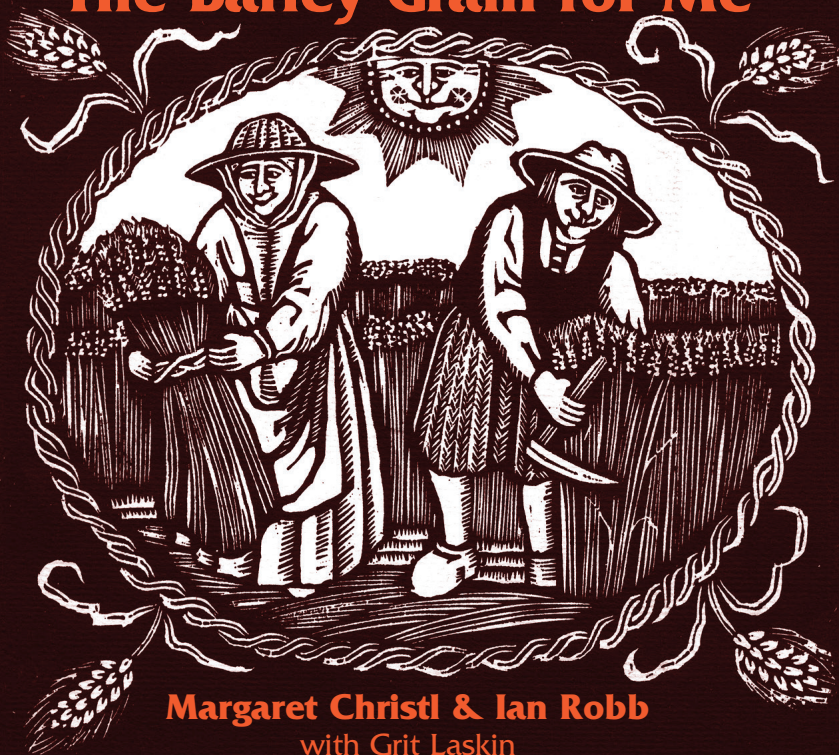


The Barley Grain for Me



Margaret Christl & Ian Robb
with Grit Laskin

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A Dedication

I'll miss Edith Fowke. She was a feisty lady who never shrank from saying what she thought about folk song or anything else. Her contribution to the scholarship and the singing of Canadian folk song is well known, but what set her aside for me was the pleasure she derived out of hearing the songs she had unearthed sung in folk clubs and at festivals. I imagine this end was perhaps as important as the hunt for her, which I think distinguished her from many of the folk song scholars of her generation. If she felt a singer showed some commitment to traditional song, she could be at once enormously encouraging and devastatingly critical. Edith knew, I think, that this is how good singers are made.

About twenty years ago, Edith introduced me to Folk-Legacy's Sandy and Caroline Paton, and was thus responsible for launching me on a modest recording career. The first of these recordings was this collection of Canadian songs, many of them from Edith's collection, which I worked on with Margaret Christl and Grit Laskin. I promised in my last letter to her that I would ask Folk-Legacy to re-release this recording on compact disc. I am grateful to Sandy and Caroline for giving me this opportunity to do just that — a small gesture to acknowledge the enormous contribution of this grand lady of Canadian folk song.

Ian Robb
Ottawa, 1997

1. Campbell, the Drover

Source: Mr. Angelo Dornan of Elgin, New Brunswick

Collected by Helen Creighton

The story line of this song is reminiscent of a bar-room trick still practiced today, in which the unsuspecting victim is left with both hands palm-down on the table, with a glass of beer on the back of each. This is the kind of song that hardly needs a good tune, but has one anyway.

2. Hard Times

Source: Gordon Willis, St. John's, Newfoundland (melody and part of the first verse); Ned Rice, Cape Broyle, Newfoundland (the rest of the text).

Collected by Kenneth Peacock

This song maintained its popularity throughout the years of the depression, for very obvious reasons. Although similar songs have been found in the United States, the first five verses make this version, at least for me, very Canadian. Its fine melody, combined with a text of biting sarcasm, describes, too well, the average day in the life of a Newfoundland fisherman.

3. Save Your Money While You're Young

Source: Mr. Jim Doherty, Peterborough, Ontario

Collected by Edith Fowke

This song flourished wherever the shantyboy worked, though it is unlikely that its advice was ever followed. I first heard it sung by Barry O'Neill, who must take credit (or blame) for interesting me in Ontario songs.

4. The Crockery Ware

Source: Mr. Everett Bennett, St. Paul's, Newfoundland

Collected by Kenneth Peacock

The story line of a young girl outwitting a man whose intentions appear to be somewhat shady is not uncommon. This song seems to have traveled well (there are several Canadian variants). A good tune, and a fine chorus, to boot!

5. Oh, No, Not I

Source: Mr. Everett Bennett, St. Paul's, Newfoundland
Collected by Kenneth Peacock

Peacock believes this song to be of English origin, but is not aware of other variants. The only thing familiar to me is part of the fifth verse, which seems to have been adapted from the “A-Begging I Will Go” family of songs, very popular in England and Scotland.

6. Green Bushes

Source: Mr. Richard Hartlan, South East Passage, Nova Scotia
Collected by Helen Creighton

Helen Creighton says this is “an Irish Song sung freely throughout England.” Although it’s a fairly common theme of unrequited love, the melody is rather haunting.

7. The Barley Grain for Me

Source: Mr. O. J. Abbott, Hull, Quebec
Collected by Edith Fowke

John Barleycorn’s death and rebirth is described here in rather more detail than in some versions. This apparently Irish variant is one of the few collected in North America.

8. Jack, the Cowboy

Source: Mr. Peter Letto, Lance au Clair, Labrador
Collected by MacEdward Leach

The story of a thief outwitted (also known as “The Yorkshire Bite” or “Well Sold the Cow”) is always very popular with audiences, and this song exists in a multitude of variants in Britain and North America. Child ballad #283, “The Crafty Farmer,” describes essentially the same story and may represent the ancestor of many of these variants. This Labrador text appealed to me because of its relative compactness — and the tune is very singable.

9. The Weaver

Source: Mr. O. J. Abbott, Hull, Quebec

Collected by Edith Fowke

Edith Fowke has published *The Penguin Book of Canadian Folk Songs*, and it is from that book that I learned “Willie Drowned in Ero” and “The Weaver.” People, years ago, had a great knack for writing smashing songs on very “every day” subjects.

10. The Foggy Dew

Source: Mr. Everett Bennett, St. Paul's, Newfoundland

Collected by Kenneth Peacock

Beautiful melodies seem to be the hallmark of this song wherever it is found, and Mr. Bennett's mixolydian air is no exception. His text has the last two verses interchanged, but I feel the reflective nature of the fourth verse makes a natural ending for the song, so I have switched them back to the order found in most British variants.

11. Willie Drowned in Ero

Source: Mrs. Eva Bigrow, Calumet, Quebec

Collected by Edith Fowke

Ballads that people can “join in with” have always appealed to me, and here's a great one, if ever there was one.

12. The Banks of Newfoundland

Source: Mr. O. J. Abbott, Hull, Quebec

Collected by Edith Fowke

Edith Fowke says she was somewhat fooled by the title of this ballad, expecting it to be the better-known song of sailors' hardship that shares the name. Fortunately, however, Edith got 'round to recording Mr. Abbott's version on the last day of her visit to Hull, and was surprised to hear a rarely-found song with an extremely fine tune. Old country variants of this song, with its interesting reference to lot-drawing, seem to be confined to Ireland.

13. The Ten Dollar Bill

Source: Cloanna Lavallee, Nicabean, Quebec

Collected by Sheldon Posen

I first heard Barry O'Neill sing this song, and it wasn't till later that I discovered that Newfoundlanders often use "de" instead of "the," so the first verse sounded like this:

"Way down in New York City

Where the cornstalks are designed..."

Very 1970-ish, I thought. I have, however, taken the liberty of changing some of the words, without changing the story of the song, simply because this is how I feel comfortable singing it. A good, light-hearted song, this.

14. By the Hush

Source: Mr. O. J. Abbott, Hull, Quebec

Collected by Edith Fowke

The theme of the Irishman leaving home because of poverty or famine, and arriving in the midst of some foreign conflict, is not uncommon. The strange thing about this one is that it has turned up in Canada, but not, as far as I know, in the United States. Perhaps the song's message persuaded prospective American immigrants to settle further north!

*For a booklet containing the texts of the songs on this CD,
send \$1 to Folk-Legacy, Box 1148, Sharon, CT 06069.*

All of the songs on this recording are traditional.

*Notes by Ian Robb and Margaret Christl (each introducing
those songs on which they sing the lead)*

Recorded and edited by Sandy Paton

Digitally remastered by Bob Katz, Digital Domain

Cover woodcut by Mary Azarian

Graphics by Sandy Paton.



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COMPACT
disc
DIGITAL AUDIO



1. Campbell, the Drover (4:20)
2. Hard Times (4:15)
3. Save Your Money While You're Young (2:22)
4. The Crockery Ware (3:00)
5. Oh, No, Not I (4:03)
6. Green Bushes (3:40)
7. The Barley Grain for Me (2:43)
8. Jack, the Cowboy (3:04)
9. The Weaver (1:43)
10. The Foggy Dew (4:30)
11. Willie Drowned in Ero (4:53)
12. The Banks of Newfoundland (4:40)
13. The Ten Dollar Bill (2:28)
14. By the Hush (3:14)

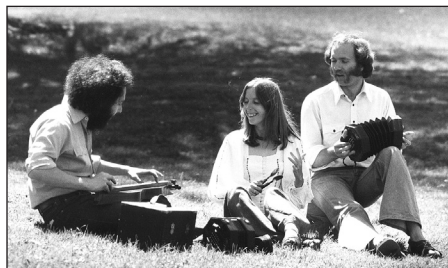
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Box 1148 Sharon, CT 06069



Grit

Margaret

Ian

This recording is dedicated to the memory of Edith Fowke, the highly respected scholar and collector of Canadian folk song, and our friend.

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