Virginia Traditions

Ballads from British Tradition
No state can boast of longer lasting and more varied folk traditions than Virginia. Many of her material traditions - such as barns, houses and plows - remain as permanent, unchanged documents of her early settlers' lifestyle. Her performance traditions - songs, tales and fiddle tunes - also help us understand something of the everyday social life and beliefs of Virginia's people. These performance traditions, however, because they have been continually changing and developing from the moment of their creation, are difficult to identify and document accurately. THE BLUE RIDGE INSTITUTE of FERRUM COLLEGE exists to seek out and document both the material and performance traditions found in Virginia.

This record of traditional British ballads sung in southwestern Virginia is only one of a series of LP's produced by the Blue Ridge Institute documenting Virginia's varied and complex performance traditions. The LP concentrates on only one section of the state in order to demonstrate the vast range of singing styles and performance possibilities found in one relatively small section of the country. This range runs from very archaic unaccompanied solo singing styles, through examples sung with one instrument accompaniment, to full treatment by stringbands. All of these examples were recorded within approximately a forty year span and all styles presented here have existed side by side at the same time and place. By emphasizing the ever changing nature of folksong tradition, the ballads on this LP are presented as continually developing works of art and not simply as static texts, historical documents, or frivolous diversions. These songs have lasted many hundreds of years because they are important to the people who sing them and to the people who listen to them.

A BOOKLET OF FULL DESCRIPTIVE AND ANALYTIC NOTES IS ENCLOSED

**Front cover — Texas Gladden, ca. 1932. Photo by Alfreda Peel, courtesy Virginia Folklore Society and Alderman Library, University of Virginia.**

**Back cover — Dan Tate, 1970. Photo by Blanton Owen.**

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MISS ALFREDA PEEL (Right) VISITING A BALLAD SINGER. MISS PEEL LABELED THIS PHOTO, "MISS FANNIE GRUBB, I AM IN HERE BY ACCIDENT." APRIL 1933.
(Photo courtesy University of Virginia Library, Manuscript Division)
COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
DEPARTMENT OF HIGHWAYS
AND TRANSPORTATION
TRAFFIC AND SAFETY DIVISION
COUNTY SEATS AND INDEPENDENT CITIES
SCALE OF MILES

HOME AREAS OF THE SINGERS
1. Polly Johnson, Joe Hubbard, Kate Sturgill, Dock Boggs
2. Stanley Brothers
3. Sam Russell, Robert Russell
4. Horton Barker, Spence Moore
5. E. V. Stoneman, Kelly Harrell
6. Dan Tate
7. Ruby Bowman Plemmons
8. Eunice Yeatts McAlexander
9. Dorothy Rorick
10. Texas Gladden
I DON'T THINK THE LAST WORDS OF THAT SONG CAN BE BEAT.

The singing of the old traditional ballads harkens back to another time in our history. The art flourished in this country in the 18th and 19th centuries when time passed more slowly and people—especially rural people—had time to reflect on their heritage and themselves. The cultural distance between them and their ancestors was short—only a memory away. Balladry flourished in close-knit, fairly homogeneous familial and social groups because the members of these groups shared a common sense of history and valued that history highly. Change, though ever-present, was not valued for its own sake. When outside influences—new songs, new styles—were brought into a group, there was time to fully digest and adapt them until they fitted comfortably into the old, familiar patterns. If the transition could not be made satisfactorily, the new was often discarded in favor of the old and familiar.

By the beginning of the 20th century our cultural landscape began to change ever more rapidly. The increased industrialization and drawing power of cities, the coming of automobiles and paved roads, radio and commercial recordings becoming more and more available—all of these and more ushered in a new sense of history; the history of “now” and of the future. Conservative, homogeneous societies were often flooded with newness and the people in them no longer had time to deal with change in the old ways. The once common homogeneous group became increasingly rare. As modernity accelerated, more and more people chose it in preference to the old ways. Traditional lifestyles took on the stigma of “old fashioned” and “behind the times.” Those who chose to retain the old ways did so less and less because it was the “natural” thing to do; to elect the traditional over the new required extra effort and thought. It is a tribute to the Virginian’s love of tradition and history that so much material reflective of the old life-ways remained a valued part of his life. The music on this album demonstrates the ability of many Virginians to hold on to the past, for all of the songs heard here can be traced back in time to the British Isles. These songs, presenting the complete gamut of performance possibilities, are all ballads—they tell a story.

The range of folk music in Virginia can be staggering. From Old World ballads brought by the original settlers, to current compositions by modern bards about today’s events, Virginia has it all. While the same can be said of other states, few other states have received the same amount of attention in the study and collection of traditional music. From the early 20th century when the Englishman Cecil Sharp wandered over Virginia collecting Old World songs and the Virginia Folklore Society was doing the same, through the continued documentation of Virginia’s folk music by the federally-funded WPA Writer’s Project in the 1930s, to the present day, collectors, enthusiasts, and scholars have documented the extent and abundance of Virginia’s folksong.

What Is A Ballad?

The ballad as a distinct form of song probably emerged sometime around 1200-1300 A.D. in northern Europe. The traditional ballad differs from other song forms in that it is a stanzaic, narrative folksong; it is constructed of lines which are grouped together in some recognizable scheme, and tells a story that has been perpetuated and changed in oral tradition over time. The schematic or stanzaic structure suggests that the form is newer than other, non-stanzaic songs, such as the epic and the romance. Additionally, each story can be told in any number of ways; thus, each ballad idea has a number of “versions” (certain key elements are restructured, but the story is still recognizable), and “variants” (only verbal or minor changes, such as a king becoming a squire).

A ballad is further distinguished from other stanzaic songs by three primary characteristics and it is classically thought that a song which lacks any one of the three elements cannot properly be called a ballad. First, the song concentrates on one single episode that is composed of scenes and usually begins in the middle of the action, then moves from scene to scene with little or no transition. Second, the story is told dramatically, usually through the means of dialogue. Third, the narrative approach is impersonal; there is little or no intrusion of the narrator’s point of view. One may sympathize with the character’s plight, but during the performance such sympathy is not explicitly stated by the singer. In addition to these three primary characteristics, there are a number of secondary characteristics found in most ballads, but not necessarily in all ballads. Foremost among these secondary characteristics are repetition, which runs rampant through balladry, and the occurrence of refrains which are usually lyrical in function and do not advance the story.

The subject matter of a ballad is partly what determines whether or not it will remain popular over time or lose favor with the singers of a later era. It is somewhat surprising that very few ballads have the same themes as medieval literature, even though they were products of the same time period. For example, although the number of stories in medieval literature dealing with lives of the saints is overwhelming, fewer than a dozen or so ballads from the same period concern themselves with religious events. Likewise, historical chronicles of major events, while popular in literature, were apparently too broad in scope to be handled successfully in ballad form. Tradition-
ballad enthusiasts ushered in the first era of modern ballad and folksong collecting in the United States. Field collecting in the United States was pioneered, perhaps, by W. W. Newell, but he was soon followed by such people as Phillips Barry in New England, Josiah Combs in Kentucky, H. M. Belden in Missouri, John Lomax in Texas, Frank C. Brown in North Carolina, the aforementioned Cecil Sharp throughout the South, and Professor Alphonso Smith then at the University of Virginia. Smith founded the Virginia Folklore Society in 1913 and set as its first purpose the tracking down of all Virginia versions of the old Child ballads.

Smith set out to accomplish this task by initiating a systematic search, conducted by classroom teachers, throughout Virginia's public school system. The results pleased Smith: "that Virginia has found more of these [Child ballads] than any other state is due . . . to the interest and perseverance and intelligence of the teachers than to any or to all other causes." (Davis, Traditional Ballads of Virginia, p. 29).

The culmination of these initial years of ballad hunting in Virginia finally took book form in 1929, after Professor Smith's death. Of the 305 distinct ballad stories given by Child, 51 were recovered in Virginia by 1929. Edited by Arthur Kyle Davis, Traditional Ballads of Virginia gives 440 versions and variants of these 51 narrative songs. Great attention was given to the large number of versions and variants because, to the scholar, every version of a ballad story has as much authority as any other, although aesthetically he may prefer one version over another.

In 1949, Dr. Davis published Folksongs of Virginia, a checklist of titles including Child ballads and other folksongs collected by the Virginia Folklore Society to that date. In 1960 he edited More Traditional Ballads of Virginia wherein he gives additional important versions, variants and tunes of 46 Child ballads including eight entirely new ballads found in Virginia since 1929. In both ballad collections, Dr. Davis explained his editorial practice of including only Child ballads and not the reams of other folksongs that have been submitted. He felt that because Child ballads are the "aristocrats of the folksong field" and are becoming harder to locate with every passing year, they deserve priority treatment. He acknowledged that the other folksong material needs publication and such seems the case, for of the 974 distinct songs collected by the Virginia Folklore Society (not including versions or variants), only 61 are from the Child canon. Davis was certainly aware that among traditional singers there is little or no distinction made between Child ballads and other equally favored "old love songs." Just like anyone else, folk singers prefer songs not for their historical pedigree, but for their story and tune.

Between 1938 and 1942, folklore collectors sponsored by the Federal Writer's Project (part of the Works Progress—later Projects—Admini-
concerns itself with political events and units (such as "Virginia" history), the study of folklore demonstrates that people share cultural traits of a regional nature and not of a political nature. The performers on this record, for example, though all Virginians, illustrate regional differences in singing style. Singers from the far western reaches of the state sing differently from those of the southern Blue Ridge section. Consequently, singers from Wise County share more in common with eastern Kentucky singers than they do with singers from Patrick County.

The songs on this record are roughly organized to indicate progressively modern musical and performance concepts, going from most archaic to most modern. It will be noticed that these concepts—old or new—do not follow chronological progression; some examples of an older musical concept are recently recorded and others are ignored when two are left out, also a common practice, the scale is pentatonic.

The two key features of this song that demonstrate its archaic style are the loose, rather rigid, conception of time or meter, and the modal tune. This modal effect can be created in a number of ways and is done in this tune by omitting the 4th tone of the "normal" scale, and dwelling more than usual on the 6th tone. When one tone is omitted, the scale is called hexatonic and when two are left out, also a common practice, the scale is pentatonic.

"Well, Polly Johnson, Wise, Virginia, 'Old Ireland.'"

As I were a-walkin' up old Ireland,
There my mind were on my girl,
Cold drops of rain fell just as it happened.
Me and my true love were here fer to meet.

"Good morning, good morning, my pretty little fair one.
How do you think you could fancy me?"

"Oh, my fancy's placed on a brisk young farmer.
Who's just late-a-ly crossed the sea."

"Oh, now describe your true love to me.
Now describe him unto me.
Perhaps I've saw some sword run through him,
On the ground your love may fall."

"He is tall, both neat and tiny,
His eyes is of a very deep blue,
Oh, his hair is black and he wears it curly,
And his name is William Hall."

"Oh, yes, I've seed him and I knowed him.
And his name was William Hall.
I saw a French cannon ball shot through him,
On the ground your love did fall."

She wrung her hands and tore her hair,
'Said, "Lord have mercy, what shall I do?"
Oh, now we're parted brokenhearted.
Oh, my heart is broke in two."

"Cheer up, cheer up, my pretty little fair one.
Cheer up, cheer up, I say again.
Oh, now to convince you of the story.
Here's the ring that you give me."

They joined their lovely right hands together.
And to the church they both did go.
Saying, "Here is a couple and they'll get married,
Whether their parents is willing or no."

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY:


Mrs. Johnson learned this song when she was seventeen from her nephew in Johnson County, Kentucky, fifteen miles below Paintsville on Big Sandy. Professor Child says this song was once one of the most popular of Scottish ballads and he has found the same story in Scandinavian and German ballads as well. The bride's bequest of good things to her friends but ill things to the author of her death is highly characteristic of ballad poetry. Perhaps because the crime seems motiveless by today's standards, this ballad survives only weakly in tradition. Davis, for example, gives no versions of it in either of his collections. Emory Hamilton recorded three variants of the song, two from Mrs. Johnson and the third from a neighbor. It has not been reported elsewhere in the state.

This ballad is a perfect example of what is termed "incremental repetition." The story progresses in clear increments or by regular consecutive additions: "What do you will your sister Ann?"; "What do you will your true love?"; "What do you will your mother dear?", etc. The seemingly meaningless refrain of this version has probably always been so for a version of the ballad collected in Scotland in 1800 (from Mrs. Brown of Falkland) is similar:

There was three ladies play'd at the ba,
With a hey ho and a little gay
There came a knight and played o'er them a'.
As the primrose spreads so sweetly.
(Kittredge and Sargent, p. 20)

It seems this ballad, as Mrs. Johnson sings it, "degenerated" little over the 139 year span between the versions.

Another version of this song attributed to Mrs. Johnson goes:

What do you will your brother John? I lily-O
What do you will your brother John?
A rope and a gallows for to hang him on.
For the rose is sweet I know.

It is likely there was simply not enough room on the disc for this last verse and it was consequently omitted.
There was three maids a-playing ball, I lily-O
There were three maids a-playing ball, I lily-O
They some three lords for to court them all,
For the rose is sweet I know.

The foremost one was dressed in red, I lily-O
The foremost one was dressed in red.
And this is the one I make my wed,
For the rose is sweet I know.

The middle one was dressed in green, I lily-O
The middle one was dressed in green.
And this is the one I'll make my queen,
For the rose is sweet I know.

The foremost one was dressed in white, I lily-O
The foremost one was dressed in white.
Oh this is the one I'll make my wife,
For the rose is sweet I know.

Her brother John was standing by, I lily-O
Her brother John was standing by.
He wounded his sister with a knife,
For the rose is sweet I know.

Ride on, ride on, to yonder's hill, I lily-O
Ride on, ride on, to yonder's hill,
Till I get down and bleed a while,
For the rose is sweet I know.

Ride on, ride on, to yonder's hill, I lily-O
Ride on, ride on, to yonder's hill,
Till I get down and make my will,
For the rose is sweet I know.

What do you will your sister Ann? I lily-O
What do you will your sister Ann?
My trunk of gold and silver pan,
For the rose is sweet I know.

What do you will your true love dear? I lily-O
What do you will your true love dear?
This snow white horse that I rode here,
For the rose is sweet I know.

What do you will your mother dear? I lily-O
What do you will your mother dear?
My snow white dress what I wore here,
For the rose is sweet I know.

Tell her to wash it nice and clean, I lily-O
Tell her to wash it nice and clean,
So my heart's blood can never be seen,
For the rose is sweet I know.

Joe Hubbard was in his 70's at the time of this recording and his singing style still exuberant. He was born, raised, and lived most of his life around Pound, Virginia, but moved to Washington state soon after this recording session, where he lived with his daughter's family until his death. He knew many old songs and ballads—about which he apparently had strong feelings—and sang them all in his own unique style. I am familiar with no other performer who so nearly chants or recites his songs rather than "sings" them.

The curtse wife—terror to demons—circulates as a humorous tale throughout the world, including the Orient, Europe, and Russia. Most American versions of the song are highly consistent in both storyline and detail; the devil comes and carries away the farmer's shrewish wife, but finds her so unbearable even in Hell that he returns her to the unfortunate farmer. The wide popularity of the song is well documented. Davis, for example, turned up fifteen texts and tunes for his 1929 Traditional Ballads of Virginia and eight additional ones for his More Traditional Ballads of Virginia.

Mr. Hubbard's version is unique not only because of his singing style, but also because his song lacks the usual "hi fi diddle li day" type refrain. After being almost badgered by one of the collectors to "put the fa la in it," Mr. Hubbard patiently explains, "I can't sing it that way, old fella." Cecil Sharp and others argued that a whistling refrain was once very common, for whistling was supposed to keep Satan at a distance, but field collecting has not born out this assumption. Only one of the seven versions in Sharp's English Folksongs from the Southern Appalachians (none from Virginia) and one of the twenty-three versions printed in both of Davis' works indicate whistling refrains.

Emory Hamilton, in his unpublished typescript "Folk Songs of the Cumberlands," gives another final verse attributed to Mr. Hubbard, but not sung by him in this example.

Now there's one advantage
That women have over men.
They can go to hell
And come back again.

I hooked up a hog and went out to plow,
And how I got along I don't know how
I see Mr. Devil come skipping through the field,
Says. "One in your family I wish to steal.

"It's neither your daughter.
No neither your son,
It's the old woman,
For the crime she's done."

He picked her up all on his back
He looked like a peddler with a pack on his back
He took her on to the forks of the road,
And he says, "Old woman, you're a terrible load."

Picked her up... you see he...

Took her on to the Devil's den,
Out run the Devil's nine or ten,
Two little devils come a-running up the wall,
Says, "Take her back Daddy she's a-going to kill us all."

Seven years there,
And seven years back,
She looked for the bread crust
She left in the crack.

"And what he musta had a terrible time, wasn't he?"


SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY:


"London's Bridge," often called "Geordie" or "Georgie" in folksong collections, has been collected in many sections of North America, but only sporadically in each locality. Davis, in both of his books, lists five examples, including one collected from Mr. Russell in 1932 and, except for minor verbal variations, sung exactly as it is sung here. All of Child's fourteen versions were collected in Scotland, including two broadside texts slightly different from the oral ones. All American versions are very similar and seem to be an amalgamation of both oral and printed versions. This joining is most evident in the ending; Child's oral versions spare Geordie's life, whereas in his broadside ones, he is hung despite his lover's attempts to buy his freedom. Some scholars feel that the "Geordie" of this song could actually be George Gordon, fourth Earl of Huntly, who was involved in a somewhat similar situation in 1554.

This ballad perfectly demonstrates the highly stylized language characteristic of ballad poetry. In much ballad poetry a white horse is a "milk white steed"; blond hair becomes "long yellow locks"; and a lover is one's "own true love." The ballad tune is also an excellent example of a very early tune type. It is pentatonic, rhythmically loose, and—as described by E. C. Mead in More Traditional Ballads of Virginia—has a "beautiful flowing melodic line whose beauty lies largely in the non-harmonic notes of real melodic significance."
the White Top festival where, incidentally, he got most of the orders for his dulcimers. He was born in Grayson County, but moved to the Marion area as a young man shortly after his marriage. He learned much of his music from his mother and father and, in addition to the dulcimer, played the fiddle and fife.

As I walked over London's bridge
So early in the morning,
I overheard some fair one say
Lord, spare me the life of Georgie.
I overheard some fair one say
Lord, spare me the life of Georgie.

Go saddle and bridle my milk-white steed
Go saddle and bridle him quickly,
I ride away to the lone castle there
And pleading for the life of Georgie.
I ride away to the lone castle there
And pleading for the life of Georgie.

She rode all day and she rode all night
Till taken wet and weary,
A-combing back her long yellow locks
A-pleading for the life of Georgie.
A-combing back her long yellow locks
A-pleading for the life of Georgie.

And out of her pockets drew a purse of gold
The like I never saw any,
Saying "lawyers, lawyers come see yourselves
And spare me the life of Georgie."
Saying "lawyers, lawyers come see yourselves
And spare me the life of Georgie."

Georgie was a-standing by
Saying "I never killed anybody,
But I stole sixteen of the king's white steeds
And sold them in Gowandy.
But I stole sixteen of the king's white steeds
And sold them in Gowandy."

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY:


In 1932, at the urging of the indefatigable ballad hunter Miss Alfreda Peel, Dr. A. K. Davis, Jr., recorded on an aluminum disc the singing of two friends and schoolmates, Miss Ruby Bowman and Miss Eunice Yeatts. These two young women, still close friends, supplied him with a number of songs, most of which were learned from parents and friends, although both readily admit refreshing their memory by going through the ballads in Davis' first book, Traditional Ballads of Virginia. Ruby's version of Little Massie Grove is printed in More Traditional Ballads of Virginia, pp. 172-175. The variant printed here and the one which appeared there are almost identical, the only difference being in verse six where Davis' "a-laughin' and a-talkin'" has become "huggin' and a-kissin'." This remarkable similarity of texts over a forty-five year span points out important characteristics of ballad singing, composing and learning. Although for the scholar there is no one "correct" version of any one ballad idea, for the ballad singer the "correct" version is usually the one they have learned. Furthermore, when singers are learning their version, they attempt to learn it exactly as sung and not to "add anything or to take anything
away," as one man explained it to me. A song is learned when it is securely memorized; the practice of adding variation or changing the sequence of events was seldom deliberately done in this tradition.

My high, my high, my high holiday
And the very first day in the year,
Little Massie Grove to the church did go,
The gospel for to hear.
The gospel for to hear.
The first one in was a fair lady,
And the next one was Lord Darnold’s wife,
And the fairest of them all, all,
And the fairest of them all.

Little Massie Grove was standing by
To him she cast an eye,
Saying, “You must go home with me today
All night in my arms to lie, lie.
All night in my arms to lie.”

“Oh no, Oh no,” said little Massie Grove,
“I daresn’t for my life,
For I can tell by the ring that you wear on your hand
That you are Lord Darnold’s wife, wife,
That you are Lord Darnold’s wife.”

“Why should we hold such vows sacred,
When he’s so far away,
He’s gone on top of the King’s mountain,
Prince Henry for to see, see
Prince Henry for to see.”

So they went home, huggin’ and a-kissin’.
And then they fell asleep.
But when they awoke on the next day’s morn,
Lord Darnold stood at their feet, feet
Lord Darnold stood at their feet.

Saying, “How do you like my new coverlet,
And how do you like my sheets?
How do you like my fair young wife
Who lies in your arms and sleeps, sleeps
Who lies in your arms and sleeps?”

“Pretty well do I like your new coverlet,
Pretty well do I like your sheet,
But much better do I like your fair young wife,
Who lies in my arms and sleeps, sleeps
Who lies in your arms and sleeps.”

“Rise up, rise up little Massie Grove,
Put on your clothes just as quick as you can,
It shall never be said in this wide world,
That I slayed a naked man, man
That I slayed a naked man.”

“Oh, no, Oh, no,” said the little Massie Grove,
“I daresn’t for my life,
For around your waist you have two swords
And me not as much as a knife, knife
And me not as much as a knife.”

“If around my waist I have two swords,
And you not as much as a knife,
Then you may take the best of them,
And then I’ll take your life, life
And then I’ll take your life.”

“And you may strike the first blow,
Now strike it like a man,
And I will strike the next blow,
And I’ll kill you if I can, can
And I’ll kill you if I can.”

So little Massie Grove struck the first blow.
It wounded deep and sore.
But Lord Darnold struck the next blow,
Little Massie couldn’t fight no more.

Then he took his lady by the hand,
And he set her on his knee,
Saying, “Which one do you love the best,
Little Massie Grove or me, me
Little Massie Grove or me?”

“Pretty well do I like your deep blue eyes,
Pretty well do I like your chin,
But much better did I love the little Massie Grove
Than you and all your kin. kin
Than you and all your kin.”

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY.


Eunice Yeatts, along with Ruby Bowman, was recorded on aluminum disc by Dr. Davis in 1932 while both were students at Radford Teachers College. Eunice, whose father was a well-known area banjoman, remembers that in her family this song and “Little Massie Grove” were not considered proper for singing in mixed company. Still, Eunice did know the song and, at the urging of Alfreda Peel, relearned the words for Dr. Davis’ visit. Eunice, unlike her friend Ruby Bowman, participated in the region’s ballad tradition more as a listener than as a singer and became familiar with the ballads in a somewhat less active manner. Eunice is a wonderful lady; she is fun to visit with and, in her very modest fashion, passes on a wealth of information to anyone interested enough to listen.

“Wild Hog in the Woods,” also called “Bangum,” or “Old Bangum,” or “Bangum and the Boar,” remains more strongly in Virginia’s ballad tradition than in that of any other state in the upper South. There are no texts of it printed in the monumental Frank C. Brown Collection of North Carolina Folklore, Volume II. Folk Ballads, nor did John Harrington Cox print any version of it in his Folk Songs of the South. Sharp printed only four fragmented versions, the longest (four verses) being from Kentucky. Davis, however, was blessed with an abundance of versions; seven are printed in Traditional Ballads and an additional four are found in More Traditional Ballads. In the latter volume is a version sung by Mrs. Edna Ethel McAleXander which is almost identical to Eunice’s version. Eunice’s unusual second verse, however, is not in Enda’s version and is seldom found elsewhere.

The song itself has “run the gamut from ‘Arthurian romance to semi-burlesqued melodrama in homespun.’” (Davis, More Traditional Ballads, p. 72). None of the Virginia versions are similar to the four Child versions; gone are the knight, giants and “wild woman.” What remains is a fanciful flight with a hog, although—in
keeping with Child—it is with a wooden knife. Some scholars feel the song's popularity on the 19th century minstrel stage may account in part for its development away from knights and toward "Old Bangum." The nonsense refrain is common to all collected versions and, although Edna McAlexander attempted to give it some sense by singing "Come out Kate, cut him down, kill him if you can," Eunice clearly does not sing it that way. The tune of this ballad is slightly unusual in that it has been carried over into the instrumental music tradition of the Meadows of Dan/Laurel Fork region. A number of local fiddle players and bands play the piece, usually without singing the words, as dance music.

There is a wild hog in the woods
Diddle O Down, diddle O day.
There is a wild hog in the woods,
Diddle O
There is a wild hog in the woods,
Kills a man and drinks his blood,
Cam O Kay, Cut him down, kill him if you can.
I wish I could that wild hog see
Diddle O Down, diddle O day.
I wish I could that wild hog see
Diddle O
I wish I could that wild hog see.
And see if he'd take a fight with me,
Cam O Kay, Cut him down, kill him if you can.

There he comes through yonder's marsh
Diddle O Down, diddle O
There he comes through yonder's marsh
Diddle O
There he comes through yonder's marsh,
He splits his way through oak and ash,
Cam O Kay, Cut him down, kill him if you can.

Bangum drew his wooden knife
Diddle O Down, diddle O day.
Bangum drew his wooden knife
Diddle O
Bangum drew his wooden knife.
To rob that wild hog of his life,
Cam O Kay, Cut him down, kill him if you can.

They fought four hours of the day
Diddle O Down, diddle O day.
They fought four hours of the day
Diddle O
They fought four hours of the day.
At length that wild hog stole away,
Cam O Kay, Cut him down, Kill him if you can.

They followed that wild hog to his den
Diddle O Down, diddle O day.
They followed that wild hog to his den
Diddle O
They followed that wild hog to his den.
And there they found the bones of a thousand men,
Cam O Kay, Cut him down, Kill him if you can.


Barbara Allen is the most widely known Child ballad in America. To list the places where it has been collected and the number of versions collected in each place would try the endurance of even the most avid ballad fan. Its existence in Virginia has been well documented; the Virginia Folklore Society alone has collected over 115 examples of the song. It has been noted, however, that the song is sometimes hard to find in the North, leading some to conclude the ballad owes at least some of its popularity to its publication in a number of popular mid-nineteenth century southern song books such as The Charleston Warbler and The Virginia Warbler. Scholars have so far been unable to find any Continental analogues to this ballad; it seems to be an entirely British, Scottish, and American product. Its antiquity, however, cannot be questioned. Pepys in 1666 praised the "little Scotch song of Barbary Allen" and Goldsmith, a century later, did the same in more flowery language. The last verse of this ballad, the "rose wrapped 'round the brier" normally associated with Barbara Allen and so admired by Dan, has, in fact, been lifted from another ballad, probably "Fair Margaret and Sweet William," for Child did not print it in any of his versions.

Dan Tate, well known for his large repertoire of old songs and tunes among folksong enthusiasts, sings in the same smooth, controlled style as do Ruby Bowman and Eunice McAlexander. He is also a fine banjo player and proves the exception to Cecil Sharp's contention that banjo music and ballad singing are incompatible.

It was early, early in the fall
When the yellow leaves were falling,
When sweet Willie on his death bed lay,
For the love of Barbara Allen.
He sent his servant through the town
To the place where she was dwelling,
"Alas my master calls for you
If your name is Barbara Allen."
They hadn't got more than half through town
When she heard the death bells ringing
And every one it seemed to say,
"Hard-hearted Barbara Allen."
"Oh yes I'm sick, I'm sick indeed
And death on me is dwelling,
And never better will I be
If I can't get Barbara Allen."

"Oh yes you're sick, and sick indeed,
And death on you is dwelling,
And I never better will you be.
For you can't get Barbara Allen."

She hadn't got more than a mile from town,
Till she saw the corpse a-coming,
"Please set him down here by my side,
That I may look upon him."

The more she looked the more she wept.
When she fell to the ground a-crying,
"I wish I could that wild hog see
And out of his bosom sprung a red, red rose,
And out of hers a brier."

They buried her in the old church yard,
They buried sweet Willie nigh her,
And out of his bosom sprang a red, red rose,
And out of hers a brier.

I don't think the last words of that song can be beat."

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY:
Glen Neaves and the Virginia Mountain Boys. Folkways F5 3830.
The Lilly Brothers and Don Stover. Folkways FA 2433.

8. WIND AND RAIN [The Two Sisters, Child 10]—Dan Tate, vocal. Recorded in Fancy Gap [Carroll County], Virginia, July 10, 1962, by George Foss. 1:50.

"Wind and Rain," otherwise known as "The Two Sisters," "The Old Woman Down by the Seashore," or "Bow and Balance to Me," has wide currency throughout America. Dan's version, however, is fairly unique to American examples in a number of ways. Whereas most examples omit the surreal image of making music out of the dead girl's "long finger bones" and "long black hair," Dan's version actually pivots on that very point. His version does not, however, contain the part in which these gruesome instruments then name the murderer, a twist found in some older British versions. Also, Dan's "dreadful wind and rain" refrain is unusual; the more common idea is "Bow and balance to me" or "Bow down, bow down." In keeping with general tendencies of the ballad's history, however, Dan's version omits much detail, especially as to why one sister (usually the eldest) pushed the other into the water (either the sea or the river), what the miller did with the girl, and what became of the miller.
The tune, as sung by Dan, is given a unique twist by his almost random repetition of words in unlikely places. Although Kilby Snow, a neighbor of Dan’s, sings the song to the same tune, he has been forced to regularize the melodic twists more than Dan because he accompanies his singing with an instrument, the autoharp. Perhaps for this reason, Dan has elected to sing the ballad unaccompanied rather than to sing with the banjo as he does with most other songs.

Two loving sisters was a-walking side by side
Oh, the wind and rain.
One pushed the other off in the waters, waters deep
And she cried a dreadful wind and rain.

She swum down, down to the miller’s pond
Oh, the wind and rain.
She swum down, down to the miller’s pond,
And she cried a dreadful wind and rain.

Out run the miller with his long hook and line
Oh, the wind and rain.
Out run the miller with his long hook and line
And he cried a dreadful wind and rain.

He hooked her up by the tail of the gown
Oh, the wind and rain.
He hooked her up by the tail of the gown
And he cried—a dreadful wind and rain.

They made fiddle strings of her long black hair
Oh, the wind and rain.
They made fiddle strings of her long black hair
And she cried a dreadful wind and rain.

They made fiddle screws of her long finger bones
Oh, the wind and rain.
They made fiddle screws of her long finger bones
And she cried a dreadful wind and rain.

The only tune that my fiddle would play
Was oh, the wind and rain.
The only tune that my fiddle would play,
And he cried—a dreadful wind and rain.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY:


Texas Smith Gladden, born in 1895, could trace her family back to an 18th century fiddle-playing Irish immigrant, James Smith. Her brother, Hobart Smith, kept the family’s instrumental tradition alive while Texas maintained the old ballad tradition. She is an incredible singer of a large number of ballads, and has been recorded as much as any other ballad singer in Virginia. This includes recordings by various members of the Virginia Folklore Society (most notably and continually by Alfreda Peel and A. K. Davis) as well as by the Library of Congress and private collectors. Some of her songs, including this one and the one following, have appeared on either commercial recordings or on Library of Congress releases. Texas’ performance of this ballad demonstrates a phenomenon that often occurs, but which is seldom noted by scholars and folksong collectors—the question of how the collector himself affects the tradition he is studying. Alfreda Peel, the renowned collector,
and Texas Gladden, the superb singer, were close neighbors and friends. According to Dr. Davis, Texas learned "The Devil and Nine Questions" from Miss Peel, who in turn collected and learned it from a Mrs. Rill Martin of Giles County in 1922.

In fact, Miss Peel put the song on disc for Dr. Davis on August 9, 1932. In 1932 "The Devil and Nine Questions" was not in Texas' repertoire, but by the time of the Lomax's recording in 1941, it was. Davis goes on to say that "according to Miss Peel, Mrs. Gladden, a gifted singer, learned the song from her, Miss Peel, as seems corroborated by the texts and tunes, despite some interesting variation. The present editor [Davis] who recorded Mrs. Gladden's songs during the 1930s, did not find this ballad in her repertory at that time" (Davis, p. 4, More Traditional Ballads).

"The Devil and Nine Questions" is extremely rare in both America and Britain. Of collections from the upper South, it only appears in Davis' works and all have the same sources—Mrs. Rill Martin. Texas' version, like the earliest Martin text, begins immediately with the riddling and leaves out any part in which we are told for certain that the riddler is, in fact, the Devil. The observant listener will also notice that there are only eight riddles.

The Virginia version has details common to all of Child's versions, but is not like any one in particular. Child notes that riddles in stories and tales are traceable to "remote times" (Kittredge and Sargent, p. 2) but that the first printed example comes from about 1450.

Oh, you must answer my questions nine
Sing ninety-nine and ninety.
Or you're not God's, you're one of mine
And you were the weaver's bonny.
What is whiter than the milk?
Sing ninety-nine and ninety.
And what is softer than the silk?
And you were the weaver's bonny.
Snow is whiter than the milk
Sing ninety-nine and ninety.
And down is softer than the silk.
And I am the weaver's bonny.
Oh, what is higher than a tree?
Sing ninety-nine and ninety.
And what is deeper than the sea?
And you were the weaver's bonny.
Heaven's higher than a tree
Sing ninety-nine and ninety.
And hell is deeper than the sea
And I am the weaver's bonny.
What is louder than a horn?
Sing ninety-nine and ninety.
And what is sharper than a thorn?
And you were the weaver's bonny.
Thunder's louder than a horn
Sing ninety-nine and ninety.
And death is sharper than a thorn.
And I am the weaver's bonny.
What's more innocent than a lamb?
Sing ninety-nine and ninety.
And what is meaner than woman-kind?
And you were the weaver's bonny.
A babe's more innocent than a lamb
Sing ninety-nine and ninety.
And the devil is meaner than woman-kind
And I am the weaver's bonny.
Oh, you have answered my questions nine
Sing ninety-nine and ninety.
And you were God's, you're none of mine
And you were the weaver's bonny.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY:

SIDE 2

1. THE TURKISH REBELEE [The Sweet Trinity, Child 286], Horton Barker, vocal. Recorded near Chilhowie [Smyth County], Virginia, April 19, 1939, by Herbert Halpert. 3:37.

This ballad has been oft recorded from Maine to Mississippi and goes by many names including "The Golden Vanity," "The Lowlands Low," "The Green Willow Tree," and a number of similar titles. All of the Virginia examples are most similar to Child's C version. Like most
southern texts—and unlike most from New England—the version here ends with the cabin boy, after being turned away by his captain, drowning himself rather than sink his comrades into the sea. In fact, in all the versions of the song collected everywhere, the ending is the most variable element of the story. The song originated in England and, unlike many English ballads, has not spread to non-English speaking countries. The earliest example of the song is a broadside, “Sir Walter Raleigh Sailing in the Lowlands,” printed in the early 1680s. Mr. Barker sang a shorter version of this ballad for A. K. Davis in 1932 and it was printed in More Traditional Ballads of Virginia, pp. 342-43.

Horton Barker was born in Laurel Bloomery, upper east Tennessee, in 1889, and was blinded by a childhood accident. While still living in Tennessee, he attended the School for the Blind in Nashville where, from other students and teachers, he learned a number of his songs, including “The Turkish Rebelee.” After his mother remarried and the family moved to Virginia, he transferred to the School for the Blind in Staunton. During the 1930s, Horton was visited and recorded by a number of ballad-hunters and performed at all of the White Top festivals, as well as in Washington, D. C., and other regional festivals. Like most singers, Horton was ever alert for a new song or a new version of an old song. He particularly liked the singing of Texas Gladden and Sailor Dad Hunt, also regular performers at the White Top festival. Horton’s version of “The Turkish Rebelee” is a classic, both textually and melodically.

There was a little ship and she sailed on the sea
And the name of this ship was the Turkish Rebelee,
She sailed on the lonely, lonesome water,
She sailed on the lonesome sea.

Up stepped a little sailor, saying “What’ll you give to me?
To sink that ship to the bottom of the sea?
If I’ll sink her in the lonely, lonesome water,
If I’ll sink her in the lonesome sea.”

“I have a house, and I have lands
And I have a daughter that shall be at your command,
If you’ll sink her in the lonely, lonesome water,
If you’ll sink her in the lonesome sea.”

He bowed on his breast, and away swam he,
He swam till he came to the Turkish Rebelee,
He sank her in the lonely, lonesome water.
He sank her in the lonesome sea.

Some had hats, and some had caps
A-trying to stop the salt water gaps,
But she sank in the lonely, lonesome water,
She sank in the lonesome sea.

Some were playing cards, and some were shooting dice
And others stood around a-giving good advice,
As she sank in the lonely, lonesome water,
As she sank in the lonesome sea.

He bowed on his breast, and away swam he,
He swam till he came to the Golden Willow Tree,
“I’ve sunk her in the lonely, lonesome water,
I’ve sunk her in the lonesome sea.

Now Captain, will you be as good as your word
Or either will you take me in on board?
I’ve sunk her in the lonely, lonesome water,
I’ve sunk her in the lonesome sea.

“No, I won’t be as good as my word
And neither will I take you on board,
Though you’ve sunk her in the lonely, lonesome water,
Though you’ve sunk her in the lonesome sea.”

“If it were not for the love I have for your men
I’d do unto you just as I’ve done unto them,
I’d sink you in the lonely, lonesome water,
I’d sink you in the lonesome sea.”

He bowed on his breast, and down sunk he
A-bidding farewell to the Golden Willow Tree,
He sank in the lonely, lonesome water,
He sank in the lonesome sea.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY:
Horton Barker, Traditional Singer. Folkways FA 2362.


When the banjo came into the upper South sometime in the second half of the 1800s, it entered already strong instrumental and vocal traditions. As a consequence, it was made to fit into these traditions as best it could. One peculiarity of any picked instrument, including the banjo played in any style, is the necessity to adhere to a strict rhythm in order to play it comfortably and easily. This is especially true in the clawhammer style, in which the strings are struck in a downward motion of the index fingernail, followed by a brush stroke and noting of the fifth string with the thumb. Therefore, when people began to experiment with singing and playing the instrument at the same time, it often required some adjustment of the song’s rhythm. “The House Carpenter,” perhaps next to “Barbara Allen” in popularity, seems to be one of the more common Child ballads to be “instrumentalized.” Dorothy’s highly animated style of singing and playing give the song an unusually high energy level and her performance is an excellent example of breakdown banjo playing being successfully used to accompany a narrative song. Her version is most like Child’s B version and is an excellent example of how compressed a highly involved narrative can become. In the short space of eight verses we learn of how two lovers met after a long separation, what each has been up to since their parting, the heartbreak of the woman’s decision to leave her house carpenter husband and babes, and finally the outcome of the whole mess. This same story has been traced to at least 1685, but in American versions the name James Harris, the woman’s cloven-footed lover (the Devil), and other similar details have disappeared. This performance is two verses longer than the one by Dorothy on Rounder #0058, probably because she plays no instrumental “breaks” between some of the verses. In keeping with general old-time Anglo-American tendencies, the banjo accompaniment demonstrated here is the song’s melody; the use of harmony and improvisation is not found. In this style of accompaniment, the use of chords and chording is also not evident. That practice probably was introduced into the upper South either with the guitar or by the traveling minstrel show sometime around the turn of the 20th century.

Mrs. Rorick learned much of her music, including “House Carpenter,” from her father Buck Quesinberry. She lived in Ohio for many years but kept up with her music by playing fiddle and banjo with such groups as “The Golden State Cowgirls” and returned to her Virginia home in
Dugspur in the late sixties. Many of her songs and tunes reflect West Virginia and Kentucky traits, for her father worked in those states for many years and brought some of the area's music home with him.

This song was recorded during a jam session at the annual Galax Fiddlers' Convention and, to say the least, this kind of audience is strikingly different from the old "fireside" situation one normally associates with ballad singing. Although this public performance setting is relatively unusual, it is still found occasionally.

"'We met, we met," cried an old true love,  
"We met, we met," cried she  
"I'm just returning from the salt, salt sea  
And it's all for the sake of thee."

I once could have married to a king's daughter dear,  
And I'm sure she'd a-married me.  
But I refused her crown of gold,  
And it's all for the sake of thee.

Now if you could have married to a king's daughter dear,  
I am sure you were much to blame,  
For I am married to a house carpenter  
And I think he's a nice young man.

But if you will leave your house carpenter,  
And come and go with me,  
I'll take you where the grass grows green  
On the banks of the deep blue sea.

Well, she called her three little babes to her knee,  
And she gave them kisses three,  
Saying, "Stay at home my three little babes  
And keep your Papa company."

"They hadn't been gone but about two weeks,  
And I'm sure it was not three,  
Till that gay lady began to weep  
And she wept most bitterly.

It's neither for your gold I leave,  
And it's neither for your store,  
But it is for my three little babes,  
That I never shall see anymore.

Now they hadn't been gone but about three weeks  
And I'm sure that it was not four,  
Till they sprang a cap in that old ship  
And it sank to rise no more."

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY:
The Watson Family. Folkways FA 2366.  
Tom Ashley. Tom Ashley and Tex Isley. Folkways FA 2350.  


Moran Lee (Dock) Boggs was born in 1898 in West Norton and lived near there most of his life. His renown as a singer and unique-style banjo player is widespread partly because of his "rediscovery" in the 1960s by Mike Seeger and his subsequent albums. In addition, his early commercial releases from the 1920s are classics.

Like many other country musicians who recorded commercially in the early days of recording, Dock Boggs' music career demonstrates the complexity of musical expression and influence during the 1920s and 1930s. His first music was strictly informal and was learned as any traditional musician learns it—from family and friends. Then, when record companies decided there was a market for country music, they sent people into the country to record it, and his music began to shift emphasis. Discovered and recorded by Brunswick Records, Dock then entered a professional music phase, traveling and playing shows at schoolhouses, dance halls, and the like, and selling his records. With the advent of records, the degree of outside musical influence on Dock's music and that of most other rural musicians increased tremendously. Dock especially was enamored by the blues, as seems obvious when listening to "Oh, Death." For more complete information on Dock's life and music, I suggest Folkways FH 5458, Excerpts from Interviews with Dock Boggs.

The song "Oh, Death," sometimes called "Conversations with Death," has appeared in a number of southern song and hymn books. It is—at best—only marginally a ballad. Although the story is told "straight" (the singer does not interject his own views directly), and it unfolds strictly through the use of dialogue, the narrative itself actually deals with an abstract condition rather than with a specific event. It is included here partly to illustrate just how far a song can drift toward lyric and still maintain the semblance of being a ballad. In oral tradition "Oh Death" is most often found in far southwestern Virginia and western North Carolina. Polly Johnson recorded ten verses of the song in 1939 for Emory
Spence from a number of western North Carolina singers. For a full tracing of the song back to its British antecedents, see "Death and a Lady: Echoes of a Mortal Conversation in English and American Folksong Tradition," an unpublished M.A. thesis done at the University of North Carolina in 1966 by Katherine Susan Barks. Dock learned his version of "Oh, Death" from his friend Lee Hunsucker in the 1930s and fit it to Homer Crawford’s unusual D tuning of f♯CGAD, starting with the fifth string.

What is this that I can see
With icy hands taking hold on me.
I am death and none can excel
I'll open the doors to heaven or hell.

CHORUS:
Oh, death, oh, death, can't you spare me over
till another year?
Oh, death, oh, death, please spare me over
till another year.

Oh, death, someone would pray,
Couldn't you call some other day.
God’s children prayed, the preacher’s preached,
The time of mercy is out of your reach.

I'll fix your feet so you can’t walk,
I'll lock your jaws so you can't talk.
Close your eyes so you can’t see
This very hour come go with me.

Death, I come to take the soul
Leave the body and leave it cold,
To drop the flesh off of the frame
The earth and worms both have a claim.

CHORUS
My mother come to my bed
Place a cold towel upon my head.
My head is warm, my feet is cold
Death is moving upon my soul.

Oh, death, how you treating me
Close my eyes so I can’t see.
You hurt my body, you make me cold.
You’re ruling my life right out of my soul.

CHORUS
Oh, death, please consider my age
Please don’t take me at this stage.
My wealth is all at your command
If you will move your icy hand.

The old, the young, the rich or poor,
Are all alike with me, you know.
No wealth, no land, no silver, no gold
Nothing satisfies me but your soul.

CHORUS

SELECTION DISCOGRAPHY:
Dock Boggs. Folkways FA 2351.

Spence’s version, like most American ones, has neutered the children—often sons in the older versions—to "babes." The story also emphasizes the religious bent, especially in the last verse. Furthermore, it preaches to the listener of the sinfulness of pride; the babes insisting that the "golden spread" be taken off the bed, for example. Davis prints several similar Virginia versions, all like Child’s D version, including one by Eunice Yeatts McAlexander. The title, "Wife of Usher’s Well," incidentally, is not found in Virginia tradition.

There was a bride, most beautiful bride.
Three little babes had she,
She sent them away to a northern college,
To learn their grammar.

They hadn’t been away but a little while,
About three months and a day,
Till death spread wide all over the land,
And took her babes away.

"Oh, saviour dear," cried the beautiful bride,
"Who used to wear a crown.
Send to me my three little babes,
Tonight or in a morning soon."

By it being close to Christmas time,
And the nights being long and cold.
Down came running those three little babes,
Into their mother’s home.

She fixed them a table in the back side room,
Spread over with bread and wine.
Come eat and drink my three little babes,
Come and eat and drink of mine.
"We can't eat your bread, sweet mother dear.
Neither can we drink your wine.
For yonder stands my sweet saviour.
From this we must resign."

She fixed them a bed in the back side room,
Spread over with a nice clean sheet,
On top of that was a golden spread,
She fixed them a place to sleep.

"Take it off, take it off, sweet mother dear,
Take it off and again," said he,
"How can we stay in this wide wicked world,
When there's a better place for me."

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY:


Kate Sturgill, 61 at the time of this recording, was born and raised in Wise County. Music has obviously been an important part of her life, for she learned to play the parlor organ when only seven, picked up the guitar from her brothers while in her teens, played fiddlers' contests and radio shows with "The Lonesome Pine Trailers" when in her early twenties, helped A. P. Carter collect songs in the thirties, taught guitar and gave performances in local schools during the depression as part of her WPA job, recorded one song for the Library of Congress Archive of Folksong, performed on the radio in Norton from 1947-1954, and in the early fifties helped with a Sunday morning hymn program on Norton radio station WNVA. In the early 1970s she found time to record an album for Mountain Empire Community College Records (#002), from which the preceding biographical information was taken. Throughout this semi-professional music career, and perhaps because of it, Kate maintained a healthy respect for the traditional songs learned from her family and friends.

Kate’s rendition of "Queen Sally" is highly unusual; she has grappled with the problem of fitting ordinary guitar chord accompaniment to a rhythmically complex song. Her solution has been to simply (but uniquely) alter the time from 3/4 to 2/4 as needed and not to attempt to adhere to any one strict time signature. She has subtly subjugated the instrumental accompaniment to the maintenance of the tune's odd twists and quirks.

The song itself has an interesting and complex history. Not only is it very similar to some versions of "The Brown Girl" (see Sharp variant J, pp. 303-304), it is also very much like some texts of "The Death of Queen Jane" (Child 170; Sharp 32, pp. 230-232). The main difference between the two ballads has to do with why Queen Jane (or Sally) is sick. In "The Death of Queen Jane," King Henry cuts a baby—his—from her dying body. In "The Brown Girl," there is none of that; we can only assume that she (in this case Queen Sally) is bearing an illegitimate child. Consequently, the overall emotion of the song is not one of sorrow on the part of the doctor (or King Henry), but rather of scorn. Kate's version is also unique in that the man called for is King Henry; he is usually a "young squire" or a "wealthy merchant." The name is evidently borrowed from "The Death of Queen Jane." Cox mentions a number of variant titles including "Sally and her True Love Billy," "The Bold Sailor," and "The (Young) Sailor from Dover" and says it has been in print since the late 18th century.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY:
6. FROGGIE WENT A-COURTIN' — Robert Russel, vocal and guitar. Recorded in Marion [Smyth County], Virginia, November 14, 1936, by Sidney Robertson. 1:34.

"Froggie Went a-Courting," also called "The Frog's Courtship," and "The Frog's Wooing" in folksong collections, has been collected all over the South and remains one of the most popular children's folk songs. Brown gives 27 versions from North Carolina, Sharp found at least 11 (one from Virginia), and Cox lists 7 texts from West Virginia. One of the main differences among the many versions is the refrain. Most are similar to the version here—an "uh huh" following the first and third lines—but many versions have a more elaborate refrain, usually similar to "rain down bonny mish ki-me-oh." It is possible that this longer refrain became attached to the song after its reworking as a blackface minstrel song in about 1850. One version of this minstrel variation collected in oral tradition begins:

Way down South where the niggers grow
Sing song kitchie kitchie ki-me-oh.

This minstrel variation has, in turn, reentered oral tradition as a children's song. Modern parodies of the song and tune abound; the tune is currently being used as an advertising jingle for a popular pancake syrup, replete with the "uh huh" refrain.

Perhaps because this song was used in blackface minstrel shows, it had at one time at least limited currency in Black music tradition; of the 36 versions collected by the Virginia Folklife Society and listed in Folk-Songs of Virginia, at least two were learned by whites from "Negro mamies." For more complete references to the history and range of this song in both England and America, see Brown, Vol III, p. 154.

Robert, Sam Russell's grandson, performs in a very natural, understated style. His father, Joe Russell, was a well known fiddle player in the Marion area and, together with Sam (playing dulcimer or fife), Robert, and Worley Rolling (playing banjo), he performed as a member of a string band. Robert worked in one of the local furniture factories and died in about 1972. Throughout the years he played with many groups and performed over several radio stations in the area.

Froggie went a-courting' and he did ride, uh huh,
Froggie went a-courting' and he did ride, uh huh,
Froggie says "Mousie will you marry me," uh huh,
Froggie says "Mousie will you marry me," uh huh,
Froggie says "Mousie will you marry me,
Way down yonder in the hollow tree," uh huh.

Where will the wedding supper be, uh huh,
Where will the wedding supper be, uh huh,
Where will the wedding supper be
Way down yonder in a holler tree, uh huh.

What will the wedding supper be, uh huh,
What will the wedding supper be, uh huh,
What will the wedding supper be
Two big beans and a black-eyed pea, uh huh.

Little piece of corn bread laying on a shelf, uh huh,
Little piece of corn bread laying on a shelf, uh huh.

If you want any more Lord you'll sing it for yourself.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY:
Almeda Riddle. Songs and Ballads of the Ozarks. Vanguard VRS 9158 and American Folk Songs for Children. Atlantic 1350.


The string band as we know it today was born when the first fiddler and banjoman decided to play together. This fiddle/banjo combination, in fact, provided the only ensemble music heard in many places until they were joined by the guitar, harmonica (or mouth harp), mandolin, autoharp, and other instruments as they became available.

With the growth of the recording industry, so grew the development and formality of string bands. Groups of musicians who once played together informally at local dances and other social get-togethers, elevated themselves when recording for record companies by giving themselves a name and a somewhat restricted membership. Stoneman's bands, for example, have always included family members and friends but have gone by a number of different names including "The Stoneman Family" and "Stone- man's Mountaineers." Pop Stoneman led an active musical life beginning with his commercial recordings in 1925, and continuing (with some interruptions) until his death in 1968.

It is unusual to find examples of the old Child ballads performed in a string band format. It is often too hard to adapt their rhythmic and melodic peculiarities to such a rigid form, and many ballads simply lost popular flavor as musical styles and tastes changed. "The Raging Sea, How it Roars," a Victor release, probably survived because of the catchy tune, semi-burlesque story, easily followed incremental repetition, and interesting chorus. John Harrington Cox gives a thorough history of the ballad from its supernatural state (connected with the mermaid),
through its appearance in broadside form, to the many parodies and burlesque versions printed in popular songsters and college song books. First seeing print in 1765, “The Mermaid” remained popular as a broadside until the 20th century.

As in most versions, the mermaid has disappeared from this one, along with the supernatural elements of the story. It is believed that the refrain about “the landlord sleeping down below” is a corruption of the original “the landsmen are lying down below.” This performance was Stoneman’s second recording of the song; he first recorded it solo in 1925 as “The Sailor’s Song” on the Okeh label. The ballad’s currency in the upper South is high to moderate; Davis, for example, lists sixteen Virginia versions in both collections.

(instrumental introduction)

‘It’s nine times around,’ said the captain of the ship.
‘It’s nine times around,’ said he.
‘Oh, it’s nine times around, or we’re sinking in the deep.
‘While the landlord lies dreaming down below.’

CHORUS:
Oh the raging sea how it roars
And the cold chilly winds, how they blow.
While tonight us poor sailors are sinking in the deep
And the landlord lies dreaming down below.

(instrumental)

The first on deck was the captain of the ship
A fine-looking fellow was he.
Says, ‘I have a wife in old Mexico
And tonight she is looking for me.’

Chorus

The next on deck was the lady of the ship
A fine-looking lady was she.
Says, ‘I have a husband in New Mexico
And tonight he is looking for me.’

Chorus

The next on the deck was the sassy little cook
A sassy little cook was he.
He cared no more for his wife and child
Than he does for the fish in the sea.

Chorus

(instrumental)

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY:
Ernest V. Stoneman and the Blue Ridge Corn Shuckers. Rounder 1008.

8. THE JEALOUS LOVER [Laws F 1] — The Stanley Brothers and the Clinch Mountain Boys. [Carter Stanley, lead vocal and guitar; Ralph Stanley, tenor vocal and banjo; other members probably Chubby Anthony, fiddle; Curly Lambert, mandolin; Lindy Clear, bass]. Recorded at the Silver Creek Ranch near Manassas [Prince William County], Virginia, August 8, 1956, by Mike Seeger. 2:13.

The Stanley Brothers, Ralph and Carter, were born and raised in the Clinch Mountains of Virginia. From the first they were surrounded with traditional music, learning much of their music from their mother. Shortly after World War II, they organized their first semi-professional band, similar in format, style, and repertoire to other regional string bands. As a result of listening to Bill Monroe and his Blue Grass Boys, then a new group broadcasting over WSM’s Grand Old Opry, the Stanleys soon shifted their music toward this newer, smoother music. By the late forties they had firmly established their own musical identity and began broadcasting over a number of radio stations, including those in Bristol, Tennessee/Virginia, and Raleigh, North Carolina. Especially in their initial efforts to acquire the new sound introduced by Monroe, the Stanleys drew heavily on the old, familiar songs and reworked them into their own image. “The Jealous Lover” is a perfect example of this effort. “The Jealous Lover,” sometimes called “The Low Green Valley” by the Stanleys, is by all accounts one of the most widely known ballads of its kind in America. Both G. Malcolm Laws (Native American Balladry, p. 60) and Phillips Barry (American Speech III, no. 6, August 1929, pp. 441-447) agree that the ballad derives from British broadsides of the sentimental type including “She Never Blamed Him” printed in the 1820s, and “The Murder of Betsy Smith” of the same era. A number of native American ballads have borrowed heavily from both the tune and story of “The Jealous Lover,” probably the best known being “Pearl Bryan,” the celebrated song of two Kentucky dental students doing in poor Pearl.

This rendition of “The Jealous Lover” by the Stanleys was made before bluegrass music had gained much urban—particularly Northern—respectability. Like other bands, they were barely scratching out a living playing schoolhouses, VFW halls, and bars. Partly because of pressure exerted by the record producers at the time, it is interesting to what ends the Stanleys went in order to entertain their often string-music-ignorant audiences. The recording made during this live performance at Silver Creek Ranch, for example, includes the then popular rock-and-roll number, “Shake, Rattle, and Roll.” The Stanleys, although they might have become rusty on the old material, as indicated when Ralph forgot the words to this song, never lost sight of it. Now that the rest of the world has caught up with old-time country music, Ralph, today, increasingly emphasizes the old styles and songs. It is unfortunate that Carter, due to his death, never got to enjoy the current degree of acceptability that his music has attained.

This recording of the song is two verses shorter than the commercial recording the Stanleys made of it less than a decade earlier. The omitted verses read (following the second verse):

One night when the moon was shining.
And the stars shone brightly too.
Down to her lonely cottage.
Her jealous lover drew.

and following the sixth verse:

Farewell my loving parents.
I’ll never see you any more.
But long you’ll wait my coming.
At the little cottage door.

(mandolin introduction)

Down in the low green valley
Where the violets bloom and fade.
There sleeps sweet blue-eyed Ellen
In a cold and silent grave.

She died not brokenhearted.
Nor by disease she fell.
But in one moment parted.
From the one she loved so well.
he left Fieldale, Virginia, where he had moved the previous year, and trekked alone to New York for an audition. The Victor people apparently liked what they heard, or were simply ignorant of what they were supposed to hear, for they recorded four songs, including “The Butcher’s Boy.” As Kelly did not play an instrument, the studio provided back-up musicians. Thus began a long career. After this initial session, Kelly recorded for Okeh in 1925, but he soon returned to Victor, this time with the traditionally oriented Virginia String Band. His recording career ended with the depression and he died in 1942. Fortunately, much of the music of Kelly Harrell and the Virginia String Band has been reissued by County Records (#408), Floyd, Virginia.

British antecedents of “The Butcher’s Boy” are given in detail in H. M. Belden’s Ballads and Songs Collected by the Missouri Folklore Society. It can be traced back to at least four British broadsides of the late 18th or early 19th centuries and has been printed on American broadsides as well. The uniformity of the American versions suggests that the song’s entrance into oral tradition was partly the result of its publication in popular pre-Civil War songsters as well as in at least five songsters published between 1869-1914. Its strength in Virginia oral tradition is evident. Davis lists 26 versions in his Folksongs of Virginia.

In London city where I did dwell,
A butcher’s boy I loved so well,
He courted me my life away,
And with me then he would stay.

There is a strange house in this town,
Where he goes up and sits right down,
He takes another girl on his knee
He tells her things that he won’t tell me.

I have to grieve, I’ll tell you why,
Because she has more gold than I,
Her gold will melt and silver fly.
In time of need she’ll be as poor as I.

I went upstairs to go to bed,
And nothing to my mother said,
Oh mother, she did seem to say,
What is the trouble my daughter dear?

Oh mother dear, you need not know,
The pain and sorrow, grief that flows,
Give me a chair and sit me down,
With pen and ink to write words down.

Go dig my grave both wide and deep,
Place a marble stone at my head and feet,
Upon my breast, a snow white dove,
To show to the world that I died for love.

And when her father first came home,
“What is my daughter, where has she gone?”
He went upstairs and the door he broke.
He found her hanging to a rope.

He took his knife and cut her down,
And in her bosom these words he found,
A silly girl I am you know
To hang myself for the butcher’s boy.

Must I go bound while he goes free,
Must I love a boy that don’t love me?
Alas, alas, will never be.
Till oranges grow on apple trees.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY:
The Lilly Brothers. Country Songs. Rounder Special Series 02.
The Blue Sky Boys. RCA AXM 2-5525.
Buell Kazee. Sings and Plays. Folkways FS 3810.
Almeda Riddle. Ballads and Hymns from the Ozarks. Rounder 0017.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY:

A very large collection of ballads and songs, mostly from the western half of North Carolina. The notes are generally good, but sometimes spotty.


Good personal accounts by five Beech Mountain, North Carolina, ballad singers (all female) about their songs. Includes a cassette tape with many of their ballads.


The definitive collection of English language ballads. A must for serious ballad students. Contains 305 distinct ballads, each with numerous variants.


A basic bibliographical too, this book lists most Child ballads found in America, describes their story types, and gives references for each item.


A good collection of ballads and songs all from West Virginia. The notes to the songs are often good, especially considering the date of publication.
The upland South. Most feature several traditional musical styles heard in the region, and all have informative booklets about the music and the performers.

The first of these books is especially useful for title variants. The other two are the most complete Virginia collections of ballads available. A must for Virginia folksong students. The notes to the songs are good.


A useful bibliographical tool, it includes story summaries and references for each item listed.


This does for American ballads what the previous book does for American ballads from British broadsides.


A useful, though incomplete, listing of the folksongs collected by the WPA in the 1930s.


This book, a standard text, contains at least one text of all but seven of the ballads found in Child's larger collection. Known as the "one volume Child," it is a standard text. The notes are abridged and revised.


This is one of the earliest complete editions of songs from a given area. Child ballads are in Volume I, other folksongs in Volume 2. The notes are often thin.


Contains the music to most of the ballads and songs found in Volumes II and III.


A careful examination of ballad scholarship since Child. Concise and easily readable.

**SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY:**

The following LPs offer a good introduction to several forms and styles of traditional music heard in the upland South. Most feature several traditional performers and all have informative booklets about the music and the performers.


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"THE BEAR HUNTER: MR. DOW HELVEY."
"ROSA TICKLE, BLAND, [VIRGINIA]," CA. 1933.
(Photo by Alfreda Peel, courtesy Univ. of Va. Library, Manuscripts Division)