Henry Stuckey was a WWI veteran who purportedly learned 'Bentonia' style open D minor tuning from Bahaman soldiers. He passed it along to Skip and Jack Owens when he returned to the United States. Skip incorporated this tuning into his playing repertoire. This E-Book captures Skip’s most essential works in this enigmatic style of tuning.
Cypress Grove Blues

Open ‘D minor’ Tuning (D-A-D-F-A-D)

Cypress Grove Blues utilizes the basics of playing in the open ‘D minor’ tuning. It is one of his most recognizable pieces.

The introduction begins with classic key of ‘E’ turnaround chord shapes in standard tuning yet it is being played in open ‘D minor’ tuning.

A brief bass run which then turns into a series of chords on the 3rd/4th frets.

This is the main riff that accompanies the main verse. Play the double stops with precision and sing out the lyrics in conjunction to playing them.
This strategic lick follows with heavy pull-off action on the notes being played on the third string.

This is an alternate way of playing the lick which appears later on in the song.

Both are followed by these chords.

Skip plays what would be a ‘D’ chord in standard tuning at this juncture. This chord serves as the ‘V’ chord in the song. The riff on the second measure is played in conjunction with the riff.
Here he plays a classic turnaround characteristic to this tuning. It is a chromatic run down the 5th string starting on the third fret.

He plays these chords before going back to CODA.

This is the part played at the end of the song.

**Lyrics**

I would rather be buried in some cypress grove

I would rather be buried in some cypress grove

To have some woman, Lord, that I can't control

And I'm goin' away now, I'm goin' away to stay

And I'm goin' away now, I'm goin' away to stay

That'll be all right, pretty mama, you gonna need my help someday
And the sun goin' down, and you know what your promise means
And the sun goin' down, you know what your promise means
And what's the matter, baby, I can't see

I would rather be dead and six feet in my grave
I would rather be dead and six feet in my grave
Than to be way up here, honey, treated this a-way

And the old people told me, baby, but I never did know
The old people told me, baby woman, but I never did know
"The good book declare you got to reap just what you sow"

When your knee bone's achin' and your body cold
When your knee bone's achin' and your body cold
Means you just gettin' ready, honey, for the cypress grove
Devil Got My Woman

Open ‘D minor’ Tuning (D-A-D-F-A-D)

Devil Got My Woman is played in open ‘D minor’ tuning. The song emphasizes the use of double stops along with the strong use of the ‘V’ chord.

The introduction is played similarly to a turnaround in the key of ‘E’ in standard tuning. The same chords apply.

A bass run followed by these chords.

The double stops on the 7th/9th fret need to be played with precision.

He sits on a ‘V’ chord which would be like playing a ‘D’ chord in standard tuning while he sings.
This succession follows. It’s the same types of chords followed by the characteristic pull-off lick on the 3rd string.

Back to the ‘V’ chord.

He reverts to these double stops and repeats what was demonstrated thus far.

Lyrics

I’d rather be the devil, then to be that woman man
I’d rather be the devil, then to be that woman man
Aw, nothin’ but the devil, changed my baby’s mind
Was nothin’ but the devil, changed my baby’s mind
I laid down last night, laid down last night
I laid down last night, tried to take my rest
My mind got to ramblin', like a wild geese
From the west, from the west

The woman I love, woman that I loved
Woman I loved, took her from my best friend
But he got lucky, stoled her back again
And he got lucky, stoled her back again
Illinois Blues

Open ‘D minor’ Tuning (D-A-D-F-A-D)

Illinois Blues is played in Open ‘D minor’ tuning. It has a fluid country feel to it.

The introduction begins with a loosely played solo.

These chords are played before the main verse begins.

Sing the song while playing these unique chords on the 4th/5th fret.
He then moves the chord positioning from the $4^{th}/5^{th}$ fret to the $2^{nd}/3^{rd}$ fret. He plays a pull-off lick afterwards.

A bass run on the 6th string followed by playing the chord on the $2^{nd}/3^{rd}$ fret. The pull-off lick comes after.

He plays an alternating bass picking pattern which also dissolves into these pull-offs on the first fret.

He repeats this part again.
Here he reverts back to the main verse. Apply the concepts demonstrated throughout the remainder of the song on the remaining stanzas.

**Lyrics**

You go to Banglin', tell my boys
You go to Banglin', tell my boys
What times I'm havin' up in Illinois
In Illinois, up in Illinois

When I gin my little cotton I'm going to sell my seed
When I gin my little cotton and sell my seed
I'm gonna give my baby, everything she need
Everything she need, ev'rything she need
I'm gonna give my baby everything she need

You know, I been in Texas and I been in Arkansas
I been in Texas and I been in Arkansas
But I never had a good time till I got to Illinois
Up in Illinois, up in Illinois
The people will treat you just so-so so'

You'll never go back to old Banglin' no more

Never no more, never no more

I been to Chicago and I been to Detroit

I been to Chicago and I been to Detroit

But I never had a good time till I got up in Illinois

In Illinois, up in Illinois

When you go down in Banglin', will you tell my boys

When you go down in Banglin', tell my boys

What a good time's a-waitin' up in Illinois

Up in Illinois, up in Illinois
Hard Time Killing Floor Blues

Open ‘D minor’ Tuning (D-A-D-F-A-D)

Hard Time Killing Floor Blues utilizes the basics of playing in the open ‘D minor’ tuning. It’s Skip James’ most famous song, and still serves as an inspiration to many artists to this day.

The introduction starts off with double stops followed by these chord strums on the 3rd/4th fret.

The main verse is based off of this combination of double stops.

The riff then evolves into this combination of bass runs on the 5th and 6th strings.
This combination of licks rely heavily on pull-offs on the 3rd string.

The alternate picking pattern on the bass strings must be played with precision.

The licks dissolve into these chord strums on the 3rd/4th fret.

Continue to the next stanza with the double stops.

And the people are driftin from door to door
This is the instrumental break in the middle of the song. It is based on the main riff found in the introduction and verses.

Back to this series.

This portion below is the outro. They are chords based on double stops.
Lyrics

Hard time here and everywhere you go
Times is harder than ever been before

And the people are driftin' from door to door
Can't find no heaven, I don't care where they go

Hear me tell you people, just before I go
These hard times will kill you just dry long so

Well, you hear me singin' my lonesome song
These hard times can last us so very long

If I ever get off this killin' floor
I'll never get down this low no more
No-no, no-no, I'll never get down this low no more

And you say you had money, you better be sure
'Cause these hard times will drive you from door to door

Sing this song and I ain't gonna sing no more
Sing this song and I ain't gonna sing no more
These hard times will drive you from door to door