



# More Than the Same Old Song and Dance

BY SUE LISK

"I still remember the Schnitzelbank song."

"The what?" I asked my mother.

"The Schnitzelbank song. They used to play this German song at wedding receptions and sometimes at parties in my Great-Uncle Schaefer's basement."

I persisted: "Yeah, but what's a 'Schnitzelbank'?"

"You know, I have no idea. But everybody really liked the music and sang along."



The Schnitzelbank in the Schnitzelbank song refers to a carving bench. A repair shop with Schnitzelbanks, i.e., carving benches, in center front. (Library of Congress)

**W**E OFTEN ASSOCIATE SONGS AND DANCES FROM THE PAST with a specific person, event, or time period. Traditional songs that have survived the test of time often mean something quite different to us than they did to our ancestors. The lyrics of songs may have been translated, altered, or forgotten. And certainly, many dances popular long ago are rarely danced today, or only in special situations.

I'd like to explore how one song has changed greatly over the years. I'll also give some examples of the types of websites you might explore to identify and learn more about different sorts of traditional music you may encounter that were once part of your ancestors' lives.

## Songs with Obscure Origins

As a curious genealogist, you may need to do some research using several websites if you're anxious to know more about individual songs your family has "inherited" from the past. The Schnitzelbank song is such a tune – one with a long history.

A "Schnitzelbank" in German – in the context of the song – is usually translated as a "carving bench". Sung in German, it follows the style of "The Twelve Days of Christmas". Singers add a new phrase with each verse and then repeat all the phrases that preceded it.

Most people who are familiar with the tune associate it with German Americans and might be aware that it is sometimes used to help students learn German. But that's just one chapter of the story of the song's origins.

Before digging deeper, you can learn how the song "works" and find a translation at <https://lyricstranslate.com/en/schnitzelbank-carving-bench.html>. I think you'll enjoy this shortened yet delightful version of the song, with a bit of artistic license taken at the end, at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=wTaFWJHsyJU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wTaFWJHsyJU).

It turns out that in German a "Schnitzelbank" is more than just a "carving bench". And the song did not originate in America, as explained at <https://germangirlinamerica.com/what-is-a-schnitzelbank/>.