

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FW 6821

**FOLK SONGS OF THE  
CANADIAN NORTH WOODS  
SUNG BY WADE HEMSWORTH**



M  
1678  
H492  
F666  
1955

MUSIC LP

DONKEY RIDING  
THE SHINING BIRCH TREE  
ENVOYONS d'AVANT  
THE JAM AT GERRY'S ROCKS  
AIDAL O'BOY  
THE FRANKLIN EXPEDITION  
V'LA I'BON VENT  
YE GIRLS OF OLD ONTARIO  
PETER RAMBELAY  
THE BRIDE'S LAMENT  
THE BAD GIRL'S LAMENT  
THE BLACKFLY SONG

DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

# FOLK SONGS OF THE CANADIAN NORTH WOODS

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# Folk Songs of the Canadian North Woods

with Wade Hemsworth

WADE HEMSWORTH, who was born in Brantford, Ontario has been singing old traditional songs to his own guitar accompaniment since he was a boy. In 1940 he joined the Royal Canadian Airforce which stationed him in Newfoundland, and it was there that he first encountered and was influenced by the living folk music of north eastern America.

After the war, while working with surveying parties in northern Ontario and Quebec he had other opportunities to hear native songs at first hand in both French and English. His bush experiences left a deep impression on him, and to express his feelings about them he has used the traditional folk idiom to compose songs of his own, three of which are presented in this collection of "North Woods Ballads."

The term "North Woods", like "Wild West", or "Down East", means much more than a geographical location. Names of this sort have historic settings and imply ways of living. The actual outlines of such areas on the map are hard to define for they not only change with time but often overlap with areas called by other names.

Roughly the name "North Woods" refers to the fringe of country directly north of the heavy population, where the permanent settlements are small and scattered, and the industry is lumbering and perhaps trapping.

Because trappers are lonely codgers they do not make many songs, but the sprawling lumber camps are isolated worlds, alive with strong tough "jacks", who must make their own fun when the days work is over. The period which straddled the century was their hey-day, but whether we call them "shanty boys", "river drivers", "woodsmen", or plain "lumber jacks", their work is still going on, cutting the timber which is turned into the material used for our daily newspapers.

Whether they work at camp or drive logs down river, they still get together to roister or become sentimental when the days work is done.

These songs, some of them as old as the country and others as new as last year, are the songs the woodsman sings despite the increasing popularity of the battery radio. For to be able to stamp and make music is a good way to while away the evenings until the next trip "out to the front" with a pocket full of accumulated pay.

## DONKEY RIDING

This song started in Scotland with the bagpipes, travelled overseas with the sailors, gathering words as it came, was introduced to the lumbermen by them, probably as the loads of lumber were changing hands for the final trip on the Atlantic. In the hands of the River drivers it gathered local names and situations and was probably a source of ribald ingenuity in the old lumbering days. It is rarely heard today. The Donkey chorus refers to the donkey engine used in loading the logs.

Were you ever in Quebec  
Stowing timber on the deck  
Where there's a king with a golden crown  
Riding on a donkey.

Chorus:

Hey and Ho and up we go, donkey riding, donkey riding,  
Hey and Ho and up we go riding on a donkey.

Were you ever in Peterbro' town  
Where the girls walk up and down  
Waiting for the boys to come to town  
Riding on a donkey.

Chorus:

Hey and Ho and up we go, donkey riding, donkey riding,  
Hey and Ho and up we go riding on a donkey.

Were you ever around the Horn  
Where it's always fine and warm  
Seein' the Lion with the Unicorn  
Riding on a donkey.

Chorus:

Hey and Ho and up we go, donkey riding, donkey riding,  
Hey and Ho and up we go riding on a donkey.

Were you ever in Heron Bay  
Where the folks all shout Hurray  
Here comes Johnny with six months pay  
Riding on a donkey. (Chorus)

Were you ever in Mon'real  
I'll be going there next fall  
Have some fun with a red head gal  
Riding on a donkey.

### THE SHINING BIRCH TREE

Words and music by Wade Hemsworth

Wade says: "I got the idea for this song when I was surveying for the new Quebec North Shore and Labrador Railroad that leaves Sept Iles on the Gulf of St. Lawrence for the iron ore fields at Knob Lake in Labrador. The theme is a familiar one to anyone who has worked in the bush.

Oh ye girls in the village, ye girls in the town  
It's a long time-- a very long time  
For a fellow who's after bein' out on his own.  
Out on his own---  
Where the whiskey-jack's a-whistlin' cheerful and free  
In the land of the muskeg and the shinin' birch tree,  
The shinin' birch tree.

Now it's all very well in the full of the day,  
When there's no time-- not very much time  
For a man to keep thinking of the things that  
don't pay,  
The things that don't pay---  
Where the rapids are rushin' so grand and so free  
In the land of the muskeg and the shinin' birch tree,  
The shinin' birch tree.

But in the quiet of the evenin' when the camp  
settles down  
And the night is cold-- so very cold  
And old Rory Bory starts shiftin' around,  
Shiftin' around---  
Then he'll think of the warm lips and the laughter  
so free  
In the land of the muskeg and the shinin' birch tree,  
The shinin' birch tree.

Come the inbetween seasons of the freezeup or the thaw  
And it's Let's go, hey look out let's go,  
For we're off for some fun with the girls of the town,  
The girls in the town---  
He's a popular guy when his money flows free  
From the land of the muskeg and the shinin' birch  
tree,  
The shinin' birch tree.

And when the huskies are a-howling in the cold  
winter's dawn  
Then he'll recall-- oh how he'll recall  
That he spent all his money with the girls in the  
town,  
The girls in the town---  
So boys save your money or you'll all be like me  
In the land of the muskeg and the shinin' birch tree,  
The shinin' birch tree.

### ENVOYONS d'l'AVANT

This popular river drivers' song is only some sixty or seventy years old which, for a French Canadian song is comparatively recent. The joy of anticipation the shanty boys sing of the fun they will have

when the seasons work is finished and they strike out for town with a pocketful of pay.

Mois quand on part des chanquiers  
Mes chers amis, tons le coeur gai  
Pour aller voir tous nos parents  
Mes chers amis, le coeur content

Envoyons d'l'avant nos gens )  
Envoyons d'l'avant ) ) bis

Pour aller voir tous nos parents,  
Mes chers amis le coeur content,  
Mais qu'on arrive en Canada,  
I'va falloir mouiller ca

Envoyons d'l'avant nos gens )  
Envoyons d'l'avant ) ) bis

Mais qu'on arrive en Canada  
I'va falloir mouiller ca  
Ah! mais qu'ca soit tout mouille  
Vous allez voir qu'ca va marcher

Envoyons d'l'avant nos gens )  
Envoyons d'l'avant ) ) bis

Ah! mais qu'ca soit tout mouille  
Vous allez voir qu'ca va marcher  
Mais qu' nos amis nous voient arriver  
I'vont s'mett'a rire, a chanter

Envoyons d'l'avant nos gens )  
Envoyons d'l'avant ) ) bis

Qui a compose la chanson  
C'etait trois jolis brave garcons  
C'etait trois jolis brave garcons,  
En tapant sur leurs flacons

Envoyons d'l'avant nos gens )  
Envoyons d'l'avant ) ) bis

### THE JAM AT GERRY'S ROCKS

Variants of this traditional ballad can be found from Michigan to Newfoundland wherever the lumberjacks have been. It is probably based on a real tragedy now forgotten except by those who sing the song.

Come all ye true born shanty boys, wherever you may be,  
I'll have you pay attent-i-on and listen unto me,  
Concernin' those brave shanty boys who did agree to go  
To break the jam at Gerry's Rocks, with foreman  
John Munroe.

Now twas on a Sunday mornin' in the spring time of  
the year  
Our logs was piled up mountains high; we could not  
keep them clear  
And the foreman cries - Heave out me boys with hearts  
that have no fear  
For to break the jam at Gerry's Rocks, for Signal-  
town we'll steer.

Well now, some of them was willin' enough, but others  
they hung back  
For to work upon a Sunday noon they did not think  
was right,  
But six of our brave New Brunswick boys did volunteer  
to go  
For to break the jam at Gerry's Rocks with foreman  
John Munroe.

They had not pulled off many a log when the foreman  
he did say,  
I'll have ye be on guard me boys, that jam will soon  
give way-  
And scarce the warnin' had been spoke when the jam  
did break and go,  
And it carried away the six brave boys and foreman  
John Munroe.

So we pulled them to the river side and we gently lay  
them there,  
And there was one sad maid among us all whose cries  
did rend the air  
'Twas none but Anna Dennison, the girl from Signal-  
town  
Come a-runnin' to the riverside to find her true  
love drowned.

Now if you're ever down that way I'll have you stop  
and see  
Two green graves by the riverside where grows a  
hemlock tree,  
And the shanty boys carved in the tree, where these  
two lovers lie low,  
Here lies Miss Anna Dennison and her true lover  
John Munroe.

#### AIDAL O' BOY

The origin of this song is obscure, but judging by  
its melody it is probably a variant of one of the  
hundreds of Irish songs carried to this side of the  
Atlantic during the last century. It was sung in  
Labrador among other places, but very little is known  
about it. The melody is found in other folk songs of  
the Eastern region.

One day in summer when daylight was fading,  
Way down by the river I wandered alone;  
I met an old man who was weeping and wailing  
And rocking a cradle that was not his own.

Chorus:

Singing aidal O'boy, sweet baby lie easy  
Your own daddy will never be known,  
O it's weeping and wailing and rocking a cradle  
For somebody's baby that is not your own.

When first I married your innocent mother  
I thought like a fool I was blessed with a wife  
But to my misfortune and sad lamentation  
She proved both a curse and a plague to my life.

Chorus:

Singing aidal O'boy, sweet baby lie easy  
Your own daddy will never be known,  
O it's weeping and wailing and rocking a cradle  
For somebody's baby that is not your own.

'Twas every night to a ball or a party  
She left me here rocking the cradle alone,  
An innocent baby who calls me his daddy  
And little he knows that I am not his own.

Chorus:

Singing aidal O'boy, sweet baby lie easy  
Your own daddy will never be known,  
O it's weeping and wailing and rocking a cradle  
For somebody's baby that is not your own.

Now all you young fellows who someday may marry,  
Take my advice and leave women alone  
For by the Lord Harry if ever you marry  
They'll bring you a baby and swear it's your own.

Chorus:

Singing aidal O'boy, sweet baby lie easy  
Your own daddy will never be known,  
O it's weeping and wailing and rocking a cradle  
For somebody's baby that is not your own.

#### THE FRANKLIN EXPEDITION

This song, sometimes called "Lady Franklin's Lament",  
was written in England at the time of the search for  
the Expedition, when this fragment was carried into  
Newfoundland, perhaps by the searching parties them-  
selves. The search has been carried on almost to  
the present day, and the song and its tragic subject  
is closely linked with the history of Canada's  
north country.

I dreamed a dream I thought was true,  
Concernin' Franklin and his jovial crew  
That from old Eng-a-land they sailed away  
To the frozen ocean in the month of May.

Now 'tis more than any man can do  
With heart undaunted and courage true  
And many's wife is leaved to mourn  
In grief and sorrow for their return.

There's Captain Austin from Scarboro town,  
Brave Captain Ross of high renown,  
And ther's Granville and Penny and many a more  
Have long been a-searchin' the Arctic shore.

In Baffin's Bay where the whale-a-fish blow  
The death of Franklin no one do know,  
Nor the fate of Frank-e-lin no tongue can tell,  
Lord Franklin along with his sailors do dwell.

#### V'LA L'BON VENT (VOILA LE BON VENT)

There are approximately one hundred and fifty versions of this old story about the King's son who goes duck hunting. It is obviously European in origin, but this version of the "good wind" has covered a vast territory on this continent. It was used as a paddle song by the old French voyageurs, and is still heard when a journey by canoe is being made or remembered.

Chorus:

V'la l'bon vent, v'la l'joli vent  
V'la l'bon vent m'amie m'appelle  
V'la l'bon vent v'la l'joli vent  
V'la l'bon vent, m'amie m'attend.

Derriers chez-nous y-a-t-un etang  
V'la l'bon vent, v'la l'joli vent  
Trois beaux canards s'on vont baignant

Chorus:

V'la l'bon vent, v'la l'joli vent  
V'la l'bon vent m'amie m'appelle  
V'la l'bon vent v'la l'joli vent  
V'la l'bon vent, m'amie m'attend.

Trois beaux canards s'en vont baignant  
Le fils du roi s'en va chassant

Chorus:

V'la l'bon vent, v'la l'joli vent  
V'la l'bon vent m'amie m'appelle  
V'la l'bon vent v'la l'joli vent  
V'la l'bon vent, m'amie m'attend.

Le fils du roi s'en va chassant  
Avec son grand fusil d'argent

Chorus:

V'la l'bon vent, v'la l'joli vent  
V'la l'bon vent m'amie m'appelle  
V'la l'bon vent v'la l'joli vent  
V'la l'bon vent, m'amie m'attend.

Avec son grand fusil d'argent  
Oh fils du roi, tu es mechant!

Chorus:

V'la l'bon vent, v'la l'joli vent  
V'la l'bon vent m'amie m'appelle  
V'la l'bon vent v'la l'joli vent  
V'la l'bon vent, m'amie m'attend.

Oh fils du roi, tu es mechant!  
Tira le noir, tu a le blanc.

Chorus

#### YE GIRLS OF OLD ONTARIO

This rousing shanty boys song is similar in content to many others be they French or English. Like other lumberjacks' songs the words vary with the locality in which it is sung.

Ye girls of old Ontario please listen what I say  
While raftsmen drive all down the rapid river  
every day;  
A-drivin' down those rapid streams as raftsmen they  
must do  
While the lazy and loafin' farmer boys, they stay at  
home with you,  
While the lazy and loafin' farmer boys, they stay at  
home with you.

The lazy loafin' farmer boys they tell the girls  
great tales,  
They tell them of the danger while a-crossin o'er  
the fields;  
And cuttin' of the grass and weeds is all that they  
can do  
While the burly courageous shanty boys are drivin'  
down the Sault.#  
While the burly courageous shanty boys are drivin'  
down the Sault.

And when the sun is goin' down their ploughs they  
cast aside,  
They jump upon their horses backs and homewards they  
do ride;  
And when the clock strikes eight or nine then into  
bed they crawl,  
While out on Lac St. Louis we're runnin' in the squall.  
While out on Lac St. Louis we're runnin' in the squall.

And when the springtime rolls around the foreman he  
will say,  
Lay down your saws and axes boys, we drive the river  
today.  
And the wind blows from the mountains, which tosses  
us upside down  
And it sets us in confus-i-on for fear we'll all be  
drowned.  
And it sets us in confus-i-on for fear we'll all be  
drowned.

So it's lee-bore-down and lee-bore-round and set your  
sails aright,  
And we'll sail out immediately and leave the lakes  
behind,  
Yes we'll sail out immediately and bid those lakes  
adieu,  
We'll steer a course for old Quebec, our sorrows to  
subdue,  
We'll steer a course for old Quebec, our sorrows to  
subdue.

And when we get to Quebec town the girls will jump  
for joy,  
Says one unto another one - Here comes me shanty boy.  
So till the drive is over my girls just do the best  
you can.  
And you're sure to be glad you waited for your rovin'  
shanty man.  
And you're sure to be glad you waited for your rovin'  
shanty man.

# pronounced Soo

PETER RAMBELAY

Known sometimes as Peter Hembly or Peter Wimble,  
this song is heard in Maine, New Brunswick and Nova  
Scotia, as well as we presume it must be in Prince  
Edward Island where the ill-fated Peter came from.  
Although not so well known as its mate, "Gerry's  
Rocks" it has done more travelling than its hero.

My name is Peter Rambelay as you may understand,  
Born on Prince Edward Island, close by the ocean  
strand,  
In the spring of eighteen eighty-one when the flowers  
was fair to view,  
I left my native count-a-ree, my fortune to pursue.

I landed in New Brunswick, that lumberin' count-e-ree,  
And I hired out in the lumberin' woods for to cut the  
tall pine down,  
When I was struck by a fallin' limb and scrunched  
into the ground.

Now I'll ne'er again see the lofty ships as they go  
a-sailin' by  
With a flag a-flyin' in the air above the canvas high.  
Farewell to you Prince Edward Isle and you island  
girls so true,  
For dyin' I lye in this strange land, so far away  
from you.

THE BRIDE'S LAMENT

Wade Hensworth first heard this song from a man who  
sailed on lake boats out of Port Arthur at the head  
of the Great Lakes. He heard it again from someone  
who picked it up in an English speaking settlement  
in the Gaspé peninsula of the Province of Quebec.  
Its beautiful simplicity of melody and sentiment is  
evidently Irish in origin, and must have been brought  
here by Irish settlers sometime in the last century.

Long years ago when I was young,  
The flowers they bloomed and the birds they sung.  
The sailor and his lovely bride  
Were weeping by the ocean side.

Chorus:

Tra la la la la - la la la la  
Tra la la la la - la la la la  
The sailor and his lovely bride  
Were weeping by the ocean side.

'Tis scarce six months since we were wed,  
And oh how fast the time has fled  
And we must part at the dawning of the day  
When the good ship bears my love away.

Chorus:

Tra la la la la - la la la la  
Tra la la la la - la la la la  
The sailor and his lovely bride  
Were weeping by the ocean side.

Long years have past and he comes no more  
To greet his love on the lovely shore  
For the ship went down in the howlin' of the storm  
And the waves engulfed his lifeless form.

Chorus:

Tra la la la la - la la la la  
Tra la la la la - la la la la  
The sailor and his lovely bride  
Were weeping by the ocean side.

I wish that I were sleeping too  
Beneath the waves on the ocean blue.  
My soul to my God and my body to the sea,  
And the restless waves rolling over me.

THE BAD GIRL'S LAMENT

This sad song is obviously an earlier version of the  
old ballad that begat 'The streets of Laredo' and  
'St. James Infirmary Blues'. From the chorus it is  
assumed that all three came from an Irish regimental  
song, and possibly came over here with soldiers from  
across the sea. A version of 'The bad girl's lament'  
is given in Helen Creighton's collection "Songs and  
Ballads from Nova Scotia."

As I walked down to St. James' hospital,  
St. James' hospital early one day,  
I spied my only fairest daughter  
Wrapped up in white linen as cold as the clay.

Chorus:

So beat your drums and play the fife lowly,  
And play the dead march as you carry me along.  
Take me to the church yard and lay the sod over me,  
I am a young maid and I know I've done wrong.

Once in the street I used to look handsome;  
Once in the street I used to dress gay;  
First to the ale house, then to the dance hall  
Then to the poor house and now to my grave.

Chorus:

So beat your drums and play the fife lowly,  
And play the dead march as you carry me along.  
Take me to the church yard and lay the sod over me,  
I am a young maid and I know I've done wrong.

Send for the preacher to pray o'er my body,  
Send for the doctor to heal up my wounds,  
Send for the young man I first fell in love with,  
That I might see him before I pass on.

Chorus:

So beat your drums and play the fife lowly,  
And play the dead march as you carry me along.  
Take me to the church yard and lay the sod over me,  
I am a young maid and I know I've done wrong.

Let six pretty maidens with a bunch of red roses,  
Six pretty maidens to sing me a song,  
Six pretty maidens with a bunch of red roses  
To lay on my coffin as they carry me along.

Chorus:

So beat your drums and play the fife lowly,  
And play the dead march as you carry me along.  
Take me to the church yard and lay the sod over me,  
I am a young maid and I know I've done wrong.

THE BLACKFLY SONG words and music by Wade Hemsworth

Anyone who spends a summer in the northern bush country will sympathize with the sentiment Wade Hemsworth has expressed in this song, which tells the tribulations of a survey trip on the Little Abitibi, a tributary of the more famous Abitibi river which flows into James Bay. Wade says: "We were on a survey for the Ontario Hydro Electric Commission when this song was born. The flies affected some of the boys so badly that they had to stop work 'til the swelling of their faces subsided so that they could see. Incidentally Tobey Colpitts, who is the 'Black Tobey' of the song is still surveying for the Ontario Hydro."

'Twas early in the spring when I decide to go  
For to work up in the woods in North Ontar-i-o,  
And the unemployment office said they'd send me thru  
To the Little Abitibi with the survey crew.

Chorus:

And the black flies - the little black flies,  
Always the black fly no matter where you go,  
I'll die with the black fly a-pickin' my bones

In north Ontar-i-o -i-o  
In north Ontari-o

The man Black Tobey was the captain of the crew  
And he said I'm gonna tell you boys, what we're gonna  
do.

They want to build a power dam and we must find a way  
For to make the Little Ab flow around the other way

Chorus:

With the black flies - the little black flies,  
Always the black fly no matter where you go,  
I'll die with the black fly a-pickin' my bones  
In north Ontari-o -i-o  
In north Ontari-o.

So we survey to the east and we survey to the west  
And we couldn't make our minds up how to do it best.  
Little Ab, Little Ab what shall I do  
For I'm all but goin' crazy with the survey crew

Chorus:

And the black flies - the little black flies,  
Always the black fly no matter where you go,  
I'll die with the black fly a-pickin' my bones  
In north Ontari-o -i-o  
In north Ontari-o.

'Twas blackfly blackfly everywhere,  
A-crawling in your whiskers, a-crawlin' in your hair,  
A-swimmin' in the soup and a-swimmin' in the tea,  
Oh the devil take the blackfly and let me be

Chorus:

Oh the blackfly - the little black flies,  
Always the black fly no matter where you go,  
I'll die with the black fly a-pickin' my bones  
In north Ontari-o -i-o  
In north Ontari-o.

Black Tobey fell to swearin' cause the work went slow,  
And the state of our morals was gettin' pretty low,  
And the flies swarmed heavy - it was hard to catch a  
breath  
As you staggered up and down the trail a-talkin' to  
yourself

Chorus:

And the black flies - the little black flies,  
Always the black fly no matter where you go,  
I'll die with the black fly a-pickin' my bones  
In north Ontari-o -i-o  
In north Ontari-o

Now the bull cook's name was Blind River Joe;  
If it hadn't been for him we'd've never pulled through  
For he bound up our bruises and he kidded us for fun,  
And he lathered us with bacon grease and balsam gum

Chorus:

For the black flies - the little black flies,  
Always the black fly no matter where you go,  
I'll die with the black fly a-pickin' my bones  
In north Ontari-o -i-o  
In north Ontari-o.

At last the job was over; Black Tobey said- We're  
through  
With the Little Abitibi and the survey crew.  
'Twas a wonderful experience and this I know  
I'll never go again to North Ontar-i-o

Chorus:

And the black flies - the little black flies,  
Always the black fly no matter where you go,  
I'll die with the black fly a-pickin' my bones  
In north Ontari-o -i-o  
In north Ontari-o.