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GOLLIWHOPPERS!

A dramatization motivated by the themes and traditions of American folklore

By Flora B. Atkin

CHARACTERS:

A troupe of seven to nine travelling players who converge upon the scene to share their tales of America's earlier days with young and old.

Players act, sing, narrate, mime, chant, dance, work puppets, and play simple music instruments interchangeably.

SETTING:

A bit of space, indoor or out, flat or raised, and children to watch and participate.

SCENES:

Prologue (The Present)

The Tales (America's Earlier Days)

Big Jesse Febold Ebenezer Chopalong

The Sun Snatchers

The Knee-High Man

Goll-Gollee-Gee

Backwoods Tall Tale

Indian Legend

Cante-Fable

Mountain Ballad

MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS AND SOUND EFFECTS:

Basic accompaniment instrument: fiddle or guitar (alternates: harmonica, auto harp, melodica, washtub bass viol, or kazoo).

Supplementary: kazoos or combs with waxed paper; washboard and thimbles; two spoons or bones; heavy crinkly paper; guiara; wood blocks; coconut shell halves; sticks and beaters of different weights and material; Indian drum and beater; gourd rattles; cardboard box wrapped with rubber bands.



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Prologue

Curtains open, full daylight; ladder, stage center; standard, upstage right.

Players enter from as many different doors into auditorium as possible. PLAYER ONE carries fiddle-type instrument; PLAYER TWO carries signboard map; PLAYER THREE carries stool; other players carry knapsacks and hobo bundles containing properties and sound effects. All Players wear kazoos as pendants around neck; four Players carry map insignia attachments in pockets.

Dialogue

Action and Sound

Player One enters, looks around, tests ladder, climbs up, tunes fiddle, plays introduction to Greeting Song (Music A), continues to accompany throughout Prologue.

Player Two
(Sings) Hi Huzza Hello!

Player Two enters, places map on standard.

Other Players
(Sing) Hi Huzza Hello!

Other players enter from different doors of auditorium, travel through audience greeting everyone.

All
(Sing)
Hello to you, greetings all
G'morning how 'ja doo!
Hi ya,
 Howdy,
 Peace,
 And how!
Top of the morning to you!
 (daytime)
 (evening)

Barber-shop type harmony.

In the not so long ago
 America's earlier days
Folks would get together
 In mighty curious ways

*Greeting Song repeated as all reach stage, put props down, gather together downstage.
(Music B)*

Without the flicks and radio

One Player
No television screen?

Second Player
Before bedtime

Third Player
But after chow

Fourth Player

At twilight, in between

All

Told tales about their blunders
And sang their country's wonders.

Momentary silence and freeze.

(Loud whisper) GOLLIWHOPPERS!

(Sing) Let us get together
In mighty curious ways
From the not so long ago
Of America's earlier days.

All do grand right and left.

Transition and Introduction to First Tale

All hum 'America's Earlier Days' on kazoos, place knapsacks and props for Tales 2, 3 and 4 far upstage left; CALLER takes knapsack with props for first tale, crosses to down right. Percussionist carries knapsack with sound effects down left; ladder moved upstage and turned on diagonal.

Map brought downstage. Fade out of melody. All freeze, focus on map. One player puts 'tree' insignia in Illinois region of map.

Caller

Rarrapin' tarrapin' backwood boasters
Lally-gaggin' on old settlers' day
Story swappers! Golliwhoppers!
They danced a galumping sashay!

'Band' (fiddler and washboard player) plays introduction to Backwoods Polka (Music 1) as six players choose partners and take places for polka. Map replaced on standard.

Golliwhopper One!
Big Jesse Febold Ebenezer Chopalong!

Golliwhop in! Story begin!

Big Jesse Febold Ebenezer Chopalong

To be played broadly with exaggerated pantomime; stoneboat, hollow log, deerskin tugs, and axe all pantomimed; 'dead' animals move along together, with upper bodies rigid to suggest riding on stoneboat; hand props procured from CALLER's knapsack as needed.

Caller

(Sings)
Hitched his mule and went to the lake
Tossed a pebble and killed a snake
Big Jesse Febold Ebenezer Chopalong.

Six players do vigorous polka.

Caught him a trout fish by the snout
When he turned his overalls inside out
Big Jesse Febold Ebenezer Chopalong.

When he swung his trusty axe
All the beasts they sure made tracks

With nary a gun
He was never outdone
Big Jesse Febold Ebenezer Chopalong.

(Narrates) Big Jesse Febold Ebenezer Chopalong! A 'genuine' American folk hero from the pioneer days of our country. He swung his axe and he cut a path through the wilderness from Maine to Illinois in two days. Folks tell all kinds of tales about him...funny stories...tall tales!

Jesse

Now when Big Jesse Febold Ebenezer Chopalong was eighteen, he cleared a place in the woods...built a log cabin...

and took him a wife.

One spring morning, as usual, Big Jesse was chopping away with his trusty axe...

Amelia

When his wife, Amelia, came out a-looking for him.

'Big Jesse Febold Ebenezer Chopalong, lay off that everlasting chopping and go hunting! You know right well we have had nothing to eat but hominy mush for almost six weeks.'

Jesse

'No use in going hunting until the barge comes up the river, Amelia...don't even have one load for my gun.'

Amelia

'Our salt gourd is rattlin' hollow. I cooked the last ground of coffee for your breakfast. Well, at least go on down to the lake and cut a section from that old hollow chestnut log...if I don't have a new hominy barrel we won't even have hominy mush to eat.'

Jesse

(Sighs resignedly) So Big Jesse sharpened his axe, tied some new deerskin tugs he had just fashioned to his stoneboat, his trusty stoneboat that could glide over the bumpy trail like a sled over snow.

Dance changes to waltz rhythm, ends with spin of partner, plopping down, feet sprawled.

Melody fade-out, laughter by players as they cross up left to observe and react until needed as characters in tale.

"Big Jesse" player crosses to Caller, gets cap and bandanna-kerchief from Caller's knapsack and begins to "grow" in size, as he dons costume pieces.

Jesse strides to center, pantomimes chopping and building (sound effects with wood blocks and sticks); Caller fades out up right.

Wife-player crosses to Jesse; Grant Wood pose. Brief music interlude.

Wife fades out (turns, goes up right); dons dust cap and apron. Jesse down right.

Jesse makes grandiose swing through air with "axe," starts to chop, stops in mid-air.

Amelia crosses to Jesse.

Jesse sharpens "axe," crosses up right, ties "tugs" to "stoneboat."

Then he hitched up old Skidmore, the Mule.

Mule

(Brays)

Jesse

And they headed down the steep winding trail.

Skid-a-long, Skidmore!

Gee around there, you skiddy old mule—gee—gee.

Whoa, Skidmore!

Skidmore

(Brays) When they got down to the lake, Big Jesse unhitched old Skidmore so he could wander around and eat all the grass he wanted.

Jesse

Jesse strode over to the hollow log and began to chop a section for the new hominy barrel...

Geese

'Honk, honk, honk.'

Skidmore

Jesse had hardly swung his axe when a terrific honking noise made him look around.

Jesse

"Well, I'll be jiggered! The lake is covered with wild geese!" He put his axe down and eased into that water. He swam around underneath all those geese, and tied their feet up with a rope from around his waist. Poked his head up among them—(Slaps hands, hollers) "Whoosh!"

Geese

"Honk, honk, honk."

Skidmore

Those geese got lined up somehow and pulled Big Jesse Febold Ebenezer Chopalong out of the water and took off with him a-hanging on.

Geese

"Honk, honk, honk."

Caller dons ears, becomes mule.

Jesse rides "stoneboat," pulled by mule. Amelia waves goodbye, turns upstage, fades out of scene.

Zig-zag ride down left (Music 1), (clip-clop with coconut shells).

Skidmore establishes lake down left by taking a drink, then wanders around stage, actively reacting to action that follows. Jesse moves "stoneboat" out of way.

Jesse crosses down right to establish "hollow log," makes grandiose swings to chop, stops short in mid-air.

Geese players swoop into lake down left and "swim" in circles continuing to "honk" under dialogue.

Jesse crosses to lake, swims in amongst geese.

Geese, flustered, begin to flap wings, honk loudly, stretch necks.

Geese grab one another in chain, Jesse hanging on behind, fly all over stage in circles.

Skidmore

Right on around the lake in circles they flew.

Jesse

When they were about to light, Jesse snubbed the line so tight those geese fell down—

Geese

DEAD!

Jesse

Then Jesse went back to his chopping.

Skidmore

He had hardly swung his axe when a big rustling in the woods made him look around.

Jesse

'As fine a big buck deer as I've ever seen peering out at me.' (To deer) 'Grin, grin.'

Skidmore

(To audience) 'Anybody knows a deer can't stand grinning.'

Deer

(Frightened) Seeing Big Jesse Febold Ebenezer Chopalong grinning so wide, from ear to ear, the big buck deer, from sheer fright, fell over (Pause) DEAD.

Jesse

Then Jesse went back to his chopping.

Snake

Hiss!

Skidmore

He had hardly swung his axe when a hissing sound made him look around.

Jesse

'As quick-slithering a snake as I've ever seen, coming after me.'

Rabbit

And a little rabbit just sitting there innocently watching.

Snake

(Hisses) Seeing Big Jesse stoop to seek a little pebble, the snake opened his mouth wide to strike.

Jesse jerks "line," causing geese to pivot and fall down. Geese are motionless for a second.

Geese raise heads on "Dead" and down again. (Thud sound on drum.)

Jesse strides over to hollow log, starts grandiose swing to chop. (Rustling sound.) Deer player peers out from around ladder.

Jesse stops short in mid-air, spies deer.

Jesse grins.

Jesse continues to say "Grin" until deer is dead.

Deer freezes, falls over, is motionless for a second, then raises head to say "Dead" and down again. (Thud.)

Jesse to log, starts to chop again.

Snake (dead goose player) rises, slithers towards Jesse.

Jesse stops in mid-air, spies snake coming toward him. Snake continues hissing.

Rabbit (second dead goose player) rises, hops forward, squats between Jesse and snake.

Jesse picks up pebble.

Jesse

Big Jesse tossed that little pebble up into the air and it landed straight down the snake's throat.

Snake

The snake choked, fell over and landed on...

Rabbit

Little rabbit just sitting there innocently watching.

Snake and rabbit

And they both fell down (*Pause*) DEAD.

Jesse

Then Big Jesse went back to his chopping.

Skidmore

He had hardly swung his axe when a scratching-scratching sound made him look around. Looking up he saw a big shaggy black bear lumbering his way.

Jesse

Now Jesse was not one to run away.

Skidmore

Besides, bears are short-sighted.

Jesse

But the wind was in the wrong direction and that bear gave out a grunt like a saw going through an oak tree.

Jesse

In one galumptuous spring, Jesse reached the nearest tree and climbed up lickety-split. His feet slipped and he sank down, into the hollow heart of the tree, into something soft and sticky. Just when he thought he was disappearing altogether, his feet touched bottom and there he stood up to his chin in wild honey.

Bear

Black Bear climbed the tree (*Sniff, sniff*), smelled the sweet honey, and started to back down inside the tree trunk to get to the honey.

Jesse

The instant the bear's tail was within reach, Jesse clamped his fist in the bear's fur and bellowed '**Scat!**'

Bear

(*Roars*) The terrified bear tore out of the tree trunk.

Tosses pebble high into air. Skidmore follows pebble's flight through air.

Snake makes choking noises, slithers down on rabbit.

Snake and rabbit down, raise heads for "Dead" and down again. (Thud.)

Jesse to log, starts to chop again.

(Scratching sound.) Bear (dead deer player) appears stage left.

Bear starts long low grunt crescendoing to a growl after Jesse's comment, starts lumbering stage right. Jesse begins to back away.

Jesse leaps to ladder, climbs two or three rungs, sidles around to supports on back, and by bending knees, appears to sink down inside.

Bear goes up two or three rungs, turns around as he sidles to side of ladder and begins to let rear down "inside," so rear faces Jesse.

Jesse grabs bear in back.

Jesse

Dragging Jesse up with him.

Bear

The bear plunged to the ground below, (*Pause*) DEAD.

Jesse

Jesse climbed down the trunk. He was that sticky with honey it took him a long time.

When he got down, he went to the shore to wash. He was so stuck with the honey, he lost his balance, and kersplashed into the lake.

Skidmore

(*Brays*) Big Jesse just stayed out there a-treading water, enjoying it.

Jesse

After a while Jesse climbed out of the lake and felt something flapping around inside his overalls. He shook himself and pulled out a big trout fish from his pants leg, and a snapping turtle out of the back of his shirt.

By then it was getting late. With one big chop, Jesse cut off a section of that big hollow log, and made a hominy barrel.

Then with one little thwack, he made a hole in the tree for the honey to drain out into his barrel.

Skidmore

(*Sniffs, brays in disgust*) The honey had hardly started to drip when a powerful smell, and it wasn't honey, made Big Jesse look around.

Jesse

(*Smells*) 'Skunks! As pretty a family of skunks sitting on a log as I ever seen.'

Skidmore

As quick as a jagged flash of lightning Big Jesse chipped a few shavings from the edge of the log and tossed them into the air.

Skunks

The skunks took those shavings for snow flakes and began to shiver and shake from the cold, till they froze stiff.

Jesse

Big Jesse banged the log ...wham!

Bear pulls self up, Jesse hanging on till he is on top of ladder, and then lets go of bear who jumps off ladder, falls down, raises head for "Dead" and down again. (Thud.)

Jesse slowly down ladder, very sticky action.

Jesse down left, into "lake," treads water, waves.

Action pantomimed as narrated.

Jesse to "log," down right, one galumptous swing and chop (loud chop sound). "Dead" animals reverberate.

Jesse takes "barrel" to "tree" (ladder). Little chop on "tree" (thwack sound).

Skunks (geese players) up on knees into row.

Action pantomimed as narrated.

(Shivering sounds with spoons.)

Jesse kicks "log," (beater on woodblock.)

Skunks

Those skunks toppled over...DEAD!

Jesse

Jesse picked up the new hominy barrel full of honey, put it on the stoneboat and hitched up old Skidmore.

Then Big Jesse loaded all those dead animals on the stoneboat.

And they started up the path for home.

Jesse

It was dark, pitch dark, and Jesse could not see where he was going. He had to grope each step of the way back up the steep trail.

Skidmore

Skidmore (*Grunt*) knew the way but it was a heavy load. And those deerskin tugs began to stretch.

Jesse

Rain began to fall. Jesse started going triple-double time in a frolic gait to keep warm.

“Whoa, Skidmore, we’re home!”

Amelia

“Big Jesse Febold Ebenezer Chopalong! Where have you been all day and out in this rain at night?”

Jesse

“Been chopping your hominy barrel.”

Amelia

“Choppin’ a hominy barrel? All day? Well where is it, and where is the stoneboat?”

Jesse

“Right behind me.”

Amelia

“No stoneboat here.”

Jesse

“I declare! Who absquatulated with my stoneboat?”

Amelia

“The deerskin tugs probably stretched so much in the rain that the stoneboat got left behind in the wood.”

Skunks fall over, pause, raise heads for “Dead” and down again. (Thud.)

Jesse brings “barrel” and “stoneboat” down right. Skidmore crosses down right, faces left to be ‘hitched.’

Jesse stands up the “dead” animals and places them on stoneboat. Bear is rolled into place, then lifted. Animals assume grotesque poses, with frozen stares and leers. (Music A while animals loaded.)

Jesse pulls Skidmore. Stoneboat full of animals follows. (Music continues slowly, clip-clops start; both increase in tempo as they near home.)

Jesse and Skidmore with stoneboat and animals behind reverse zig-zag trip. Stoneboat gets further and further behind and stops far over on stage left.

Jesse and Skidmore continue up right.

(Music tempo fast.) Amelia, holding imaginary lantern, appears down right looking for Jesse. (Music out.) Jesse stops up right, pats Skidmore, but does not look stage left.

Amelia looks behind Skidmore.

Jesse looks behind Skidmore.

Jesse

“Well, it’s too dark tonight to go find it, and besides I’m boliterated and exfluncticated and I’m so hungry that my stomach thinks my mouth’s gone on vacation.”

Amelia

So they went in to their supper...

Amelia and Jesse

Of cold hominy mush.

Skidmore

(Awakens) The next morning the sun shone bright and hot.

Musician

“It’s so hot today, the corn is probably popping in the field.”

Percussionist

“It’s so hot today, if I were to go fishing I’d meet the fish swimming up the dry trail.”

Amelia

“Big Jesse, you go get that stoneboat.”

Jesse

“Too hot today, Amelia, even if your tongue were coated with bear grease, you couldn’t make me go.”

Amelia

(With nagging persistence) “Big Jesse Febold Ebenezer Chopalong!”

Jesse

(Sighs) So Big Jesse sharpened his axe, and got ready to start down the path for the stoneboat.

Skidmore

(Brays)

Amelia

“Well, pickle my turnips, the stoneboat is here! Right to the cabin door.”

Jesse

“Well, paddle my gullywhump! *(Looks up surprised)* The sun was that hot it dried the deerskin tugs till they shrank and drew the stoneboat whippety-cut up to the door.”

Amelia and Jesse turn upstage, Skidmore goes to sleep.

Brief music interlude. Rooster (percussionist) crows.

“Dead” animals move up slowly to Skidmore.

Amelia and Jesse appear, cross down right fanning and mopping themselves from heat, are not aware of stoneboat.

Skidmore senses something behind him, tries to call attention to it.

One after the other, all three look up, surprised, notice stoneboat.

Skidmore

“Well, pull my ears! Three brays for the sun!”

Amelia

“Oh, oh! I’ll smoke the bear meats, salt the fish, make hats from the skunk skins, a belt from the snake skins; I’ll dry the deerskins, I’ll make turtle soup, and bake the rabbit in honey for Sunday dinner, and we’ll have feather beds out of the goose feathers. (*To Jesse*) Big Jesse Febold Ebenezer Chopalong, you told a tarradiddle. You said you didn’t have any powder for your gun.”

Amelia pokes in amongst dead animals, lifting limbs, discovering all the loot.

Jesse

“Not an acorn’s worth, Amelia. But I can swing an axe! Or my name ain’t Big Jesse Febold Ebenezer Chopalong.”

Jesse makes one big final swing and chop (chop sound) and holds pose.

Skidmore-Caller

Golliwhop. Story stop!

Skidmore removes ears, stands upright.

Transition and Introduction to Second Tale

All hum ‘America’s Earlier Days’ on kazoos. Properties replaced in knapsack. Ladder placed stage center, with stool immediately downstage of it. NARRATOR-DRUMMER dons vest, gets drum and beater. SUN-HOLDER player hands out props for new tale.

Map brought forward. Fade out of melody. All freeze, focus on map. One player puts ‘sun’ insignia on map in south-west region.

Narrator

(*Setting an epic mood*)
Harvest ceremonials
Indian medicine show
Fiestas, round-ups
Pow-wows long ago!

Narrator-drummer crosses downstage, drumming very rhythmically.

Golliwhopper Two!
The Sun Snatchers!

Narrator crosses to stage left, continues drumming as map replaced on standard, Villagers assemble stage left. Medicine men to center; all don costume pieces. (Drum stops for a moment.)

Golliwhop in! Story begin!

The Sun Snatchers

Land of Darkness action is on stage right; Land of Sun on stage left; a stylized, dance-like movement throughout, suggesting a long-time-ago legend.

Narrator

In the early days of the world, in the time of the very long ago, there was no sun on this side of the world.

Narrator resumes drumming, punctuating and accenting action and dialogue as needed.

From the Eskimos of Alaska down to the Indian tribes of California and Oklahoma, the people were in darkness.

Medicine Man-Who-Chants

(Chants)

O Great Spirit
Bring back the warm sun for us!
Brighten our dark cold sky.
Bring us the warm sun
So that our people may live.

Narrator

The tribal medicine men made their strongest charms and performed ritual dances to try to bring light.

Medicine Man-Who-Chants

Yo mah-ah, sah ooo-nahd
Wo-ah-kah, gah-ah-nahn
Hah-wah
Kah-wah
Gwee———chud
Wah-chah been-ah-nehm
Hah-ah zay-dah dem
Hah-wah
Kah-wah
Gwee———chud.

Narrator

But the darkness continued. There was much sorrow among the people. They stumbled around trying to find their way.

Long Runner

It is as dark as midnight inside the earth.

Short-Long Runner

It is as cold as the ice on the frozen river.

Short Runner

I'm as hungry as a bear after his long winter sleep. Ugh!

Long Runner

Sorry, little brother. I did not mean to bump into you. I did not see you.

Short-Long Runner

It is so dark. How shall we get along?

Narrator

The world grew colder and colder. The night showed no sign of ending.

Narrator crosses down left.

Medicine Man-who-Chants sits on stool, shakes rattles to rhythm of spoken lines.

Medicine Man-who-Chants hums softly in high falsetto under narrator. (Drum out.)

Medicine Man-who-Chants recites in deep low voice to rhythm of Music II, as Medicine Man-who-Dances shakes rattles and dances.

Narrator resumes drumming.

Medicine Men fade out upstage removing stool, as Villagers of Land of Darkness grope their way downstage.

Runners grope around down right, bumping into each other, expressing cold and darkness through posture, shivering.

Long Runner collides with Short Runner.

Runners freeze momentarily.