he’s sober.”