WOLF RIVER SONGS

Recorded and with notes by Sidney Robertson Cowell

Monograph Series of the Ethnic Folkways Library FE 4001

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THE LITTLE BROWN BULLS
THE LOST JIMMIE WHALEN
WE ARE ANCHORED BY THE ROADSIDE
FOREMAN MONROE
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THE WRECK OF THE LADY SHERBROOKE
PRETTY POLLY

FOLKWAYS RECORDS Album No. FE 4001

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MONOGRAPH SERIES

OF THE

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WOLF RIVER SONGS

These are the traditional songs of Wisconsin lumber camps, sung by men and women who have spent their lives in the north woods. Robert Walker, born in 1883, was still running a logging camp for a pulp and paper company in Michigan when he recorded these songs for me in 1952-54; he worked in the woods every winter of his life until he retired in 1955. Elizabeth Walker Ford is his sister, the wife and mother of lumberjacks; she has often cooked for the crews in camps run by her husband or her brothers on the Wolf River near Crandon, Wisconsin, where most of the family were still living when I first met them in 1937. Her son, Warde H. Ford, much preferred working with his father to school, a and he spent most of his time in the woods until he was in his thirties. Carlton Hawks worked in lumber camps too as a boy. He and his sister, Mrs. Tracy, now living in Sundance, Wyoming, have apparently had less occasion to keep up the songs they learned from their mother, Mary Walker (Hawks) Wells; but Mrs. Tracy must have had a fine repertory once, for her singing has the readiness, the consistency of style and the concentration of the very best traditional musicians.

The six Walkers (of whom 2 are represented on this record) all sang old songs, and four of them are or were extraordinarily fine singers, with prodigious memories and a fine swinging style. Their mother was Leila Harris (born in New York State of English parents) and "Grandpa Walker", of Scotch-Irish descent. One of Leila Harris' brothers fought in the Union Army and brought back songs of the Civil War that members of the family still sing. Both the senior Walkers "knew a power o' songs and sang 'em every day of the world". They met and married after the Harris family moved to Wisconsin, and all their children were born there. Another lively singing tradition fed the family repertory when Elizabeth Walker, one of their da ughters, married Jerome ('Rome) Ford, whose ancestors were Irish and English. The four Ford sons and their sister Hazel all sang many old songs, but Warde Ford has by far the greatest interest in them and the largest repertory: he has recorded over 80 fine full versions of great songs, -- a most unusual thing among singers born since 1900.

The Ford-Walker family repertory (about 140 titles) includes some comparatively rare Child ballads, lumber camp ballads and songs of the sea, along with many love songs, (most of them not long from Ireland), ditties made up to suit special occasions, and stage and minstrel songs. None of the family ever sings these particular songs with an accompaniment; but Mrs. Ford and her daughter Hazel Pulver have sung a great deal in church with piano or harmonium. Since he joined the Army in the mid-Forties Warde Ford has occasionally sung popular songs with a crowd or with a guitar-playing friend, but when he sings the family songs, he sings alone and unaccompanied. This is a wholly vocal tradition, not an instrumental one.

There is a strong Celtic imprint on most of the tunes sung by the Walkers and Fords, evident in the general melodic style as well as in actual transplanted Irish and Scottish tunes and texts. Most of the tunes used for the lumberjack balads are traceable to Irish songs with Gaelic texts. Several newly-arrived Irishmen whom the Walker men met in the woods reinforced this element in the family with a number of Anglo-Irish ballads. A later intrusive layer, chiefly in the repertory of the Ford boys, came into Wisconsin with the "Kaintucks" -- loggers from the Kentucky mountains who followed the lumbering industry north before World War I and who were stranded in Wisconsin on the cut-over lands, when the lumber companies moved west to fresh territory and the Kaintucks proved too oldlor too "settled" to follow. In 1937 small groups of Kaintucks were living in their own settlements in Forest and Vilas Counties in Wisconsin, the men wearing coonskin caps, hunting, trapping, fishing and 'stilling liquor when they could, just as their cousins were doing back in the Kentucky mountains.

Most of the Ford-Walker songs belong to the solid song traditions from Ireland, Scotland and England that met in the fo'c's'les of 19th-century sailing ships, moved into the logging camps of New England and eastern Canada, and then went west with the lumber industry, reaching the Great Lakes states about the time of the Civil War. These are often the same songs that Mrs. Eckstorm and Phillips Barry found in Maine, and that others have reported from Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Newfoundland, as well as from Vermont, Ohio and Michigan in the northern United States.

In New England and later in the Great Lake States, logs could best be handled over ice and frozen snow in winter, and so lumbering was for most of the crew a seasonal activity. After the spring thaw and the big river drives that "herded" the logs downstream to mills or railhead, the men had to find jobs elsewhere until the next freeze. Along the New England coast many of them went to work in clipper ships or with the fishing fleet, and they were likely to be followed back to the logging camps the next winter by seamen who were challenged by the loggers' conviction that theirs was the toughest occupation known to man.

The long winter months of isolation of lumber camps deep in the woods turned the men back upon their own resources much as long sailing voyages did, and so it is not surprising that famous fo'c's'le ballads were carried from ships to the logging shanties (the bunkhouses on runners that made the logging camps mobile over snow) and then inland, to be sung with gusto by men who never saw a ship.

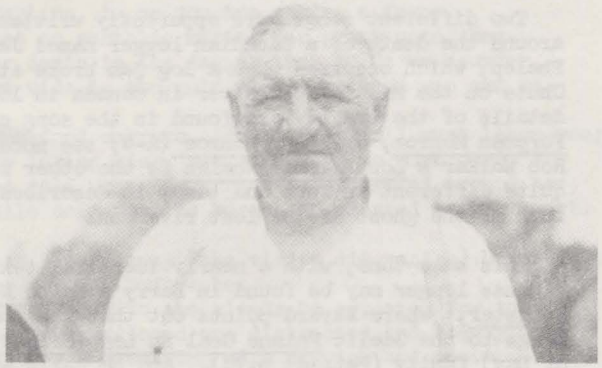
At the end of a day's work in the woods, when they had struggled out of their wet working clothes and had eaten a Gargantuan supper, it was usual for the men to sit on bunkhouse benches and boxes, smoking, darning socks, patching pants, carving or whittling. Those who could would take it in turn to fiddle, sing, dance a jig, recite a poem or tell a story. There was a strong feeling that each man should contribute whatever he could, for sociability's sake, just as there is today at a ceilidh (an informal gathering) among Gaelic-speaking Irish and Scots.

As at sea, it was customary to speak the last few words of a song in order to warn the next fellow in the circle that you were coming to an end. Several of the songs on this record conclude with this sort of hastily-spoken word or phrase, testifying to long turn-and-turn-about group usage. Although many of the songs had refrains that a group might be expected to join in on, several of the older singers have assured me that they never heard this done indoors, although it did sometimes happen on the rare occasions in the woods when a man raised a song at work. The songs were known to everyone, and prized for their familiarity, but they were always sung by a single singer; they had nothing to do with community singing.

Nor are these work songs: they bear no relation to the rhythms of work in the woods or at sea. They are primarily tales -- ballads rather than songs. Their hall-mark is a sense of the prodigious in human effort

and experience, all slightly larger than life in the epic fashion, so that it is not surprising that the same men who transmitted these songs made, and enlarged, and passed on, the Paul Bunyan stories.

Suggested reading: books and articles by Phillips Barry, Fanny Eckstorm, Samuel Bayard; William Doerflinger's Shantymen and Shanty Boys; Franz Rickaby's collection of Wisconsin and Michigan songs of lumberjacks; Joanna Calcard's Roll and Go; P.W.Joyce's Ancient Irish Music.



ROBERT WALKER, CRANDON WISCONSIN, 1952.

THE LITTLE BROWN BULLS

Sung by Robert Walker, Crandon, Wis., 1954.

This is the classic ballad of American lumber camps. No information about the author seems ever to have been found. Rickaby was told that the song "was made in Mort Douglas' camp in northeastern Wisconsin in 1872 or 1873, where (or so the singer believed) the contest between the two woods teams was staged." The song's Wisconsin provenience is borne out by its rarity farther east, where it has usually been traced to singers from Wisconsin or Michigan. Texts vary little from singer to singer, since the details are accurate and familiar to an experienced audience, and they are all necessary to the story.

The text written out below is taken from the recording Mr. Walker made in 1937, so that anyone interested may compare it with the song as he sang it in 1954. He varies the tune with great freshness and musicality, very differently at many points from the 1937 recording.

The vagaries of melody preservation, adaptation and exchange are well illustrated by this song. The tune Rob Walker and his family use for Little Brown Bulls belongs in general to the King John and the Bishop tune family; it is close to Rickaby's Wisconsin B tune and to the one sung 20 years later to William Doerflinger by Archie Lant, a native of Ontario. It lacks, however, the down derry down refrain that usually travels with King John tune variants, whether the associated text is the King John ballad, or this song, or a different text entirely. A somewhat reduced southern relative of the variant Walker uses for Little Brown Bulls is the familiar Way Up on Old Smoky, now well established in juke boxes here and in Europe.

Bob Walker sings a much finer King John tune variant, refrain and all, for a hair-raising text called The Pickled Jew, embodying the widespread folk tale of the body shipped in a cask of alcohol or brine, the cask being then innocently broached during the voyage under stress of thirst or famine.

On the other hand, the fine Ford-Walker family version of the traditional King John ballad goes to a different tune entirely, with a longer and quite different refrain.

Mr. Walker says he spoke the last 3 words instead of singing them "because it was kind of customary, I guess...just gettin' through with the song." He learned this song "from a fellow in Jennings a good many years ago...He probably took it up from some other lumberjack, I guess." The use of the term lumberjack by loggers themselves has been called into question, but none of my Wisconsin friends had any quarrel with it.

Not a thing in the woods had McClusky to fear
As he swung his gored stick o'er the big spotted steers.
They were young, sound and quick, girding eight foot and three.
Said McClusky the Scotsman, "They're the laddies for me."

Oh, it's next come Bull Gordon, the skidding was full
As he hollered, "Wau-hush!" to his little brown bulls.
They were ...(young)...short legged and shaggy, girding six foot and nine,
"Too light," said McClusky, "to handle our pine,

"For it's three to the thousand our contract does call,
Our skidding 'tis good and our timber 'tis tall."
Said McClusky to Gordon, "To make the day full,
I will skid two to one of your little brown bulls!"

"Oh no," said Bull Gordon, "that you never can do,
Though your big spotted steers are the pets of the crew.
But mind you, my laddie, you'll have your hands full
When you skid one more log than my little brown bulls!"

O the day was appointed, and soon it grew nigh,
For twenty-five dollars their fortunes to try.
Both eager and anxious, the morning 'twas found
The scalers and judges appeared on the ground.

That morning said Gordon with blood in his eye,
"Today I will conquer McClusky or die."
Said Sandy to Gordon, "We'll take off their skins
We'll dig them a grave, and we'll tumble them in."

'Twas first come Bull Gordon with the little brown bulls,
With a pipe in his mouth and a cud in his jaw.
But little did I think when I saw them come down
That a hundred and forty they'd easily yank 'round.

With a whoop and a yell came McClusky in view
With the big spotted steers, the pets of the crew,
Saying, "Chew your cuds slowly, boys, keep your mouths full,
For you easily can conquer those little brown bulls."

O the sun had gone down, the foreman did say,
"Turn in, boys, turn in, you've enough for today,
For well we have called each man for his team;
Very well do we know which team holds down the beam."

After supper was over, McClusky appeared,
With a belt ready made for his big spotted steers;
To make it he'd tore up his best mackinaw,--
He was bound to conduct it according to law.

O the scaler speaks up, said he, "Hold on a while,--
Your big spotted steers are behind just a mile.
You've skidded one hundred and ten and no more,
While Gordon has beat you by ten and a score."

O the boys they all hollered and McClusky did swear
As he tore out in handfulls his long yaller hair.
Said McClusky to Gordon, "My dollars you'll pull
And the belt you shall have for your little brown bulls!"

So here's to Bull Gordon and big Sandy John
For the biggest day's work on the Wolf River ever
was done.
So fill up your bumpers, boys, fill them plumb full,
And we'll drink to the health of the little brown
bulls."

Stanza 1: gored stick -- goad. girding 8 foot and 3 (inches). A team animal's girth, or the diameter of a tree, or the waist of a pretty girl, is alway worth mention where these songs are sung.

Stanza 2: skidding was full -- full in the old sense of plenty (of work skidding logs to the river bank.)

Stanza 3: three to the thousand -- "pretty big trees", of which you'd need only 3 to make 1000 feet of lumber. The bigger the tree, the harder it was to handle, or course, but the men like the challenge of a hard contract, as much for the sake of bragging of difficulties overcome as for pride in getting out logs that would cut up into the finest, widest planks. Stands of timber of this size were not common after 1870 in Wisconsin.

Stanza 5: $25 was a month's cash wages in 1875. The scalers were experience men, expert at judging standing timber to estimate the number of feet of lumber it would produce, responsible for laying out the work of the crews in advance, and for keeping track of what was done in a day.

Stanza 9: holds down the beam (of the scales). A fine Bunyanesque conception, as though a single set of scales might hold all the logs skidded out by a team in a day.

Stanza 10: A belt ready made ... according to law. This was the "law" of the prize ring, where it was customary for the winner of a really important match to be given a fancy belt. A mackinaw is a heavy woolen jacket, usually a brilliant plaid. Blankets made of such material are still made for trade with Indians, on a cheaper level than the famous Hudson's Bay blankets, which were accurately graded by weight and so marked in the weaving, and were a fixed medium of exchange in the fur trade. The name comes from the (Michilli) mackinac Indian tribe of the Great Lakes area.

Stanza 11: As Rickaby points out, the big Scotsman never believe for a minute that his team could be defeated. The crews normally worked out of sight of one another, so that both scores would be known only to the scaler, who kept tally. To skid 110 logs in a day was no mean feat, and Bull Gordon's 140 logs must have been quite unimaginable to McClusky. The men I met agreed that such a tally was credible, but impossible today. I was taken in 1937 to admire the only remaining stand of timber of such size in Wisconsin: It is preserved as a memorial to the old days by a lumber company in Laona that today must confine itself to pulp wood for paper and various sawdust products.

Stanza 12: The second line usually reads: biggest day's work in the woods or on the river ever was done. But the men in the Walker and Ford families all worked on the Wolf River, which runs from northern Wisconsin down to Green Bay; and it was customary to incorporate factual local detail where one could.
dollars you'll pull -- in the sense of pull down a prize.

THE LOST JIMMIE WHALEN

Sung by Robert Walker,
Crandon, Wisconsin, 1952

Two different songs were apparently written around the death of a Canadian logger named James Phalen, which occurred when a log jam broke at King's Chute on the Mississippi River in Canada in 1878. The details of the tragedy are found in the song called Foreman Monroe, or Young Monroe (A-4; see note below). Rob Walker's Lost Jimmie Whalen is the other song, quite different in form and tone; it describes the return of the ghost of the lost riverman.

This same tune, with a nearly identical text 2 stanzas longer may be found in Barry's Maine Woods Songster, where Bayard points out that the tune belongs to the Gaelic Fainne Geal an Lae (Bright Dawn of Day) family (Petrie, p.70), and he calls attention to the strong resemblance to the common New England Young Charlotte tune, allowance being made for a change in meter. The Ford-Walker family tune for The Cumberland Crew (not on this record) is dimly related to the tune Rickaby prints with his fragment of the Lost Jimmie Whalen text, which in turn is dimly related tp Walker's tune for this same text. It is as if the Rickaby tune were a bridge between them.

The pronunciation of arms as arrums and realms as rellums indicates an Irish singer, of course since the insertion of an unwritten vowel between certain adjacent consonants, to make a two-syllable word out of what looks in print like a single syllable, is a feature of the Gaelic language. This has been carried over into Anglo-Irish speech, where it is heard among cultivated people as well as in stage burlesque.

It is possible that an Irishman actually wrote the words, for ghosts are more familiar companions in Ireland than America; here the supernatural element is usually dropped out of songs, even when the plot is a puzzle without it.

The repetition of vowel sounds (stanza 2, for instance) also suggests an Irish hand, since Irish poetic forms pay as much attention to assonance as to rhyme.

The word rave (stanza 9) seems anticlimactic to us, but that is because it has now lost its one-time force: it implied insanity, a complete loss of control.

The text below is taken from Mr. Walker's 1937 recording. This may be one of the songs learned from a family friend named Mike Brennan who worked with the Walker brothers in the woods before World War I.

As slowly and sadly I strayed by the river,
A-watching the sunbeams as evening drew nigh,
As onward I rambled I spied a fair damsel,
She was weeping and wailing with many a sigh.

Sighing for one who is now lying lonely,
Sighing for one whom no mortal can save,
For the dark rolling waters roll sadly around her,
As onward it rolls o'er young Jimmie's grave.

"Jimmie," said she, "won't you come to my arrums,
And give me sweet kisses as ofttimes you've done?
You promised you'd meet me this evening, my darling,
O come, my lost Jimmie, love, come from your grave!"

Slowly there rose from the depths of the river
A vision of beauty far brighter than sun,
While red robes of crimson encircled around him,
Unto this fair maiden to speak he's begun!

"Why did you call me from the rellums of glory
Back to this cold earth that I'll soon have to leave,
To clasp you once more in my fond loving arrums?
To see you once more I have came from my grave.

"Darling, to me you are asking a favor
That no earthlie mortal can grant unto thee.
For death is the dagger that holds us asunder,
And wide is the gulf, love, between you and me.

"One fond embrace, love, and then I must leave you;
One loving kiss, pet, and then we must part."
And cold were the arrums he encircled around her,
While cold was the bosom she pressed to her heart.

Then straightway (the vision did vanish) he vanished
before her,
Straightway to the clouds he appeared for to go,
Leaving his loved one distracted and lonely,
Weeping and wailing with anguish and woe.

Throwing herself on the banks of the river,
A-weeping and wailing as though she would rave,
Sighing, "My loved one, my lost Jimmie Whalen,
I will sigh till I die by the side of your grave."

WE ARE ANCHORED BY THE ROADSIDE, JIM

Sung by Robert Walker,
Crandon, Wisconsin, 1952

"How about an anti-prohibition song?" Mr. Walker inquired with a smile. This is a favorite, sung by all the men in the family, -- although there are two different opinions about liquor. Pat and Warde Ford both sang "stranded by the roadside" instead of "anchored."

We are anchored by the roadside, Jim, as we oft-times
been before,
When you and I were weary from sacking on the shore.
The moon shone down in splendor, Jim, it shone on
you and I
And the little stars were shining when we drank the
old jug dry.

But that was those good old days, those good old
days of yore,
When Murphy run the tavern and Burnsy kept the store,
When whisky ran as free, brave boys, as waters in the
brook,
And the boys all for their stomach's sake their
morning bitters took.

But times they have now altered, Jim, and men have
altered too:
Some have undertaken for to put rum sellers through,
For they say that whisky's poison, and scores of
graves have dug:
Ten thousand snakes and devils have been seen in our
old jug.

But never mind such prattle, Jim, though some of it
may be true.
We will lie where we're a mind to, together, me and
you,
For the drink they call cold water won't do for you
nor I,
So we'll haul the cork at leisure, and we'll drink
the old jug dry!

Stanza 1: Sacking (as in ransacking) on the shore -- "When they was driving logs and high water had put 'em way out in the marshes someplace, and the men'd have to get right into the water and roll 'em out into the stream again, -- that was sacking, see? ... sacking 'em up into the river. They rolled 'em right out with their peaveys (the loggers' hooked pikes). Eight or ten men'd get hold of a log and roll it and get it right out in the flow of the water again.... Some of 'em was awful far up. Take, marshlands 'n one thing 'n another, when they'd open up a dam it'd take an' flow that water all over and carry 'em up, and when the water'd recede, why the log'd lay there on the ground, and no good to anybody."

Stanza 3: To put rum-sellers through --"to stop the flow of liquor"; through in the sense of conclusion: out of business.

WARDE AND ARTHUR FORD WITH A FINE SUPPLY OF MEAT. COUNTRY NEAR CRANDON, WISCONSIN, ABOUT 1935.

FOREMAN MONROE

Sung by Warde Ford,
Munich, 1954

The breaking of a log jam was the greatest hazard of lumbering, requiring skill and courage beyond the ordinary. A singer who gave this song to Helen Hartness Flanders in Vermont (under the title of Garrish's Rollway) told her, "There wasn't a man in a hundred would do it even if he could". In 1937 I met several men who had witnessed such accidents and who were still speculating 20 years later about how they could have been prevented. Everybody knew that you should pull the key log down behind you (if you could!) as you ran up-river, climbing the logs that pushed into the gap. A man must be not only quick and daring, but lucky. It was up to the foreman to do it, and if he succeeded, and survived, he was sure of a bonus.

The Jam on Gerry's Rocks, or Foreman Monroe, or Young Monroe, is the most widely known of all woods songs, having turned up all over eastern Canada, across the northern United States from Maine to

Washington and California in Newfoundland, and in Scotland, where it was carried by woodsmen sent from the United States to cut timber during World War I. The texts are so much alike as to suggest the circulation of a broadside, but none has ever been found. I am inclined to feel that the influence of broadsides on the oral tradition has been much over-rated, and that so long as a song circulates, like this one, among men able to identify themselves with the figures in the story, variation will be kept to a minimum in a natural way independent of print.

No convincing locale for this incident which will make sense of the proper names has ever been established, although the suggestion that it is an Ontario song based on the same event as The Lost Jimmie Whalen (A-2, above) is as probable as any. It seems however to have circulated longer in New England than elsewhere, so that it is also possible that it describes a parallel incident but not the identical Canadian one.

For the tune, see Petrie's Complete Collection of Old Irish Music, No. 498 (The Maid of Timahoe) and No. 657 (As I roved out one morning.). The relationship appears in the last 3 of the 4 phrases. In the Irish tunes phrases 1 and 4 are identical, but the American one has a different opening phrase, so that the Irish tune is ABBA and the American one XBBA. Barry calls this "one of the most frequently dismantled and reassembled yet still recognizable, tunes in the north woods." Bayard places it in the Fainne geal an lae family of Celtic tunes (see Petrie, p.70) along with Young Charlotte, The Lost Jimmie Whalen, and a host of others. Several members of the Ford-Walker family sing The Shanty Boy and the Farmer's Son to this tune, and the same tune-text association is found in other northern collections. The only tune-variant of comparable quality is in Korson's Pennsylvania Songs and Legends (Two Cent Coal, p.390).

In 1955 I heard the tune sung by a man in a public house in Galway (Ireland). I could catch an accasional contemporary political reference, but he was singing in Irish (Gaelic), so that I could be sure only that the words were recent, and that the tune is serviceable still.

The text below is from the same singer's recording made on Christmas Day, 1938, at Central Valley, California. He had also recorded it for me the year before, in Wisconsin.

Come all you brave young shanty boys, a tale to you I'll relate
Concerning a young riverman and his untimely fate;
Concerning a young riverman, so manly, true and brave,
'Twas on a jam on Gerry's Rock where he met his watery grave.

'Twas on a Sunday morning, as you will quickly hear,
Our logs were piled up mountain high, we could not keep them clear;
Then up stepped our young foreman, said: "Who'll volunteer to go
And break the jam on Gerry's Rock with your foreman, Young Monroe?"

Now some of them were willing, while others they were not,
For to work on Sunday they did not think they'd ought,
But six of those bold rivermen did volunteer to go
And break the jam on Gerry's Rock with their foreman, Young Monroe.

Now they had not cleared off many logs when they heard his clear voice say:
"I'd have you boys be on your guard, for the jam will soon give way."
These words he'd scarcely spoken when the jam did break and go,
Taking with it six of these brave boys and their foreman, Young Monroe.

Now, when these other shanty boys the sad news came to hear,
They all pulled for the river, for Gerry's Rock did steer,
Where six of those brave riverman a-floating down did go,
While crushed and bleeding on the bank lay their foreman, Young Monroe.

They lifted him from his watery grave, brushed back his raven hair;
There was one fair form among them whose cries did rend the air,
One fair form among them, a girl from Saginaw town,
Whose cries rose to the misty skies for her lover who's gone down.

Fair Clara was the lady's name, the riverman's true friend,
Who with her aged mother lived at the river's bend.
She was to wed young Monroe some sunny day in May,
And the boys made up a generous sum and gave to them next day.

RIVER DRIVERS' SONG

Sung by Warde Ford
Munich, Germany, 1954

The words were made by the singer's father, Jerome Ford, and a friend named Kimball, when they were working together as river drivers for the Waite Brothers' small lumber camp on the Wolf River about 1905. This is one of hundreds of texts made up casually to fit the famous tune best known as Drill, Ye Tarriers, Drill.

Stanza 1: A duck-bill is a blunt-nosed tool good for pushing as well as pulling logs about.

Wallace Waite was the walkin' boss,
Hell to pay when he gets cross;
He tries his best his men to kill
Saying, "Come down heavy on the ol' duck bill!

CHORUS:
"Roll, you tigers, roll!
Roll, you heroes, roll,
Roll all day, no sugar in your tay
While working for Waite Boys' rollway!"

Johnny Waite was a fine young man,
Married to a handsome dame,
She baked her bread and she baked it well,
But she baked it harder than the hubs of Hell!

CHORUS:
"Roll, you tigers, roll!
Roll, you heroes, roll,
Roll all day, no sugar in your tay,
While working for Waite Boys' rollway!"

Wally Waite went to town one day
T'get some sugar t'put in our tay.
When he got there, it was too dear,
So we had to drink our old tay clear!

CHORUS:
"Roll, you tigers, roll!
Roll, you heroes, roll,
Roll all day, no sugar in your tay,
While working for Waite Boys' rollway!"

THE KEITH AND HILES LINE

Sung by Warde Ford
Munich, 1954

This is another song in the well-established tradition of ironic comment by the "bohunks" (pick-and-shovel men in this case, or track-layers) on their boss the foreman (and his boss), on the food, the cook and the company store. "Written by the two bohunks who missed the work train that morning," -- probably again 'Rome Ford and his friend Kimball.

The tune is Sweet Betsy from Pike, much used for parodies still. It is in general a southern and western tune, but it may have been contributed to the Ford-Walker family by the Kaintucks.

We arrived at North Crandon one morning, 'twas fine.
The bartender said, "You're a little behind.
The train left for South Crandon at a quarter to nine,
With four hundred bohunks for the Keith & Hiles Line."

Now there's old Mack McGinnis, you all know him well,
The best old woods foreman left outside of Hell,
-- But when he sees Keith a-coming around,
It's a sight to see Mack getting over the ground.

There's also Sam Purdy in the store for the mill:
You can buy all his wares with a five dollar bill.
A pound of old Peerless in his clay pipe you'll find
That he sells to the bohunks of the Keith & Hiles Line.

Now I don't know the name of the cook at the camp,
But his doughnuts and pancakes were soggy and damp.
And it's corned beef and cabbage you get every day
That you handle those cant hooks so far and so gay.

So we'll pick up our pack sacks and start for out West,
Some nice pretty haystack, a fine place to rest,
Far away from the snowdrifts where the weather is fine,
-- And to Hell with the bohunks of the narrow-gauge line!

Stanza 4: Cant hooks have a hooked point for canting (turning) logs. So fair and so gay is of course no sensible description of a heavy logging tool; it is only one of those ballad commonplaces that came handy to the singer's mind (giving also a touch a irony) when the song called for a descriptive phrase and the proper words escaped him.

THE NIGHTINGALES OF SPRING

Sung by Warde Forde
Munich, 1955

This is The Welcome Sailor, one of the broadsides reprinted in John Ashton's Real Sailor Songs (London, Simpkin.. New York, Scribner's, 1891), where the same story is told with many of the same lines. The same plot appears (in duller form and without the ring) in a Boston broadside printed in 1820 called Johnny Jarman, and its relatives turn up with tunes quite different from Nightingales in several southern collections (Sharp; Cox; Belden) and in Nova Scotia.

In the form known to Warde Ford it comes more directly from Ireland, having been learned by his parents "from two Irish brothers than came through (Crandon) about 1906" -- presumably en route to Idaho and the Far West. The tune is an especially fine one.

Stanzas 5 and 6 begin with the famous "Scotch snap" (an accented short note followed by an unaccented long one) which derives from the many 2-syllable words in Gaelic that have that rhythm, and which is conspicuously unsuited here to the rhythm of the English words. This suggests of course that the tune was taken over from a Gaelic text, -- whether a Gaelic form of this same song or a quite different one. The "snap" is of course Gaelic, related to the language, and neither Scotch nor Irish alone.

This is the text as sung by Warde Ford in Central Valley, California, in 1938.

Down by the ocean side where ships are sailing,
I saw a maid on shore weeping and wailing;
I said unto her, "Sweet, what is't that grieves thee?
The answer that she gave, "None can relieve me.

"'Tis seven long years since I and my love last parted;
He's left me here on shore, I'm broken-hearted.
He promised to return if life was lent him:
The reason that I mourn, fear death prevents him."

"Your love and I, we fought 'neath Errol's banner,
We fought old England's side, justice and honor;
Being a soldier bold, of courage valiant,
He scorned to be controlled by his assailant.

"A while before he died, being quite heart-broken,
He turned to me and said, 'Bear me this token
To her who is my love, there's none that's fairer,
And tell her to be kind and wed the bearer.'"

She wrung her hands and cried, like one distracted,
She knew not what she said, nor how she acted;
She tore away from me, all in her anger,
She said, "You've come too late, I'll wed no
stranger!"

She wrung her hands and cried, being quite amazed;
I handed her a ring, on which she gazed.
"It is my love's," said she. "Won't you come
nearer?"
And the answer that I gave, "Be pleased, my dearer."

When I saw that she'd proved true, my love grew
stronger,
I tore off my disguise, 'twould stay no longer.
To her, "My love," said I, "love is no slander,
You're my dear old girl, and I'm Phylander."

Then hand in hand we walked, long lived together,
Then hand in hand we talked, like maids of pleasure.
We both sat down and sang; she sang the clearer
Of the nightingales of spring, "Welcome, my dearer!"

THE WILD COLONIAL BOY

Sung by Robert Walker
Crandon, Wis.,1952

At least two songs, and a stage parody of one of them, have been made around the "wild career" in Australia of an Irishman named Jack Donohue. Both songs have both Australian place-name references, but they have been distinguished on the ground that the Wild Colonial Boy always has the names of the 3 pursuing officers and Bold Jack Donohue always has some reference to an escape from the jail at Sydney. Both titles seem to be used indiscriminately by the members of the Ford-Walker family who sing the song, but as there is never any reference to the Sydney jail in it, and the names of the officers always appear, the title above seems to be proper one.

Pat Ford (brother of Warde) recorded this song in California in 1938 as he had learned it from Robert Walker's brother Charlie, and his proper names vary somewhat: Castlemaine instead of State of Maine; Chatbeach Four instead of Beach Ford. Castlemaine (probably from the Irish town of that name), is a famous center for surface-mining of gold in Australia, established during the 1851 gold rush. The surrounding gum-tree (eucalyptus) forests harbored several generations of highwaymen who waylaid the mail coaches and the pack-trains carrying gold into Melbourne 75 miles away. Chatbeach Four presumably identifies the fourth shaft of another gold mine. In Rob Walker's singing these names are being translated from forms meaningless in Wisconsin to familiar ones. The policemen of Pat Ford's text (as of most others), were Dewey, Davis and MacAvoy, the latter (as also here) the brother of William MacAvoy, on account of whose murder the wild colonial boy is being sought.

A stage remaking of the Bold Jack Donohue form of the song, printed about 1860, has been located by MacKenzie, and about 1954 the plot and the Wild Colonial Boy form were incorporated into a famous Hollywood film: (Ed: please add title if you know it)

The tune has the usual 19th century come-all-ye ABBA form, with the B phrases higher than the A's. This is a structure inherited from a period when it was one of the chief ways of providing variety in a modal tune, a step on the way toward modulation. Here, however, all modal suggestion is lost in the actual melody, which is a late-19th century stage (probably minstrel show) type, in a 7-note major scale.

'Twas of a wild colonial boy, Jack Donohue was his
name,
Of true and honest parents, raised in the State of
Maine.
He was his father's only pride, his mother's only
joy, --
The pride of all the family was their wild colonial
boy.

At the early age of sixteen, Jack began his wild
career,
He seemed to know no danger, and of no one seemed
to fear.
He robbed the mail stage at Beach Ford, bade them
to go their way, --
With trembling hands they passed out their gold to
the wild colonial boy.

Jack wrote the judge a letter and told them to be
aware,
Never to stop a poor boy from loafing 'round the
square,
And never to rob a mother of her pride and only joy,
Or else he'd go 'way plundering like the wild
colonial boy.

As Jack rode out one morning, as he merrilie rode
along,
A-listening to the mocking birds as they sang their
cheerful song,
He espied three mounted policemen: MacDavitt,
MacDavis and MacElvoyd,
Had been out hunting for the wild colonial boy.

"Surrender now, cried Davis, "for you see there is
three to one!
"Surrender in the Queen's name, you outlawed plunder-
er's son.
"I'll fight but I won't surrender," cried the wild
colonial boy.

Jack drew a pistol from his pocket, a tiny little toy.
He then took aim at Davis, and felled him to the
ground;
He then took on MacDavitt, gave him the mortal wound,--
'Twas only through bloodshed as they captured there
the wild colonial boy.

ELIZABETH WALKER FORD AND HER NEPHEW CARLTON HAWKES, SUNDANCE, WYOMING, '54.

BRENNAN ON THE MOOR

William Brennan was a famous Irish highwayman who ran out his career in the Kilworth Mountains, near Fermoy in Cork, during the 18th century. Joyce mentions a broadside sheet of the song published in Cork before 1850, and he himself took down a tune for it from a singer in Cork about 1860, but his tune is not this one. Sharp has found the song text and tune approximately as here, in England and in the Appalachians, and it is on the Finding List for Collectors that H.M.Belden circulated in Missouri in 1907. A version from Virginia has the last (farewell) stanza in the 1st person, which suggests a broadside version conforming to the convention of "last goodnights" circulated during famous trials and at hangings, and which were usually framed as first-person narratives from the beginning. The Virginia versions mention Tipperary and Clonmore (both in Ireland) and also Culloden -- a mark of the song's long popularity in Scotland.

In O'Conor's Com-All-Ye's and Ballads from Ireland (New York, 1910) the text may be found substantially as here. I had taken down odd lines of all the stanzas below from barious members of the family, and in 1953, when Mrs. Ford and I visited her sister's children at Sundance, Wyoming en route from California to Wisconsin, they all undertook to put the song together so that Carlton Hawks, who remembered more of it than anybody else, could sing it. I have added here the last 4 stanzas from O'Conor, to complete the tale, as they were all recalled in substance or in fragment by Mr. Hawks. O'Conor has a "juler" (jeweller) instead of a peddler. Mr. Hawks learned it from his uncles and is sure he has never seen it in print.

'Twas of a jolly highwayman, his story I will tell,
His name was Willy Brennan, in Ireland he did dwell.
He plundered from the rich, like Turpin and Black Bess,
And he always did divide with widows in distress.

CHORUS:
Brennan on the moor, Brennan on the moor,
Bold, gay, undaunted stood young Brennan on the moor!

He met with a young peddler as he was going on,
They travelled along together till the day began to dawn.
The peddler, finding his money gone, likewise his watch and chain
He at once encountered Willy and robbed him back again,

CHORUS:
Brennan on the moor, etc.

Then Willy, finding the peddler was as good a man as he,
He took him along with him, his companion for to be.
The peddler threw away his pack without any more delay,
And became his faithful comrade until his dying day.

CHORUS:
Brennan on the moor, etc.

(Mr. Hawks says the peddler fought and was killed... eventually Brennan was recognized by the Mayor, who said: .."Now Willy Brennan, you come along with me!")

Now Willy's wife being in town, provisions for to buy,
When she saw her Willy, she began to weep and cry.
He said: "Give me that tenpenny!" As soon as Willy spoke,
She handed him the blunderbuss from underneath her cloak.

CHORUS:
Brennan on the moor, etc.

Now with that loaded blunderbuss young Willy he grew bold;
He caused the Mayor to tremble, and robbed him of his gold.
There was ten thousand pounds to that operation there,
And then with horse and saddle to the mountains did repair.

CHORUS:
Brennan on the moor, etc.

Willie being an outlaw upon the mountains high,
With cavalry and infantry to take him they did try;
He laughed at them with scorn, until at length did say:
Ah! a false-hearted young woman did basely me betray!

CHORUS:
Brennan on the moor, etc.

(Someone in the family told me that his sweetheart gave him a gun filled with water instead of lead, so that he was defenseless)

In the country of Tipperary, in a place called Clonmore,
Brennan and his comrade was made to suffer sore;
He lay amongst the briars, that grew thick upon the field,
And he received nine wounds before that he would yield,

CHORUS:
Brennan on the moor, etc.

They were taken prisoners, in irons they were bound,
Conveyed to Clonmel jail and strong walls did them surround;
The jury found them guilty, the Judge made this reply:
"For robbing on the Queen's highway, you're both condemned to die!"

CHORUS:
Brennan on the moor, etc.

"Farewell unto my wife, and you my children three!
And you my aged father, that may shed tears for me!
And you my loving mother, tore her gray locks and cried:
It were better, Willie Brennan, in your cradle Agall Chigh.
(.. in your cradle you had died, said Mrs. Ford for this last line.)

LAND OF PLEASURE

Sung by Elizabeth Walker Ford (Mrs. Jerome Ford) of Crandon, Wisconsin, at Central Valley, California, 1952.

Mrs. Ford is a younger sister of Robert Walker and the mother of Warde Ford. She has an extraordinary memory and a great sense of the historical value of a song tradition such as this one, although as she has grown older she prefers to sing hymns. Her two youngest sons, Pat and Harris Ford, went out west to work on various big construction projects during the Depression of the 30's, and they followed the famous contractor "Hurry-Up" Crowe from Boulder Dam in Nevada to Deadwood Dam in Idaho, and then to Shasta Dam in California, where Warde went to join them not long after I met him in Wisconsin. Pat and Harris both died suddenly a year or two later, not implausibly from too many years of heavy construction work, and their mother has now gone to California to live as close as she can to Shasta Dam, which is to her her sons' memorial.

Mrs. Ford sings three spiritual songs that were printed in various shape-note collections. They all appear in Walker's Southern Harmony but this volume was unfamiliar to Mrs. Ford; from her account of the book her mother used I think it may have been The Revivalist (Troy, N.Y., 1865-68). Land of Pleasure is a great family favorite, and is sung by all Mrs.Ford's children and by some of her grandchildren. Mrs. Ford's daughter, Hazel Pulver of Rhinelander, often sings it for funerals, but it is a "social" and prayer-meeting-at-home-type of song, not sung in church as a rule.

The tune is a famous one, often cited in connection with texts of traditional and popular stage songs in England and Ireland, under the title of The Rose Tree, or Rose Tree in Full Bearing. Thomas Moore wrote a new poem that he called I'd Mourn the Hopes that Leave Us for this tune, published in the collection called Irish Melodies, which appeared serially beginning in 1807, and which Moore had been working on since 1780.

The tune in a much finer modal form had already been appropriated by the singing schools in America, and it was included in the shape-note printed collections of "spiritual songs for social worship" all through the 19th century. The Knoxville Harmony (Tennessee, 1838), for instance, gives the words as Mrs. Ford sings them, except that the 2nd stanza has another 4 lines for its ending, instead of repeating what seem to have been the last 4 lines of the 1st stanza as a refrain. It is to be sung to the tune Rose Tree. The Ford-Walker family tune appeared almost exactly in Walker's Southern Harmony in 1835 (with these same Land of Pleasure words) and it is clearly recognizable as the "old tune" incorporated by William Shields into his ballad opera The Poor Soldier in 1783.

There is a land of pleasure
Where joy and peace forever rule,
And there I've laid my treasure,
And there I long to rest my soul.

CHORUS:
Long darkness was around me,
With scarcely once a cheering ray,
But since my Savior found me,
A light has shone along my way.

My way is full of danger,
But 'tis the road that leads to God,
And like a pilgrim stranger,
I tread the path that saints have trod.

CHORUS:
Long darkness was around me,
With scarcely once a cheering ray,
But since my Savior found me,
A light has shone along my way.

THE LOWLANDS LOW, OR THE GOLDEN WILLOW TREE (Child 286)

Sung by Warde Ford
Munich, Germany, 1955

This is one of the best-loved of the old ballads of the sea, one of "Grandpa" Walker's great songs; but this particular text is something of a patchwork. In order to get a good recording of a fairly complete song, I have apparently instigated a shot-gun wedding between two slightly but consistently different forms. Warde Ford in 1937 recorded stanzas 4 and 10 so well that I could easily believe that he had known the whole song at one time; Arthur Ford knew stanzas 2 and 3; their aunt Mrs. Mary Walker (Hawks) Wells dictated stanzas 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6; Mrs. Ford supplied all of these in a recording in 1950 except 5 and 6, and she added besides stanzas 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11. But it is a man's song, and so Warde agreed to record it in Germany using a composite family text. On 2 or 3 other occasions when he has done this he has obviously used the gathered stanzas I gave him only as a reminder, often inerpolating stanzas I did not have and making small changes that satisfied me he was recalling his own version, and was not reading the sheet I showed him.

However, in this case a snag developed when it proved that Warde's tune was always 5 lines long, requiring a repetition of the second line of the stanza as well as the last, whereas his mother and his aunt both were accustomed to a 4-line version. This means that in the recording only stanzas 4 and 10 are surely as he first knew them years ago; the others have a repetition of the second line in an often unsatisfactory adaptation provided by me; in several stanzas Warde revised this line as he recorded the song.

Warde's 5-line form of the song is said to come from his other singing uncle, Charles Walker, and he uses Uncle Charlie's refrain, which is slightly different from Uncle Rob's refrain: Rob says "lonesome low" and Charlie didn't.

When I was trying to find one of the men in the family who really remembered this song in 1953, Robert Walker couldn't bring back much of it to his mind, and other people's stanzas were no help to him at all. But he did come up with 2 fine stanzas that nobody else in the family remembered, -- and as a footnote to the above discussion it will be observed that one of these has 4 lines and the other 5!

Similar stanzas were found by Helen Creighton in Nova Scotia.

Then he swum around to the other side
Saying, "Shipmates, take me up, for I'm floating with the tide,
For I'm sinking in the lowlands, lonesome low,
For I'm sinking in the lowlands low."

Then they took him up, and on the deck he died;
They placed him in his ham-mock, so snug and wide,
They sank him in the sea, now he's floating with the tide,
And he's sinking in the lowlands, lonesome low,
As he sank into the lowlands low.

'Twas on the Spanish Main that the Turkish Lovaree
Was trying for to stop the Golden Willow Tree,
She thought that she could stop the Golden Willow Tree
As she sailed upon the lowlands low,
As she sailed upon the lowland sea.

Then up stepped the cabin boy, a fine young man was he,
And he said: "O tell me, Captain, what will you give to me..."
Yes he said, "Now tell me, Captain, what will you give to me
If I sink them in the lowlands low,
If I sink them in the lowland sea?"

"I have houses on dry land, a fine ship upon the sea;
My handsome, handsome daughter your wedded wife shall be,
Yes, my handsome young daughter your wedded wife shall be,
If you sink her in the lowlands low,
If you'll sink her in the lowland sea."

Then he seized his auger and overboard jumped he,
He swam along the side of the Turkish Lovaree,
He bored her bright ship's bottom and he let the water in,
And he sank her in the lowlands low,
And he sank her in the lowland sea.

Some of them were playing cards and some were throwing dice,
And some were standing 'round a-giving good advice,
Some were standing 'round, a-giving good advice,
As she sailed in the lowlands low,
As she sailed in the lowland sea.

Then some with their hats and some with their caps
Were trying hard to stop up the salt-water gaps,
Were trying very hard to stop up all the gaps,
As she sailed upon the lowlands low
As she sailed in the lowland sea.
(Mrs. Wells had "As she sank into the lowlands.." here)

He turned upon his face and back swam he,
Until he reached the side of the Golden Willow Tree,
He swam until he reached the Golden Willow Tree,
As she sailed upon the lowlands low,
As she sailed upon the lowland sea.

"Captain, my Captain, be as good as your word;
Now stop your handsome ship and take me back on board.
Please stop your handsome ship and take me back on board,
For I've sunk them in the lowlands low,
For I've sunk them in the lowland sea."

"Oh no, I will not be as good as my word,
As to stop my handsome ship and take you back on board.
I'll not stop my handsome ship and take you back on board,
Though you've sunk them in the lowlands low,
Though you've sunk them in the lowland sea."

"Captain, cruel Captain, if it wasn't for your men,
I would bore your bright ship's bottom and I'd let the water in.
I would bore your bright ship's bottom and I'd let the water in,
And I'd sink you in the lowlands low,
And I'd sink you in the lowland sea."

Then he turned on his back and down sank he,
Saying nothing more to the Golden Willow Tree;
No he never said no more to the Golden Willow Tree,
As he sank into the lowlands low,
As he sank into the lowland sea.

ANDREW BATAN (Child 250)

Sung by Warde Ford, 1955. Learned from his Uncle Charles Walker, of Crandon, Wisconsin, who learned it from Randal Macdonald, a Scottish logger in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, in 1906.

Sir Andrew Barton was a Scottish sea-officer who around 1511 was harrying shipping under pretense of searching for smuggled Portuguese goods, which in true pirate fashion he always found on each vessel he boarded. Henry VIII turned a deaf ear to complaints about Barton because he was reluctant to make enemies in Scotland at the moment. So the Earl of Surrey undertook to equip 2 ships privately under his 2 sons, and Barton was pursued by them and killed. The ballad-maker, however, was plainly on the side of the pirate.

The ballad has firm points of resemblance with Henry Martin (Child 250); Charles Stewart is an anachronism, of much later date than the song or the events it describes. Since Andrew Barton was a real person, and since this text has obviously been very much eroded down in the process of oral transmission, it seems likely to me that this is the older form, and that Henry Martin is a later rewriting of the same song, with a new title, for broadside purposes.

The tune has a somewhat unusual form: ABCB, with the A phrase ranging up and back from the tune center, and the B phrases descending down and up again to the tune center, giving the tune a wide range and an almost continuous, circular effect. These characteristics are found in many Gaelic tunes, so that this tune may well come from Scotland.

There once were three brothers from Merry Scotland
From Merry Scotland were they.
They cast a lot to see which of them
Would go robbing all o'er the salt sea.

The lot it fell to Andrew Batan,
The youngest one of the three,
That he should go robbing all o'er the salt sea,
To maintain his two (three) brothers and he.

He had not sailed but one summer's eve
When a light it did appear.
It sailed far off and it sailed far on,
And at last it came sailing so near.

"Who art? Who art?" cried Andrew Batan,
"Who art that sails so high?"
"We are the rich merchants from old Engeland,
And I bid you will let us pass by."

"Oh no, Oh no," cried Andrew Batan,
"Oh no, that never can be.
Your ship and your cargo I'll take them away,
And your merry men drown in the sea."

When the news reached old Engeland
What Andrew Batan had done:
Their ship and their cargo he'd taken away,
And all of their merry men drowned, --

"Build me a boat!" cried Captain Charles Stewart,
"And build it strong and secure.
And if I don't capture Andrew Batan,
My life I'll no longer endure."

He had not sailed but one summer's eve,
When a light it did appear.
It sailed far off and it sailed far on,
At last it came sailing so near.

"Who art? Who art?" cried Captain Charles Stewart,
"Who art that sails so nigh?"
"We're the jolly Scotch robbers from Merry Scotland,
And I pray you will let us pass by."

"Oh no, Oh no," cried Captain Charles Stewart,
"Oh no, that never can be.
Your ship and your cargo I'll take them away,
And your merry men drown in the sea."

"What ho! What ho!" cried Andrew Batan,
"I value you not one pin,
For while you show me fine brass without,
I'll show you good steel within."

Then broadside to broadside these vessels they stood,
And like thunder their cannon did roar.
That had fought but two hours or so,
Till Captain Charles Stewart gave o'er.

"Go home, go home," cried Andrew Batan,
"And tell your old King for me,
While he remains king upon the dry land,
I'll remain king of the sea."

YOUNG JOHNNY

Sung by Warde Ford
Munich, 1954

Young Johnny has been found both north and south, and in Canada. Its theme was close enough to the experience of lumberjacks when they came to town after a winter in the woods for it to be popular in lumber camps as well as among sailors. It is an English song. Several versions of the tale (and some of these stanzas) circulated widely on broadsides, where the song is found as The Saucy Sailor, The Liverpool Landlady, The Tarry Sailor, and so on.

A peculiarity of many southern versions has been the form given the mother's bold invitation on her daughter's behalf: "Our green beds are empty.." Warde Ford sings the more reasonable clean beds, but one of his uncles said green beds and the term is so frequent as to suggest that it did not seem meaningless to the singers. When I asked about it, I was told the word meant "clean" but still the singer did not substitute clean for green. Vance Randolph has many green beds versions and has puzzled over the term, as he knows of no Ozarks custom that would explain it. A parallel with the Armenian country custom of draping the bridal bed with living green branches seems possible, but rather far-fetched in so comparatively recent and urban a song. So the mystery remains unsolved for the present.

Oh Johnny's been on sea and Johnny's been on shore,
He went to a tavern where he had been before:
"Oh, how do you do, Johnny, how do you do?
Last night my daughter Polly was dreaming of you!

"Oh, what luck, Johnny, oh what luck at sea?"
"Immaterial," said Johnny, "bring down your daughter dear.
Bring down your daughter Polly and sit her on my knee.
We'll drown all melancholy and happy we will be."

"Oh Polly's not at home, John, she'll not be home today.
She's gone to a neighbor's engaged for to stay.
Oh, Polly's getting rich and, Johnny, you are poor.
If Polly were at home, John, she'd turn you out of door."

Then Johnny was sleepy and he hung down his head,
He asked for a candle to light him up to bed.
"Our clean beds are full, a fortnight or more,
Of handsome young strangers, -- and Johnny, you are poor."

"Then how much do I owe you and down it shall be laid,
How much do I owe you, and down it shall be paid!"
"Oh, four and twenty shillings, John, the new and the old."
And Johnny pulled out his two hands full of gold.

The sight of that money made the old woman stare,
The sight of that money made the old woman glare.
"Oh, you, you are in earnest, John, but I was but in jest:
You and my daughter Polly will happy be at last!"

And Polly observing, and downstairs she ran,
She caught him in her arms, crying, "How do you do, John?
"Oh, how do you do, Johnny? You're welcome home from sea!
Our clean beds are empty, dear Johnny, for thee!"

"I wana none of your clean beds, my gold's laid up in store,
I want none of your clean beds, my gold's laid up in store.
So fare you well, my pretty Polly, and that old jade your mother:
My gold and my silver I'll spend with some other!"

Come all you young sailors who plough the raging main,
Who work for your money through hail, sleet and rain,
Take care of your money, and lay it up in store,
For without that fair companion they'll turn you from their door.

THE FLYING CLOUD

Sung by Robert Walker, Crandon, Wisconsin, 1954.

This is a famous com-all-ye ballad. It belongs to the first quarter of the 19th century, when fast sailing ships were often slavers from Africa to the West Indies and pirates on the return voyage to Africa.

The slave trade was carried on openly by American ships in the 18th century; it contributed to the establishment of famous New England ship owners' fortunes as well as to southern plantations. But between 1807 and 1823 several Acts of Congress forbade it. Smuggling of slaves continued, however, into ports in the southern United States, in foreign as well as American bottoms. Joanna Colcord mentions that there were convictions of American shipmasters for this crime as late as 1861. She believes this song dates from somewhere between 1819 and 1825. It has nothing to do with the famous clipper Flying Cloud, which was not built until 1851. Several people have searched the newspapers and records of the first quarter of the century without finding any reference to a Flying Cloud nor a Captain Moore, but they may not have realized that Baltimore (mentioned in a stanza that has dropped out of Mr. Walker's version of the song) is a harbor on the south coast of Ireland west of Tramore, and has nothing to do with the American port of the same name.

William Doerflinger thinks the ballad cannot be earlier than 1830 because he considers that its author must have known a pamphlet called The Dying Declaration of Nicholas Fernandez, supposed to have been written by the notorious pirate Fernandez on the eve of his execution at Cadiz, along with Captain Benito de Soto, in 1829.

It seems more likely to me that the coincidence between the two texts are parallels dictated by the conventions for evil-doers' "last good-nights". These were the tabloid tear-jerking journalism of the day, and hundreds of them circulated on penny sheets before, during and after the public execution of any notorious pirate or highwayman in the 18th and early 19th centuries.

Greenleaf and Mansfield's Ballads and Sea Songs of Newfoundland prints a 30-stanza Flying Cloud that includes most of Walker's stanzas, but the tune is quite different; Archie Lant's tune from Ontario, printed by Doerflinger, is practically identical with Walker's tune. The supposed author of the text has a variety of names, although the text varies little from singer to singer. Even in the Ford-Walker family, Rob Walker calls him Rollins, Mrs. Ford thinks his name was Anderson, and their brother Clayton Walker called him Holohan. The 4th and 5th stanzas in the text below were omitted in singing but were supplied by Mrs. Ford, who says her brother certainly did sing them, as she learned the song from him.

Warde Ford and his brothers all knew a line or two of this song, but I didn't get around to asking Rob Walker about it until one fine day in 1953. Uncle Rob burst straightway into the song and I was able to record this superb performance as he sang it "for the first time in anyway 25 years."

My name is Edward Rollins, I give you to understand.
I was born in the city of Waterford, in Ireland's happy land.
I being young and innocent, and beauty on me smiled,
My parents doted on me, I being their only child.

They bound me to an apprentice, in Waterford's own town.
They bound me to a cooper by the name of William Brown.
I served him well and faithful for eighteen months or more,
Till I took on board of the Ocean Queen, bound for New Britain's shore.

I arrived at Valparaiso, I feel fell in with Captain Moore.
He was captain of the Flying Cloud belonging to Tramore.
He did so kindly invite me on a slav'ry voyage to go,
To the burning shores of Africa, where the sugar-cane does grow.

About a fortnight after that we set from Afric's shore,
With eighteen hundred of those poor souls to be slaves forevermore.
We lined them up along our decks and stored them down below,
Till eighteen inches to a man was all we could allow.

Then with our cargo we set sail, upon a Monday morn.
It's been better far for those poor souls if they had ne'er been born,
For a plaque of fever came on board and swept them half a away, -
We lined their bodies on our deck and threw them in the sea.

Alas, we arrived on the India's burning shore with 1500 of those poor souls.
We sold them to the planters there, to be slaves forevermore,
To hoe the rice and coffee, beneath a burning sun,
To lead a sad and dreary life ontil their career was run.

At last, our money being all spent, we went to sea again.
Then Captain Moore he came on deck and saying to us, his men:
"There's gold and silver to be had, if 'long with me you'll go,
We will hoist aloft our pirate flag and we'll scour the raging sea.

To this we all consented, excepting five young men,
Two from Boston City and two from Newfoundland;
The other was an Irish lad belonging to Tramore, --
Oh it's would to God I'd joined those boys, and stayed with them on shore!

For many's the ship we've plundered, down on the Spanish Main,
Manys the widow and orphan we left behind to wail.
We only made them walk the plank, gave them a wat'ry grave,
For the saying of our Captain was: "The dead man tells no tales."

Now the Flying Cloud is the finest ship that ever sailed the Main,
With her sails as white as the driven snow, and on them not one stain.
I have ofttimes seen that gallant ship, when the wind blew off her beam,
With her royal sails and her top-sails set, sailing 16 by her reel.

Oft we've been chased by liners and fygurates (frigates) too,
Ofttimes at the stern of us their burning shells they threw;
Ofttimes at the stern of us their cannon aloud did roar, --
We ploughed the Main, 'twas all in vain to catch the Flying Cloud

Till alas an English man of war, the "Dungeon" hove in view,
She fired three shots across our bow, a signal to heave to.
To her we gave no answer, as we steered before the wind,
Till a chance shot cut our main mast off, 'twas then we feel behind.

We prepared our decks for action, as main mast off she hove alongside,
And soon across our quarterdeck there flowed a crimson tide.
We fought till Captain Moore was slain, and eighty of his men,
When the burning shells set our ship on fire: we had to surrender then.

To Newgate we were taken, bound down in iron chains,
For the robbing and the plundering down on the Spanish Main.
It was drinking and bad company that first led me astray,
Come all ye men, a warning take and beware of the pirate sea.

Adieu to my own country and the girl that I adore.
No more her voice like music will sound upon my ear,
No more her ruby lips I'll press or sing to her a song,
For I'm doomed to die a shameful death in some old Foreigh land.

THE SINKING OF THE CUMBERLAND

Sung by Warde Ford
Munich, 1954

This song celebrates the first battle ever fought by an ironclad man-of-war, which took place during the Civil War when the Confederate Merrimac met and sank the sloop Cumberland on the morning of March 8, 1862.

Two songs about the Cumberland's battle with the Merrimac are current in the oral tradition. This one is the more direct and vivid account; the other song, called The Cumberland Crew, is more effusive and literary in its manner. Both songs are known to members of the Ford-Walker family.

After the southern states seceded from the Union, northern strategy aimed at starving the South by blockading her coast line. The adherence of Virginia to the slavery states had meant that the Union Navy lost its main storage center at Newport News; left behind also was the hull of the frigate Merrimac.

The Confederate forces moved in and in the first summer of the Civil War Lt. J.M. Brooke was assigned to design "an ironclad that should be able to gain control of the navigable waters in and about Chesapeake Bay." He entered upon this duty at once and submitted plans for a casemated vessel with submerged ends and inclined ironplated sides. His design was approved.

Lt. Brooke proposed also to have the ends prolonged and submerged two feet underwater, so that nothing was to be seen afloat but the shield itself. As the hulk of the Merrimac was available, the order to transform the old frigate into a floating fort was issued. When ready for her trial run, she drew 22 feet of water. Her battery was made up of six of 9-inch Dahlgrens found abandoned in the Navy Yard, and four rifles designed by Brooke; her crew numbered 320 men.

Rumors of the building of an armoured vessel soon reached the North and 3 months after Lt. Brooke began his assignment, Congress also made an appropriation for the building of ironclads. The final contract for a design by John Ericson was signed October 4th, 1861, and by the end of January the Union ship Monitor was floated off Greenpoint in Brooklyn. This spurred the South to hurry the completion of the Merrimac, and on Saturday, March 8th, 1862, her crew left Norfolk on a trial run, determined to show what the ship was good for; the men "slushed her walls to make the Yankee shells slip off."

That morning two Union vessels, the sailing frigate Congress and the sailing sloop-of-war Cumberland, lay just off Newport News Point in Chesapeake Bay. It was a lovely spring day, and no one gave a thought to the armour-boxed vessel that, as was common knowledge, the Rebs were trying to put together in the Navy Yard. At noon the crew of the Cumberland saw a long trail of smoke from 3 steamers that were boldly coming up the channel from Norfolk, of which one, though it made more smoke than the others, did not look at all like a ship, but like a low black box. Drums beat the call to quarters on the two Union vessels.

With no delay the Merrimac headed past the Congress for the Cumberland. Both the Union ships began to "talk," without doing any damage whatever: the shells from their guns rattled against the side of the Merrimac and burst like peas from a pea shooter. The Merrimac's first salvo was directed at the Congress; one shot struck home, and her guns were silenced, after their single broadside; she was seen to be afire.

Lt. G.U. Morris, in command of the Cumberland, sent a broadside of solid shot at the odd monster, but the Merrimac was close on his vessel, and her long bow slid relentlessly into the side of his old wooden sloop. The crash of timber was heard above the roar of guns, the Merrimac firing every gun that would bear, while water went roaring into the Cumberland through the hole where the Merrimac's ram had struck.

When the Merrimac hailed her victim and demanded surrender, Lt. Morris replied: "Never: I'll sink alongside!" And then the Cumberland's crew kicked off their shoes and stripped to the waist (to give themselves a chance to swim off as the water rose around them), and round after round was sent at the ironclad as long as the guns would fire, smoke rolling from her side as she sank out of sight with her flag still flying. Out of 376 men, 117 were lost.

By five o'clock in the afternoon the Merrimac had put both blockading ships out of action and had silenced the Union shore batteries. She was preparing to return to her berth at the Norfolk Yard, when her crew noticed another strange-looking craft brought out in bold relief against the light of the burning Congress. This was the Union ironclad Monitor.

The two ironclads lay all night in Hampton Roads within hail of one another, and the issue was joined at half-past seven the next morning, in a battle described by a reporter of the time as "the most important naval battle in the history of the world". After five hours neither ship was damaged, but neither had any advantage over the other, and both withdrew, the struggle seemingly a draw. The day of wooden fighting ships was over.

'Twas early in the morning, just at the break of day
When our good ship the Cumberland at anchor safe did lay,
When the man upon the lookout to those below did cry:
"I see something like a housetop, to our larboard it doth lie!"

The captain seized his telescope and gazed far o'er the blue,
And then he spoke as follows to his brave and hardy crew:
"That thing you see floating yonder, just like a turtle's back,
Is that infernal Rebel steamer they call the Merrimac!"

Our decks were cleared for action, every gun was shotted true;
On came the Merrimac steaming across the waters blue,
And down she still kept steaming till short distance did us part,
And sent a ball a-humming that stilled many a beating heart.

Then to our brave commander that Rebel pirate spoke:
"Haul down your flying colors or I'll sink your Tankee boat!"
Our captain's eyes did glisten and his cheeks grew white with rage
And in a voice line thunder to that Rebel pirate said:

"My men are brave and loyal, my flag shall ever stand.
Before I'll strike my colors you may sink me and be damned!
I'll never strike my colors while this vessel rides the wave,
But you, my brave companions, may seek your lives to save."

The broadside after broadside into her ribs of steel,
Poured broadside after broadside, but no damage did she feel.
That ironclad monster drew off a hundred yards or more
And with her whistle screaming, at our wooden sides she bore.

She struck us right amidships, her ram came crushing through,
And the water came a-pouring in upon our brave and hardy crew.
They swore they'd never leave her, and they manned their guns afresh,
Poured broadside after broadside, till the water reached their breasts.

The Cumberland was sinking, going under keel and bow,
The captain on the quarterdeck refused to break his vow.
And as we sank, far down, far down, into the briny deep,
Our colors still were lying at the topmast's highest peak.

THE WRECK OF THE LADY SHERBROOKE

Sung by Robert Walker
Crandon, Wisconsin, 1953

Like the Flying Cloud, this is a song Mr. Walker had not sung nor thought of for more than 25 years, and he was as much surprised and impressed by its rediscovery as I was. He recorded it without warning, just as it came to mind.

I am indebted to Samuel Bayard for what must be the proper clue to the "File" -- the River Foyle (pronounced F'yle) in northern Ireland. The song was unknown to Bayard, and to Helen Creighton in Nova Scotia, as it was to me; I have never been able to find it in a published collection. Sean O'Sullivan, archivist of the Irish Folklore Commission in Dublin, tried also to locate it without success. There have been hundreds of similar songs concocted, of course, out of bits and pieces of other songs: the two stanzas about poor Mary D'yle were probably borrowed as suitable background for tragedy. But the rest of the song is so concrete in detail that it must have sprung from a real voyage. Any clues from readers of these notes would be much appreciated.

One evening in August as daylight was closing,
I careless did stray by the banks of the F'yle (Foyle)
I espied a fair female on the green banks reposing;
Alas, I soon found it was poor Mary D'yle.

Her cries through the wildwood did sound o'er the valley
And tears in big drops down her cheeks they did flow.
She sighed for her truelove who had left her in sorrow,
A poor lonely maiden to languish and woe.

On the twentieth of June, from the F'yle we weighed anchor,
Bound for Quebec in the North Amerikee.
'Twas a fine pleasant gale and our hearts light and merry,
Little thinking that Q-bec we never would see.

Our ship was well strung and our seamen were worthy.
John Bell, I am told, was our good captain's name,
A fine pleasant fellow and a fine navigator,
He was kind to his passengers, from Bristol he came.

If any of his passengers were short of provision,
He soon gave them more, and that without fee.
He soon gained th'affections of all that sailed with him,
For he well knew the dangers in crossing the sea.

It was one windy night on the twenty-fourth of July,
Little thinking at night as we slumbered in bed,
When a loud dismal cry from our dreams did awake us,
A man at the bow crying, "Breakers ahead!"

Those words from his lips they had scarcely proceeded
When our ship struck a rock with a most terrible crash;
The cries would have melted the hearts of a savage,
We were driven to destruction by this dismal crash.

It would make your hearts ache for to see those drowning infants,
All drowning and strangling before their father's eyes,
While their mothers were wringing their hands in despairing,
While the wild roaring billows down their thatchway did dash.

All night we were tossed to and fro by the billows,
No help from the island could reach us, 'tis true,
And all that remained to see the sun rise next morning,
Out of three hundred and eighty, there were thirty two.

Now come all ye brave seamen who were going to cross the ocean,
Leaving your friends and relation far behind,
Just think of the fate of that poor Lady Sherbrooke,
Who's left many's a widow and poor orphan child.

PRETTY POLLY or THE FALSE-HEARTED KNIGHT (Child 4)

Sung by Clara Hawks Tracy, daughter of Mary Walker (Hawks) Wells, Sundance, Wyoming, 1953

The year before she died (in 1937) Mary Walker Wells came in her best black dress and lace collar to call on me in my auto-camp cabin in Crandon. The first clue I had to her rare repertory of fine songs came when she looked out my window, and with a gesture calling attention to a dog who entered the water in a business-like way to swim across the lake to an Indian rice-harvesters' camp, she quoted: "He bent his breast and he swum!" The ballad she called Little Mathy Groves soon followed, and having settled us in world of lords and ladies for the afternoon, she remarked that she also knew the False-Hearted Knight, which she discovered in print as she leafed through Barry's British Ballads from Maine on my table. She was highly pleased to find an opening stanza that she had forgotten, without which she felt the song began too abruptly. A few days later, when she dictated it to me, Barry's first stanza was firmly incorporated into the ballad. But of course I could not be sure that it belonged there.

Just 15 years later I was to be reassured about this. When in 1953 Mrs. Tracy (Mrs. Wells' daughter) began the song, she started off firmly with the dubious stanza, only changing knight in the first line to man. So I was satisfied that it came from the same song tradition that Barry had tapped in Maine.

Both women called the song Pretty Polly or The False-Hearted Knight indiscriminately. Mrs. Wells sang the song almost word for word as her daughter sings it here (as to the text) but she offered two odd lines that she remembered but could not fit in:

"For it is not fitting such a villain as you
A naked woman should see."

These of course are properly the last 2 lines of stanza 7, which has been bowdlerized.

Mrs. Tracy sings what is basically the same pentatonic tune her mother did, but it was immediately noticeable that her singing is much more melismatic than Mrs. Wells' was. I had associated the kind of firm one-note-to-a-syllable singing that Mrs. Wells did with the younger generation, and if there were a melismatic tradition in the family, I should have expected to find it in Mrs. Wells rather than in her daughter. But things were reversed.

I think the explanation is that Mrs. Tracy's ear has been somewhat "modernized" and so she is moving the song toward a 7-note scale. She is much more musical, natively, than her mother was (Mrs. Wells was more interested in the stories than in the music), and she has begun to fill in the tones between the pentatonic skeleton points. This is the way new tones have been added in the historical evolution of the scale, and it is what a musical person would do in the natural course of development.

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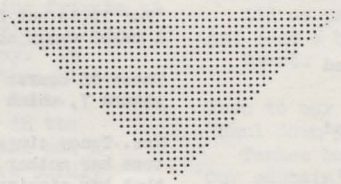

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