

A 19th Century Slang Dictionary Compiled & Edited by Craig Hadley

Absquatulate: to take leave, to disappear.

1843: A can of oysters was discovered in our office by a friend, and he absquatulated with it, and left us with our mouth watering. Missouri Reporter, February 2

Acknowledge the corn: to admit the truth; to confess; to acknowledge one's own obvious lie or shortcoming.

1840: David Johnson acknowledged the corn, and said that he was drunk. Daily Pennant, St. Louis, July 14

Across lots: to push on straight through despite obstacles.

Afeared: scared, frightened.

1840: I was afeared you were a gone coon.

All to Pieces: completely; absolutely.

1839: "I know him all to pieces," replied the gentleman.

Charles Biiggs, Harry Franco

1847: I knew him all to pieces as soon as I caught sight of him. Charles Briggs, Tom Pepper

Anti-fogmatic: raw rum or whiskey.

1829: The takers of anti-fogmatics, juleps, or other combustibles. Savannah Mercury, July

1852: Tom Nettles [was] mixing a couple of rosy anti-fogmatics. As Good as a Comedy, p.134

Arkansas toothpick: a long knife. Also known as a California or Missouri toothpick.

1855: We mistrust that the author of that statement saw a Missouri toothpick, and was frightened out of his wits.

Bad egg: a bad person; a good-for-nothing person.

1864: A bad egg-a fellow who had not proved to be as good as his promise.

Balderdash: nonsense; foolishness; empty babble.

1848: The steam was well up on both boats, which lay rolling, and backing and filling, from the action of the paddles, at the dock. Stray Subject p.1 74\

Beat the Dutch: to beat all or beat the devil.

1840: Of all the goings on that I ever did hear of, this beats the Dutch. Knickerbocker Magazine, February

B'hoys: a rowdy young man; reveler; ruffian.

1847: [He] had lived too long in the wire grass region to misunderstand the character of that peculiar class of b'hoys who dwell there. Knickerbocker Magazine, March

Boodle: a crowd of people.

1833: He declared he'd fight the whole boodle of 'em. Seba Smith, Major Jack Downing, p. 183

Brick in one's hat, to have: to be drunk.

1854: A seedy-looking old negro, with a brick in his old hat, and a weed 'round it.

Bully for you!: well done; good for you.

1861: "Bully for you!" alternated with benedictions, in the proportion of two bullies to one blessing. Atlantic Monthly, June, p. 745

Catawampiously chewed up: utterly defeated, badly beaten. An expression largely confined to the South and West, from at least the 1840s on.

Cavort: to frolic or prance about.

1834: Government's bought their land, and it's wrong for them to be cavorting around quiet people's houses any more. C.F. Hoffman, A Winter in the Far West, p.28

1845: She better not come a cavortin' bout me with any of her carryins on. W. T. Thompson, Chronicles of Pineville,

Chirk: cheerful. Synonyms: chirp, chirpy.

1843: She is not very chirk, but more chirkier than she had been; and all our folks appear more chirkier than they really feel, in order to chirk her up. Yale Literary Magazine, p.26

Cold as a wagon tire: dead.

1833: If a man was as cold as a wagon tire, provided there was any life in him, she'd bring him to. James Hall, Legends of the West p.88

Conniption fit: a fit of hysteria.

1833: Ant Keziah fell down in a conniption fit. Seba Smith, Major Jack Downing, p.218

Coot: an idiot; a simpleton; a ninny.

1856: He's an amazin' ignorant old coot, tew.

Corned: drunk.

1840: William McG. brought a load of corn to market, and got corned on the strength of it. Daily Pennant St. Louis.

Cotton to: to take a liking to, a popular expression throughout the South & West from early in the century on.

Cracker: a poor white of the South, named after the crackling whips used by rural Southerners.

Dashing: showy, elegant or spirited, especially in dress.

Doggery: a cheap drinking establishment; in modern lingo, a dive. 1848: The drunkard, while reeling homeward from the doggery, is attracted by both sides of the street, which accounts for his diagonal movements.

Do tell: phrase used to express fascination with a speaker's subject. 1842: Among the peculiar expressions in use in Maine we noticed that, when a person has communicated some intelligence in which the hearer feels an interest, he manifests it by saying: "I want to know"; and when he has concluded his narrative, the hearer will reply: "O! Do tell "

Exfluncticate: to utterly destroy. 1839: The mongrel armies are prostrate – used up – exfluncticated.

Fix one's flint: to settle a matter.

1837: I thought I had fixed your flint yesterday. Knickerbocker Magazine, April

Full chisel: at full speed; executed with everything you've got. 1832: I met an express coming on full chisel from Philadelphia. Seba Smith, Major Jack Downing, p. 168

Go the whole hog: to go all the way.

1830. As ladies now wear pantaloons and boots, I see no reason why they should not go the whole hog and mount the hat and swallow tailcoat likewise. N. Dana, A Mariner's Sketches, p.186

Guttersnipe: a homeless child who roamed and slept in the streets. Hundreds roamed the larger cities throughout much of the century.

Hornswoggle, honey-fuggled: to cheat; to pull the wool over one's eyes. 1856: Pardon me for using the word; but Sharp honeyfuggled around me. Mr. Bennet, Nebraska, House of Reps., Congressional Globe, July 22, p.965
1860: P.E is going to hornswoggle the Democrats. Oregon Argus, May 12 1862: Now we want the particulars as to how much honey fugling and wool pulling was done. Rocky Mountain News, Denver, August 14

Huckleberry above a persimmon: a cut above. The phrase had many variations and shades of meaning. 1836: It is a huckleberry above my persimmon to cipher out how I find myself the most popular bookmaker of the day. Colonel Crockett in Texas, p.13

Kick: to protest or to object to something; to complain. 1842: [Members of Congress] kicked against receiving any more petitions. Philadelphia Spirit of the Times, January

Mad as a March hare: very angry, from early in the century.

Mosey: to saunter or shuffle along. 1836: You're not going to smoke me. So mosey off.

Mudsill: the uneducated, working class. 1858: States as the mudsills of society, as a pauper banditti, as greasy mechanics and filthy operatives.

Opine: to be of the opinion. 1830: Not a few leeches in that city, we opine, will vote for him. Northern Watchman, August 17

Peart (pert): fresh and happy, sprightly. 1820: These little fixins make a man feet right peart. Hall, Letters from the West p.304

Philadelphia lawyer: popularly credited with nearly superhuman intellect by the masses. 1803: It would puzzle a dozen Philadelphia lawyers to unriddle the conduct of the democrats.

Picayune: used to signify something small or frivolous. 1837: The hon. senator from Kentucky by way of ridicule calls this a picayune bill.

Pitch a Fit: To throw a temper tantrum, get upset.

Plug-ugly: any rowdy or ruffian. 1857: The city of Baltimore, from whose midst the plug uglies claim to hail. Oregon Weekly Times, August 1

Pony up, post the pony: pay up. 1838: It was my job to pay all the bills. "Salix, pony up at the bar, and lend us a levy. "J.C. Neal, Charcoal Sketches

Ramstuginous (rambunctious): rowdy, disorderly or boisterous. 1847: [An old he-bar] is as ramstugonous an animal as a log-cabin loafer in the dog-days.

Ride out on a rail: to be forced to leave town. 1866: Others proposed giving him a good coat of tar and feathers, and riding him out of town on a rail.

Seven by nine: something or someone of inferior or common quality, originating from common window panes

of that size. 1846: [The charge was] re-echoed by every little paltry seven by nine Locofoco print, and every brawling bar-room politician. Mr. Root, Ohio, House of Reps., Congressional Globe, December 24

Shaw, pshaw!: an expression of contempt or incredulity. 1845-. 0, shaw, 'taint gwine to rain, no how, and I'm all fixed. W. T. Thompson, Chronicles of Pineville, p. 165

Shecoonery: a corruption of chicanery. 1845: This town's got a monstrous bad name for meanery and shecoonery of all sorts. W.T. Thompson, Chronicles of Pineville, p.47

Shut pan: shut up; shut your mouth. 1833: Shut pan, and sing small, or I'll throw you into the drink. J.K. Paulding, Banks of the Ohio, p.213

Soaplock: a rowdy. Named after a hairstyle (cut short behind and long in front and parted to fall below the ears on the sides, sometimes as far as the collar) worn by such a rowdy. 1840: The hostility between the Yankee soap locks and the Dutch musicians, in regard to Ellsler serenade, has come to a happy termination. Daily Pennant, St. Louis, September 12

Some pumpkins: someone or something impressive. 1846: One of them thinks he's got a scrub (horse) that's some pumpkins. A Quarter Race in Kentucky, p. 118

Tukered out: exhausted. 1853: Set us to runnin, an I could tucker him; but he would beat me to jumpin, all holler. Turnover, A Tale of New Hampshire, p.59

Vamose: to disappear or leave quickly. 1848: The united faces of the company would have reached a mile. They bolted, mizzled, flew, vamosed. Stray Subjects, p. 198

Virginia fence: a staggering drunk was said to make this (a zigzagging fence) when he walked. Anyone or anything that meanders. Also, a fence constructed in this manner. 1824: You pass no stone walls [in Virginia] but hedge, or in-and-out zig-zag cedar rails, or wattled fences. Arthur Singleton, Letters from the South and West, p.59

Wake snakes: to raise a ruckus. 1848: This goin' ware glory waits ye hain't one agree'ble feetur. An ef it worn't for wakin' snakes, I'd come home again short meter. Biglow Papers, No.2