

SONGS OF A MANITOBA FAMILY

EDITH FOWKE

Up to the present practically no Anglo-Canadian folk songs have been reported from Manitoba. Margaret Arnett MacLeod does include a few English verses in her *Songs of Old Manitoba*, but with the exception of one, "O Prairie Land," they are composed texts which had no run in tradition. The Métis songs, particularly those of Pierre Falcon, are the most important previously reported from this province.

This lack of English songs prompts me to publish a small collection which I made in one evening from one Manitoba family. In 1966 when I was in Winnipeg attending the annual conference of the Canadian Authors' Association, a friend, Nancy Drake, arranged for me to meet a family she had discovered who knew some folk songs. In the evening of June 24 we met at her home and there the mother, Mrs. Cecil Anderson, born Katharine Asham, then 46, and her two children, Mrs. Pat Anderson Paul, then 25, and Austin Anderson, 19, sang a dozen songs for me.

This small collection is interesting because it is remarkably representative of the variety of folk songs found in Canada. It contains one Child ballad: "The Lady Gay" (Child 79); three British broadsides: "Who Taps at My Bedroom Window?" "The Gay Spanish Maid," and "You Tell Me That You Love Me"; two lumbering ballads: "The Jam on Gerry's Rocks" and "In Eighteen Hundred and Eighty-Five"; two English children's songs: "Nickety Nackety" and "The Swapping Song"; three American country and western songs: "The Cowboy's Wedding Ring," "The Young Mountie's Prayer," and "Can I Sleep in Your Barn Tonight, Mister"; and one local song: "The Kinnesota Cannonball."

The British songs appear to have come from Mrs. Anderson's maternal grandfather, a Campbell, who came out to the Canadian prairies from Glasgow around 1860. The lumbering and country and western songs the children picked up from men in their neighborhood, around Reedy Creek, a small community some miles south of Winnipeg. Mrs. Anderson sang the British ballads unaccompanied; Pat and Austin sang the others to Austin's guitar accompaniment.

Notes on the Songs

"The Wife of Usher's Well" (Child 79) is generally known in North America as "The Lady Gay." It is very popular in the United States, but Mrs. Anderson's version is the first reported in Canada. It is shorter than most American texts but retains the essence of the story and gains effectiveness through its brevity. Coffin lists over 50 American versions (pp. 77-79), and Bronson gives 58 British and American texts with tunes (II, pp. 246-266).

"The Gay Spanish Maid" (K16) is better represented in Canada: both Creighton and Mackenzie found it in Nova Scotia, and I have three Ontario versions. Laws lists half a dozen American versions (*ABBB*, p. 148).

"Who Taps at My Bedroom Window?" is a version of "The Drowsy Sleeper" (M4), although it also resembles the North American "The Silver

Dagger" (G21). It is quite similar to Sharp's version C from North Carolina (I, p. 360). This ballad, like "The Lady Gay," is common in the States (Laws, *ABBB*, p. 182), but rare in Canada.

I have not yet found any references for "You Tell Me You Love Me," although it is similar to several rather sentimental Irish ballads.

"The Jam on Gerry's Rocks" (C1) is of course the best known of all lumbering ballads, and the version Pat and Austin sang is quite typical. For references see Laws *NAB*, p. 147, and Fowke, p. 99.

"In Eighteen Hundred and Eighty-five" is a less familiar lumbering song that apparently originated in northern Ontario as "The Teams at Wanapitei" (Fowke, p. 79), and then drifted west.

"Nickety Nackety" is a children's offshoot of "The Wife Wrapt in Wetherskin" (Child 277). Dean-Smith lists English versions under "Robin-a-Thrush" (p. 101), and Bronson gives some as his Group F, IV, 170-173. See also Randolph III, 190.

"The Swapping Song" combines two popular rhymes listed in *The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes*: "When I Was a Little Boy I Lived by Myself," p. 96, and "My Father He Died But I Can't Tell You How," p. 163. See also Brown II, 471, and Sharp II, 307.

"Can I Sleep in Your Barn Tonight, Mister?" is a well-known hobo song spread by phonograph records. For references and other traditional versions see Brown III, 420 and Randolph IV, 364.

"The Cowboy's Wedding Ring" is interesting because of its close parallel to "Hind Horn" (Child 17). It is well established in Canadian tradition: I have found it in Ontario and have been told it is known in British Columbia. In the United States the Fifes included it in their *Ballads of the Great West*, p. 216, and report three versions in the manuscripts of an Idaho woman. Thanks to Neil Rosenberg and D. K. Wilgus, it has been traced to a Hank Snow recording made in Montreal, February 8-10, 1941, issued as Canadian Bluebird B-4696, and reissued on RCA Canadian Camden CAS 2257, "My Nova Scotia Home."

"The Young Mountie's Prayer" is another typical country and western number probably learned from a record. Neil Rosenberg informed me that it was recorded by Yodellin' Slim Clark on Quality 1180B, and that Don Miller of Port Clyde, Nova Scotia, says the song was written by Pete Roy and C. Raymond Clark. Mr. Miller noted that the words in the Manitoba text are a bit different than on the record, indicating at least some passage through oral tradition. Mr. Rosenberg adds that Clark also recorded "The Mountie's Prayer" on a small U.S. label, Palomino 45-1 (a 45 rpm "single").

"The Kinnesota Cannonball" is a local song set to a familiar tune.

Reference List

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Note: My thanks to Ruth Pincoc who transcribed the tunes, and to Austin Fife, Neil Rosenberg, and D. K. Wilgus who supplied useful information.

THE LADY GAY

There was a la - dy and a la - dy gay Lit-tle chil-dren she had three. She
sent them a - way to the North coun-try To learn their gram-ma-ry.

There was a lady and a lady gay,
Little children she had three.
She sent them away to the North Country
To learn their grammar.

They hadn't been gone very long,
Scarce three months and a day,
When death came slowly riding along
And took those babes away.

I set a table both wide and long
And placed on it both bread and wine.
"Come eat, come drink, my three little maids,
Come eat, come drink of mine."

"We don't want any of your bread, mother,
Neither do we want any of your wine.
In yonder stands the Savior dear
And He calls us to resign."

A GAY SPANISH MAID



A gay Spanish maid at the age of six-teen Roamed o - ver the hills far and wide And be-



side of each tree she sat down for a rest, With her gay gal-lant youth by her side .

A gay Spanish maid at the age of sixteen
Roamed over the hills far and wide,
And beside of each tree she sat down for a rest
With her gay gallant youth by her side.

“My ship sails tomorrow, my darling,” said he,
“And together we never more will roam,
So when your fond parents retire to rest,
Will you meet me tonight, love, on shore?”

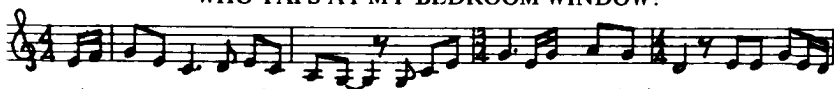
That night when her parents retired to rest
Lady Ellen walked out the hall door.
With her hat in her hand she walked down the broad strand,
She met with her love on the shore.

The moon that had risen shone clear through the blue
And the earth and the sky seemed to meet,
And the only sad sound was the murmuring waves –
They splashed on the rock at their feet.

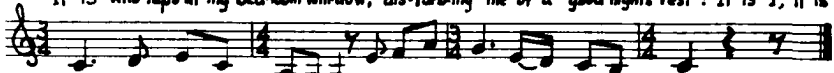
That night on the beach we were tossed to and fro
And the vessels were lost in the storm,
So I jumped on a plank and was saved from the wreck
While the rest met their watery grave.

And then I returned to the maid on the shore
Who had thought of her boy in the storm,
But she died like a rose that was nipped by the frost
And she left me in sorrow to mourn.

WHO TAPS AT MY BEDROOM WINDOW?



It is who taps at my bed-room win-dow, dis-turb-ing me of a good night's rest? It is I, it is



I, your own true lov-er— I come to trou-ble you once more.

"It is who taps at my bedroom window
Disturbing me from a long night's rest?"

"It is I, it is I, your own true lover.
I come to trouble you once more."

Mary arose from her soft down pillow
And went to see who there might be.

"It is I, it is I, your own true lover.
I'm down beside a willow tree.

"It is Mary dear, go and ask your mother
If you can be my wedded bride."

"It is no use to go and ask my mother
For she is sure to answer no."

"And if she says no return and tell me,
I'll come no more to trouble you.

Then Mary dear, go and ask your father
If you can be my wedded bride."

"It is of no use to go and ask my father
For he is on his bed of rest,
And by his side is a silver dagger
To pierce the heart that I love best."

Willie picked up the silver dagger
And plunged it through his aching heart.
"It is goodby, Mary, my own true lover,
I'll come no more to trouble you."

Mary picked up the bloody dagger
And plunged it through her aching heart.
"It's goodby, Mother, goodby, Father,
Willie and I have gone to rest.

"There is seven ships upon the ocean
And seven more upon dry land.
Willie in one and I in another,
And oh how happy we will be!"

YOU TELL ME YOU LOVE ME





own bride and ne-ver de-ceive. You have of-fered to — me — your
heart and your hand, And to make me the mis-tress of a house and of land.

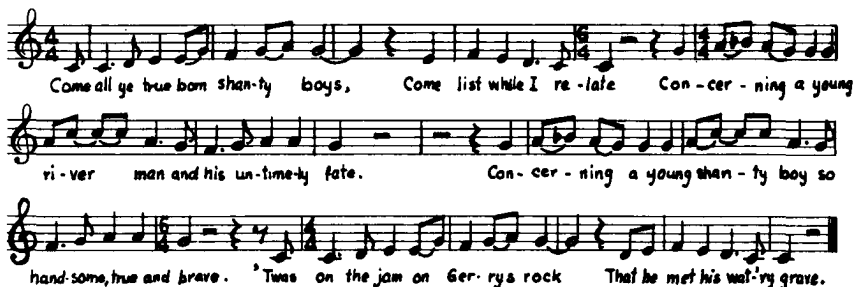
You tell me you love me, I fond would believe,
And to make me your own bride and never deceive.
You have offered to me your heart and your hand,
And to make me the mistress of a house and of land.

My dear father's last words still rings in my ear.
When dying he bid me my Maker to fear,
To be kind to my mother, from her never to part,
And if I would leave her it would break her poor heart.

If your parents would bless us and give their consent
We would all live together in peace and content,
And my poor aged mother would sorrow no more.
I won't leave my mother to be rich and her poor.

You have offered me servants and carriages gay,
And perhaps would deceive me and lead me astray.
For some men will flatter, it has been before.
I won't leave my mother although she is poor.

THE JAM ON GERRY'S ROCKS



Come all ye true born shan-ty boys, Come list while I re-late Con-cer-ning a young
ri-ver man and his un-time-ly fate. Con-cer-ning a young shan-ty boy so
hand-some, true and brave. 'Twas on the jam on Ger-ry's rock That he met his wat-ry grave.

Come all ye true-born shantyboys, come list while I relate
Concerning a young riverman and his untimely fate.
Concerning a young shanty boss so handsome, true, and brave:
'Twas on the jam on Gerry's rocks that he met his watery grave.

It was on the Sunday morning in the springtime of the year,
Our logs were piled up mountains high, they couldn't keep them clear.
Our foreman said, "Turn out, brave boys, with a heart devoid of fear.
You'll break the jam on Gerry rocks and to Ellingtown you'll steer."

Now some of them were willing and some of them were not.
 To break the jam on a Sunday morn they didn't think they ought,
 Till six of our Canadian boys did volunteer to go
 To break the jam on Gerry's rock with the foreman young Monroe.

They hadn't rolled off many logs till they heard his young voice say:
 "I want you boys to be on your guard for the jam'll soon give way."
 Those words were scarcely spoken when the jam did break and go,
 And it carried away those six brave boys with the foreman young Monroe.

When the rest of the young shantyboys the sad news they did hear,
 In search of their brave comrades to the river they did steer,
 And saw the mangled bodies a-floating down did go,
 And dead and bleeding near the banks was that of young Monroe.

They took him from his watery grave, brushed back his raven hair.
 There was one among the watchers whose cries did rend the air.
 There was one fair girl among them, she came from Ellingtown;
 Her moans and cries rose to the skies for her true love had gone down.

They buried him in sorrow there — it was on the fourth of May.
 In a green mound by the river there grew a hemlock tree,
 And carved upon that hemlock tree beside the bank did grow,
 'Tis the name and date and the sad fate of the foreman young Monroe.

Fair Clara was a noble girl, a riverman's true friend.
 Her and her old mother lived near the river bend,
 And the wages of her perished love the boss to her did pay,
 And the shantyboys made up for her a generous purse next day.

Fair Clara didn't long survive, her heart broke with her grief.
 While scarcely six weeks later death came to her one day,
 And when the time at last had come when she was called to go,
 Her last request was granted: to be laid by young Monroe.

IN EIGHTEEN HUNDRED AND EIGHTY-FIVE

The image shows three staves of musical notation in a single system. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The melody is written in a simple, folk-like style. Below the first staff, the lyrics are: "In eight-teen hun-dred and eight-y five In-to the woods flat wed stria. Har-din fig-gered on". The second staff continues the melody, with lyrics: "Geor-gian Bay to cut the logs and haul 'em a way —. Tim-e - rant, tim-e - ra-ro". The third staff concludes the melody, with lyrics: "fid-dle la-ro da-ro. Dance to the rain —, down by the way —." The lyrics are written in a stylized, hyphenated format typical of early 20th-century songbooks.

In eighteen hundred and eighty-five
 Into the woods flat we'd strive.
 Hardin figgered on Georgian Bay
 To cut the logs and haul 'em away.

Chorus: Timerant timararo, fiddle lare daro
 Dance to the rain, down by the way.

The first team came was a team of bays –
 They were the ones could handle the sleighs.
 The driver's whip went chigga chigga chack,
 And says, "By gosh, I'll hang you, Jack."

The next team came was a bay and a black –
 They were the ones you couldn't hold back.
 The driver's whip went chigga chigga chack,
 And says, "By gosh, I'll hang you, Jack."

The next team came was a Felishes' team –
 They were the ones run by steam,
 Made four trips on a twelve-mile haul,
 One hundred logs on every load.

NICKETY NACKETY

The image shows two staves of musical notation in G major (one sharp) and 2/4 time. The first staff contains the melody for the first line of lyrics. The second staff contains the melody for the second line of lyrics, which includes a more complex rhythmic pattern with many eighth notes.

I married a wife in the month of May, Nick-e-ty, nack-e-ty, now now now & ev-er since then I've had naught to say.

Nick-e-ty nack-e-ty Hey Jock Ack-e-ty, wil-i-cky wall-i-cky, Res-cue the col-i-cky, Nick-ety nack-e-ty now now now.

I married my wife in the month of May,
 Nickety, nackety, now now now,
 And ever since then I've had naught to say,
 Nickety nackety, hey jock ackety,
 Willicky wallicky, rescue the collicky,
 Nickety, nackety, now now now.

She baked a pie and called it mince,
 Nickety, nackety, now now now,
 I've never known such misery since,
 Nickety nackety, hey jock ackety,
 Willicky, wallicky, rescue the collicky,
 Nickety, nackety, now now now.

She rides to town on the old gray mule,
Nickety, nackety, now now now,
And when she does she look like a fool . . .

The halter and bridle they lie on the shelf,
Nickety, nackety, now now now,
If you want any more you can sing it yourself . . .

THE SWAPPING SONG



When I was a young man and lived by my self On the bread and cheese that was laid up on the shelf, Come a



wing wang waddle come a jack straw straddle Come the don fair saddle Come a long way home.

When I was a young man I lived by myself
On the bread and cheese that was laid upon the shelf.

Chorus: Come a wing wang waddle, come a jack straw straddle,
Come the don fair faddle, come a long way home.

The rats and the mice they led me such a life
I had to go to London to get myself a wife.

The streets were so wide, the bridges were so narrow,
I had to bring her home in an old wheelbarrow.

The wheelbarrow broke and we all had a fall —
Down came wheelbarrow, wife, and all.

I sold my wife and got me a horse,
And then I rode from course to course.

I sold my horse and bought me a mare,
And then I rode from fair to fair.

I swapped my mare and got me a cow,
And on that deal I just learned how.

I swapped my cow and got me a calf,
And on that deal I just got half.

I swapped my calf and got me a sheep,
And there I rode till I fell asleep.

I swapped my sheep and got me a hen.
Oh, what a pretty thing I had then!

CAN I SLEEP IN YOUR BARN TONIGHT, MISTER?

Can I sleep in your barn to-night mis-ter? For it's cold sleep-ing out on the ground. There's a
cold north wind that's blow-ing, And I have no place to lie down.

Oh, I haven't a blanket, kind Mister,
And I carry no matches to light.
I will cause you no harm whatever —
Can I sleep in your barn for tonight?

Oh, the stranger was fair, tall, and handsome —
He looked like a man who had wealth.
He wanted to stop in the country
And stay there a while for his health.

My wife thought she'd like to be earning
Some money to fix up our home
The top was kind of disheveled.
The stranger could stop there and board.

I was coming from my workshop one evening,
I was whistling and singing with joy,
I expected some kind-hearted welcome
From my dear loving wife and my boy,

But what did I see but a letter —
It was placed in the room on the stand.
The moment my eyes gazed upon it
I picked it up in my hand.

The lines that were written upon it,
They ran through my brain, drove me wild.
It said that the stranger had married
And taken my wife and my child.

THE YOUNG MOUNTIE'S PRAYER

Way up in that cold north coun-try, Up far from our old ar-row home, That's
where I left my bro-ther, A sto-ry you soon shall know.

We were boys together:
I remember how we cried.
I was only seventeen,
He, ten, when Mother died.

Jack grew up as a cowboy,
Could ride and rope with the best,
But he fell in with evil companions
In the fur-trapping business out west.

One day when he came from his trap-
line
He wasn't surprised when he saw
A red-coated ranger in the doorway,
For he knew he had broken the law.

In a cabin in Canada's Rockies
Where there's nothing but beauty and
trees
Jack took the life of a ranger —
A Canadian Mounted Police.

The captain then called me beside him,
Said, "Rod, you're not to blame.
Before that young ranger died, son,
He mentioned your young brother's
name."

"I hope that Jack isn't guilty,
But I'll get him if I can.
I'll leave here with your orders —
A Mountie will get his man."

For day and days I trailed him,
Broken, disgusted, and sad.
He finally left me a letter
Saying, "Rod, you'll take me in dead."

I finally found his trail, boys,
From tracks they left in the snow.
They led to a little log cabin
Back to our old Arrow home.

I told him to surrender;
His answer to me was in lead.
I fired three shots in the darkness,
And my little brother lay dead.

O Mother in heaven, forgive me
For sending the boy to his grave.
And God up in heaven, I'm grateful —
You've answered this young Mountie's
prayer.

THE COWBOY'S WEDDING RING

A cow-boy with his sweet heart stood, be-neath the star-lit sky. To-mor-row he was
leav-ing for that lone-some prai-rie wide. She said "I'll be your lov-ing bride, when
you re-turn some day!" He hand-ed her a bro-ken ring and this to her did say.

"You'll find inside this ring, sweet-
heart,
My name engraved in gold.
I will keep the other half
Which bears your name, you know."

He rode away to toil next day,
This cowboy brave and bold,

And as he swayed and as he strayed
His maiden's love grew cold.

Three years they passed, he did not
come,
And Nell will wed tonight.
Her father hoped some earl she'd wed,
A happy home so bright.

The lights were gaily glowing
As they stood there side by side.
"We'll drink a toast to this young man
And to his lovely bride."

She tipped the glass and from her lips
The ring fell shining bright:
The token she had longed to see
Fell there beneath the light.

Just then there stood within the door
A cowboy tall and slim.
"I'll drink a toast to you," said he,
And slowly he walked in.

"Three years, my cowboy sweetheart,
And love's won its last long fight.
It's you, my cowboy sweetheart,
And my Jack I'll wed tonight."

THE KINNESOTA CANNONBALL

Tune: "The Wabash Cannonball"

You may talk of your steam engines, make songs about them all:
That is the Northern and the Wabash Cannonball.
But horses they are surer, I'd rather run them all —
They call him the pacer, the Kinnesota Cannonball.

They brought him home from Freedman's on one cold December day,
Angus McCloud and Walter, they drove him all the way.
When they reached Kinnesota he was noticed by us all:
That is why they called him the Kinnesota Cannonball.

Lorne Anderson kept him while Angus was away,
And gave to Finley Garrick when he ran out of hay.
Finley said, "I'll keep him as long as I have room."
Everything went fine and dandy till one Sunday afternoon.

Finley was out walking and I was in alone.
When Lorne came to ask me if Finley was at home.
I said, "If you go faster you'll catch him at the hall."
He said, "I came to borrow the Kinnesota Cannonball."

Belle came from her mother, a scarf around her arm,
And she quickly noticed that Lorne went to the barn.
When the barn door opened, "Lorne", she said, "Whoa,
They'll ask me where you're going." He said, "To Ebbenflow."

"Oh, why should we argue our quarrel on Sunday morn
When he is only a common pacer horse?"
"He may be just a pacer but he's faster than them all.
That is why they call him the Kinnesota Cannonball."

Resumé: Douze chants recueillis dans une famille du Manitoba en 1968 par Edith Fowke illustrent les différents genres de chants que l'on trouve généralement au Canada: ballades de la collection de Child, chants de bûcherons, chansons enfantines, chansons campagnardes et "western" Américaines, et chansons locales.