

Review:
A Study of a Song Maker

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Ives, Edward D. *Larry Gorman: The Man Who Made the Songs*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964; Fredericton: Goose Lanes, 1993.

We welcome this reissue of Professor Ives' first study of a singer-composer, in its first Canadian edition. This is only fitting as Larry Gorman was a Canadian, and his songs circulated as much in the Canadian Maritimes as in Maine.

This edition has a short added preface in which Professor Ives recalls Larry Gorman. Maps of Prince Edward Island, Miramichi, and Union River provide background for the many place names; notes list some forty-five songs and cante-fables written or generally attributed to Larry, with the various singers or sources for each song cited; and there is an extensive bibliography.

Born of Irish parents in Prince Edward Island, Larry is the best known of the three woods poets that Professor Ives documented. He gives support to what I have often said: that Canadian folksingers are primarily Irish, although our English-speaking population of both English and Scots is larger. Larry frequently uses the double rhyming lines so characteristic of Irish broadsides, his rhymes often indicate an Irish pronunciation, and his tunes are typically Irish.

This is not a folksong book, but that of a lumberwoods poet. It is both a biography of the poet and an anthology of his songs. Although only a few of Larry's songs became traditional, the way he created them throws light on how most of the shanty songs were created. Ives suggests that such poets "are likely traditional singers themselves who created songs both within and for that tradition. A woodsman who created a new ballad about a comrade killed on the river-drive, who modeled his work on other woods songs, and who intended it to be sung by his fellow woodsmen would be a case in point."

He says the search for Larry Gorman was fun, and reading about it is also fun. He began by finding out what had been written about the oral and the satirical song traditions, then searched for everything that had appeared

about Larry. He had worked in the lumberwoods of Maine and the Canadian Maritimes as a log-driver and swamper, but he was first and foremost a poet. Dr. Ives found many of his songs had been published in papers or books, and when he located some of his relatives and many who had known him, he found people had preserved his songs in scrapbooks, and others who knew dozens of them by heart. From them he gathered more songs, verses, and cante-fables, as well as many anecdotes that began to paint a picture of “an angular, cantankerous individual who lived his own lonely life, dying as obscurely as he was born, a disappointed man. But he made men laugh, and some few of his works survive.”

The book gives over seventy of Larry’s songs, twenty-six with musical annotations, including the seven that became traditional: “Bachelor’s Hall,” “Boys of the Island,” “The Good Old State of Maine,” “The Gull Decoy,” “The Scow on Cowden’s Shore,” “The Shan Van Voght,” “The Winter of Seventy-Three.” This is more than by any other woodsman poet of whom we have record. Both Joe Scott and Lawrence Doyle, the two that Ives studied later, had a few of their songs pass into tradition, but not as many as Larry.

Perhaps most interesting to the average reader are his cante-fables, short anecdotes involving verses. Several of these have survived in the memories of local inhabitants. The most frequently quoted verse, which is incorporated in several brief tales, is:

And when they see me coming,
Their eyes stick out like prongs,
Saying, “Beware of Larry Gorman!
He’s the man who makes the songs”.

That illustrates Larry’s malicious satirical quality that made him feared all over the northwestern lumberwoods.

Professor Ives discusses the satirical song tradition, showing that it exists in Britain and the States, and that it is common among lumbering songwriters. Then he goes on to discuss the reason why Larry stood out even though he was part of a larger tradition. Other powerful satirical songs were designed to improve conditions, but his seem composed solely to make fun of anyone who annoyed him, and they were sung purely for entertainment.

Ives goes on to say that although people didn’t approve of Larry’s songmaking and didn’t like him as a person, he was nevertheless famous, and tries to discover the reasons why. Larry had good publicity: he was the hero of Holman Day’s novel, *King Spruce*, and several of his songs appeared in the first collection from the area: Eckstorm and Smyth’s *Minstrelsy of Maine*. Later, people heard of him through Louise Manny’s radio programs. And Larry was his own best press agent—the verse about being the man who made the songs appeared in many variations and spread

through the lumbercamps of three different areas: Prince Edward Island, Miramichi, and Maine.

But the most important reason for his fame, Dr. Ives concludes, is that of all the men who made up satirical songs, he was by far the best. He sums it up: "His cleverness with parody, his skill in handling rhyme and metres, and the sharp edge of his wit kept him well ahead of the rest."

TOM KINES (1922–1994)

Word has just reached us that Tom Kines, the inspiration for Paula Conlon's article, has died after a valiant battle with cancer.

Tom learned some folk songs from his grandfather and became interested in Irish songs when he was stationed in Northern Ireland during World War II. After the war he settled in Ottawa where he soon became known in musical circles. He sang with the Tudor singers, the Ottawa Choral Society, and the Toronto Bach Society. But his main interest was in folk music.

He presented folk songs in concerts in Montreal and Stratford, and sang several times at the Mariposa Folk Festival. He appeared on two CBC children's television series, "Song Shop" and "Magic in Music," and prepared several folksong series himself. His radio series, "The Song Pedlar," was heard off and on in the 1960s, and his "Folk Fair" in the early 1970s.

Elektra Records issued Tom's first records, *Maids and Mistresses*, and Moe Asch brought out *An Irishman in North America*. He also made a Victor record, *Folk Songs of Canada*, and he sang with Jean Price on *Canadian Folk Songs: A Centennial Collection*.

He published an interesting booklet, *Songs from Shakespeare's Plays and Popular Songs of Shakespeare's Time*, and researched the authentic tunes of the songs in Burns' *Merry Muses*. He prepared several programs of traditional Ottawa Valley singers for the CBC, and arranged for some of them to sing on Canada Day concerts,

From 1966 to 1986 Tom was national director of CARE Canada and travelled around the world visiting CARE centres. When he retired he began editing tapes of traditional Canadian singers to make cassettes.