

# The Music Man Dictionary

*Slang and turn of the century references from the musical script by Meredith Willson*

**notions:** Small lightweight items for household use, such as needles, buttons, and thread.

**button-hooks:** A small hook for fastening a button on shoes or gloves.

**cotton goods:** bolts of fabric

**hard goods:** Products that aren't consumed or quickly disposed of, and can be used for several years. Cast iron, metal or ceramic. Also called durable goods.

**soft goods:** Textiles, clothing, and related articles of trade. Also called dry goods.

**fancy goods:** fabrics of various colors, patterns, etc., as ribbons, silks, laces, etc., in distinction from those of a simple or plain color or make. Adapted to please the fancy or taste; ornamental.

**noggins:** A small mug or cup. Also a unit of liquid measure equal to one quarter of a pint.

**niggins:** A small wooden pail or tub with an upright stave for a handle, -- often used as a dipper.

**firkins:** A small wooden barrel or covered vessel -- used for butter, lard, etc., usually equal to about 1/4 of a barrel or 9 gallons (34 liters).

**hogshead:** A large cask or barrel, of indefinite contents, ranging from 63 to 140 gallons, especially a unit of capacity used in liquid measure in the United States, equal to 63 gallons

**demijohn:** A large, narrow-necked bottle made of glass or earthenware, usually encased in wickerwork..

**Model T Ford:** When Henry Ford (1863-1947), began selling the Model T in 1909, it was the first car that the average person could afford to buy. It wasn't very fancy, but it was reliable (by the standards of the day) and cheap and easy to fix when it did break down.

**two-by-four store:** putdown - small or petty

**Uneeda Biscuit:** In the early 1890s there were hundreds of hometown bakers putting out generic crackers in barrels with plain cookies in square shipping boxes. Uneeda was one of the first mass marketed products outside of its region, due to the "sanitary packaging" it promoted as being a step above the cracker barrel in terms of health and convenience. National Biscuit Co. launched the first prepackaged biscuit, Uneeda, with the slogan "Lest you forget, we say it yet, Uneeda Biscuit." Eventually, the company launches the first million-dollar advertising campaign for Uneeda.

**sanitary package:** first used to describe packaging to keep items like crackers from spoiling. This package is generally considered to have signaled the end of the bulk-merchandising procedures of the country-store era.

**cracker barrel:** A large, cylindrical container, usually made of staves bound together with hoops, with a flat top and

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bottom of equal diameter. Holding cracker barrels – a commonly purchased food item. People supposedly would gather round cracker barrels for conversation in old-time general stores.

**Mail Pouch cut plug:** a popular brand of chewing tobacco, sold in hard plugs that would be cut with a knife. The grocery store owner would use a mechanical device to cut the plug into flakes to sell or make hand-made cigarettes to

**sugar barrel:** as above for cracker barrel, except holding sugar for sale

**pickle barrel:** as above for cracker barrel, except holding brine and pickles for sale

**milk pan:** shallow milk pans with flaring shoulders were common household items until the mid-1800s. Milk was allowed to sit until the cream had risen to the top and could be easily removed with a shallow spoon or skimmer.

**tierce:** A cask larger than a barrel, and smaller than a hogshead or a puncheon, in which salt provisions, rice, etc., are packed for shipment. Also a measure of liquid capacity, equal to 42 gallons

**bang beat bell-ringin':** exact meaning unknown, but likely refers to tactics used by traveling carnivals and patent medicine salesmen to draw attention and customers

**big haul:** seems to refer to money being made by con or criminal activity.

**great go:** passing a test or trial successfully

**neck-or-nothin':** figure of speech - at all risks, desperately

**"when the man dances the piper pays him":** To pay the piper means "to bear the consequences of something". This just means Harold Hill never has had to pay for his actions – as a matter of fact, he even profits from them without consequences.

**thimble rigger:** One who cheats by thimblerrigging. 1. Also known as a shell game: A game, usually involving gambling, in which a person hides a small object underneath one of three nutshells, thimbles, or cups, then shuffles them about on a flat surface while spectators try to guess the final location of the object. Also called thimblerrig. 2. A fraud or deception perpetrated by shifting conspicuous things to hide something else.

**neck-bowed Hawkeyes:** Iowans from Hawkeye, Iowa in bowties

**tank town:** A small town. So called because trains would stop there only to replenish water.

**grip:** A suitcase or valise.

### billiards vs. pool

Billiards: played with three balls (one cue ball and two object balls) on a pocketless table

Pool: Developed much later than billiards. Also known as pocket billiards, using a cue ball and 15 object balls on a table with six pockets

**iron clad leave to yourself from a three-rail billiard shot:** leave is slang for a favorable position for a stroke in billiards

(ca 1850). Three-rail billiard shot refers to the fact that in billiards, the cue ball must contact at least 3 cushions before it hits the second object ball in order to score any points. This sentence seems to imply that the player has,

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through excellent strategy and difficult maneuvers, put the balls in such a position as to give him an excellent shot at making points.

**balkline:** A line parallel to one end of a billiard table, from behind which opening shots with the cue ball are made.

**patch-back suit:** an imitation or substitute

**Jasper:** any male fellow or chum, usually a stranger

**Dan Patch:** (1897-1916) Most famous trotting horse ever, from Indiana. Dan Patch had his own private railway car to travel in, and at home he lived in a huge barn that was so grand it was called the "Taj Mahal."

**Frittern away their time:** To squander little by little. To waste.

**cistern:** A receptacle for holding water or other liquid, especially a tank for catching and storing rainwater.

**knickerbockers:** Full breeches gathered and banded just below the knee (which is why moving them above the knee is such a shocking thing to do)

**shirt-tail young ones:** Very young

**Bevo:** From Anheuser-Busch. A non-alcoholic drink that tasted like beer, introduced in 1916

**Cubeb:** the dried unripe berry of a tropical shrub (Piper cubeba) of the pepper family that is crushed and smoked in cigarettes or as a medicine for catarrh, an inflammation of the nose and throat with increased production of mucus.

**Tailor Mades:** A tailor-made cigarette referred to any cigarette made in a factory on a cigarette making machine.

**NOTE:** So the section talking about the boys down at the pool hall means they are trying to mimic adults, and look as if they are drinking beer and smoking tobacco, although they are drinking fake beer and smoking fake cigarettes.

**Sen Sen:** Sen-Sen was to the 19th century what breath mints are to our time.

**Captain Billy's Whiz Bang:** Started in 1919 (too late for Music Man, but I guess Willson wasn't worried about that!). It represented the decline of morality and the flaunting of immodesty; to others it signified an increase in openness. For much of the 1920's, Captain Billy's was the most prominent comic magazine in America with its mix of racy poetry and naughty jokes and puns, aimed at a small-town audience with pretensions of "sophistication" Quit publishing sometime from 1932-36.

**The Maine:** U.S. battleship sunk (Feb. 15, 1898) in Havana harbor, killing 260, in an incident that helped precipitate the Spanish-American War. The cause of the explosion was never satisfactorily explained, and separate American and Spanish inquiries produced different results. But the American jingoistic press blamed the Spanish government, and Remember the Maine became the rallying cry of the war.

**Balzac:** Honoré de. 1799-1850. French writer and a founder of the realist school of fiction. Among the great masters of the novel. Half-starving in a Paris garret, he began his career by writing sensational novels to order under a pseudonym. His great work, called The Human Comedy, written over a 20-year period, is a collection of novels and stories recreating French

society of the time, picturing in precise detail individuals of every class and profession.

**masher:** a man who is aggressive in making amorous advances to women [synonym: woman chaser, skirt chaser]

**pest house:** A hospital for patients affected with plague or other infectious disease.

**Pat Gilmore:** Patrick Sarsfield Gilmore (pictured below), known as the "Father of the American Band". Gilmore, a musical soloist in his own right, came from Ireland in 1848, carrying ideas about instrumentation and interpretation from the European bands. With his "new" ideas and a penchant for showmanship, he soon redefined the course of American band music for all time to come. He was especially interested in the advancement of community bands. Wrote many songs, including "When Johnny Comes Marching Home"

**Liberatti:** Alessandro Liberati, 1847-1927. Born in Italy, played in the Cacciatori Band of Rome. 1872 came to U.S., became a U.S. citizen, and directed his own band that toured the U.S. from 1889-1919 and 1921-23.

**Pat Conway:** Patrick Conway, 1865-1929. 1900-08, Director of the Ithaca N.Y. Municipal Band, which later became famous as the Conway Band. Toured and performed around the U.S. at the same time as Sousa's band. During WWI, was the first U.S. Air Corps bandmaster. In 1922 started the Conway Band School in Ithaca.

**The Great Creator:** Giuseppe C. Creatore 1871-1952. Directed the Naples Municipal Band in Naples Italy. Came to the U.S. in 1899. Organized his own band, Creatore's Orchestra, which toured and performed around the U.S. at the same time as Sousa's band, and continued performing until 1947.

**W.C. Handy:** 1873-1958, African-American songwriter and bandleader; b. Florence, Ala. He was among the first to set down the blues and became famous with Memphis Blues and St. Louis Blues.

**John Philip Sousa:** 1854-1932, American bandmaster and composer; b. Washington, D.C. Gilmore's successor. He improved the instrumentation and quality of band music. From 1880 to 1892 he led the U.S. Marine Band and in 1892 formed his own band and successfully toured the world. He wrote some 100 marches, many immensely popular, such as The Stars and Stripes Forever.

**battery:** Music: the percussion section; Navy: the heavy guns of a warship.

**double bell euphoniums:** A duplex instrument is played by one performer, but has the characteristics of two different instruments

**Jeely Kly:** This is a regional phrase used as a more acceptable version of "Jesus Christ". Similar substitutes include Jeel!, Geel!, Jee whizz!, and Jee Whillikins

**"hear from me till who laid the rails":** exact origin unknown, but there are several other variations of the "hear from me until..." phrase that mean, you'll be hearing about this for a long time, or I won't forget this anytime soon and you're going to know it.

**"For no Diana do I play faun":** Diana is the Roman Goddess of the hunt, the moon, forests, animals, and women in childbirth. Both a virgin goddess and an earth goddess, she was identified with the Greek Artemis. Some legends have Diana marrying Faunus, in Roman myth, woodland deity, protector of herds, and crops; identified with the Greek Pan. He was attended by fauns - mischievous creatures, half man, half goat, with short horns, pointed ears, tails and goat's feet (the counterparts of the Greek satyrs).

**On the que veev:** misspelling of French phrase "on the qui vive", meaning on the alert; vigilant:

**pianola:** a trademark kind of player piano

**Del Sarte:** Francois Del Sarte, 1811-71, French teacher of acting and singing. He studied singing (1825-29) at the

Paris

Conservatoire and appeared as a tenor at the Opéra-Comique, but faulty training had damaged his voice. Delsarte formulated certain principles of aesthetics that he applied to the teaching of dramatic expression. He set up rules coordinating the voice with the gestures of all parts of the body. In 1839 he opened his first cours d'esthétique théâtrale, and his advice was sought by many famous artists, e.g., Rachel, Henriette Sontag, and W. C. Macready. Steele MacKaye studied with him in Delsarte's last years and brought to the United States the Delsarte system, to which he had added many of his own ideas, including elements of gymnastics. Some of Delsarte's writings are included in the compilation *Delsarte System of Oratory* (1893).

**Steelies:** A type of marble. Many steelies are merely ball bearings

**Aggies:** A type of marble. A shooter made from the mineral, agate. These marbles were the choice of marble shooters. Many hand-cut agates exhibit exquisite and complicated natural designs.

**PeeWees:** A type of marble. A smaller marble that is 1/2" or less in diameter.

**Glassies:** A type of marble. Glassies are glass marbles, either handmade or machine-made; and are the most common type of marble used.

**carrion:** decaying flesh of a dead body.

**O'Clark, O'Mendez, O'Klein:** These three famous musicians were definitely not Irish. Clark was Canadian, Mendez was Mexican, and Klein was Jewish. Harold is just adding an O' in front of their names to make them sound Irish so he can make the sale.

Herbert L. Clarke (1867-1945) -- Herbert Lincoln Clarke, acknowledged to be the greatest cornetist of his time, certainly the most celebrated.

Rafael Méndez (1906-1981), a famed Hollywood trumpet soloist and composer

Mannie Klein was a trumpet player who was comfortable playing both jazz and classical music.

**St. Michael's own way with you:** A charismatic character that draws people to him. St. Michael, the archangel, was especially honored as protector of the Church.

**hod-carrying:** A kind of wooden tray with a handle, borne on the shoulder, for carrying mortar, brick, etc.

**Mavorneen-pinchin':** ma·vour·neen also ma·vour·nin -- My darling; -- an Irish term of endearment for a girl or woman.

**Tara's háll minstrel-singin':** Song by Moore, Thomas 1779-1852, Irish poet. His *Irish Melodies* (1808-34) include *The Harp that Once through Tara's Halls*. Tara was a village of eastern Ireland northwest of Dublin. It was the seat of Irish kings from ancient times until the sixth century A.D.

**Be-gob:** "By God" - a corrupted form of begorra, meaning "by God" or "by Jesus"

**Be-jabbers:** "by Jesus" - also a corrupted form of begorra (h)

**Hodado:** unknown. Maybe short for "How do you do?"

**Lancelot:** French knight. Friend of King Arthur and bravest and most celebrated of the Knights of the Round Table in

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Arthurian legend until (according to some versions of the legend) he became the lover of Arthur's wife Guinevere.

**Venus:** Roman goddess of love and beauty

**Yankee League:** Methodist youth group, extremely popular in rural America in the 1890's and early 1900's.

**Black Hole of Calcutta:** Small, airless detention cell in Fort William (Calcutta, India) where 123 of 146 prisoners died after an overnight stay in 1756 (Seven Year's War).

**The Wells Fargo Wagon:** Since 1852, their stagecoaches traveled across thousands of miles of desert, prairie, and mountain roads to deliver mail and cash.

**mackinaw:** 1: a short plaid coat made of made of thick woolen material [syn: Mackinaw coat] 2: a thick plaid blanket formerly used in NW US [syn: Mackinaw blanket] 3: a flat-bottomed boat used on upper Great Lakes [syn: Mackinaw boat] 4: a heavy woolen cloth heavily napped and felted, often with a plaid design

**C.O.D.:** "Cash on Delivery"; merchandise sent with the expectation of payment upon receipt

**DAR:** Daughters of the American Revolution, a patriotic society founded 1890 in Washington, D.C., and open to women with ancestors who aided the American Revolution.

**Tempus fugit:** Latin for "time flies"

**"It's Capulets like you make blood in the marketplace":** reference to Shakespeare's tragedy Romeo and Juliet (1596). Romeo, the young heir of the Montagues, attends the great ball of the Capulets in disguise and falls in love with Juliet, the daughter of the house. During a street brawl in the marketplace, Romeo's friend Mercutio is killed by Juliet's cousin Tybalt, and Romeo in turn kills Tybalt.

**"What does the Poet say? The coward dies a thousand deaths – the brave man only 500":** The correct quote is "Cowards die many times before their deaths; / The valiant never taste of death but once" -- William Shakespeare, from Julius Caesar.

**Bach's conception of the Well-Tempered Clavichord:** a clavichord is a stringed musical instrument with keyboard; similar to a harpsichord. The Well-Tempered Clavier or Clavichord is a musical composition by Bach. It is a set of preludes and fugues, or musical exercises, that uses all the major and minor keys of the keyboard. The popularity of this system, used to show off the way a particular 'clavier' was tuned, resulted in pianos and clavichords being tuned the way they are today. In Bach's time the word 'clavier' did not denote any keyboard instrument in particular but meant either harpsichord, clavichord, spinet, virginal, or even the organ.

**The Redpath Circuit:** The purpose of the lyceum movement (started in Massachusetts as early as 1826) was self-improvement by lectures and discussions on literary, scientific, and moral topics. After the Civil War, commercial lecture bureaus were founded, among them the Redpath Lyceum Bureau of James C. Redpath in 1868. In the next ten years such famous names as Susan B. Anthony, P. T. Barnum, Henry Ward Beecher, James G. Blaine, Wilkie Collins, Mark Twain, and Ralph Waldo Emerson were represented by the Redpath Bureau. Lyceums continued to exist into the twentieth century, although by 1925 they were found for the most part only in small towns, often in combination with musical programs.

**tintype:** A positive photograph made directly on an iron plate varnished with a thin sensitized film. Also called a ferrotype.

**Hector Berlioz:** 1803-1869. French composer and leading representative of romanticism in French music. His works

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include Symphonie Fantastique (1830), Romeo and Juliet (1839), and the opera Les Trojans (1855-1858).

**cat-boat in a hurricane:** A small sailboat, with a single mast placed as far forward as possible, carrying a sail extended by a gaff and long boom. Easily tossed around by rough waters.

**Buster Brown:** Buster Brown the comic strip, first appeared in color in 1902. Buster Brown was "an incorrigible scamp. Each Sunday page ended with a promise to mend his mischievous manners." He "dressed like a sissy, but was a rough and tumble kid at heart." Buster and his dog, Tige, remained a popular comic and soon became even more famous as the emblem for a shoe company, a textile firm, and others. The strip was discontinued in 1920.

**clink:** A prison cell; a lockup

**Lilligags me around:** To waste time by puttering aimlessly; dawdle (same as lollygag and lallygag)

**doxy:** A disreputable sweetheart.

**round-heel:** A woman of questionable reputation

**fiz gig:** A gadding, flirting girl. From gig - A playful or wanton girl, which is from the Old English term giglot - A light, giddy girl.

**Cote a 'Shropshyre sheep:** cote is a small shed or shelter for sheep or birds, so the reference is to a shed full of sheep. Shropshire is a large, hornless, black-faced sheep of a breed developed in Shropshire England, and raised for meat and wool.