Side 1
Band 1: The Poor Little Girls of Ontario—Mrs. Hartley Minifie
Band 2: The Banks of the Don—O. J. Abbott
Band 3: Johnston's Hotel—Mrs. Tom Sullivan
Band 4: The Murder of F. C. Benwell—Lamont Tilden
Band 5: Maggie Howie—Mrs. Tom Sullivan
Band 6: The Railroad Boy—Martin Sullivan
Band 7: The Hobo's Grave—Tom Brandon
Band 8: The Little Indian Maid—Lotys Murrin
Band 9: The Indian's Lament—Mrs. Tom Sullivan
Band 10: Sally Greer—Martin McManus
Band 11: The Twelfth of July—Tom Brandon

Side 2
Band 1: The Weaver—Mrs. Jack Keating
Band 2: The Golden Vanity—Joe Kelly
Band 3: A Fair Maid Walked in Her Father's Garden—Mrs. Wm. Towns
Band 4: In Bristol There Lived a Fair Lady—Jimmie Heffernan
Band 5: The Wintry Winds—Mrs. Jack Keating
Band 6: Mary of the Wild Moor—Lotys Murrin
Band 8: The Bold Privateer—Tom Brandon
Band 8: General Wolfe—Mrs. Margaret Ralph
Band 9: What Is the Life of a Man More than the Leaves?—Mrs. Wm. Towns
FOLKWAYS RECORDS Album No. FM 4005
Copyright © 1958 by Folkways Records & Service Corp. 117 w. 46th st NYC. USA.

MONOGRAPH SERIES of the Ethnic Folkways Library

Folk Songs of ONTARIO

Recorded and with Notes by Edith Fowke
FOLK SONGS OF ONTARIO
by Edith Fowke

When Canadian folk songs are mentioned, most people think first of French-Canada or of the Maritime provinces, particularly Nova Scotia and New-fundland. These are the areas where collecting has been concentrated, and until recently little was known of the folk songs of Ontario. In fact, it was generally assumed that we had few folk songs and that it was the last songs that the ones that might have existed earlier because Ontario is our most highly industrialized province. However, when I began my collecting in 1956, I was surprised to find how well the tradition has been preserved in this province. In fact, I've recorded over four hundred traditional songs, and the number would be much greater if I could have spared more time for collecting.

Practically ever since they began to take an interest in folk songs, collectors have been lamenting that traditional folk singers are a disappearing breed. Back in 1855 when "The Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne" started to collect Northumbrian ballads, they noted that so far as the words were concerned they were "half a century too late", and in 1907 Cecil Sharp wrote: "The English interest its account is well-nigh closed." Similarly, when Dr. Roy MacKenzie started his collecting in Nova Scotia in 1909 he lamented that "the oral propagation of ballads has in our day and generation almost ceased.

In the fifty years since we've learned that the folk singer is a much harder type than anyone gave him credit for being, but even so I've been amazed to find how well the tradition has been preserved in this province. Practically every song is as barren. It has been very satisfying to record in 1957 many ballads which Dr. MacKenzie first noted forty-odd years ago, and which he then feared were disappearing.

A large part of these songs come from the Irish-Canadians of the Peterborough region, some ninety miles north-east of Toronto. In this province the Irish settlers seem to have preserved their songs and the habit of singing them much better than people of Scottish or English descent. Peterborough is a particularly fruitful field because it's far enough from the main industrial centers to have developed slowly, and many of the people living there today were descendants of the original settlers who were brought out from Ireland in 1825 by Peter Robinson after whom the city is named. Also, as the only city within ninety miles, it has become the home of many farm-folk who moved in from the surrounding country. In the little villages of Lindsay, Peterborough, Douro, Douver's Corners, there are many people whose forefathers carved farms out of the wilderness early in the nineteenth century.

Another reason why Peterborough has been a particularly rich source of songs is that during the nineteenth century it was a great lumbering center, and when the lumber camps moved further north, many of the Peterborough men followed them. Until quite recent times it was the custom for the men to work their farms in the winter and head for the lumber camps in the fall. The long winter evenings in the shanties did a very great deal to preserve the traditional folk songs in Ontario. Most of the older men I've recorded had grown up in their youth, and many of the younger ones had learned them from their father or grandfather. Thus while the bulk of my collecting has been done in the Peterborough region, I believe the songs that I have recorded are known in many other parts of the province. Certainly samples from other regions show enough duplication to indicate that many of the songs are shared by more than one region. The older singers are represented by Mrs. McFay, who is 78, Mrs. Ralph, who is 80, and Mr. Abbott who is 84. Martin Smith is one of the best known folk singers and has nearly a thousand songs in his repertoire. He also sings for me. Another large group is made up of the songs and ballads dealing specifically with lumbering. Most of the well known lumberjack songs are to be found here, as well as a few that are peculiar to Ontario.

Quoted at length is the story of the lumbermen of Peterborough. Back in 1855 when "The Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne" started to collect Northumbrian ballads, they noted that so far as the words were concerned they were "half a century too late", and in 1907 Cecil Sharp wrote: "The English interest its account is well-nigh closed." Similarly, when Dr. Roy MacKenzie started his collecting in Nova Scotia in 1909 he lamented that "the oral propagation of ballads has in our day and generation almost ceased.

In the fifty years since we've learned that the folk singer is a much harder type than anyone gave him credit for being, but even so I've been amazed to find how well the tradition has been preserved in this province. Practically every song is as barren. It has been very satisfying to record in 1957 many ballads which Dr. MacKenzie first noted forty-odd years ago, and which he then feared were disappearing.

A large part of these songs come from the Irish-Canadians of the Peterborough region, some ninety miles north-east of Toronto. In this province the Irish settlers seem to have preserved their songs and the habit of singing them much better than people of Scottish or English descent. Peterborough is a particularly fruitful field because it's far enough from the main industrial centers to have developed slowly, and many of the people living there today were descendants of the original settlers who were brought out from Ireland in 1825 by Peter Robinson after whom the city is named. Also, as the only city within ninety miles, it has become the home of many farm-folk who moved in from the surrounding country. In the little villages of Lindsay, Peterborough, Douro, Douver's Corners, there are many people whose forefathers carved farms out of the wilderness early in the nineteenth century.

Another reason why Peterborough has been a particularly rich source of songs is that during the nineteenth century it was a great lumbering center, and when the lumber camps moved further north, many of the Peterborough men followed them. Until quite recent times it was the custom for the men to work their farms in the winter and head for the lumber camps in the fall. The long winter evenings in the shanties did a very great deal to preserve the traditional folk songs in Ontario. Most of the older men I've recorded had grown up in their youth, and many of the younger ones had learned them from their father or grandfather. Thus while the bulk of my collecting has been done in the Peterborough region, I believe the songs that I have recorded are known in many other parts of the province. Certainly samples from other regions show enough duplication to indicate that many of the songs are shared by more than one region. The older singers are represented by Mrs. McFay, who is 78, Mrs. Ralph, who is 80, and Mr. Abbott who is 84. Martin Smith is one of the best known folk singers and has nearly a thousand songs in his repertoire. He also sings for me. Another large group is made up of the songs and ballads dealing specifically with lumbering. Most of the well known lumberjack songs are to be found here, as well as a few that are peculiar to Ontario.

In addition to the lumberjack ballads composed here, there are other local types that describe the songs of pirate ballads which I hope to present in a later album. There are also few of the songs that migrated here from the British Isles.

There are quite a few types of Ontario songs that are not covered. The largest missing group is that of lumberjack songs which I hope to present in a later album. Also few of the songs that migrated here from the British Isles. Nor are there many songs from Ontario citizens of non-English-speaking origins.

I've been pleasantly surprised not only by the number and variety of the songs, but by the quality of the singers. Consider how many were recalling songs they hadn't sung for twenty, forty, or even sixty years, it was remarkable how many long ballads they could reproduce without hesitation. Of course every collector is tantalized by fragments of songs once known and now forgotten, but most of the singers I've recorded have produced complete and well-rounded versions. They also give repeated demonstrations of the traditional singer's ability to sing in key without accompaniment. I feel many professional singers find hard to emulate.

This record gives a sampling of some of the Ontario songs. I've tried to pick ones that were of interest to themselves as well as of the different types to be found here. On Side I are grouped the songs that originated in Ontario or in America; on Side II are the songs that were transplanted from the British Isles.

There are quite a few types of Ontario songs that are not covered. The largest missing group is that of lumberjack songs which I hope to present in a later album. Also few of the songs that migrated here from the United States have been included, and none of the sailors' songs from the Great Lakes. Nor are there any songs from Ontario citizens of non-English-speaking origins.

I've tried to select only songs that are sung well enough to make pleasant listening, with the result that most of the singers heard here are somewhat younger than the average of the group. The older singers are represented by Mrs. McFay, who is 78, Mrs. Ralph, who is 80, and Mr. Abbott who is 84. Martin Smith is perhaps the best known of the singers. He is about sixty-five, and the others range from about thirty to forty-five. However, they all learned their songs traditionally and reflect the traditional style.

As an interest in folk music seems to run in families, quite a few of the singers I've recorded are related. For example, Mrs. Tom Sullivan is the sister-in-law of Mr. Sullivan, who is a fine fiddle player, and two of his sisters have also sung for me. Joe Kelly and Mrs. Kesting are cousins, and Mr. Ron Wood of the Wood brothers, and another cousin have also contributed songs. So have Mrs. Towns' brother and Mrs. Murrin's uncle.
"THE POOR LITTLE GIRLS OF ONTARIO"

Sung by Mrs. Hartley Minifie, Peterborough

This little ditty circulated in Ontario in the latter part of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, when the boys were being lured to the North-West Territories by the promise of free homesteads. The newly-developed Territories were divided into the provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta in 1905, and from that date to the outbreak of World War I the west saw its greatest influx of settlers.

Mrs. Minifie, who was born Ethel Mabee, learned these verses around 1906 in her home at Frankford, near Belleville in eastern Ontario. Her tune is very close to "Yankee Doodle".

The song must have been known over most of the province, for I collected another version in Guelph, near Lake of the Woods, and Rapid City (in South Dakota).

I'll sing you a song of that lone pest,
It goes by the name of the Great North-West.
I cannot have a beau at all,
Thinking to better ourselves, no doubt,
From the poor little girls of Ontario.

REFRAIN:
One by one they all clear out,
Thinking to better themselves, no doubt,
Caring little how far they go.
From the poor little girls of Ontario.

First I got mashed on Charlie Brown,
The nicest fellow in all the town.
He tipped his hat and sailed away,
And now he's settled in Thunder Bay.

Then Henry Magner with his white cravat,
His high stiff collar and his new plug hat,
He was formed he'd have to bag,
And now he's settled in Winnipeg.

Then my long-legged druggist with his specs on his nose,
I really thought that he'd propose,
But he's sold his bottle-shop and now he's gone.
Clear out to little Saskatchewan.

I'll pack my clothes in a carpet sack,
I'll go out there and I'll never come back,
I'll find me a husband and a good one, too,
If I have to go through to Cariboo.

LAST REFRAIN:
One by one we'll all clear out,
Thinking to better ourselves, no doubt,
Caring little how far we go.
From the old, old folks of Ontario.

"THE BANKS OF THE DON"

Sung by Mrs. O.J. Abbott, Hull, Quebec

This song describing life in the Don Jail in Toronto, has been popular for many years in many parts of the province. Mr. Abbott learned it around 1930 from an Irish farmer in the Ottawa valley: it probably reached northern Ontario through the lumber crews. It also circulated in western Ontario: Harry Boyle, a CBC program supervisor, reports that he heard it in his youth in Huron County around 1920. Mrs. Don Bein of Burlington remembers school children singing it in a Toronto schoolyard around 1930.

The Don Jail, which was built in the 1860's, stands on the banks of the Don River in eastern Toronto. The song about it is similar in spirit to an Irish one called "The Mountjoy Hotel" about the Dublin jail. However, "The Banks of the Don" appears to be older, for "The Mountjoy Hotel" is said to have been written in 1918. They have in common a somewhat satirical tone, but the actual verses do not correspond at all. Nor is the tune the same: "The Mountjoy Hotel" uses "Villikens and His Dinah". "The Banks of the Don" uses another tune found in "Erin Go Bragh" and several lumberjack songs.

Another of Ontario's "grand institutions" is described in the next song, "See St. Mary's Jail", which describes the fate of a boy of Irish origin who came up to Ontario and ran afoul of the law.

On the banks of the Don there's a dear little spot,
A boarding house proper where you get your meals hot,
You get fine bread and water and you won't pay a cent,
Your taxes are paid for, your board and your rent.

So turn out every man of you, all in a line,
From the cell to the stoneyard you all must keep time,
You work like a Turk till the bell it strikes one,
In that grand institution just over the Don.

Our borders are honest, not one of them steal,
For we count all our knives and forks after each meal;
Our windows are airy and barred up beside
To keep our good boarders from falling outside.

So turn out every man of you, all in a line,
From the cell to the stoneyard you all must keep time,
You work like a Turk till the bell it strikes one
In that grand institution just over the Don.

"JOHNSTON'S HOTEL"

Sung by Mrs. Tom Sullivan, Lakefield

The Peterborough county jail stands on the banks of the Otonabee River, just across from the Quaker Oats plant. Dalton Johnston was governor there from about 1890 to 1950. Langley was a well-known magistrate who retired some ten years ago, and the other names mentioned were members of the police force.

This song originated in the early 1930's. I learned the name of the man who is said to have made it up, but as he was one of the boarders at Johnston's Hotel at the time, it might be tactful not to mention him. At any rate, the verses have been sung by many subsequent "boarders" as well as by many law-abiding folks in Peterborough.

The title parallels "The Mountjoy Hotel", and it uses the same ubiquitous tune. However, the first lines indicate it was inspired by "The Banks of the Don" rather than by its Irish counterpart. Another version, sung by John Condon of Peterborough, confirms this assumption with the following lines:

"If you want free board in the Johnston's Hotel Just ramble down George Street a-raising blue hell. Dry bread and water don't cost you a cent: Your lights and your water go on your back rent."
And there's a boarding house there where you get your meals hot,
And oh, don't you wish you were boarding at Johnston's Hotel?
Oh, there's old Johnny Dainard, not a bad sort you know,
And old Billy Wigg, he ain't bad also,
Just to be boarding at Johnston's Hotel.
Oh, there ain't much to do; just to clean up the park,
And other odd jobs from daylight till dark,
And then after that you wash.
You go right to bed up at Johnston's Hotel.

SIDE 1 -- BAND 4

"THE MURDER OF F.C. BENWELL"

Sung by Lamont Tilden, Toronto

This ballad recalls the most famous murder case in Ontario's history. In 1890 James Reginald Birchall was tried and hanged for the murder of Frederick C. Benwell, an English boy whose body was found in the Blenheim swamp in southwestern Ontario on February 21.

Birchall was himself an Englishman, the son of a clergyman and a former Oxford student, who had come to Canada some years earlier and settled in Woodstock, where he won quite a reputation in various sporting circles as "Lord Somerset." When his creditors became troublesome, he left Woodstock and went back to England where he advertised for farm work. He was also to be the dummy for well-to-do English families to send their younger sons to Canada to establish themselves on the land, and Birchall told Benwell's father that he had a well-stocked farm near Niagara Falls.

That farm did not exist, but on the pretext of taking Benwell to inspect it, Birchall murdered him and left his body in the lonely swamp. When it was identified by a cigar which the boy had been smoking, the police finally discovered Birchall's relationship with Birchall and established a strong chain of circumstantial evidence which led to Birchall's conviction at the fall assizes in Woodstock.

The trial aroused great interest, and thousands congregated in the market place in front of the town hall to see the prisoner. Birchall was sentenced to hang on October 14, and in the interval he wrote the story of his life for "The Mail" and the "New York Herald Tribune," to raise money for his wife. A book based on his story, "The Story of His Life, Trial, and Imprisonment," was written, and bearing the heading "Woodstock Gaol, October, 1890," went through many printings.

Such a celebrated trial naturally produced ballads, and this one, supposed to have been composed by Birchall, was widely sung at the time and for many years afterwards. The story is reasonably accurate; Birchall maintained his innocence to the end, and his wife did visit him in the jail the night before he was hanged. The Lord's Prayer was recited in the scaffold by Birchall's spiritual counselor, and the trap door flew open at 8 o'clock mentioned in the ballad.

The words of this song have appeared in Sigmund Spaho's "Mean Some More," Mr. Kelly, and a somewhat changed version, "The Death of Bendall," in Louise Pound's "America's Ballads and Songs.

While many people in Ontario remembered hearing it, I could find no one to sing it to me until by chance I discovered that Lamont Tilden, the CBC announcer who reads the scripts on the radio program, "Folk Song Time," knew it. He recorded it as he had learned it in his childhood in Harriston in western Ontario, with the phrases spoken in the traditional manner. While this habit is common among old-time lumberjacks to indicate the end of a ballad, and I suppose appropriate here as the song is supposed to be sung by Birchall—and he would have had difficulty finishing the line after the trap door flew open—

Another completely different song about Birchall also circulated in Ontario. It was told in the third person, and had six verses, two of which ran:

"John Reginald Birchall was the name of this inhuman man, Fred Benwell was his victim, he is numbered with the slain. He lowered him into a lonely swamp and took his life away; Two bullet wounds he did inflict, and left his body lay."

"To get away out of the place he thought it would be best, Still link by link they made a chain which caused his arrest. They lodged him in the Woodstock jail his trial for to stand Before the judge and jury, the best ones in the land."

The tune and pattern of the better-known version were borrowed from the American gallows ballad about Charles Guiteau, the assassin of President Garfield, who was executed in 1882.

My name is J.R. Birchall, that name I'll never deny; I leave my aged parents in sorrow for to die, For little did they think that in my youth and bloom I'd be taken to the scaffold to meet my fatal doom.

Come al you tender Christians, wherever you may be, And kindly pay attention to these few lines from me. On the fourteenth of November I am condemned to die For the murder of F.C. Benwell, upon the scaffold high.

Now Benwell was an Englishman and had not yet a wife; He came into this country to seek an honest life. They said that I betrayed him unto a certain spot, And there with my revolver Benwell he was shot.

I tried to play off innocent, but found it would not do, The evidence being against me, it proved I had no show. They took me to the prison, all in my youth and boom, And there upon the scaffold I must meet by fatal doom.

My wife she came to see me, to bid her last farewell; She said it was heartrending to leave me in the cell. She said, "My dearest husband, you know that you must die For the murder of F.C. Benwell; upon the scaffold high."

"Twas nine o'clock in the morning, and I knew my doom was near; I gathered up my courage to prove I had no fear.

The last few words were spoken, the words: "Thy will be done!" The trap door it flew open—and Birchall he was hung.

SIDE 2 -- BAND 5

"MAGGIE HOWIE"

Sung by Mrs. Tom Sullivan, Lakefield

While I had trouble finding anyone who could sing the ballad about Benwell's murder, several knew this one about the murder of Maggie Howie. The case was not as famous, but the chief figures were Irish, and so are most of the Ontario folk singers.

I have now six different versions of this ballad, all very similar, but varying a little from singer to singer. The first came from Mrs. Swann, how living in Toronto, who was born in Napanee. Her version was the tune of "The Wild Colonial Boy," and it was the only one that included these lines which explain the parents' opposition:

"Maggie Howie was a farmer's daughter, as you have heard men tell, She was of Protestant birth, a fact you know full well, But I of Roman faith, but not of high degree, Her parents interfering, she would not marry me."

The people in and around Peterborough sang the song much as Mrs. Sullivan does. Some miles eastward, not near Indian River, an old man sang a longer version which had the murder committed with a stick instead of an axe, and included these lines:

"The public feeling being very hard, they acted so severe, That day they wanted to lynch me for the murdering of my dear. As she lay in her rosewood coffin, oh, there's hundreds come to view The body of Maggie Howie, to bid her remain adieu.

When I wrote to the editor of the Japanese Post-Express for details of the murder, he printed the Request in his paper, and from information supplied by residents of the district he compiled this report which appeared on April 11, 1957:

"One of the most startling aspects of the murder for the editor was that Maggie Howie was murdered at the site of this house. There was a barn and a hotel there before. Maggie Howie was walking a cow in the barn when Michael Lee swung his axe and killed her, apparently for unrequited love."
Maggie Howie was a farmer's daughter, the truth to you I'll tell.
She was renowned in Napans, as you know quite well.
It's true I loved her dearly, as you will understand,
For she was wearing my own gold ring upon her lily-white hand.

Maggie Howie was a farmer's daughter, the truth to you I'll tell.
She was renowned in Napans, as you know quite well.

It's cruel that I have murdered her, I own it to my shame.

"My dearest dear, I must be severe and take away your life
Unless you promise to marry me, and become my lawful wife."
She rung her hands with anger and wept most bitterly.

It was early one Tuesday morning, my love along did stray,
I overtook my darling, those words to her did say:
"My dearest dear, I must be severe and take away your life
Unless you promise to marry me, and become my lawful wife."

So it's now I am a prisoner in the town of Napans,
It's there I'll stand my trial and the judge will sentence me.
For I know that I am guilty and I do deserve to die
For the murder of my own true love upon the gallows high.

This is an Ontario variant of an old Irish song
called "The Bonny Laboring Boy". It parallels closely a version that appears in Colm O'Lochlainn's Irish Street Ballads, except of course for the final line which localises this one very neatly.

The northern Ontario railroad line "from Ottawa to Owen Sound" was being built in the last decade of the nineteenth century.

This pattern must have been very popular in Ontario for I've also collected a song called "The Jolly Shuanty Boy" whose words correspond closely to the words here given, although the tune is somewhat different, and the second verse is used as a refrain.

A similar dialogue between mother and daughter turns up in "Ye Maidens of Ontario" (see Folk Songs of Canada, p. 76) and in the American song "The Rolling Dambles", although these apparently spring from a different Irish song, "The Rolling Journeymen".

It was on a summer's evening in the merry month of May,
I overheard a pretty girl, whose words I heard her say:
"It's cruel are my par-i-ents, on me they keep their eye,
And will not let me rumble with my jolly railroad boy."

"His cheeks are like the roses and he always wears good clothes,
Admired by all the pretty girls, no matter where he goes.
Of medium height he is, and in my opinion a very good fellow.
If I had my will I'd wed him still, my jolly railroad boy."

"Oh daughter, dearest daughter, why do you talk so strange,
For you to marry a railroad boy this wise world for to range?
Some drygoods clerk would suit you better, with salary you'd include,
Than to throw your youthful life away with a reckless railroad boy."

"Oh mother, dearest mother, your talk is all in vain.
Some drygoods clerk would be good enough, but him I don't admire.
I mean to have a humble life and salary I'll include.
I'd rather live in poverty and I'll wed the railroad boy."

"If I had all the riches that's in my father's store,
Oh freely I would share it with the boy that I adore."
"We'll fill our glasses to the brim, let the toast go merrily around,
And we'll drink to the health of the railroad boy, from Ottawa to Owen Sound."

This pattern apparently spring from a different Irish song,
and in the American song, "The Roaming Journeymen", the third verse's reference to "the money or the cheque" suggests that the dead hobo might have been a "remittance man": the name applied to the ne'er-do-well sons of respectable English families were frequently shipped out to Canada and supplied with a small allowance to keep them from coming home and embarrassing their relatives.

It was a bright summer's day in the month of May,
By the waters called the Tomahawk flows,
Through a pine wood just where I chanced to stroll.
There I spied a hobo's grave.

Now he lies all alone in a grave unknown
Where the Norway maple, and the woolly west;
There's none to direct the money or the cheques
For the hobo lies at rest.

He may have been his father's only son,
Or his mother's pride and joy,
But he lies at rest in the land called the west,
Where no lilies bloom in May.

Now stone marks the spot where the hobo lies,
There's no lilies to direct your gaze,
There's none to watch over the spot where he lies
In the lonesome hobo's grave.

This piece ditty was apparently quite popular in Ontario at one time, and, strangely enough, it seems to have circulated in the lumbercamps. Although it's hard to imagine a husky lumberjack singing it, I first heard it from Tom Brandon in northern Ontario.

The words suggest that the song was of missionary origin, and the tune is reminiscent of various nineteenth-century hymns. However, it must have circulated fairly widely by oral tradition for there are numerous verbal differences between Mr. Cleary's and Mrs. Murrin's versions, although the general pattern is the same.
Through these dark woods and forests wild
My father roamed, wild nature's child,
With tomahawk and bended bow
To lay the bear and the red deer low.

My brother in his bark canoe
Across the waves so gaily flew,
To shoot the bear and the otter fine
Or catch the white fish in the lake.

My mother in her wigwam stayed
The various baskets for to braid,
To pound the corn or dress the skin
To sew my father's mocassin.

While I, a little Indian maid
With corn shells or mariglores played
Or by my mother stayed all day
To braid the plaited baskets gay.

I could not read, I could not sew;
My Mother's name I did not know.
My parents they I disobeyed
And to the Saviour I never prayed.

Till the white man to the forest came
And taught poor Indians Jesus' name.
They built a church and schoolhouse near,
With wildwood hymns did the wildwoods cheer.

Now I can read, now I can sew,
The Saviour's name now I have to know,
And to the Saviour I implore
To bless the white man for evermore.

SIDE 1--BAND 9
"THE INDIAN'S LAMENT"
Sung by Mrs. Tom Sullivan, Lakefield

This more pessimistic picture of the effect of the white man on the Indians makes a nice contrast to the preceding song. It also was sung in the lumbercamps, and seems to have been more widespread. While I've found no trace of "The Little Indian Maid" in printed collections, "The Indian's Lament" appears in Helen Creighton's Songs and Ballads of Nova Scotia and B.C. Beck includes it in his Lament "Widely sung in the woods of the Great Lakes region".

It was also widely sung in the northern Ontario woods; in addition to Mrs. Sullivan, I found several others around Peterborough who knew it, and Mr. O.J. Abbott of Hull, Quebec, had learned it in northern Ontario lumbercamps some sixty years ago. He sang it to a quite different tune in which the last line of each verse was repeated.

Helen Creighton also gives two different tunes, which suggests that the words were originally printed and the verses were picked up and sung to various tunes which happened to fit the metre. The writer was probably a white man but some of my informants tell me they have heard Indian lumberjacks sing it in the camps.

While "The Little Indian Maid" may have originated in Canada, "The Indian's Lament" is obviously an American import, as the line "from Texas to Maine" shows.

As an Indian sat in his little bark canoe,
He called it right over the waters so blue,
He sang of the days when the land was their own
Long before pale faces among them were known.

When first that these red men were lord of this soil
They lived happy, contented, without trouble or toil.
They hunted the beaver, the otter, the deer,
For they thought in the wild woods there was nothing to fear.

When first that these white men came to our land
We used them like brothers, we gave them our hand.
We knew they were weary, in need of repose,
Little thinking the white men would ever turn our foes.

For a while we lived happy with our white friends all round
We showed them the beauty of our own hunting ground.
They paid us with trinkets which pleased us for a while,
And caused us poor Indians like children to smile.

They built their large cities all over the land,
And on the rich prairie their farm houses stand.
They own all the country from Texas to Maine,
And the Indian may seek for his wigwam in vain.

Oh the pride of the forest that over us bow,
The tall pine, the red pine, oh where are you now?
The beaver, the otter, the hunters have slain,
And they've driven the red deer far over the plain.

The graves of our forefathers, where are they now?
They're rudely trodden over and torn by the plough.
Their children have wandered distant and lone,
And the graves of our forefathers we visit no more.

For awhile we will linger around this happy place,
Our wives and our sweethearts we them embrace,
Till the Great Spirit calls us away from all pain.
To that bright happy land where we will all meet again.

SIDE 1--BAND 10
"SALLY GREER"
Sung by Martin McManus, Peterborough

This is a sample of the many ballads inspired by the Irish immigration to Canada during the nineteenth century.

While there were many similar tragedies, I've not been able to locate the particular shipwreck described here. Of course, the factual details may be inaccurate; the only other version of the song reported was collected by Helen Creighton in Nova Scotia, and in it the date is given as 1843, the ship is called the Rose of Aberdeen, and the number of immigrants is set at 10, of whom 14 reached the shore. The larger tragedy described by Mr. McManus is more typical for the immigrants were usually overloaded.

In his book, The Great Migration, the Ontario historian, Ed­win O. Guiliet, describes many similar shipwrecks. For example, in 1827 the brig James was wrecked off the banks of New­foundland, only 11 escaping death out of 257, and the bar­que Astra was wrecked on the rocks of Louisbourg with a loss of 208 out of the 211 on board. Mr. Guiliet mentions a death list of some 700 for the three worst disasters that year, and quotes a Quebec Gazette recommendation of rigid regulations to insure the seaworthiness of emigrant ships which "in general were quite the worst in the Atlantic service. Those sailing from Ireland were commonly the most defective of all."

The site of the wreck described in "Sally Greer", St. Paul's Island, some ten miles beyond Cape North at the mouth of the Gulf of the St. Lawrence, was described in 1847 as "a huge rock dividing at top into three conical peaks. Rising boldly from the sea, there is a great depth of water all round it, and vessels may pass at either side of it. It has been the site of numerous shipwrecks; many vessels, carried out of their reckoning by the currents, having been dashed against it when concealed by fog, and instantly shattered to atoms. Human bones and other materials of these disasters are strewn around its base."

There are certain flaws in Mr. McManus' song; verse three is apparently a combination of two original verses, and its second line is unintelligible. However, he sings it with complete conviction, and in a style that is characteristic of the Irish-Canadian lumberjack, including the speaking of the last few words to indicate the end of the song.

Ontario singers use this same tune for the lumberjack ballad, "Peter Noye".

Oh it being in the month of August, eighteen hundred and thirty-three,
My parents they forced me to leave this country,
To leave this fine island whose first my breath I drew.
They forced me to America, my fortune to pursue.

The reason that they banished me I mean to let you know,
Because I would not break the vows I made unto my dear.
'Twas from the Monarch of Aberdeen to Belfast we set sail;
We hoisted an English color, to Quebec we were bound.

Sailing on the ocean no danger did I fear,
I started (?) and the one I love was charming.
On the wind blew from the mountains and it tossed us up and down,
For three long weeks we were floating all on those stormy waves, Expecting every moment for to meet a watery grave.

Oh it was on Paul's Island for three long days we lay,
The cold ground being our bed and our covering were the skies.
Of three hundred and fifty passengers, only thirteen reached the shore.

The rest of them to the bottom went, they sank to rise no more.
And he bid adieu to that Orange crew in the city of Montreal.

And he received a fatal ball which entered in his brain.

So come all you true-bred Catholics who love your church and creed,
I hope you’ll pay attention to what King Billy and Cromwell did,
They tore down Catholic churches from Lewis to Donegal,
But they can’t come across with no games like that in the city of Montreal.

It’s now I’m in strange country, my sorrow to bewail;
No friends or relation to hear my mournful tale.

And there they sat down by the side of the stream
Till they came to a pond where the pond lillies grew,
They walked along together for an hour or two
And they sat there and talked for an hour or two

We lost our money and clothing all by that dreadful wreck,
And we were not a sight to be seen when we landed at Quebec.

Well, I hope you’ll pay attention to the few lines that you read,
To day of course the hostility
Between Protestant and Catholic
In Montreal:

One Man Shot and Killed—Several Others Wounded

The newspaper account indicates that the ballad isn’t quite accurate, for there was no formal Orange men’s parade that day, but on that day there has been dropped because of the hostility of the United Irishmen. However, brawling broke out between a number of Catholics and Protestants in Victoria Square, and in the melee a man called Francis Hackett was shot.

The Twelfth of July parades have long been common in many parts of Canada, but in Montreal the Orange men have always been a small minority in a predominantly Catholic city. The religious friction which created the 1877 riot was not typical of the relations between the Catholic and Protestant Irishmen in Montreal between 1834 and 1856 the two groups had worked together in such organizations as the St. Patrick’s Society, and their relations were generally so harmonious that an Irish historian speaking on the hundredth anniversary of the battle of the Boyne asserted that “the history of the Montreal Irish is a lesson in toleration.” In Toronto, on the other hand, where the Protestants outnumbered the Catholics, there used to be ructions during the St. Patrick’s Day parades.

Today of course the hostility between Protestant and Catholic Irishmen in Canada is largely a thing of the past, but in the nineteenth century feelings still ran high. Religious rivalry was embittered by the centuries when the large Catholic population of Ireland had been harshly oppressed by the largely Protestant landowners and ruling classes; a bitterness recalled by the key to “what King Billy and did.” In fact, the whole tone of this ballad echoes that of the many Irish songs of resistance during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, even though the scene is Montreal rather than Dublin.

Come all you gallant Irishmen who love your church and creed,
I hope you’ll pay attention to the few lines that you read,
Concerning your church and countrymen, your brothers one and all.

So come all you true-bred Catholics who love your church and creed,
I hope you’ll pay attention to what King Billy and Cromwell did,
They tore down Catholic churches from Lewis to Donegal,
But they can’t come across with no games like that in the city of Montreal.

IT IS NOW I’ M IN STRANGE COUNTRY, MY SORROW TO BEWAIL;
NO FRIENDS OR RELATION TO HEAR MY MOURNFUL TALE.

And the other was a weaver with dark wavy hair.
The reference to ‘Lager beer’ might indicate that the weaver was Dutch, as many of the early weavers came to the British Isles from the Netherlands, and “old Denver” may be a new-world substitution for a Netherlands town.

Mrs. Keating, who was born Vera Monaghan and lived near Ormsby, some fifty miles north-east of Peterborough, learned her song from her father.

For comparative references see American Ballads from British Broadside, P 14.

As I went out walking for pleasure one day
I spied a young couple all on the highway.
The one was a maiden, a maiden so fair,
And the other was a weaver with dark wavy hair.

“Good morning, good morning,” the weaver he said,
“Oh where are you going, my pretty fair maid?”
“I’m going out walking by the side of the stream
To watch the silver waters gilding, hear the nightingales sing.”

They walked along together for an hour or two
Till they came to a pond where the pond lillies grew,
And there they sat down by the side of the stream
To watch the silver waters gilding, hear the nightingales sing.

They sat there and talked for an hour or two
When out of his paisley a fiddle he drew,
And he played her a tune caused the valleys to ring,
And the silver waters gilding, hear the nightingales sing.

And now,” said the maiden, “will you marry me?”
“Oh, no,” said the weaver, “that never can be.
I’ve a wife in old Denver and children twice three;
Two wives in old Denver I’ll never take near me.

“I’ll go back to old Denver and stay there one year;
I’ll drink no cold water, I’ll drink lager beer,
And if I return it will be in the springtime
To watch the silver waters gilding, hear the nightingales sing.”
"The Golden Vanity" (Child 286)

**Sung by Joe Kelly, Downer's Corners**

This ancient tale is widely popular in Ontario as well as in many other parts of North America. At least two different versions of it circulated in this province; the one given here seems to have been the most popular, but I've also recorded another called "The Green Willow Tree."

The song dates back at least to the days of the first Queen Elizabeth; one early copy cited Sir Walter Raleigh as the original captain. This Ontario version follows the ancient pattern very closely except for the last two verses which were added by someone who felt the wicked captain shouldn't get away with his treachery. This particular form seems to be known only in Canada, but several American variants reveal the same desire to punish the captain. Belden quotes one in which the boy's ghost returns to haunt him, and Shoemaker gives one in which the crew throws him overboard.

Joe Kelly, a cousin of Vera Keating, also comes from Orono and learned this song from his father. Mr. Abbott of Hall, Quebec, sang a very similar version, which suggests that it circulated in the lumber camps.

For comparative references see British Traditional Ballads in North America, p. 153.

**There was a gallant ship in North America,**
She goes by the name of the Golden Vanity,
She was to be taken by the Turkish Commune
For to sink her in the lowlands, lowlands, lowlands,
And I'm sinking in the lowlands low.

**The first to come on board it was the cabin boy,**
Saying, "Captain, what'll you give me if that ship I will
"Gold I will give you, my daughter for your bride, destroy!"
If you'll sink her in the lowlands, lowlands, lowlands,
If you'll sink her in the lowlands low.

**The boy took an auger and overboard went he,**
He swam till he came to the Golden Vanity,
For to sink her in the lowlands, lowlands, lowlands,
And I'm sinking in the lowlands low.

Three holes the boy bored, three holes the boy bored twice,
While some were playing cards and the others were shooting dice.
How their black eyes they did jingle as the water it poured in
And she sank in the lowlands low, lowlands, lowlands.

The boy bent his breast and back swam he,
He swam till he came to the Golden Vanity,
Saying, "Shipmates, pick me up, for I'm going with the tide,
And I'm sinking in the lowlands, lowlands, lowlands,
And I'm sinking in the lowlands low.

"Pick you up," said the captain, "For that I shall not do,
Kill you or drown you, I'll do it with a will.
Gold I'll not give you, nor for your bride,
But I'll sink you in the lowlands, lowlands, lowlands.
"I will sink you in the lowlands low."

The boy swam around unto the other side
And there he most pitiful did cry,
Saying, "Shipmates, pick me up, for I'm going with the tide,
And I'm sinking in the lowlands, lowlands, lowlands,
And I'm sinking in the lowlands low.

His shipmates picked him up, there on deck he died.
They rolled him in his hammock for it being long and wide,
They rolled him in his hammock and they lowered him in the
deed sink in the lowlands, lowlands, lowlands, tide,
And he sank in the lowlands low.

About three weeks after this, the day being calm and clear,
A voice from the heavens did reach the captain's ear,
Saying, "Captain, dearest captain, you've been mighty cruel
And I'll sink you in the lowlands, lowlands, lowlands/to me,
And I'll sink you in the lowlands low.

The captain was amazed, he didn't know what to do,
The captain was amazed when his mastsam broke in two,
His mastsam broke in two and she leveled with the tide,
And she sank in the lowlands, lowlands, lowlands,
And she sank in the lowlands low.
In Bristol there lived a fair lady, 
And two very fine choices are they. 

She was courted by a gallant young sailor. 
And cruel was that false young man that sold his love for gold. 

But she had an angry old father, 
And cruel was those wintry winds that pierced my heart with cold, 
And cruel was her handsome Jimmy. 
And I'll for give those wintry winds that pierced my heart with cold. 

She was courted by a gallant young sailor, 
And she called him her handsome Jimmy. 

And a lady of honor was she; 
And cruel was those wintry winds that pierced my heart with cold, 
And she called him her handsome Jimmy. 
And cruel was those wintry winds that pierced my heart with cold. 

And she was courted by a gallant young sailor, 
And cruel was those wintry winds that pierced my heart with cold, 
And cruel was her handsome Jimmy. 
And cruel was those wintry winds that pierced my heart with cold. 

But the villain forsook his fair bride 
And cruel was those wintry winds that pierced my heart with cold, 
And cruel was her handsome Jimmy. 
And cruel was those wintry winds that pierced my heart with cold. 

And cruel was her handsome Jimmy. 
And cruel was those wintry winds that pierced my heart with cold, 
And cruel was her handsome Jimmy. 
And cruel was those wintry winds that pierced my heart with cold.

She was courted by a gallant young sailor, 
And cruel was those wintry winds that pierced my heart with cold, 
And cruel was her handsome Jimmy. 
And cruel was those wintry winds that pierced my heart with cold, 

But she had an angry old father, 
And cruel was those wintry winds that pierced my heart with cold, 
And an angry old father was he, 
And cruel was those wintry winds that pierced my heart with cold, 

And she called him her handsome Jimmy. 
And cruel was those wintry winds that pierced my heart with cold, 
And cruel was her handsome Jimmy. 
And cruel was those wintry winds that pierced my heart with cold.

And an angry old father was he, 
And cruel was those wintry winds that pierced my heart with cold, 

And cruel was her handsome Jimmy. 
And cruel was those wintry winds that pierced my heart with cold, 

And cruel was those wintry winds that pierced my heart with cold, 
And cruel was her handsome Jimmy. 

Mr. Hefferman learned the ballad from an older Peterborough man, 
Sung by Joe Mackenzie, Frontenac County.

"IN BRISTOL THERE LIVED A FAIR MAIDEN" 
Sung by Jimmie Hefferman, Peterborough

The origin of this ballad is a mystery to me; so far I have not been able to locate anything similar in either British or American sources.

It is obviously of English origin, and the theme and style indicate it is fairly old. The reference to a "loaded fuse" suggests a seventeenth-century origin, for according to the Oxford Dictionary, the term "fuse" was used for a light musket or firelock between 1650 and 1659.

There are, of course, a whole host of ballads in which fathers object to their daughter's choice, but in most of them the father remains adamant and the story either ends tragically or the lovers run away. This is almost unique in picturing a father capable of changing his mind in the face of his daughter's devotion.

Mr. Hefferman learned the ballad from an older Peterborough man, 
Sung by Joe Mackenzie, Frontenac County.

"MARY OF THE WILD MOOR" 
Sung by Mrs. Jock Kesting, Peterborough

This tale of a betrayed maiden who dies at her father's door parallels the ballad song quite closely, but while "The Wintry Winds" is fairly rare, "Mary of the Wild Moor" has been collected in many parts of Britain and America.

In fact, MacKenzie notes that "few songs have appeared more frequently in broadsides and song books".

Mrs. Mackenzie learned this from her grandfather, 
Sung by Mrs. Jock Kesting, Peterborough

"THE WINTY WINDS" 
Sung by Mrs. Jack Kesting, Peterborough

While it resembles other tragic ballads of the nineteenth century, this particular ballad is rare in North America. The only version reported was collected by Mackenzie in Nova Scotia under the title of "The Fatal Snowstorm". It relates it to a Pitts broadside at Harvard, but the broadside does not seem to me to be the same song. Both the Nova Scotia and the Ontario versions are more likely to have come from Ireland. Mrs. Sarah Makem, a fine contemporary Irish folkelinger who lives in County Armagh, has recorded a very similar song under the title of "In the Month of January".

It's one cold night in winter, how cold those winds did blow. 
I glanced to spy a fair young maid cut out on the banks of snow. 
With her baby in her arms, she had no place to go. 
I stopped to pay attention to hear what she would say.

She said: "Oriel was my father who barred those doors on me, 
And cruel was my mother who might have pitied me, 
And cruel was those wintry winds that pierced my heart with cold, 
And cruel was that false young man that sold his love for gold.

"I'll go o'er to yonder valley and there I will kneel down 
And pray to the Almighty God for all that I have done. 
And I'll forgive my father who barred those doors on me, 
And I'll forgive my mother who might have pitied me, 

And I'll forgive those wintry winds that pierced my heart with cold, 
But I'll never forgive that false young man that sold his love for gold. 
She kissed her baby's cold, cold lips and laid it by her side/gold."

And turned her eyes up towards the skies, and then lay down and died.
**SIDE II--BAND 7**

"THE BOLD PRIVATEER"

Sung by Tom Brandon, Peterborough

This is another sample of the sea songs that have flourished in this inland province. Although it has appeared in various broadsides and songsters in America it has not often been reported in oral tradition (See American Balladry from British Broadsides, p.52).

In Britain Kidson included it in his *Traditional Tunes* in 1891 with the comment that it was well known in Hall and other seaport towns. He stated that it dates "at least from our last French and American war"—presumably the Napoleonic war which overlapped the American War of 1812. Certainly "the cruel war" mentioned in the song could not have been any later for that was the last period when privatisation was commonly practiced.

Mr. Brandon learned the song from his uncle, John Coffey, who lives near Kinmount.

"O Mary, darling Mary, since you and I must part, I'm going to cross the ocean and leave with you my heart. Since you are the mistress of ten thousand pounds a year, I will now go on board of the bold privateer."

"Willie, darling Willie, stay at home if you can, Many the man has lost his life since this cruel war began. Stay at home, dear Willie, with the girl that loves you dear; Do not venture your life on board of the bold privateer."

"Your father and your mother both owe me a great spire; Likewise your brother has threatened my life. Now I'm in heaven from their anger I'll get clear If I once set my foot on board of the bold privateer."

"O Mary, darling Mary, ten thousand times adieu, My good ship lies at anchor with all her jolly crew. We'll run up our colors till our purpose we make clear, We will soon let them know that we are the bold privateer."

"But now this war is over and God has spared our lives. Some men are returning to their sweetheart and their wives, But I am returning to the arms of my dear, For I ventured my life on board of the bold privateer."

---

**SIDE II--BAND 8**

"GENERAL WOLFE"

Sung by Mrs. Margaret Ralph, Peterborough

While this ballad has been found in England, it does not seem to have been reported on this continent before. A different ballad on the same theme, variously titled "Brave Wolfe," "Bold Wolfe," or "The Death of the Brave General Wolfe" was quite widely known in New England and eastern Canada.

The English ballad (under the title of "Bold General Wolfe") was included in Baring-Gould's *A Garland of Country Songs* in 1895, and has also been reported in Sussex and the Thames valley (see *A Guide to English Folk Song Collections*, "General Wolfe," p.58).

Mrs. Ralph learned this song from her father, Edward Drum, who had come out to Ontario from Ireland in 1867 when he was 12 years old. He may have learned it in Ireland for I haven't located anyone else in Ontario who knows it.

The ballad is reasonably accurate as far as the historical background goes. When he was killed in 1759, Wolfe had indeed served his king (George III) for sixteen years; he acted as adjutant during the battle of Dettingen in Flanders where he was only sixteen. He did lead his men up the steep cliffs to the Plains of Abraham outside Quebec, and he was wounded in the attack. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* reports: While leading a charge at the head of the Louisbourg grenadiers, Wolfe had one of his wrists shattered by a shot, but wrapping a handkerchief around it he fought on. Another shot struck him, and he still advanced, when a third lodged in his breast."

General Wolfe to his men did say, "Come, come, my boys, come follow me. To yonder blue mountains that stand so high, You lads of honor, you lads of honor, You lads of honor, come follow me."

---

**SIDE II--BAND 9**

"WHAT IS THE LIFE OF A MAN ANY MORE THAN THE LEAVES?"

Sung by Mrs. William Towns, Peterborough

I have found no report of it in any American collection, and only one reference in Britain: in *Williams' Folk Songs of the Upper Thames*, where he notes that "The piece is old and was a favourite throughout the Thames valley". The version he gives is called "What's the Life of a Man Any More than a Leaf?" and it parallels this one with only minor variations in wording.

This song is unusual because of its strong philosophical tone which is quite free of religious references. Many moralistic songs circulated in Ontario during the last century, but most of them clearly pointed the path toward heaven. The realistic acceptance of death implicit in these verses seems more akin to ancient Greek than to Christian philosophy.

As I went a-walking one morning at easy, Viewing the leaves as they fall from the trees, They were all in full motion appearing to be, And those that were withered, they fell from the tree.

**REFRAIN:**

Then what is the life of a man any more than the leaves, For a sun has his reasons and why should it grieve, Although on this earth he appears light and gay, Like the green leaves that wither and soon fade away.

Oh don't you remember a short time ago
The leaves were in full motion appearing to grow? The frost it came on them and withered them all, The rain fell upon them and down they did fall.

Lock down in yonder churchyard, many graves you will see Fell from this earth like the leaves from the tree, Old age and affliction upon them did fall, Death came upon them and down they did fall.
MRS. EDITH POWKE is a well-known Canadian authority on folk songs. Born in Saskatchewan, she now lives in Toronto, Ontario. Her record program, “Folk Song Time”, has been a popular feature on the CBC Trans-Canada Network since 1950, and she has prepared many other radio series based on folk songs and folklore.

She is editor of three books: Folk Songs of Canada, and Folk Songs of Quebec (with Richard Johnston), and Looting with Paul Bunyan.

She prepared the notes for three Folkways albums: FW 3001: O CANADA: A HISTORY IN SONG, sung by Alan Mills; FW 3002: SONGS OF THE IRISH REBELLION OF 1798, sung by Wallace House; and FA 2512: SONGS OF THE SEA, sung by Alan Mills.

Another album based on Mrs. Powke’s field collecting is PG 3506: IRISH & BRITISH SONGS FROM THE OTTAWA VALLEY, which illustrates the extensive repertoire of Mr. O. J. Abbott. She has also prepared two other albums presenting English nursery rhymes and songs by Vivienne Stenson, and eastern square dance calls by Roy Clifton.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The following books have been mentioned in the notes:


Creighton, Helen, and Doreen Senior: TRADITIONAL SONGS FROM NOVA SCOTIA. Toronto: Ryerson, 1950.


Dean-Caith, Margaret: A GUIDE TO ENGLISH POLK SONG COLLECTIONS. Liverpool: English Folks Dance and Song Society, 1954.


Edith Powke with the oldest folk singer she has recorded - Mr. George Hughey of Peterborough, Ont., who is 94.