For audio recordings of the songs in this edition, visit https://sites.google.com/a/umich.edu/musa/publications.

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CONTENTS

xi Foreword

xiii In Memoriam: Anne Dhu McLucas (1941–2012)

Preface
xv The History of This Edition
xvi Acknowledgments

British-Irish-American Folksongs
xix Overview, Scope, and Purpose
xxiii Historical Overview of British-Irish-American Folksongs
xxvii The Selection of Folksongs for This Edition
xxxiii Historical Overview of American Folksong Recordings
xxxviii The Selection of Performances for This Edition
xli Musical Characteristics of British-Irish-American Folksongs
xlv Conclusion

xlvi About the Song Notes, Tune Notes, and Transcriptions

One Hundred British-Irish-American Folksongs
3 1. Barbara Allen *(sung by Rebecca Tarwater)*
8 2. Frog He Went A-Courting *(sung by Maud Long)*
15 3. The House Carpenter *(sung by Clarence Ashley)*
20 4. Lord Thomas and Fair Ellender *(sung by Horton Barker)*
26 5. Black Jack David *(sung by Cliff Carlisle)*
32 6. The Jealous Lover *(sung by Dortha Freman)*
36 7. The Lassie Mawhee *(sung by Mrs. T. M. Bryant)*
42 8. Sweet Willie *(sung by Ina Jones)*
47 9. The Butcher Boy *(sung by Everett Pitt)*
53 10. Jimmie Randall (The Pizen Song) *(sung by the Vass Family)*
60 11. Tom Sherman's Barroom & St. James' Hospital *(sung by Dick Devoll and James Baker)*

73 12. The Golden Willow Tree *(sung by Elmer George)*
78 13. The Devil and the Farmer's Wife *(sung by Carrie Grover)*
82 14. Hangman, Hangman, Slack the Rope *(sung by Charlie Poole and the North Carolina Ramblers)*
86 15. Knoxville Girl *(sung by Asa Martin and James Roberts)*
92 16. A Package of Love Letters *(sung by Louisiana Lou)*
97 17. My Horses Ain't Hungry, They Won't Eat Your Hay *(sung by Captain Pearl Nye)*
102 18. Pretty Fair Miss in the Garden *(sung by Cousin Emmy)*
108 19. Lord Lovel *(sung by Winifred Bundy)*
112 20. Lady Marg'et *(sung by H. G. Robbins)*
119 21. Young Charlotte *(sung by Charles Ingenthron)*
125 22. Lord Bateman *(sung by Asa Davis)*
134 23. Pretty Polly *(sung by Dock Boggs)*
138 24. Three Nights Experience *(sung by Sabra Hampton)*
145 25. Frankie and Johnny *(sung by Jimmie Rodgers)*
154 26. Madam I've Come to Marry You *(sung by Lulu Belle and Scotty)*
158 27. The Three Babes *(sung by Mrs. Texas Gladden)*
162 28. The Two Sisters *(sung by Bradley Kincaid)*
168 29. As the Dew Flies Over the Green Valley *(sung by Warde Ford)*
172 30. Lord Daniel *(sung by Sewanee Begley)*
178 31. Charming Billy *(sung by Clay Walters)*
182 32. John Henry *(sung by the Callahan Brothers)*
188 33. Sleepy Desert *(sung by Wilmer Watts and the Lonely Eagles)*
192 34. The Story of George Collins *(sung by the Dixon Brothers)*
197 35. Springfield Mountain *(sung by Josiah Kennison)*
203 36. Ommie Wise *(sung by G. B. Grayson)*
208 37. Jesse James *(sung by Marc Williams)*
214 38. I've Always Been a Rambler *(sung by G. B. Grayson)*
220 39. Old Joe Clark *(sung by Ernest V. Stoneman)*
225 40. Little Sir Hugh *(sung by Emma Dusenbury)*
230 41. The Prisoner's Song *(sung by Vernon Dalhart)*
235 42. Old Dan Tucker *(sung by Al Hopkins and His Buckle Busters)*
242 43. The Blind Child *(sung by the Delmore Brothers)*
246 44. Father Go Dig Me a Boat *(sung by Dizia Puckett)*
250 45. The Cuckoo She's a Fine Bird *(sung by Kelly Harrell)*
254 46. The Orphan Girl *(sung by Molly Jackson)*
258 47. Beware All You Handsome Ladies *(sung by Alec Moore)*
262 48. Lord Varnold *(sung by Ruth Cullipher and Angie Clark)*
266 49. Sourwood Mountain *(sung by the Fruit Jar Guzzlers)*
270 50. Jack Monroe *(sung by Carrie Walker)*
276 51. Bury Me Under the Weeping Willow *(sung by the Carter Family)*
283 52. Boston Burglar *(sung by Riley Puckett)*
291 53. Who's Going to Shoe Your Pretty Little Feet *(sung by the Renfro Valley Boys)*
297 54. The Darby Ram *(sung by Bascom L. Lunsford)*

302 55. Little Old Log Cabin in the Lane *(sung by the Binkley Brothers' Dixie Clodhoppers)*
309 56. Charley He's a Good Old Man *(sung by Kelly Harrell)*
312 57. Pretty Sally *(sung by Horton Barker)*
318 58. Rye Whisky *(sung by Woody Guthrie)*
321 59. Give My Love to Nellie *(sung by Mrs. Ray Oxford)*
326 60. Texas Rangers *(sung by the Cartwright Brothers)*
333 61. Wild Rippling Water *(sung by Alec Moore)*
338 62. Charles Guiteau *(sung by George Hastings)*
345 63. John Hardy *(sung by Buell Kazee)*
350 64. The Golden Dagger *(sung by Nell Weaver)*
354 65. The Roving Gambler *(sung by Annie Owen)*
359 66. The Three Crows *(sung by Sue Putnam and an unknown singer)*
362 67. Casey Jones *(sung by John Carson)*
368 68. The Miller's Will *(sung by John Feaster)*
372 69. Birmingham Jail *(sung by Jimmie Tarlton and Tom Darby)*
376 70. Red River Valley *(sung by Harry McClintock)*
380 71. Edward *(sung by Edith Price)*
385 72. Go Tell Aunt Phoebe *(sung by Stella and Jane Buchanan)*
388 73. I Courted a Fair Maid *(sung by Ben Rice)*
393 74. Skip to My Lou *(sung by Mrs. Ollie Womble)*
396 75. I Wish I Was Single Again *(sung by Welby Toomey)*
400 76. The Two School Boys *(sung by Mrs. G. A. Griffin)*
404 77. The Dying Cowboy *(sung by Jules V. Allen)*
408 78. Old Woman and the Cow *(sung by Gene Autry)*
414 79. Early, Early in the Morning *(sung by Leroy Roberson)*
419 80. Cambric Shirt *(sung by Mrs. Thomas M. Bryant)*
424 81. Sally Goodin' *(sung by Uncle Am Stuart with Gene Austin)*
428 82. King William Was King George's Son *(sung by Mr. and Mrs. Crockett Ward)*
432 83. Cripple Creek *(sung by Gid Tanner and the Skillet Lickers)*
437 84. They Say It Is Simple to Flirt *(sung by Mary and Cora Davis)*
440 85. Old Ninety-Seven *(sung by Fred Lewey)*
444 86. Foreman Monroe *(sung by Pat Ford)*
449 87. Cindy *(sung by Mrs. W. L. Martin)*
452 88. Round Town Gals *(sung by Wanda Neal)*
459 89. Little Brown Jug *(sung by Chubby Parker)*
462 90. In the State of Arkansas *(sung by Mrs. Minta Morgan)*
466 91. Going Down the Road Feelin' Bad *(sung by Fred Painter)*
470 92. With His Old Gray Beard A-Shining *(sung by Reba and Wilma McDonald)*
474 93. Mary of the Wild Moor *(sung by the Blue Sky Boys)*
480 94. Pretty Saro *(sung by H. G. Robbins)*
487 95. Liza Jane *(sung by the McClung Brothers)*
490 96. Single Girl, Married Girl *(sung by the Carter Family)*
497 97. Kitty Wells *(sung by Obed Pickard)*
503 98. Jimmie Randall *(sung by Florence Puckett)*

506 99. Wild Bill Jones *(sung by Eva Davis)*
510 100. Down by the Greenwood Side *(sung by Emma Dusenbury)*

Appendices

515 Appendix 1. Tally of the One Hundred British-Irish-American Folksongs
519 Appendix 2. Tune Analysis: Modes and Scales, and Tune Families, *by Anne Dhu McLucas*

525 Bibliography

Indices

537 Index of Child Ballads
538 Index of Laws Ballads
539 Index of Roud Numbers
541 Index of Titles
545 Index of First Lines

BRITISH-IRISH-AMERICAN FOLKSONGS

Overview, Scope, and Purpose

The aim of this edition is to bring together representative examples of one hundred folksongs and ballads in the British-Irish-American[1] tradition that have enjoyed widespread familiarity throughout twentieth-century America.

The backbone of American music, from the nation's earliest beginnings to the present day, has been a vital and many-streamed oral tradition of song and instrumental music. This oral repertoire was perhaps the most portable portion of the cultural heritage of the successive waves of immigrants who brought their tunes to America—sometimes with lyrics from the old world, sometimes with new lyrics responding to their new lives and spawning new variations. Although other ethnic streams of song are undeniably significant in the total repertoire of American folksong, the most pervasive tradition is the British-Irish-American, largely owing to the settlement patterns and social characteristics of immigrants from the British Isles and their descendants, which resulted in their cultural and linguistic traditions becoming widely prevalent in the United States. Moreover, the interaction between British-Irish-American and African American musical traditions has been long-lasting and pervasive. Other song traditions in America, such as German American, Cajun, Scandinavian, Yiddish, Native American, and diverse Spanish-language repertoires, are typically allied with one particular linguistic or geographical group, and therefore have been more localized both regionally and temporally.

The legacy of traditional music has been partially documented in dozens of published collections of regional styles, from the very early *Cowboy Songs* (1910) of John A. Lomax, to the widely influential *English Folksongs of the Southern Appalachians* (1917) by Cecil Sharp, to recorded collections in the 1970s and 1980s by Mike Yates, Sandy Paton, and others. Up to the present day, an estimated 30,000 different folksongs have

1. The rather awkwardly hyphenated word "British-Irish-American" replaces the more usual "British American" or even "Anglo American" in view of the fact that the Republic of Ireland is independent of the United Kingdom, and given that the Irish nation has contributed enormously to the repertoire of songs documented in this edition. This edition also includes songs created on American soil from a mixture of peoples, including African Americans, though this edition does not focus on the genres to which they contributed the most, such as slave songs, spirituals, and blues, which are addressed in other volumes in the *Music of the United States of America* series.

ABOUT THE SONG NOTES, TUNE NOTES, AND TRANSCRIPTIONS

Number, Title, Cross-Reference Numbers, and Alternative Titles

The songs in this edition are numbered according to their position in our tally (see "Appendix 1: Tally of the One Hundred British-Irish-American Folksongs," below, and "The Method of Selecting Songs" under "The Selection of Folksongs for This Edition," above). This edition takes the titles of each folksong from the commercial record label or the documentation of the field collector unless explained otherwise in the song notes. In some cases, the title that the collector or recording company assigned a folksong might not have been the same as the performer's title.[1] For each piece, this edition includes the identification number from Roud's catalogue, and when available the identification numbers from the catalogues of Child and Laws for legacy identification (for descriptions of these catalogues, see "Methods of Categorizing American Folksongs," above). When available, this edition includes a list of alternative titles from Roud, Child, Laws, or other regional collections. This list of alternative titles only includes those found in the United States; it does not list additional alternative titles found in other countries. In a few cases, an alternative title might be more widely known than the main title in this edition.

Song Notes

A brief contextualizing essay discusses the history and influence of each folksong.

Recording and Performance Information

Recording and performance information for each folksong has been taken from the documentation for the recordings themselves, other sources listed in the bibliography, previous publications of the present editor Norm Cohen, and (for biographical information about commercial hillbilly artists) Tony Russell's *Country Music Originals: The Legends and the Lost* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). Discographical sources are discussed under "Historical Overview of American Folksong Recordings," above.

1. Early collectors often assigned Child's own titles to Child ballads regardless of the singer's own title or lyrics.

1. BARBARA ALLEN

Child 84, Roud 54

By far, the most frequently collected (and therefore, presumably, the most widely known) American folksong is the British ballad "Barbara Allen." Its pedigree is venerable: a reference by Samuel Pepys in his diary for 2 January 1666 records his pleasure on hearing the actress, "my dear Mrs. Knipp . . . sing . . . her little Scottish song of 'Barbary Allen' . . . ." Assuming this is indeed the very same ballad, we gain a hint of both antiquity and origin. (While Pepys was greatly interested in music and songs, he was even more interested in Mrs. Knipp herself; so we can learn no more from his account about the ballad per se.)[1] A comic version (at least, in manner of its stage performance) of "Barbara Allen" enjoyed great popularity in the latter half of the nineteenth century in Britain.

How and when the song came to the New World—whether in print or via oral transmission—is not known, but its presence in several very popular songsters in the 1840s and in manuscripts from about the same decade attests to its familiarity then. Some songs and ballads have regional "hot spots"; "Barbara Allen," on the other hand, has been collected in thirty-four states in all regions of the United States. This popularity is doubtless accounted for (at least in part) by the timelessness of its theme of unrequited love. Barbara Allen's would-be swain is pining away for her love; she, thinking he had deliberately slighted her, scorns him heartlessly. After his death, presumably finding evidence of his true love, she suffers a change of heart and, in turn, dies of grief. (Nothing offers such convincing proof of fidelity as expiring for one's beloved.) Not only did the ballad travel to all regions of the country, but it also entered African American tradition. In the twentieth century it was recorded by many hillbilly and country music artists (Tex Ritter, Merle Travis, Dolly Parton), and in the 1960s it took its place as a favorite in the urban folksong revival (New Christy Minstrels, Joan Baez, Art Garfunkel). It was still being collected in the 1990s.[2]

The song's popularity in folk tradition has inspired a prominent position in pop culture. One of the editors recalls a comic strip in the daily newspapers during the 1960s

---

1. In "British Ballads From Maine," Barry and Eckstorm suggested that Barbara Allen might have been a real person. They subsequently came to believe that the ballad sung by Mrs. Knipp [spelling uncertain] was the original and was written as a lampoon on the Duchess of Cleveland, Barbara Villiers, the bad-tempered mistress of Charles II. By "Scotch" Pepys may have meant merely a northern (English or Scottish) dialect. Although it could never be proven, Barry also suggested that the author of this lampoon might have been Sir John Mennis. See Phillips Barry, Fannie H. Eckstorm, and Mary Winslow Smyth, "British Ballads from Maine, Second Series," *Northeast Folklore* 44 (2011): 297. George Pullen Jackson credits the tune to the Scottish ballad, "Wae's Me For Prince Charlie," see George Pullen Jackson, *Spiritual Folk-Songs of Early America* (Locust Valley, NY: J.J. Augustine, 1953), No. 28.

2. On the ballad's career in cheap print, see Ed Cray, "'Barbara Allen': Cheap Print and Reprint," in *Folklore International: Essays in Traditional Literature, Belief and Custom in Honor of Wayland Debs Hand*, ed. D. K. Wilgus (Hatboro: Folklore Associates, 1967), 41–50.

that happened to include a portrayal of a hootenanny party; one character says, "Let's sing 'Barbara Allen.'" Another responds (referring to Francis Child's catalog number), "Yes—good old Child 84!"[3]

Johnny Cash wrote new lyrics to this song and performed it live at Austin City Limits in 1987. The song was renamed "The Ballad of Barbara," with a main theme of divorce instead of death.

The first stanza was sung by Porky Pig in the character of Friar Tuck in the 1958 Warner Brothers cartoon "Robin Hood Daffy." Much of the song is sung throughout the 1951 film classic *Scrooge* starring Alistair Sim. It is also sung in the 1940 movie *Tom Brown's School Days*. It is heard again in the 1958 Yul Brynner film *The Buccaneer*, and in an episode of the 1989–91 TV series "Bordertown." In the 2000 mockumentary *Best in Show*, Michael McKean's character sings a stanza of this song to his dog over the phone, saying it is the dog's favorite song. John Travolta offered a short rendition of the song in *A Love Song for Bobby Long* (2000), included on the soundtrack. The song is sung in various versions in the 2000 film *Songcatcher*. It is also sung by the character, Flora, in Jane Campion's *The Piano* (1993). The stage play *Dark of the Moon* (1942) by Howard Richardson and William Berney is based on the ballad, as a reference to the influence of English, Irish, and Scottish folktales and songs. The name of the female lead is Barbara Allen.

The radio series "Suspense" performed a dramatic interpretation of the ballad on 20 October 1952 entitled "The Death of Barbara Allen," with Anne Baxter in the title role. The song also provided the inspiration for a British radio play called "Barbara Allen," initially broadcast on 16 February 2009.

Recording and Performance Information

Rebecca Tarwater (later, Mrs. Mason Hicks of New York), from Rockwood, Tennessee, recorded this version at the Library of Congress on 2 June 1936 for Charles Seeger (AFS 2087 A1). She recorded fifteen selections at that time, some with banjo or harmonica accompaniment (and some duets with Penelope Tarwater). A later recording was made between 1939 and 1941 (see Brown IV, 68).

As Seeger points out in his monograph on "Barbara Allen,"[4] Tarwater sings in a style "probably the nearest to what the average urban concertgoer would consider 'good singing.' That is, she has a sweet-toned voice and sings with a slight vibrato, as a trained singer would do; however, many untrained traditional singers, especially females, often have natural vibrato. Tarwater's sense of ornamentation and the upward glides are part of the southern tradition whence she comes"; Seeger also noted that she learned her song "from an elderly relative."

Tune Notes

Four phrases: ABCD
Lyrics: aba′b′

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3. Barbara Allen influenced the character Bobbie Allen in William Faulkner's *Light in August*, see J. D'avanzo, "Bobbie Allen and the Ballad Tradition in *Light in August*," *South Carolina Review* 8 (1975–76): 22–29.

4. Charles Seeger, "Versions and Variants of 'Barbara Allen,' as sung in traditional singing styles in the United States and recorded by field collectors who have deposited their discs and tapes in the Archive of American Folk Song in the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C." *Selected Reports of the Institute of Ethnomusicology*, UCLA 1, no. 1 (1966): 120–67; reprint in Charles Seeger, *Studies in Musicology, 1935–1975* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 273–320.

1. BARBARA ALLEN

(𝅗𝅥 = ca. 60–66)

1. 'Twas in the love- ly ___ month of May, The flow- ers all ___ were bloom- in'; ___

2. He sent his ser- vant ___ to ___ her door, He sent him to her ___ dwell- in';

3. Then slow- lye, slow- lye ___ got ___ she up, ___ And to his bed- side ___ go- in';

4. He turned his pale face ___ to ___ the wall, ___ And bust- ed out ___ a- cry- in';

5. Sweet Wil- liam died on a Sat- ur- day night, ___ And Bar- bry died ___ a- Sun- day;

6. A white rose grew on ___ Wil- liam's grave, A ___ red ___ rose grew on ___ Bar- bry's;

32. JOHN HENRY

(♩ = ca. 132)

Mandolin
Guitar

E B7

Mandolin

E B7

1. Uh-huh

1. John Hen- ry was a little boy, Sit on his ma- ma's knee;

E B7

2. What'd he say, John?

2. John Hen- ry told his cap- tain, "Cap- tain, you go to town;

E B7

3. Uh- huh

3. John Hen- ry had a lov- in' lit- tle wom- an, Dress she wore was bl- ue;

E B7

4. ? ? ? down, son

4. Well, John Hen- ry ham- mered in the moun- tain, 'Til his ham- mer caught on fire;

E

E

Picked up a ham- mer and a lit- tle piece __ of __ steel, ham- mer be __ the death of me, ____

Picked up a ham- mer and a lit- tle piece __ of __ steel, "Lord this ham- mer be __ the __ death of me, ____

E

Bring John- ny back a twelve pound __ ham- mer, lord- y, Sure hold your steam drill down,

Bring John- ny back a __ twelve pound __ ham- mer, lord- y, Sure hold your steam __ drill down,

E

Went up a track, she nev- er did __ look back, Sayin', "John Hen- ry I __ been true to you, ____

Went up a track, she nev- er did __ look back, __ Say- in', "John Hen- ry I ___ been true __ to you, ____

E

Last words I heard poor __ John Hen- ry say, Was, "A cool drink of wa- ter 'fore I die, ____

Last words I heard poor __ John Hen- ry say, __ Was, "A cool drink of wa- ter 'fore I die, ____