

Stroke Style Technique

It will be assumed that you already have some knowledge regarding use of the left hand. Our focus will be on setting up the right hand and executing the basic moves needed to play Stroke Style Banjo. The descriptions found here are from the original source of this style, and unaltered in any way. Included will be examples from the *Briggs' Banjo Instructor* of 1855, *The Phil Rice Method for The Banjo* of 1858. Each one offers a slightly different view of a similar idea.

First, setting up the hand:

- **The Briggs' Banjo Instructor of 1855.** This is the first significant book to be published that specifically provides instruction and repertoire for Stroke Style Banjo. Here is what the book, on page 8, has to say. *"The thumb should be extended and rest on the 5th string. The fingers should not be separated, but held closely together, and move simultaneously with the first finger; the first finger should be held a little further out from the hand than the other fingers. The fingers should be held stiff, except at the 3rd joint. The wrist should be held limber."*
- **Phil Rice's Banjo Instructor of 1858.** This one, published a short time after the Briggs' book, gives us perhaps the most detailed information about this playing style. On page 9, it states: *"The hand should be bent so that the end of the first finger should point to the ball of the thumb. The space between the end of the finger and the ball of the thumb should be about an inch and a half."*



We are preparing the right hand to execute what we call a "STRIKE." Basically, strings are hit by the back of the nail on the first finger as a result of the hand coming down upon the string. The thumb also strikes a string in a pulling motion on the way back up. These are the principal motions used to play the banjo. Here is what the books say about right hand execution:

- **The Briggs' Banjo Instructor of 1855.** On page 8, it says *"In playing, the thumb and first finger only are used; the 5th string is touched by the thumb only; this string is always played open, the other strings are touched by the thumb and the first finger, the thumb and finger should meet the strings obliquely, so as to cause them to vibrate across the finger-board. The strings are touched by the ball of the thumb, and the nail of the 1st finger. The first finger should strike the strings with the back of the nail and then slide to. * When using the thumb, the first finger nail should rest against the first string; when using the first finger, the thumb should rest on the 5th string; when the first finger strikes any one of the strings, other than the first string, the finger should slide to, and rest on the next string to the one struck; when the 1st string is struck, the finger should slide to, and rest on top of the instrument."*

* This incomplete sentence is printed as-is from the book.