



Yankee Notions

"I am informed that the Minds and Manners of many People about the Countrey are much corrupted by foolish Songs and Ballads which Hawkers and Peddlers carry into all parts of the Countrey. By way of Antidote I would procure Poetical composures full of Piety --- to be published and scattered in all parts of the Land."

Cotton Mather's Diary, October 4, 1713

It used to be thought that the Puritan's antipathy toward secular songs and singing (witness Cotton Mather's oft-quoted remark) produced an environment so hostile that few traditional folk songs survived in New England. Even today many people tend to associate American folk music solely with the remote areas of the Southern Appalachians. However, collectors such as Phillips Barry, Fannie H. Eckstorm, Eloise Linscott, Helen Flanders, Gale Huntington and others have documented a wealth of traditional song that has been cherished and preserved for generations in the Northeast.

Here are some of the songs that were sung around the farmer's hearth and at the apple-paring frolic, in the sailor's foc'sle and the lumberman's shanty. They are all part of our region's heritage. They help us to recall some of the experiences and customs that shaped New England lives and thoughts --- our YANKEE NOTIONS.

ABOUT THE SONGS

SIDE I

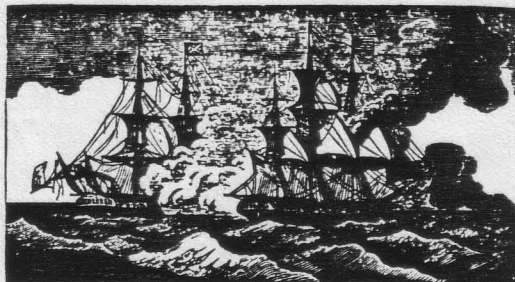
JOHNNY OF HAZELGREEN (Child 293) It is nice to find an old ballad where, for once, the young lovers are encouraged by a parent. Mary W. Smyth recorded the text from Horace Priest of Sangerville, Maine, in the 1920's. He had learned it in the lumbercamps in the 1880's. No tune was noted, but in 1974 Packie Manus Byrne, a fine traditional singer from County Donegal, Ireland, recorded virtually the same set of words with this melody. That an Irish version of this song should have been known by lumbermen is not surprising since many of the Irish found employment in the Northern woods.



THE LOW RIVER SHORE This song comes from the repertoire of Annie Marston of West Gouldsboro, Maine. Of herself, she once wrote "I was born (in 1853) in the little town of Charleston. My mother's ancestors were English, my father's Irish, and I am a State of Maine Yankee." She had an extensive repertoire and was eager to share her songs --- many of them were published by Phillips Barry in The Bulletin of the Folk Song Society of the Northeast and in British Ballads From Maine (ed. Barry, Eckstorm and Smyth).



SEA MEDLEY (GO TO SEA NO MORE/MY LOVER IS A SAILOR LAD/THE COAST OF PERU) Here is a group of songs which look at the enterprise of going to sea from various perspectives. We begin and end with a seasoned sailor's resolution never to venture off to sea again --- a sentiment many sailors expressed at the end of a long voyage only to find themselves outward bound a month or two later. The second song relates the feelings of a girl left behind. It first caught my attention because of the use of the word "tormentuous" to describe her lover's spirit. This rather aptly describes the restlessness and searching for adventure that caused many a young man to leave the farm in the 19th century. Some left in search of new land. Some sought gold. Others, perhaps spurred on by songs like our third one, searched the seas for "greasy luck".



THE PRESSGANG SAILOR/THE MUSICAL PRIEST This song was collected by Helen Flanders from Lena Bourne Fish of East Jaffrey, New Hampshire. Like Annie Marston, she had a great store of traditional songs. According to Mrs. Fish, this song had been in her family since the French and Indian Wars. The reel which follows is a familiar one to fiddlers in this country as well as in Ireland and Scotland.

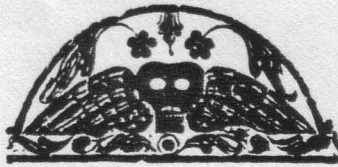
WHEN SAMUEL LED THE SINGING Mary Ellen Cohane found this song in an old Milford, Connecticut newspaper while working one summer as the town folklorist. Since no tune was mentioned, she set it to "How Can I Keep From Singing?" Although there was a great deal of singing in the old New England meetinghouses the quality of that singing was, to say the least, not always the best. To help the congregations keep the proper pitch and melody various instruments, such as the bass-viol, were employed.



THE BUNDLING SONG Due to a general lack of furniture and good heating our Puritan ancestors practiced an interesting custom called 'bundling'. A courting couple would be obliged to climb into bed (fully clothed, of course) to keep company. By the Revolution, however, ministers and others tried to discourage this custom. They even had songs published to ridicule it. But the bundlers had a poet of their own and this song in their defence was the result. Similar versions have been found in Vermont (Green Mountain Songster, Sandgate, 1823, compiled by an unknown Revolutionary War soldier), Massachusetts (an early 19th century broadside in the Isaiah Thomas Collection of Broadside, American Antiquarian Society), and Connecticut (in the papers of a young schoolteacher from 1786). I have set the song to the tune "There Was A Jolly Miller", which was popular at the same time the song was current.



THE ROLLING STONE This version comes from Eliphalet Mason's Complete Pocket Songbook, 1802, (Simsbury, Connecticut), and is the earliest known printed one in America. New England has never been the easiest place to farm and the temptation to find one's fortune at sea or out West was always strong. In this case, the attraction was "Genessee Land", i.e. the western counties of New York which the Indians called the 'beautiful valley'. It is worth noting that this song, which argues so well against emigrating, was carried across the continent by the pioneers.



RENARDINE Here is another song from Annie Marston. Some traditional and revival singers have attributed supernatural powers to Renardine, while others find no mystery in the all to human seduction of a young maid at the hands of an outlaw. Phillips Barry traced the origins of the song's plot to a popular 19th century romance which had been translated from the German into English. The German novel had, in turn, been based on the exploits of an Italian bandit with the improbable name of Rinaldo Rinaldi. Herman Melville was certainly familiar with this novel, for he wrote of Moby Dick that "there hung a terrible prestige about such a whale, as there did about Rinaldo Rinaldi."



THE GRAND CONVERSATION OF NAPOLEON This is another of the many Irish songs which found favor in the lumbercamps. Barry included it in his Maine Woods Songster and says it was considered a "test piece" for singers. It is one of several songs about Napoleon still sung in Ireland and Great Britain. They all have in common rather grandiose language and wonderful melodies.

All songs are traditional, except for the melody to "Go To Sea No More", which was composed by Gina Dunlap.

CREDITS

Lead vocals, guitar and English concertina - Jim Douglas
Fiddle and mandolin - Joe Gerhard
Uilleann pipes ("Coast of Peru" and "The Grand Conversation of Napoleon")
- Tony Morris
Tin Whistle ("Coast of Peru") - Gina Dunlap
Dulcimer ("Johnny of Hazelgreen") - Lee Townsend
Chorus ("The Rolling Stone") - Lui Collins
("Go To Sea No More") - Lui Collins, Gina Dunlap, Joe Gerhard and
Tony Morris
("When Samuel Led the Singing") - Sandal Astrausky, Christopher
Cook, Amy Dabis, Gina Dunlap, Joe Gerhard, Tony Morris,
Tom Randall, Lee Townsend, Dennis Wearing, and Kevin
Wimmer

Engineer - Doug Clark

Recorded and mixed at The Gallery, East Hartford, Connecticut